

FILM, FRENCH, AND *FOIE GRAS*:  
EXAMINING THE FRENCH CULTURAL EXCEPTION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate  
School of The Ohio State University.

By

Kelly Kathleen Campbell, M.A.

Graduate Program in French and Italian

The Ohio State University

2010

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Jean-François Fourny, Advisor

Professor Judith Mayne

Professor Jennifer Willging

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers and evaluates the notion of the “French cultural exception” (*l’exception culturelle*) in three distinct domains: cinema, language, and bgastronomy. Through a detailed analysis of these three domains, I trace the historical importance of these cultural institutions and their associated cultural capital in French culture. A discussion of each of these areas begins by examining how each of these culture industries has been instrumental in the cultivation of French identity and France’s global image. I argue that while cinema, language, and gastronomy have historically exemplified the French cultural exception, they have also become fertile ground for mounting tension and debate over the past several decades. The debate in each of these areas centers on an underlying notion of national protection, whether through government-backed subsidies in cinema, nationally driven bans in the food industry, or the espousal of Republican ideals in the French education system.

The discussion of each culture industry has a significant intertextual component, as I draw on literature, film, and current events to provide examples of the significant histories of each cultural domain as well as those issues that color their contemporary statuses. My analyses of these three areas also reveal the enormous obstacles facing those organizations and institutions that champion the cultural exception and support

continued attempts at meaningful differentiation from other cultures. Through an analysis of these three culture industries within the context of cultural particularity, I reveal the developing uncertainty that faces three of the principal pillars of French identity in the twenty-first century.

To Rob, Kate, and Caroline.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor Professor Jean-François Fourny for his unwavering support, invaluable advice, and thoughtful feedback throughout this entire process. I also am also indebted to Professors Judith Mayne and Jennifer Willging for their excellent feedback related to my chapters.

I am extremely grateful to Elizabeth Bishop for her wonderful friendship, advice, and most importantly, laughter, over the past seven years – salute, dear friend.

I would like to thank my mother Kathleen for taking care of my children while I was working, for supporting me with words of encouragement, and for always believing in my dream, even when I did not. I would like to thank my father Rick for laughter, good humor, and for being such an attentive grandfather so that I could work. I thank my sister Samantha for taking care of Kate and Caroline, for her unrelenting optimism, and for helping me to gain a better perspective on life's challenges. I would also like to thank my brother-in-law Chad for playing with his nieces while I worked and for demonstrating such enthusiasm for The Ohio State University. The time spent with each of my family members has provided a wonderful and necessary balance to my life. To each of them, I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

Finally, I am most grateful to my husband Rob whose tireless financial and personal support and love never wavered, even in the most difficult of times. The completion of this project would not have been possible without him. And last, but certainly not least, to my *exceptionally* beautiful girls, Kate and Caroline, who sacrificed unknowingly-*je vous aime*.

## VITA

December 7, 1976.....Born – Lake Forest, Illinois

May 1999.....BA French, UNC – Chapel Hill

BS Business Admin., UNC – Chapel Hill

May 2000.....MA Accounting, UNC-Chapel Hill

2003-present.....Graduate Teaching Associate

The Ohio State University

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: French and Italian



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC)

Association générale des usagers de la langue française (AGULF)

Association pour la sauvegarde et l'expansion de la langue française (ASSELAF)

Avenir de la langue française (ALF)

Centre national de la cinématographie (CNC)

Comité d'organisation de l'industrie cinématographique (COIC)

Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)

Conseil national des arts culinaires (CNAC)

Conseil supérieur de la langue française (CSLF)

Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues (DGLFL)

Délégation générale des relations culturelles et des œuvres françaises à l'étranger (DGFFR)

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

Institut européen d'histoire et des cultures de l'alimentation (IEHAC)

Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)

Short Message Service (SMS)

Société pour le financement du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel (SOFICA)

Tax Rebate for International Productions (T.R.I.P.)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA)

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that certain “exceptional” aspects of French culture are disappearing in a globalizing world. In fact, the book *La république du centre: La fin de l'exception française*, published in 1988, describes the inevitable demise of such exceptional French qualities. The 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) caused a flurry of discussions about *l'exception culturelle*, renewing interest in both the history and future of French distinctiveness and more generally cultural specificity. At the time, there were clear indications that the French cinematic industry was suffering considerably. As a result, the French lobbied its European partners to support *l'exception culturelle* in the GATT negotiations. The *exception* to which the phrase referred was the audiovisual sector, which the French government wished to exclude from the liberalization of trade of goods. Consequently, the audiovisual industry (film, television industries, digital technologies, and new media) was excluded from the negotiations. Ultimately, this meant that France and other European Union members could continue their subsidies to European film and television industries and likewise maintain quotas, thereby limiting the percentage of non-European content on TV. And although the term “exception” was used in reference to the way in which the audiovisual sector was “excepted” from the negotiations, the term has evolved in its usage and come

to embody those cultural elements that distinguish French culture from other cultures, warranting the protective measures afforded by the afore-mentioned negotiations.

While the French have admittedly felt under cultural siege at times in recent years, certain exceptionalities are still championed today in the name of this *exception culturelle*. In fact, state legislation and popular movements have strengthened certain cultural domains to protect such exceptional components. Many of the attempts to protect French culture have been supported and even imitated by other European countries, impressed by the core values that the French continue to espouse in the face of globalization and powerful cultural imperialism.<sup>1</sup> Why are the French so committed to the protection of what are perceived as core aspects of their Frenchness? How is *l'exception française*, or *la diversité culturelle*, which I will later define, reflected in French culture today? In what way is Frenchness distinct from and/or challenged by America's cultural hegemony? Has globalization helped or harmed French specificity? How have measures taken to protect certain aspects of French culture fared, and what do these measures indicate about French society?

I have chosen to address these provocative questions in three areas that I believe best highlight the French cultural exception and the challenges to it: cinema, language, and gastronomy. Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier note the importance of these specific fields, asserting that "uncontrolled globalization, many French worry, will oblige France to abandon some of the most distinctive and best-loved aspects of its entertainment, art, culinary traditions and language – in short, those things that most make it France" (42). Although these seemingly distinct cultural components do not

provide a comprehensive definition of French identity, nor are they intended to, they do provide excellent examples of *collective preferences*, a term coined by Pascal Lamy, Director-General of the World Trade Organization. According to Lamy, *collective preferences* are social and cultural inclinations that are rooted in the cultural and religious values and traditions of a country (2). Other scholars have used terms such as specificity, particularity, exceptionality, diversity, and *habitus* to describe similar cultural aspects. All of these terms will serve as ways to denote clearly defined notions of French culture.

In my research, several terms appear in every chapter that are worth defining here, as they are inherently ambiguous and have a number of competing interpretations. Certainly, the term “exception” and all derivatives of it – exceptional, exceptionalism, etc. – will be used repeatedly throughout all chapters. The term “cultural exception” has its roots in the GATT discussions of 1993, but the expression has come to embody a variety of meanings. Depending on the perspective presented, the term generally has one of three connotations in this dissertation. First, exceptionalism can reflect the perceived uniqueness of French culture and the desire to promote it universally. This has ties to French universalism and the ethnocentric belief that French culture is both distinctive and superior. This particular usage has also been linked to *rayonnement*, a term that can be translated as “radiance” or “radiation” in English. This word evokes an image of the sun and Louis XIV (le roi soleil), thus implying that France is the center of the universe, capable of illuminating the entire world. Because of its ethnocentric quality, this particular connotation has the greatest number of critics. The term “exception” has also been equated to “diversity,” as the term “cultural diversity” has gained currency in recent

years. In this usage, the expression embodies the desire to differentiate cultures and promote cultural pluralism, as opposed to cultural imperialism, on a global level. Finally, the term is sometimes used specifically in reference to the GATT discussions, speaking of those culture industries which supporters of French exceptionalism say deserve government protection, since they have significant sociocultural value in France. Indeed, these three definitions are not mutually exclusive, and there is certainly overlap among them. It is helpful to note that there is no monolithic definition of the term, and its use in this dissertation depends heavily on context and the perspective presented.

In each of the “exceptional” areas presented, there is an analysis of the many challenges that threaten these particular elements of French culture. Though each cultural institution<sup>2</sup> has experienced a wide variety of contemporary challenges, globalization and Americanization represent two dominant forces that have impacted and continue to impact French film, the French language, and French gastronomy. The term “globalization” is fraught with widely varying definitions. Since the use of the term in this dissertation is particular, it is helpful to describe what is widely conceived as globalization in its contemporary application to better illuminate its comparative usage in my research. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) provides a traditional definition: “it [globalization] refers to the reduction and removal of barriers between national borders in order to facilitate the flow of goods, capital, services and labour” (4). This idea of globalization has long been marketed as a positive force that fosters a better economic environment globally, even when the facts show otherwise. In the wake of numerous contemporary examples of economic



hegemony and financial scandal, the word “globalization” has acquired a negative connotation for many.

The definition provided by the UN, however, speaks only to the economic side of globalization. Another definition incorporates the critical cultural element: “the cluster of technological, economic, and political innovations that have drastically reduced the barriers to economic, political, and *cultural* exchange” (Drezner 53). For this dissertation, the focus will be on the “cultural exchange” identified in this definition. The exchange born of “cultural globalization” is described as “worldwide standardization - as in ‘Coca-Colonization’ and ‘McDonaldization’ – as well as to postcolonial cultures, cultural pluralism, and ‘hybridization’” (Moghadam 35). In this study, unless noted otherwise, globalization will denote this type of cultural interaction. Additionally, although *globalization* is recognized as a condition spanning many centuries, the use of the term in this dissertation will refer to *modern globalization*, specifically the worldwide integration of goods (both material and cultural), services, and capital that has occurred since World War II.

Like the word “globalization,” the term “Americanization” is ambiguous; in fact, it is often wrongly equated with globalization. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, the term Americanization suggested the process by which immigrants became Americans. A modern definition of the word suggests that Americanization is simply the process of making or becoming American. In the research I have conducted, it is not my intention to imply that the French have undergone an American transformation through the “Americanization” of their films, their language, or their food. Therefore, in this

dissertation, the term “Americanization” will be used, as is done in many of the cited references, to suggest the widespread and growing popularity of American films, food, and the English language in France.

The first and second chapters of this study will be devoted to the field that birthed the notion of cultural exceptionalism, French cinema. Considered a prime example of a culture industry, French cinema has long been regarded as an established part of French identity and vehicle by which to transmit the French national image. Cinema scholars Sue Harris and Elizabeth Ezra assert that French cinema is possibly the “most important medium for the transmission of French cultural values and identity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries . . . and remains the vehicle by which the nation conveys an image of itself abroad, thereby reinforcing its projected (or desired) identity” (3). Here, the notion of cultural exceptionalism and diversity is clear: French cinema brings something unique and different to the global table, reflecting and “projecting” a unique identity in the world.

Although many associate *l’exception française* with the GATT negotiations of 1993, the protection of French cinema existed throughout the twentieth century. Government intervention in the cinematic industry has tended to trend toward two principal efforts: assistance to increase profitability in the cinematic industry and protection from American influence. Throughout the twentieth century, a variety of minor quotas, taxes, and government subsidies were used to help promote film and to compete against France’s American counterpart, Hollywood. French filmmakers have experienced enormous difficulty in recuperating even a portion of the costs incurred for a

French film, as well as well-financed American blockbusters have attracted the greatest crowds. Numerous examples of government protection reveal that the debate over cinematic protectionism has long-standing historical roots that came to head at the end of the twentieth century, as globalization and a strong American presence threatened to displace this contemporary art.

Although the GATT negotiations allowed for continued protection of French films in France, they did nothing to help the continued challenge of exportability on American soil. The challenge on American soil involves what I call the “art-house challenge” and the cultural transposition of French films. In this American age of super-technology and the “bigger is better” ideal, art-houses are being edged out by huge multiplexes that house a number of theaters. And, those few resilient art-houses that remain are necessarily driven more by their bottom line than a once-held commitment to cinematic diversity. Specifically, many of the art houses that formerly provided a protected venue for French films are now housing independent American films, because they are more popular, and thus more profitable, for art house owners motivated by the sustainability of their establishment.

As art-houses can no longer ensure a protected space for French cinema, many French filmmakers have resorted to another marketable option: cultural transposition. Cultural transposition occurs when a film is made with the purpose to cater to the likes of the target culture. Whereas in the past a film’s origin was usually readily identifiable, contemporary films have become more “global,” and it is increasingly difficult to attribute one clear nationality to a film. Luc Besson provides an illustrative example of a

French director who has capitalized on cultural transposition, often choosing a cast and script that are “American.” Despite his success, many French film supporters claim that Besson’s techniques compromise the integrity of national cinemas.

Other films undergo to a different type of cultural transposition when they are remade by another country. In the United States, many French films have been remade, and the transformed film is viewed by many as an inferior, recycled version of the original. Furthermore, such films are often culturally transposed to the point where there is no trace of the source country. For example, many American viewers are likely ignorant of the fact that *Taxi* (2004) and *Father’s Day* (1997) are French films that have been remade for an American audience and thus have no awareness or appreciation of the cultural value that was transformed or lost in the remake process.

Given the significant hurdles in the cinematic industry both domestically and abroad, it is worthwhile to examine three contemporary films that have somehow defied the odds, resonating with both the domestic and American audiences. *Le placard*, *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac* are three examples of French films that fared very well at home and abroad. These films all share certain qualities that seem to have ensured their success on both a domestic and international level. If these films have a cross-cultural common denominator, do films that play to such commonalities sacrifice their cultural particularity? The second chapter of the dissertation will conclude in an evaluation of this thought-provoking question.

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation will be devoted to an examination of the French language in the context of cultural exceptionalism. I will

examine the role of the French language from a chronological perspective, analyzing why language has been so exceptionally important to French identity, what measures have been taken to protect and promote the French language, the major threats to French language in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the status of this cultural component today. The importance of the French language has been explained by linguistic scholars in several different ways. French has been considered to be a fundamental pillar of the republican forces in France that has unified French people throughout history. Many French citizens view language as any other integral component of French identity; it colors the linguistic globe and promotes diversity throughout the world (Gordon and Meunier 57-61).

Defense of the French language is of course not strictly a twentieth-century effort. Scholars actually date the defense of the language as early as the sixteenth century. A number of legal measures were taken in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. At the same time, many organizations formed to support the movement to protect the French language. National policy and organizations have developed to encourage and protect the use of the French language as part of a long-held “nation-building” effort. Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, many other important steps were taken to protect the French language not only against foreign languages but at the expense of regional languages. The French Revolution led to several significant changes in language planning, reinforcing the importance of national policy to achieve linguistic unity. The nineteenth century brought with it important changes to the educational system, as Jules Ferry spearheaded the reinforcement of French instruction

throughout French schools. It was during this century that the desire to *defend* French took on a new meaning; the push was not only to protect it internally from outside influences but also to promote its use internationally.

During the twentieth century, an abundance of American words entered everyday French vocabulary; this was especially significant during periods of rapid industrialization. Words that had not existed needed to be created, and the adoption of the existing English equivalent often appeared as the simplest, quickest, and most effective linguistic approach. As English words multiplied and trickled into other domains, the French government felt a need to defend the language from the cultural threats posed by a growing American linguistic influence, globalization, and modernization. The late twentieth century was marked by a number of initiatives to protect and promote the French language. The strong movement to protect France's linguistic heritage was and continues to be championed by the French government, various organizations, and private individuals.

Initiatives to defend the French language have become more introspective during the latter part of the twentieth century, as perceived linguistic threats have emerged within the hexagon. Many French citizens bemoan what they consider the degeneration of the language; language traditionalists believe that French has been impoverished by a wide variety of sources, including minority languages, *banlieue* language, *le langage SMS* (Short Message Service), and spelling reform initiatives, among others. This conservative view is countered by the perspective supported by many leftists and sociolinguists, who believe that the influx of English words and the many variations of

the French language do not necessarily point to a decline in the language. In fact, most language scholars describe language as a living entity whose changes and developments are a positive sign of life, tenacity, and, ultimately, longevity.

An analysis of the film *Entre les murs* (2008) highlights the heated debate between those who see value in safeguarding a *français standard* and those who welcome language variation and evolution. The many dialogues between teacher and students and the ultimate expulsion of one student reveal the powerful ability of language both to unify and divide. Ultimately, the film highlights the perplexing question that underscores the larger national debate: is the French language best described as *une langue en crise* or *une langue en transition*, and what does this then mean for the future of standardized French?

The fifth and sixth chapters of this dissertation will be devoted to an examination of French gastronomy in the context of cultural exceptionalism. A look at French history reveals how this culture field became so very entwined with French identity and respected on an international level. France's long agricultural history has helped foster an appreciation of food and wine among many French citizens. Gantrel explains that gastronomy reflects "un certain état de la psyché nationale" that figures into its "conscience collective" (697). An examination of the refinement in cooking and eating in France and the history of *haute cuisine* will allow for a better understanding of the role gastronomy plays in French culture.

Historically, there is strong evidence of a link between Gallic interest in food and the French gourmand. Elaborate methods of food preparation were adapted from Rome,

and many authors date the beginning of *haute cuisine* to this period when wine was used both to accompany food and as a necessary ingredient in sauces. The important role of wine has its roots in Catholic mass and has thus been long considered as something sacred in this traditionally Catholic country. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the tradition of culinary interest persisted, and by the end of the Middle Ages, certain culinary practices and tastes were attributed uniquely to France. At the dawn of the early modern era, the love of eating and drinking, often conveyed through gluttonous feasts, became intertwined with French national identity and most certainly with the royal table.

The importance of gastronomy at the court was certainly a significant stepping stone in the development of France's great food culture, but its development into a recognized culture field was aided by the culinary discourse that evolved in the nineteenth century. What was said or written about what the French were eating was largely responsible for institutionalizing this cultural field. Several writers from the nineteenth century have been accredited with founding the gastronomic field. Specifically, through the writings of Grimod de la Reynière, Antonin Carême, and Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, gastronomy became more a topic of discussion than a practice or technique. Patricia Ferguson argues that it is precisely these texts of gastronomy that "served as a vehicle for a distinctively French culinary nationalism" (619) and an illustration of the "cultural work of nation building" (624).

The evolution of the gastronomic field in France will permit a better evaluation of the challenges to its cultural singularity today. Anxiety over food has been principally



due to the effects of the three forces: globalization, industrialization, and American influence. As a direct result of globalization and the increase in food exchange from country to country, many French citizens are increasingly apprehensive of the quality of imported food, as opposed to that which is cultivated domestically. Industrialization, and specifically “agribusiness,” has also lead to new unorthodox agricultural methods that have proven to be more profitable. Many French citizens lament the disappearance of traditional agricultural practices and a decline in locally grown foods. As the population of France has become increasingly diverse, “international food” has gained in popularity, threatening to displace the classic French bistro and the traditional French fare associated with it. The American influence on French food has also changed the culinary landscape of France. What is particularly disconcerting for many “foodies”<sup>3</sup> in France is that despite the outward admonishment of McDonald’s and American-inspired fast food, patronage of such establishments has increased, as reflected in the skyrocketing number of fast food chains in France.

Initiatives to protect France’s gastronomic sovereignty have involved both government-backed initiatives and private individuals, such as José Bové, who has become a symbol for the fight to preserve French identity and culinary traditions. Such attempts to protect gastronomic sovereignty have had questionable results. There is an aggressive response to American commercialism in France, particularly in the food industry, but the patronage at McDonald’s and American-inspired fast-food restaurants continues to rise. Other champions of France’s culinary singularity have found that the

best recourse may simply be to promote French food through culinary celebrations and food education as exemplified by the annual *Semaine du goût*.

The consideration of these three distinct cultural domains in relation to cultural exceptionalism and diversity will reveal common arguments and principles that thread these three institutions together. A look at all three areas will reveal the historical importance of these fields and the tenacious support of those who champion the notion of cultural particularity. In addition, it will enable an understanding of the multitude of contemporary threats to these domains and the divisive atmosphere that the consequent debates have fostered. In all six chapters, I will argue that movements to safeguard these cultural institutions can be examined critically, as ardent supporters seem to define France by fixed notions of these cultural domains, resisting cultural and sociological shifts and imposing traditional views on evolving collective preferences. This dissertation will thus highlight the paradoxical nature of the discussions surrounding the French cultural exception, as French film, the French language, and French gastronomy, must, in many cases, evolve or transform themselves in order to ensure their very existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, the term *imperialism* has implied empire building, often in reference to a political or geographical domain. Although applied in the past to a variety of different empires, the word has gained currency in contemporary times as a term associated primarily with the United States.

<sup>2</sup> The term “institution” is often reserved for references to public services, buildings, corporate entities or organizations. However, the French have traditionally viewed each of the analyzed domains – cinema, language, and gastronomy - as fields that are established, fixed, or *instituted* in the national culture. For a more in-depth discussion on the use of the word “institution” in this context, see Nadeau and Barlow p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> “Foodies” is an expression used to describe a particular group of people who have a love of food and are passionate about its consumption, study, preparation, and evolution. The term is often interchanged incorrectly with “gourmet” which denotes someone of refined taste who is often involved in the professional preparation of food. For more information on this term and its use, see Weston.

## CHAPTER 1

### *L'EXCEPTION CINÉMATIQUE* : THE CRADLE AND GRAVE OF THE CULTURAL EXCEPTION?

*I pity the French Cinema because it  
has no money. I pity the American  
Cinema because it has no ideas.*  
Jean-Luc Godard

*Votre invention, Monsieur Lumière,  
c'est notre grammaire, notre langage,  
notre raison d'être.*  
Paul Paviot

In 1995, France marked the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lumière brothers' invention of motion pictures with countless celebrations highlighting this historic year. In a year-long commemorative spirit, French citizens recognized their state's cinematic contribution as a source of international pride and a pillar of national heritage. But as they paid tribute to their own cinematic achievement, it was the American film *Die Hard with a Vengeance* that took in 52% of the Parisian box office receipts on its opening day in the summer of 1995 and continued to rank number one in France week after week. At the same time, *Congo*, *Batman Forever*, *The Puppet Masters*, *The Usual Suspects*, and *Bad Boys* accounted for the other top five movies in France. During one particular week, only one French film, *Belle de jour*, ranked among the top 60 films (Evans 14).<sup>1</sup>

These statistics highlight a developing cultural paradox: an appreciation and zeal for the French cinematic art combined with, or perhaps pitted against, a developing interest in Hollywood productions. The increase in popularity of American films, though lamentable to many French critics, was nothing new in 1995. In fact, only one year earlier, in 1994, the decrease in films produced and the erosion of audience and French market share were all clear signs that the French cinema industry was suffering considerably. In the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations of 1994, an international debate erupted as the French government lobbied its European partners to support the protection of the audiovisual sector industry. Specifically, the French wished to exclude, or *except*, the French audio-visual sector from the proposed liberalization of this industry. The move was termed *l'exception culturelle*. The rationale behind this effort was twofold: the declining health of French national cinema and the fear of considerable foreign penetration, especially by Hollywood, necessitated continued government intervention in the cinematic market. As a result, the audiovisual industry (film, television industries, digital technologies, and new media) was designated as an *exception* to the free-trade talks and ultimately was deemed as “off the table” for purposes of those discussions. Thus, France and other European Union members could continue their subsidies to European film and television industries and likewise maintain quotas limiting the percentage of non-European content on TV. For many French politicians and citizens, the continued implementation of government aid and protection in this industry would help to avoid an imminent cultural invasion and reinvigorate the declining health of French cinema.

Considered a prime example of a “culture industry,” French cinema is generally viewed as a contemporary art which functions as a critical component of France’s national identity; it is likewise recognized as a brand that should be exported internationally.<sup>2</sup> Debates over the liberalization of this culture industry have continued since the GATT negotiations, and many critics of France’s policy disparage what they consider to be acts of unfair protectionism in an increasingly globalized market. In this chapter, I will provide a brief historical context for French cinema in an attempt to reveal why this seventh art is so essential to French identity and how it entered the “collective consciousness” of the French community (Goff 8).<sup>3</sup> I will likewise consider the domestic challenges to this cultural exception, bringing to light the paradoxical nature of the numerous external and internal threats.

### 1.1 From Invention to Identity: Tracing Cinematography in the Twentieth Century

The symbiotic relationship between French cinema and the nation dates back to the nineteenth century when France claimed its birth in 1895. Since then, this art has remained a critical part of French identity and cultural policy. As Buchsbaum explains, “France values cinema as an essential cultural achievement, even ‘one of the totems of French society,’ and one of the last vestiges of France’s international stature” (50). Furthermore, cinema has often acted as the face of France, constructing and disseminating its cultural heritage and conveying it abroad (Harris and Ezra 3).

An examination of certain periods of French cinema is useful in observing how its place in French identity has evolved over time. I will detail only a few of the major events and genres that punctuated French cinema’s development over the twentieth

century to provide an historical context from which to discuss French identity and the roots of *l'exception culturelle*. As mentioned earlier, Auguste and Louis Lumière were credited with the invention of the cinématographe. This invention was revolutionary because it permitted the projection of the film, thereby allowing the images to be viewed by more than one person simultaneously. The production and release of their film, *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895), is often recognized as the true birth of film, since it was the first time that moving images could be appreciated by a crowd. Inspired by the French duo, filmmakers all over the world began to dabble with film and a variety of innovative cinematic techniques. Although claims to the true invention of cinema are disputable, it is generally agreed that the creation of cinema was a collaborative effort, since the contributions of Eadweard Muybridge (England), Etienne-Jules Marey (France), and Thomas Edison (United States) among others have all been acknowledged with the Lumière brothers as important pioneers in the development of what is called “cinema” today.

Given that the origins of cinema are debatable, it is useful to look beyond the achievement itself and focus rather on the distinct way in which the French have celebrated the Lumière brothers. In other words, some say that it has been the French commemoration of the Lumière brothers' achievement, the country's “inspired boosterism of its own cinematic contributions,” that has helped to remind the public of the achievement and firmly secure it as a pillar of French identity (Cheshire 23). An overwhelming number of honors, ceremonies, celebrations, monuments, and simple references to the Lumière brothers provide a testimony to the French enthusiasm for the seventh art and the sustained commitment to honoring the historic achievement.

Country-wide celebrations honoring the Lumière brothers' invention have existed since 1920, when le Syndicat français des directeurs de cinématographes celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the brothers' contributions. Such anniversarial celebrations occurred again in 1925 to celebrate thirty years, and then every ten years thereafter. Each subsequent anniversary has become more extravagant than the previous and attracted an increasingly larger crowd. In 1995, an estimated 400,000 people travelled to Lyon in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of the original screening. Over the past century, several films have been created to honor the Lumière brother's achievements on certain anniversaries, including *La machine à refaire la vie* (1924) and *Lumière et cie* (1995).

One of the largest supporters of celebrations and festivals honoring the Lumière brothers is the Institut Lumière, an institution created in 1982 to honor the brothers' achievement.<sup>4</sup> The mission of the Institute is as follows: "Les missions de l'Institut Lumière sont celles de la conservation, de la diffusion et de la pédagogie, dans une double perspective: le patrimoine Lumière et le siècle du cinéma" (Vie Culturelle). In order to help accomplish this mission, the Institute created an annual film festival, the Festival Lumière, in 2009. It is interesting to note that the Prix Lumière, which is an important ceremonial part of the festival, was given to American actor Clint Eastwood in 2009, thereby emphasizing the institute's commitment to honoring the global impact of the *cinématographe* and the remarkable diffusion of *le patrimoine Lumière*.

In addition to the plethora of celebrations, festivals, streets, building, schools, and awards that have commemorated the Lumière brothers and their cinematic contributions, the obituaries for the brothers have likewise served historically as reminders to the French public that cinema was a French invention. A quick look at the obituary section

of *Le monde* throughout 1948, the year in which Louis Lumière died, reveals that there are few, if any, obituaries printed. And, for those individuals who are mentioned, the length of space devoted to their obituary does not generally exceed ten lines. On June 8, 1948, *Le monde* printed the obituary for Louis Lumière; it far exceeded the typical length, with a forty-line description of his life and his monumental contribution to French cinema appearing on June 8, 1948: “Né le 5 octobre 1864 à Besançon, il était de deux ans plus jeune que son frère Auguste, avec qui il effectua ses principaux travaux qui aboutirent, on le sait, à l’invention du cinématographe et à la mise au point pratique de la photographie en couleurs”(“Louis Lumière” 5).

An obituary for Auguste Lumière that appeared in *L’humanité* on April 14, 1954 contained wording that was less hesitant in its acknowledgement, recognizing Auguste as “le co-inventeur du cinéma” (“Les funérailles” 8). The claims to such monumental contributions to cinema in these well-read newspapers served as an effective medium through which to emphasize the French claim to the invention and evoke *le patrimoine cinématographique*. These obituaries can be compared to the brothers’ obituaries in *The New York Times*. While the obituaries in the *Times* acknowledged their contribution to cinema and provided brief biographies of the two brothers, they also addressed the controversy surrounding the origin of cinema. For example, the obituary for Auguste Lumière stated that he was the co-inventor of “what a large percentage of Europeans consider the first motion picture” (“Louis Lumière, 83” 19). The article later describes the debate over claims to the invention, citing American Thomas Edison as a possible contender for such a title.



While the debate over the origin of cinema continues, the contributions of the Lumière brothers undoubtedly created an atmosphere in early twentieth-century France where interest in film and cinematic development blossomed. In 1908, the Société du Film d'Art was established to give French cinema "cultural (for which read middle-class) respectability" (Powrie and Reader 5). The efforts of this organization combined with an increasing interest in the production of French film marked unprecedented expansion in French cinema. In fact, French film accounted for approximately sixty percent of the world market during the early 1900s.

Prior to the late 1920s, films were silent, so many countries achieved international cinematic success, because their images had a universal language and thus widespread appeal (Kelle). With the invention of the Vitaphone and the resulting advent of sound in movies, French filmmakers found that sound was a double-edged sword. On one hand, the advent of sound made it increasingly difficult to find an international audience due to the language barrier. On the other hand, the language barrier protected, at least temporarily, the domestic market for French films.

French film faced significant economic obstacles in the years following the devastation of World War I. Film production in France and other European countries decreased due to a lack of capital, and many critics argue that French film never regained its cinematic hegemony. The American cinematic industry seized this opportunity to enter the European market and competitively underpriced French films, having already achieved financial success on the domestic front. Many film analysts claim that this was the moment when Hollywood began its ascendancy to "the economic and cultural centre of film in the western hemisphere" (Hesmondhalgh 188). In France, the strength of

American films was certainly mounting; in 1925, just thirty years after the invention of cinema, American films represented seventy percent of film revenues in France. Yet despite the growing presence of American films, French cinema continued to expand in the post-war period, with the help of film magazines and a budding star system. In order to capitalize on this growth and curb the increasing number of American films, the French government established the first quota system. With an import quota of 1:7, the government hoped to give the cinema industry the push it needed to compete with Hollywood domestically.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, in 1932, the government required that the dubbing of foreign films into French be accomplished in France with French personnel (Powrie and Reader 8).

The impact of the World War II on French cinema is not easily summarized, as there were both positive and negative consequences for the industry. Under Nazi control, France was not permitted to import American films, so French cinema was temporarily relieved of its fiercest competitor. Furthermore, the central control over French cinema created a more efficient industry and made a system of advances available to producers for the first time. Advances were initiated by the COIC, which was a Vichy organization, but approval was given by the Germans.<sup>6</sup> Nazi control over French cinema also significantly restricted freedom of expression and forced many talented Jewish producers and actors to flee the country and find work elsewhere in foreign markets.

The Liberation also had a damaging effect on French cinema. Some collaborators who were previously involved in cinema were no longer welcome, and the formerly protected domestic market was suddenly flooded by a backlog of American films that had accumulated throughout the war years. In early 1945, the percentage of foreign films

shown, predominantly American, was 60% compared to 35% during the occupation years (Crisp 74). But the impact of the Liberation on the French cinematic industry was not entirely negative. As Crisp notes, the survival of the national cinema became a part “of the systematic regeneration and promotion of French culture” (65). The emphasis on this culture industry was crucial at a time when competition from foreign films skyrocketed.

In order to thwart once again the increasing presence of American films on the French screen, the French government introduced the Blum-Byrnes agreement of 1946 which established a screening quota for French films which began at thirty percent in 1946 and climbed to thirty-eight percent in 1948. And although the agreement protected French cinema for a certain number of weeks per year, it likewise removed any restrictions on the import of American films into France for the duration of the year, which ultimately had a disastrous effect on the industry.

To assist with the administration of film finance, the Centre national de la cinématographie (CNC) was created at the same time. The CNC was formerly the Comité d’organisation de l’industrie cinématographique (COIC), an organization created in 1940 under the Nazi regime to manage the technical industry, film producers, film personnel, distributors, exporters, and exhibitors (Hayward, *French National Cinema* 36). Although COIC is credited with helping to revitalize French cinema at the time, the fact that it was initiated under German occupation poses an interesting question about what defines French national cinema. Hayward explains: “This raises again the very problematic question of how one talks of a French national cinema when its very survival was ensured by the consolidation and rationalisation practices put in place by the Germans and when most films made during the Occupation were produced by German

companies” (36). When the CNC was established in 1946 to take over as the overseeing body for the French film industry, it tried to separate itself from its predecessor. The organization renamed itself, turned away from the industrial focus of the COIC, and firmly established a national focus for the cinematic organization. Crisp asserts that the organizational structure of the CNC was important, because it was centered upon professional self-regulation, which was a significant departure from the direct government control during the occupation years (64). In 1948, the CNC created a fund to help French film production and distribution to help counter the flood of post-war films from the United States. This was only one of many organizational attempts to help protect and promote French film. The importance and longevity of the CNC has helped to institutionalize cinema and had an enormous impact on the successful administration of the *compte de soutien*.

The “Fourth Republic years” are sometimes referred to as a period of “Le Cinéma de Papa” because of the seeming lack of political and artistic contributions during this period. Although many contemporary film historians agree that the ‘Fourth Republic years’ were perhaps richer than initially thought, it is generally agreed that the innovation and spirit of earlier and later years seemed generally much stronger than that of this period. Still, it was during this time that cinematic discourse flourished in the form of several French journals, such as *L’écran français*, *Positif*, and *Cahiers du cinéma*. The importance of these influential journals and the frequent debates among them created an important conversation in a cinematic context. Powrie and Reader explain that they allowed for critical and theoretical expression, revealed the way in which political allegiances impacted cultural discussions, and exposed the conflicted

relationship with the United States that would continue to impact French artistic and cultural development in the following years (20).

This period was followed by one of the most respected movements in French cinematic history as the year 1959 marked the beginning of *La Nouvelle Vague*. Although the New Wave was not considered an organized movement at the time, the directors and films that originated in this period shared several defining characteristics, and their contributions are widely accepted as some of the most important developments in cinematography to date. Known for their rejection of French classical cinema, the new directors of the New Wave films were celebrated as the true *auteurs* of their films. As a result, the personal signatures of Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Éric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette among others were often evident in their films, which had not been the case in the preceding period. Though each *author* left his mark on his film, there were several shared conventions that ultimately emerged, including jump cuts, shooting on location, natural lighting, improvised dialogue, direct sound recording, and long takes. Although these techniques seem unexceptional by today's cinematic standards, they were deemed revolutionary at the time. Internationally, there was an increased interest in French films and an attraction to films that were counter-culture, downbeat, gritty, and full of jump cuts (Kelle). The expenses of some of these innovative techniques were somewhat relieved by the introduction of the *avance sur recettes* in 1960; a system of government loans, this fund was distributed based on the quality of scripts in order to help with the financial burden of production.

By the late 1960s, the directors of the New Wave began to go their separate ways and the movement itself seemed to weaken but continued to influence the way films were

produced. A period of realist and comedic films ensued, and although film historians cite a number of respectable films produced during this period, cinema attendance declined. In order to keep French cinema afloat, many co-production deals were arranged, and each successive government promised to maintain the protectionist measures that had been put into place.

By the early 1980s, several important changes in production and distribution were underway, one of which was the “televisualisation” of the cinema. The arrival of the multiplex, a movie theater composed of a large number of screens, was the second major change to occur in the 1980s. Although co-productions with television and multiplexes were intended initially to be used in support of French cinematic art, this period of time was marked by the changing preferences of French spectators. Statistically, the number of French people watching Hollywood films exceeded those watching French films for the first time in French cinema history. As the French police thriller and comedy dwindled in popularity, several new genres emerged: *heritage*, *le cinéma du look*, *beur cinéma*, *le cinéma de banlieue*, and *le jeune cinéma*. These contemporary genres reflected both a need to compete with Hollywood blockbusters as well as a desire to portray developing social issues on the domestic front, such as immigration and social exclusion.

The preceding overview of French cinema underscores the variety of genres and techniques that developed over more than a century of cinematic history in France. Although the types of movies produced and the techniques behind them have evolved, cinema has always been viewed as an integral component of French identity. Thus, although the art has a diverse background and cannot be neatly categorized as a single

genre or artistic technique, the common thread among all periods of French cinema is the unique associations that have always existed between the art and the state, a connection that has helped establish this pillar of French national identity.

Harris and Ezra argue that France recognized early the importance of cultivating a national image and understood the role of cinema in the formation and dissemination of the national image (2). Here, two words beg additional analysis: formation and dissemination. The formation of French identity through film has its roots in the birth of the industry in France, and French citizens have long regarded cinema as an essential anchor of their national heritage. It is even likely that French film and national identity were linked before the invention of the *cinématographe*. In 1891, anatomist Georges Demeny used Étienne-Jules Marey's serial camera to film a continuous sequences of individual shots. In the shots, he utters the syllables, "Vi-ve la Fran-ce."<sup>7</sup> These "speaking portraits" were replicated in a number of journals, and Demeny even hoped that they might ultimately replace family-album pictures. It has often been said that Demeny is one of several innovators that "gave cinema a soul." The honor of this accomplishment has often been used in reference to him and others who helped make "movie pictures talk." It is therefore worth noting that Demeny chose the specific phrases "Vi-ve la Fran-ce" for such a monumental moment; I believe this specific utterance was well-thought and certainly not *par hasard*. In the images, Demeny gazes directly at the spectator and exaggerates his enunciation of the syllables. Because the shot is so small in size and so focused on Demeny's face, the spectator is forced to concentrate on his mouth and the words themselves. During the brief moments caught on the clip, it seems that Demeny is making a declaration of the strength and power of

France. France had celebrated the centenary of the French Revolution only two years earlier, so the feelings evoked from such a momentous occasion were certainly still relevant and very palpable. Furthermore, it was during this fin-de-siècle period that France seemed to become increasingly aware of the state's international presence and the role it needed to play in the modern world. In "The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889-1900," Thompson highlights the importance of visual culture in the 1890s as a way for France to paint a new, modern picture of itself to the international world. Demeny's contribution can thus be examined on an international scale as well. Viewers with no knowledge of the French language would still be able to understand this popular phrase and would recognize immediately its country of origin. Thus, it was across this visual medium that the state of France was exalted, functioning as both a message to potential viewers worldwide as well as a type of authorial signature on the medium itself. Perhaps Demeny did give cinema a soul, a *French* soul that is. Through his shot, an enthusiastic French spirit was conveyed visually across an innovative medium, thereby anticipating more than a century of cinema reflecting, engaging, disputing, and informing the nation's image and cultural values.

As with any type of cultural representation, cinema has a role not only in the formation of a national image but also in the dissemination or *rayonnement* of this image. Due to the dual nature of film as both an art and an industry, French film has asserted itself as an international brand throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Harris and Ezra argue that French film is really the vehicle *par excellence* by which the nation projects itself abroad (6). Louise Strode echoes this assertion through her definition of a country's culture: "The 'Culture' of any given nation may be taken to mean those aspects



of cultural life that can be understood on an international level, such as films, music and language” (61). Thus, French film represents a visual culture by which French identity can project itself internationally.

## 1.2 The Domestic Challenge: Distinction or Imitation?

French cinema has proved throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries to be a significant component of French identity. Yet, despite its unquestionable classification as France’s seventh art, as a cultural product in an international market, it has proven to be extremely fragile, and its cultural specificity is subject to the challenges that an increasingly global market presents. The challenges to the existence of any art form are extensive and multi-faceted. However, I will limit my discussion to only a few of the greatest contemporary challenges to France’s cinematic specificity domestically.

A fear of American hegemony was undoubtedly behind a majority of the government assistance efforts (tariffs, subsidies, and quotas) that were enacted throughout the twentieth century. The American influence on the French cinema industry is indisputable. Hollywood’s mounting presence in France dates back to the early twentieth century and was especially pervasive in the post-war periods. Many film historians and analysts attribute Hollywood’s dominance simply to the popularity of American films. Jack Valenti, former president of the Motion Picture association of America, argued that consumer preference is what supports the growth of American films in France: “The public ought to decide... We dominate world screens – not because of armies, bayonets, or nuclear bombs, but because what we are exhibiting on foreign

screens [is what] the people of those countries want to see” (United States 211-212). Interestingly, Valenti omitted the significant financial advantage of the American cinematic industry to produce a high quality visual experience. Regardless of the reason, it is certainly true that the popularity of American culture and blockbuster Hollywood films has increased significantly over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The appeal of American films has understandably impacted consumer preference and reduced viewership of French films, thereby jeopardizing the cultural specificity of this industry. However, “American appeal” is certainly not the only threat. There are other recognized factors that help explain Hollywood’s ascendance to a global film power and specifically Hollywood’s powerful presence in France.

Ulf-Møller reveals four identifiable factors that have contributed to Hollywood’s overwhelming success in France. An examination of these factors and their French equivalent, where one exists, is useful in understanding how an American influence has become so pervasive in the French cinema market. First, he argues that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the American film industry, unlike its French counterpart, circumvented antitrust laws and set up vertically integrated industry organizations (xiii). As a result, several major US film studios have long controlled production, distribution, and exhibition. Lack of a similar structure in France has put the French industry at a significant organizational and economic disadvantage for competition purposes. Furthermore, problems in production, distribution, and exhibition are often common in the French industry. Of the three sectors, distribution is often the most problematic. A majority of the French distribution companies have very poor profitability, and the promotional budgets for French films are far exceeded by

Hollywood promotional budgets. For example, in 2006, the average marketing budget for French films was 508,800 euros, while American film studios spent nearly 36 million dollars on average to promote a film (Friedman; “France Spends More”). With such a staggering and growing difference in the promotional budgets of the two countries, it is difficult for the average French film to compete with its Hollywood counterpart.

Additionally, cinema law has traditionally been more restrictive in France than in the United States. The French government has strictly enforced its quota and subsidy system, often to the detriment of French films. Often likened to the American art world that receives financial assistance, French filmmakers are accused of being complacent, satisfied with a product of lesser quality. Said independent producer Deutchman, “French filmmakers still want their movies to be seen, it’s just that they can end up being satisfied with a much smaller audience and a much smaller profit margin as a result of working in a very heavily subsidized industry” (qtd. in Martin 13). Another reason for Hollywood’s significant presence in France is strong American trade policy and legislation in the post-World War I period. Finally, the last century has revealed that American film policy is consistently focused on exporting and promoting films worldwide, while France has been occupied with foreign imports and protecting films in France. In short, the US government has been extremely successful in promoting Hollywood on a global scale, while the French have done comparatively little in the way of *rayonnement*. These major differences in the Hollywood and French film industries explain in part the growing film imbalance between the two countries and the fear that French film is disappearing (Ulff-Møller xv-xiv).

The developing film imbalance studied by Ulff-Møller and the resulting crisis between industry and art were highlighted by a public dispute involving the current subsidy system in France. In 2004, a debate erupted over the possibility of making *le compte de soutien* available to all production companies that choose to film French movies in France. This support fund is derived from taxes, banks, and the state and is returned to films to help cover a portion of the production and exhibition costs.<sup>8</sup> The *compte de soutien* had been formerly reserved for French films that were funded 100% by a French production company. The debate began when *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, by French producer Jean-Pierre Jeunet, was refused an *agrément* from the CNC who is responsible for the management of the *compte de soutien*.<sup>9</sup> The film was denied funding because it was financed by Warner, an American production company. Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, the then-French minister of culture, announced plans to make the coveted *agrément* available to American producers, provided that they film in French and invest their funds in France. Many French citizens criticized this move, including Jean-François Lepetit (*Président de la Chambre syndicale des producteurs de films*). He argued that this reform would eliminate the small competitive edge that was provided to French cinema by the financial support system: “Notre système d’aides permet au cinéma français de faire bonne figure face à l’américain, à la différence de nos voisins européens” (qtd. in Meignan 117). Pascal Thomas (*Président de la Société des réalisateurs de films*) added that “Si vous laissez rentrer l’argent américain dans le financement des films français, les petits films auront plus de mal à trouver des fonds” (117). Additionally, many argued that this move would just allow American films a *carte blanche* on the television screens, as stations would be allowed to count these popular

American films among their required quotas. These arguments were echoed by many French citizens who believed that the financial gain of allowing American investments in the industry did not outweigh the damage that might be done to French cinema and its cultural distinctiveness, once again underscoring the incompatibility of economic and cultural goals within the cinema industry.

Undoubtedly, the growing popularity of American films, the strength of the American film industry, and French-funded financial assistance for American productions in France all put French films at a serious disadvantage. Yet, it can be also argued that France has been complicit in the industry's downfall, and not just on a financial level. Hayward explains that Hollywood represents the epicenter of the film industry, because it leads in exportation of films and "because all other cinemas define their difference in relation to this dominant cinematic culture against which they cannot compete either on the economic or on the production level" (Hayward, *French National Cinema* 13). Thus, according to this mentality, French national cinema views itself in relation to Hollywood. That France's cinematic identity is defined by the Hollywood product is critical to the integrity of the French cultural exception. If French cinema is to survive, some say it must creatively define itself. From production to exhibition, the creation of a French film is often a reaction to the American model, rather than a cultivation of the French cinematic industry. Preferring that the French advance their own model and champion their own cinematic specificity, many cultural exception champions berate this type of reactive approach.

One of the ways that many French products have survived has been through the imitation of the highly successful American product, and cinema is no exception. French

action films provide one example of the way in which the French industry has tried to compete head-on with its American counterpart through an imitative approach.

Mainstream American films generally share six characteristics: “brisk pacing (or at least quick cutting), sexual tension, graphic violence, intrigue, a novel approach to a timeworn fable, and whenever possible, a happy ending” (Martin 14). French films that adopt these characteristics tend to fare well in France. For example, Luc Besson’s films often contain many of these “American” characteristics. *La femme Nikita* (1990), *Le cinquième élément* (1997), and the *Taxi* (1998) films are action films that contain many of these defining cinematic qualities *à l’américaine*. This type of imitation can have both positive and negative results for France’s cinematic exception. If France were to continue to produce films that are *French* compared to American films, French film might have a chance at maintaining a cultural distinction. But Besson’s films clearly imitate the mainstream, box-office hits in the US, and they also are undeniably successful in France as well. But, their success is not without criticism. Accusations of Besson’s “crossing over” are plentiful; he makes an *American* movie, filled with action and special effects sequences, and many believe this undermines the theoretical foundation of the cultural exception. For many, who share the opinion of NYU professor Reed Martin, this represents a larger problem, a true crisis of art and industry. States Martin, “Unless French filmmakers switch reels and begin to make movies that the global marketplace demands, the country that produced classic motion pictures . . . will become just another ancillary market”(6). Thus, it appears economically critical that French production companies produce films that can compete with mass-market Hollywood products in

order to survive, but does this then begin the inevitable eradication of distinctively French films?

As some producers are accused of *Americanizing* their films and thereby threatening the existence of French film, there are other challenges in the exhibition facet of a film's life. Since the mid-1980s, the construction of multiplex cinemas has skyrocketed across France as well as the rest of Western Europe. In 1993, French studio giant Pathé built the first multiplex in France with the hope of countering the decline in cinema audiences. The goal was to build something based on the American model that might attract those spectators that found the existing French theaters to be small and uncomfortable. The CNC defines a multiplex as the following: "un complexe cinématographique d'au moins 10 salles disposant d'une capacité d'accueil d'au moins 1500 fauteuils" (Delon 6). Thus, the multiplexes are far larger and more spacious than the existing theaters. In terms of the films shown, multiplexes feature a mix of Hollywood blockbusters, mainstream French productions, and the occasional independent film (Hayward, *French National Cinema* 53). Eleven multiplexes opened in 2008, bringing the total of multiplexes in France to 164 which is more than double the number of multiplexes in France only ten years earlier (Exploitation). The building of these complexes, and the resulting growth in the number of theaters (from 4300 in 1993 to 5400 in 2008), has significantly impacted cinema attendance. Over the fifteen year period between 1993 and 2008, audience figures have risen from 132 million to 188 million. In 2008, multiplexes accounted for more than half (54.9%) of total film audience for the year (Ibid.). All these figures demonstrate that the *effet multiplexe* is likely responsible for helping to increase film attendance in France.

Despite their seemingly positive impact on the industry's financial health, the explosion of multiplexes in France has certainly been controversial. Many French citizens were and continue to be outraged by a perceived Americanization of French film culture in all stages of a film's life from production to exhibition. Several online forums reveal heated conversations related to the growing presence of multiplexes in France: "l'ère est aux multiplexes, ces blocs de salles multiples qui appartiennent à des monstres internationaux qui ont fait de la projection cinématographique une industrie alors que c'était un artisanat" ("Pour un cinéma d'auteurs"). The complexes seem to follow the American trend of "hyperconsumption," already evident in the growing popularity of hypermarkets, sports stadiums, theme parks, and leisure and retail parks. Three metaphors have been used to criticize the multiplex, including *les McDo du cinéma*, *le cinéma fast-food*, and *ciné-supermarchés* (Hayes 15-16). Hayes suggests that these metaphors make associations that underscore the commercial, as opposed to the cultural, value of the multiplex. It is argued that, like fastfood and hypermarkets, the origin of the multiplex is American, and it embodies American ideals that promote capitalism and challenge traditional French cultural values.

Multiplex criticism extends beyond the commercialism and hyperconsumption associated with the establishments. Although a wide variety of movies appear on the screens in the multiplexes, the selection of films is usually market-driven, meaning that American films or mainstream French films tend to dominate the screens. Only films with large initial returns remain on the screens, so independent films with small promotional budgets are the first to go. Many critics argue that the rise of the multiplex precipitates the fall of the independent exhibitor. For those who champion the cultural



exception, this would mean that those French films that have escaped American influence might not find a venue for their film. Likewise, it could mean that young, innovative producers, who have historically represented one of France's principal cinematic strengths, might not find a theater willing to exhibit their film.

It is undeniable that this less restrictive subsidy system will lead to an increase of mainstream French films, based frequently on the American model described earlier. As I have shown, the multiplexes that house many of these films have helped boost audience figures in France and improved the cinema industry's overall health. Furthermore, the increased revenues from the multiplexes increase the state film support budgets, thereby contributing additional financial assistance toward the production of future French films. And although an increase in audience attendance is critical to French cinema's economic health, these changes have certain consequences for France's cinematic specificity. France's adaptability and eagerness to compete with the mass-market Hollywood product through imitation is perceived by many as a double-edged sword. As an increasing number of French citizens flock to see American films or Hollywood-like movies in an American-like setting, it appears to many that the Hollywood model has begun the potentially irreversible homogenization of global cinema. One must then consider the paradoxical implications of France's adaptability to the American model. On one hand, it strengthens the industry; on the other hand, it may threaten "the concepts of citizenship, diversity, and pluralism on which the legitimacy of the *exception culturelle* ultimately rests" (Hayes 30).

Although American hegemony in the cinematic world presents a nearly insurmountable challenge for many French cinema enthusiasts, much of the problem

stems from the French adaptability to an increasingly *Americanized* industry, as discussed earlier. Other French cinema enthusiasts argue that the problem stems not only from the imitation of the American model but likewise from the industry's own divisiveness. Some have argued that the so-called devil within has come in the form of French film critics. In 1999, a group of directors claimed that many of the influential critics at leading newspapers appropriated more space and consistently gave more positive reviews to American films. On October 13 of that year, Patrice Leconte, a well-known French director, sent the following letter to his colleagues in the Société Civile des Auteurs, Réalisateurs, et Producteurs expressing his disgust of the treatment of French films in the Paris press:

Chers amis,

Depuis quelques temps, je suis effaré de l'attitude de la critique vis-à-vis du cinéma français. Je ne me sens pas plus visé qu'un autre (plutôt moins d'ailleurs), mais je lis simplement ce qui s'écrit sur nos films. Certains papiers qui ressemblent à d'autant d'assassinats prémédités, me font froid dans le dos, comme si leurs auteurs s'étaient donnés le mot pour tuer le cinéma français commercial, populaire, grand public.

Je ne sais pas ce que nous pouvons faire face à cette situation critique (le mot est amusant). J'ai bien quelques idées, mais je ne sais pas si elles sont bonnes. J'aimerais en parler avec vous, d'une manière informelle.

Merci de ne pas me laisser seul avec ma colère et ma perplexité.

Amitiés,  
Patrice Leconte (Ecran Noir)

Lamenting the decline in audience attendance during 1998 and 1999, Leconte later targeted the French Press, specifically *Libération*, *Le monde*, and *Télérama*: "Since the

fall, all French films have flopped. I see this auguring the collapse of French cinema in its entirety. And in this, French critics are playing the role of gravediggers” (qtd. in Riding). Leconte garnered support from sixty other directors and ultimately suggested that critics work as partners with French film producers to help promote French films. In a draft of a directors’ declaration that was to be distributed to moviegoers outside theaters, a request was made that no negative review of a film be published before the weekend after its theater release. The reaction to the draft was hostile, as the targeted newspapers condemned what appeared as censorship request. A statement denouncing the draft followed shortly, but the impact of the declaration and its request lingered. Further, some directors continued their support of the declaration, arguing that many of the newspapers’ film critics used “killer words,” or overly negative expressions that had an extremely damaging impact on the more serious directors whose natural audience actually read reviews (Riding). Whether or not the critics’ reviews of French movies have an impact on their popularity and audience attendance is debatable and certainly difficult to quantify. However, the heated debate, now commonly referred to as “L’Affaire Leconte,” drew attention again to the paradoxical nature of the cultural exception, as French citizens took pause to contemplate whether or not censored criticism would in fact help French cinema or seriously undermine its integrity.

More recently, film critics have been accused of providing reviews that counter the American reaction to films and actors. It is well-known that the French have long been enamored with Jerry Lewis, a fact that is still surprising to many Americans. From time to time, an American actor or actress such as Lewis will capture the attention of French cinephiles and critics alike; some American critics argue that the French

obsession with a certain actor, actress or film is based on a desire to provide support for someone or something that has been underappreciated or not taken seriously by American viewers. The French fascination with Mickey Rourke provides a more contemporary example of this. In the 1990s, Mickey Rourke began his climb to fame in France. A certain look, that of “faded jeans, dirty hair, two-day stubble,” was even dubbed Le Look Rourke (Stanley, “Can 50 Million”). Rourke managed to exemplify a social type that was appreciated by the European, and certainly French, audiences. The French were captivated by *9 ½ weeks* (1986) and *Year of the Dragon* (1985), films that were relatively unpopular, and perhaps even unknown, in the U.S. As his films received unflattering criticism by Hollywood spectators and critics alike, one French critic from *Cahiers du Cinéma* claimed that *Year of the Dragon* was a masterpiece and enthusiastically praised Rourke’s performance, claiming he was clearly more talented than other Hollywood leading men (“Vive le Wrestler”). The film went on to make the *Cahiers du Cinéma*’s annual top ten list, while its reception across the ocean provided a stark contrast. Called an abomination by many film critics, the film was nominated for five Razzie Awards in the US, including Worst Screenplay, Worst Picture, and Worst Actress.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note though that the *Cahier*’s list and the Razzie Awards are only two examples of an enormous body of film criticism. As acknowledged earlier, individual examples of film criticism cannot be viewed as universal or entirely reflective of public opinion.

In 2008, Rourke was cast in the film *The Wrestler*, which received widespread critical acclaim in the United States. Although the French were reportedly excited about the return of one of their beloved American actors to the big screen, their initial enthusiasm was subsumed by an adverse reaction to the American reception of this film.

Philippe Garnier of *Libération* wrote, “On est content pour Mickey Rourke, mais ce film sentimental et mal fichu n’est même pas *Rocky*” (Garnier). This sentiment was echoed by several other film critics as well who seemed to change their tone in comparison to their initial reviews, once the film was given flattering reviews in the US. This polarized reception of certain actors and films is problematic for many French film enthusiasts. For them, this prescribed, artificial reaction against whatever American reviewers say is equally as damaging to French cinematic identity as the unreserved praise that is often given to American films.

The current debate over French film criticism underscores a larger, more serious issue for the French cultural exception. Is French film in a reactive state, where the life of a film, from its screenplay to its criticism is *prescribed* by a Hollywood model? There is certainly concrete evidence that many of the films produced in France, the establishments that house them, and the criticism that follows them are purely reactions to an American model. If this is the case, then claims of cultural exceptionalism may be misguided, since the French product seems, in many cases, to be a response: an adoption or rejection of the Hollywood model.

If American films, or imitations of them, are what resonate most with the French audience, on whose behalf are the protection efforts executed and maintained? That is, it seems that protection of French film against American influence in the cinematic industry may not necessarily represent public interest, as revealed by the popularity of American films and those French films with imitative qualities. Attempts to protect French film against external influences may more accurately represent the anxieties of a minority who

are fearful of a Hollywood “takeover” of the French cinematic industry and the global implications for the self-image of a country that “invented” cinema.

It appears that French cinema currently rests in an awkward state, teetering between those who want to cling to France’s rich history in cinema and those who feel that France’s cinematic future should be decided on economic, rather than artistic, terms. Ultimately, the future of France’s cinematic exception will be determined by the way in which the industry resolves the increasing tension between imitation and distinction and industry and art.

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<sup>1</sup> *Belle de jour*, the 1967 box office hit, was re-released in 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *Kulturindustrie* (culture industry) is an expression first used in 1947 by German philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. It has been defined in an official legal context by the Canada and United States Free Trade Agreement (CUFSTA) which defines a cultural industry as the sectors of books, magazines, films and video recordings, musical recordings, radio-communications, and broadcasting. Several synonyms for this term are commonly used, including *copyrighted industries*, *sunshine industries*, and *creative industries*. For a more in-depth discussion of culture industries, see Neuwirth.

<sup>3</sup> The expression “seventh art” (*septième art*) was developed by Ricciotto Canudo, a Franco-Italian film critic who believed that cinema deserved an official classification as an art. Asserting that cinema helped to synthesize spatial arts with the temporal arts, Canudo lobbied for its recognition as the seventh art. It followed architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, music and poetry, which were the six other arts originally identified by Hegel in his “Lectures on Aesthetics.”

<sup>4</sup> The Institute is comprised of a museum and a projection and editing center and is housed in what was formerly the Lumière family mansion in Lyon.

<sup>5</sup> An import system of 1:7 requires that one French film must be produced and displayed in French cinemas for every seven foreign films imported to France.

<sup>6</sup> In this context, “Nazi control” refers to the German occupation of France, while Vichy refers to the French government that was in place between July 1940 and August 1944.

<sup>7</sup> The serial camera is considered to be the immediate precursor of the *cinématographe*.

<sup>8</sup> For additional information on this support fund, see Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> According to the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie), *films agréés* are those films that are 100% French or co-produced films in which France is a partner.

<sup>10</sup> The Razzie Awards are part of the Golden Raspberry Awards. Created in 1980, these awards dishonor the worst acting, screenwriting, directing, and films in the American film industry.

## CHAPTER 2

### *L'EXCEPTION CINÉMATIQUE :* PROTECTING AND “PROJECTING” THE FRENCH CINEMATIC EXCEPTION

*Un film n'est pas seulement  
une histoire que le cinéma  
vend, mais aussi une culture,  
un pays, un autre type de  
consommation.*  
Bertrand Tavernier

*Mon invention sera exploitée  
pendant un certain temps comme une  
curiosité scientifique, mais à part  
cela elle n'a aucune valeur  
commerciale quelle qu'elle soit.*  
Auguste Lumière

The preceding chapter highlighted the growing challenges facing the cinematic industry in France. The French cinematic exception finds itself at a crossroad of industry and art: imitation of the American model boosts the health of French cinema, while attempts to distinguish itself help to sustain the cultural value and distinctiveness of French film. In the following chapter, I will evaluate the attempts to protect and “project” French cinema. Specifically, I will detail the subsidy and quota system in France today and the arguments for and against this unique economic understanding between state and culture. I will likewise explore the issue of exportability of French

cinema today in an effort to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of France's attempts to market its films internationally.

## 2.1 French Cinematic Specificity: A Collaborative Effort between State and Culture

If, as it has been revealed in the previous chapter, French cinema has helped the state in creating and projecting a national image, the relationship has certainly been mutual. That is, the state has intervened in the form of quotas, dubbing restrictions, tariffs, and a variety of production subsidies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to help keep French cinema afloat and to counter the many contemporary challenges that French film faces. And although the survival of French cinema is the ultimate goal, these protective measures reflect a deeply-held belief that cinema must not be subjected to the whims of economic liberalization.

Over the last century, economic liberalization has grown in tandem with cinema, and the French government has been forced to justify the protection of the industry that France created. In her book *Limits to Liberalization*, Patricia Goff highlights the difficulty in reconciling economic and cultural interests: "Europeans insist that they cannot simultaneously liberalize the culture sector and mobilize this sector in the pursuit of cultural sovereignty, cultural particularity, and identity formation" (11). Thus, France as well as many other European countries, there seems to be an inherent incompatibility in the pursuit of economic and sociocultural goals in modern times. Given the important role that cinema plays in France's cultural heritage and its very delicate position in an era of liberalization, the French government has taken and continues to support a number of significant measures to protect this seventh art.



Although many associate *l'exception française* with the GATT negotiations of 1993, the protection of French cinema existed throughout the twentieth century. Two predominant characteristics defined government intervention in French cinema throughout the twentieth century: assistance to increase profitability in the cinematic industry and protection from foreign, notably American, influences. It is certainly true that other cinematic influences are present in France; however, as Hayward asserts, “Traditionally the ‘national’ of a cinema is defined in terms of its difference from other cinemas of other nations, primarily in terms of its difference from the cinema of the United States (i.e., Hollywood)” (*French National Cinema* 8). Thus, although there are many competing forces in the global cinematic market, the focus in this section as well as this entire chapter will be on the protection and promotion of the cultural exception in the face of Hollywood and the cinematic hegemony it represents in France.

The measures to support French cinema in France have not been met without resistance, even on the domestic front. Generally speaking, over the history of government assistance to French cinema, film producers have supported government protection, while cinema owners have lobbied for free access to American films (Ulff-Møller 55). Thus, the debate over how to treat American films in France is long-standing and has its origin in Hollywood’s international expansion during World War I. As the US implemented dumping practices, the American film industry firmly rooted itself in the European market.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the French government felt a need to intervene and resorted to tariffs, since that was the typical protective tool used to combat foreign influences in trade matters. The measure proved, however, to be ineffective and even

harmful domestically, due to the financial power of the American film industry and the unexpected unemployment that it created in the French film industry.<sup>2</sup>

Unsuccessful at moderating Hollywood's dominant position in France, the French government sought other measures to protect the French industry. In 1919, a visa system was introduced; under this system, a *Commission de contrôle* was given the responsibility to assess and ban, if necessary, imported films. An official quota policy was proposed in 1928 to replace the existing visa system. The quota policy sought to reduce American film imports to France while increasing French film exports to the United States. In 1927, the then minister of fine arts, Edouard Herriot, established a film commission to study the French cinema industry and ultimately decide what measures of protection were needed in order to compete with Hollywood. On March 1, 1928, the Herriot decree went into effect and was composed of several defining parts. First, the decree sought more favorable tax treatment for the national cinema industry. Secondly, it bestowed additional powers on the Cinema Control Commission, allowing the commission to censor any films that contained an "anti-French" message. Finally, the decree gave the commission the power to institute quotas. As a result, a seven-to-one quota was introduced; for each seven export licenses sought, the United States was required to buy one French film. The president of the Film Commission, Paul Léon, argued that the decree was a purely protectionist measure and in no way reflected resentment toward foreign films. The American reaction to the decree strongly contested Léon's assertion. In fact, on March 4, 1928, an article from *The New York Times* entitled "Hollywood Has a Foreign War" was published. In the article, journalist John Carter argued that the motives behind the decree were driven by more than economic protectionism. He

claimed that such a quota reflected the French, as well as European, conviction that American films are “a subtle and pervasive means of advertising American goods.” Carter added that the French believed that American films, when shown in colonized areas such as Africa, presented natives with messages that were “incompatible to white prestige, demoralizing and trouble breeding.” It is worth noting that it was American, and not French, cultural colonialism that was feared in areas where the French had colonized. To summarize, the motives behind the first French quota legislation appeared far more complex than they appeared on paper and stemmed from more than purely economic concerns.

Many film historians agree that the Herriot decree, France’s first quota system, arrived after American film already had a firm grip on the French market and that such a foothold was nearly irreversible. Hayward remarks that the tardiness of the Herriot decree and its ultimate futility foreshadowed a series of similar outcomes throughout the twentieth century. Specifically its “attempted protectionism and limited failure, served as a metonymy for any future legislation aimed at protecting France’s industry against America’s monopolising tendencies” (*French National Cinema* 23). At the time however, it was widely believed that the system merely needed to be reworked to protect more effectively the French industry. Therefore, in 1936, the French government established a dubbing quota of 150 dubbed American films per year which was ultimately reduced to 110 dubbed American films permitted in 1952.

During World War II, German occupation of France prevented any import of American films. Thus, the postwar period represented a large threat to French national cinema, since Americans had a huge backlog of more than two thousand films. The

previously instituted numerical quotas had proven quite ineffective. A new trade policy was needed to protect French cinema from an inundation of American films that would protect French cinema during the post-war period and have a long-term application for the industry. The Blum-Byrnes Agreement was established in 1946.<sup>3</sup> This agreement eliminated all restrictions on U.S. film imports, and a screen quota replaced the former import quota. This particular screen quota required that four weeks of each thirteen-week quarter (31%) be reserved for the presentation of domestic films. The agreement was criticized immediately for clearly understating French film production potential. Before the war, France had consistently produced more than thirty-one percent of the market share. The agreement was intended to establish a minimum requirement, but it simultaneously became an unanticipated maximum (Segrave 165).

The agreement had a disastrous impact on the French film industry. In the years following the Blum-Byrnes agreement, French film production fell drastically. As a result, many of the film industry personnel found themselves unemployed, and a handful of French film studios were forced to close their doors. It was not, however, the quality of American films that seemed to stifle the French cinema industry. The weakness of the Blum-Byrnes agreement combined with the financial muscle of the American film industry resulted in a seeming paralysis of the French cinema industry. Having already recuperated production costs in the United States, American film producers were able to underprice French films and offer French cinema owners a larger cut of the box office gross relative to their cut of French films. For French distributors and exhibitors, the decision was simple: American films were a better buy. So, for the other nine weeks of

every quarter that were open to American films per the Blum-Byrnes Agreement, French films had little chance against the Hollywood competition.

The variety of tariffs and quotas implemented in the first half of the twentieth century demonstrated the need for a different kind of government intervention if French cinema were to rebound. The numerical and screen quotas placed on American imports seemed to do little to overcome the drastic economic disparities between the French and American cinema industries. In short, French film needed more than protection, it needed financial assistance. In response to a significant amount of dissent and lobbying efforts, the French government passed the *Loi d'aide* in 1948. The *Loi d'aide* was a tax on box office sales that was placed on every film exhibited. The funds garnered from this tax on profits were to be used to help finance French film production and exhibition. The law was enacted for a five-year period.

In 1953, a second *loi d'aide* was proposed and adopted; French film producers continued to receive financial aid for production and exhibition. In 1959, the third *loi d'aide* was enacted, and the *fonds d'aide* became the *fonds de soutien*. These *fonds de soutien* had and continue to have two primary sources: *soutien automatique* and *avance sur recettes (aide sélective)*. The *soutien automatique* is a levy on box-office receipts that benefits all French productions and assists with the financing of subsequent films. At the time that it was implemented, it accounted for fifteen to twenty-five percent of production costs and helped “stimulate ‘national’ productions to compete against the Americans” (Hayward, *French National Cinema* 46). Today, it accounts for about only eight percent of production costs, so it has a considerably weaker impact.

In 1960, the *Avances sur recettes* was implemented, giving interest-free loans to those approved films that might not otherwise be able to finance their cinematic productions. A government appointed commission is responsible for the administration of these loans and the selection process is based on the quality of these films, as deemed by the administration. The system ultimately benefits twenty percent of films made and often targets films that can be classified as experimental or auteur, a type of “new cinema.” This system should not be confused with a subsidy system; unlike subsidies, these loans are to be repaid with a portion of the profits that the film yields. Realistically, only a small fraction of these loans are repaid, since the films selected to receive these funds are rarely blockbusters and thus do not yield a sufficient profit to repay the original loan. Despite its inability to impact a wide range of films, the fund reflected the state’s commitment to creativity and innovation, cinematic ideals that underscored a *politique de création*.

The system of aid that was put into place at the middle of the twentieth century continued to be enforced throughout the following decades. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that these financial assistance measures were changed. In 1981, the then Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, doubled the advance fund. He also established a tax shelter called a Société pour le financement du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel (SOFICA) so that investors that choose to invest in French film production receive favorable tax treatment. Lang believed that this might motivate investors to contribute much needed capital to producers and filmmakers.

In the 1980s and subsequent decades, the focus on French film profitability took a back seat to the invasion of American films in France. In fact, in looking retrospectively

at government intervention in the cinema industry, it appears as though France has oscillated frequently between periods of government protection and financial assistance, or perhaps it is best defined as periods of cultural defense and promotion. For example, after decades of fine tuning the *fonds de soutien* in an attempt to promote French film, attention in the 1980s and 1990s seemed to steer back toward the influx of American blockbusters in France. In 1989, the European Union instituted the “Television without Frontiers” directive which limited the number of American films shown in French theaters and on French television. When this directive did not attain the effectiveness its supporters sought, the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations of 1994 provided an apt venue for a debate. As described earlier, the French lobbied its European partners to support *l’exception culturelle*, thereby excluding French film from the liberalization of trade and thus permitting France to maintain its system of protective subsidies.

The subsidies that provided the stimulus behind the heated debates at the GATT negotiations represent one of France’s largest and most controversial protective measures to French films. Currently, the process begins with the *compte de soutien* which is managed by the CNC. The funds for the *compte de soutien* are from taxes, banks and the state. The *compte de soutien* is administered as a *soutien automatique* which all French films and co-productions may use and *avance sur recettes*, mentioned earlier. Although the original criterion for selection for the *avance sur recettes* was films of “quality,” which meant mostly auteur films, the administrative committee of the CNC is far less selective today (Hayward, “State, culture and cinema” 2).

Although the GATT agreements and the related subsidies are most frequently cited in discussions of the French cultural exception, there have been several, lesser

known laws that have been passed in an attempt to protect French cinema. In 1996, the Raffarin Act was passed in an attempt to limit the growth of multiplexes. Modeled on the 1973 Royer Act, the Raffarin Act required that all cinema complexes that exceed a certain capacity must be submitted for authorization.<sup>4</sup> France was the first country in the European Union to introduce and pass legislation intended to curtail multiplex growth. The Raffarin Act did have its share of critics, because its goals seemed to be more commercial than cultural. Another recent law which is likely to cause some controversy in the context of the French cultural exception is the Tax Rebate for International Productions (TRIP) which was passed in June 2009. Unlike previous legislation which has seemed to focus on the protection or promotion of French-produced films, the *crédit d'impôt international*, as it is known in France, is a twenty percent tax rebate for international productions that film in France. Film France, the organization responsible for attracting international film-makers, had lobbied for four years to establish this significant tax rebate for foreign productions. With a cap of four million euros per film, this tax credit provides a significant financial incentive to those film productions that might have chosen to film in other countries for financial reasons. International film producers that hope to be eligible for the rebate must spend at least one million euros on eligible costs and shoot the film for at least five days in France. Beyond these criteria, the producers must submit the film for a cultural test that requires French characters, French source material, or the use of French technicians (Tartaglione-Vialatte).

On paper, the goal of the rebate appears to be to primarily economic: to encourage foreign investment in France through the production of films that showcase the culture,



heritage, or territory of the country. Film France president Nicolas Traube argues the following:

The raison d'être of this measure is to convince foreign producers to shoot films in France whose action has a French element but which are often shot in foreign countries – as is the case with Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Bastards* for which a large part of the script happens in France but which is being shot almost entirely in Germany. (qtd. in Tartaglione-Vialatte)

And although there is widespread support for Traube's argument, there is a growing concern that this new financial incentive will result primarily in the dumping of blockbuster American films in France, making success for the small, struggling French producer increasingly difficult, if not impossible. According to Frank Priot, deputy director of Film France, foreign production companies typically film five kinds of movies in France, including romantic comedies, spy movies, gentleman-burglar stories, sword-and-sorcery movies, and sequels (Hopewell). Not surprisingly, many of these genres coincide with the American genres that are especially popular in France. Skeptics wonder how stringent the cultural test, which has yet to be finalized, will actually be and if the promise to promote French culture in film is really an empty one, masking a clearly financial decision.

## 2.2 Supporting and Opposing Government Intervention

The debate over the tax rebate highlights the growing tension and division between supporters and opponents of protection measures. Those in favor of state

intervention to help French cinema typically cite American domination and the need for cultural diversity as their two principal arguments. As described in the previous chapter, the fear of American hegemony in the cinematic industry is one of the principal arguments for state intervention and the implementation of defensive measures. According to some scholars, this fear is immeasurable and stems in part from a developing identity crisis in France. In an article in *Time* magazine published in 2007, journalist Donald Morrison suggests that French culture is experiencing a *déclinisme*, a state of decline that many other contemporary authors have articulated in books such as *La France qui tombe* (Nicolas Baverez), *Le grand gaspillage: Les vrais comptes de l'Etat* (Jacques Marseille), and *La guerre des deux France: Celle qui avance et celle qui freine* (Jacques Marseille). These texts argue that this “decline” has a cultural impact and challenges the country’s notion of or claim to cultural exceptionalism. The term *déclinisme* must be used cautiously and with limited application, given that France continues to boast the sixth strongest economy worldwide and is still regarded as an international cultural center. But, Morrison and other scholars suggest that “France’s diminished cultural profile” is particularly significant because of the country’s long history of promoting cultural influence. Certain culture industries, such as cinema, have been a part of national policy for over a century, making this so-called decline particularly agonizing for such a significant cultural institution. With a growing belief that French cinema is indeed experiencing a “failing position in the international arena,” many French blame the United States, and specifically Hollywood, for this cinematic decline (Gentleman).

Although *un déclinisme cinématographique* is itself difficult to quantify, recent statistics detailing France's cinematic industry reveal Hollywood's mounting presence in the hexagon. According to [cbo-boxoffice.com](http://cbo-boxoffice.com), Hollywood films or co-productions have accounted for seven of the top ten films shown every year during the period from 1999 to 2009.<sup>5</sup> For all but two of the years analyzed, two of the top three films were consistently American productions. Figures such as these continue to motivate supporters of government intervention who hope to prevent France from becoming a mere channel for any Hollywood product.

The threat of a Hollywood takeover of French cinema has become so entrenched in French mentality that several metaphors describing this threat are commonly used today. A language of colonialism and war has been applied to Hollywood's hegemony, suggesting the notion of France as battlefield or a site of struggle between French film (*Astérix*) and Hollywood (*César*). In this same context, the threat of American films has been likened to a mental occupation. Says French director Bertrand Tavernier,

The Americans understood that if they are forcing people to see the film, the people who see the film will buy the product – they will buy hamburgers, they will buy Coca-Cola, they will buy clothes – and maybe they will buy their policy. They [Americans] always understood that the first way to occupy a country was to impose their films. (qtd. in “French hit out”)

The term *vampirisation* has also been used to describe the “draining of the life-blood of French culture by powerful Hollywood producers” (Mazdon, *Encore Hollywood*, 148). These provocative expressions are not just used among those in the cinema industry. In

two separate speeches in 1993, François Mitterrand and Jacques Toubon each spoke of a French cinema “under attack,” struggling against the cultural other (America). In his acceptance of an honorary doctorate at Gdansk University in 1993, Mitterrand clearly explained how this attack by Hollywood would lead to a cultural enslavement: “Une société qui abandonne à d’autres de se rendre présente à elle-même, est une société asservie.”

Yet many who draw such conclusions are quick to explain that it is not just the dominance and pervasiveness of American films in France that concern them, it is also the content of American films. According to many French directors and intellectuals, American films are partially responsible for producing a generation of “stupid children” in the country (“French hit out”). Claiming that many Hollywood movies suffer from a poverty of ideas, a handful of French critics believe that the viewing of Hollywood movies, specifically high-profile effects-driven blockbusters, have a negative impact on French children. Some argue that the consequences on these French youth are profound, long-lasting, and have broader implications. Tavernier explained that this trend is creating a less analytical generation: “I go very often to schools, and I have found a lot of young kids have difficulties in analyzing a concept, an idea, in a film” (qtd. in “French hit out”). Thus, advocates of protectionism argue that defensive measures are critical in mitigating the damaging impact of what many call an American non-culture.

The other principal justification behind government aid in the cinematic industry concerns the issue of cultural diversity. During the 1990s, the term “cultural exception” was replaced by the term “cultural diversity” (*la diversité culturelle*<sup>6</sup>), although both are used interchangeably today. Originating in Canada, the expression *la diversité culturelle*

was deemed more acceptable, marketable, and arguably more politically correct than its predecessor. While the two terms are often considered synonymous in their contemporary usages, the fundamental idea behind *la diversité culturelle* is that protecting French culture contributes to worldwide cultural diversity and preserves what ex-president Mitterrand has called “l’idée universelle de la culture,” the basic notion that culture, including but not limited to cinema, has universal significance (Strode 67). Jacques Toubon, former French minister of culture, echoed this sentiment, claiming that proponents for government protection are less concerned with a French identity crisis, as described earlier, but rather are supporters of world cinema. In this context, world cinema implies the existence and longevity of a multiplicity of cinematic products. These arguments for cinematic diversity in the world are based on the premise that the value of cinema transcends commercialism and has a definable sociocultural worth in the world, one that is worthy of safeguarding. Patricia Goff maintains that government intervention in the cinematic sector is not protectionism but a necessary way to “negotiate regional, cultural and economic heterogeneity” in the world (40). She adds that cinema, as well as other visual culture industries, play a critical role in providing “a forum in which a repertoire of signs, traditions, values, myths, and intersubjective understandings that make up collective identity can be transmitted and debated” (7). In short, it is argued that government subsidies and defensive measures help prevent the homogenization of the cinema market and likewise help cultivate a protected space for collective identity formation. Supporters of protective measures argue that government-backed social protection thwarts a Hollywood takeover of world cinema and likewise protect the diverse cultural products that color the cinematic industry today.

The arguments for government intervention are countered by advocates of complete economic liberalization of the cinematic sector. One of the most basic tenets of their case involves consumer sovereignty. Opponents of government intervention share a belief that cinema, like French wine, is a consumer good that should be subjected to an international market without barriers. Thus, their argument is based on a conviction that the consumer reigns supreme and should have complete discretion over the movies he watches. Citing France as a country of free-choice, these critics claim that through protectionist measures, film selection is pre-programmed for the viewer. Opponents of complete economic liberalization of the industry are quick to rebut, asserting that the argument for free choice is a myth and that American distributors *program* viewers through advertising. Cowen explains that the “sheepish public, in turn, responds passively to whatever is offered.”

For other critics of government aid, the problem is less about the individual and more about the system itself. They argue that quotas and subsidies are often damaging to filmmaking, creating an environment that does not foster innovative films. This can result in *quota quickies* which are hastily made films produced in order to meet a certain quota. These types of films often use low-budget treatments of sex and violence, thus encouraging the movie industry to adopt American cinema’s worst attributes. It is interesting to note that the money gained from the production of these films is rarely reinvested into the French cinema industry, as the production of these films is often financed by American business executives (Cowen). Another problem is that the administration of interest-free loans (*avances sur recettes*) frequently has unintended results. Specifically, since these loans must be repaid if the film is profitable, the “policy

lowers the incentives for making a successful film,” as filmmakers are satisfied with a mediocre product (7). Hayward summarizes the seeming paradoxical nature of the structure, explaining that the attempts of the state to help the industry often have an unproductive or counterproductive impact primarily because cinema is not a state institution; simply put, it is not nationalized. She reasons that the more the industry receives, the less effective it seems to become (Hayward, *French National Cinema* 39). Finally, with the Tax Rebate for International Production (T.R.I.P.) offered to American productions, many critics say that the integrity of the traditional structure has been compromised. That is, if financial concessions are being made to American filmmakers, what remains of the justification behind exclusive support of French filmmakers?

Some opponents of government aid, such as Tyler Cowen, author of “French Kiss-Off : How protectionism has hurt French films,” offer an argument supporting transnational cinema, or world cinema.<sup>7</sup> This is a belief that decisions should be made in the best interest of the cinema product at large, not just on the basis of a particular cinema. To that end, some claim that the discourse upon which this debate rests is flawed. Specifically, supporters of economic liberalization believe that the term “national cinema” is misleading, since a number of actors, directors and producers from a variety of backgrounds come together to create a product that may or may not have ties to a traditionally French genre or innovation. One interesting example of this is the film *JCVD* (2008), a crime-based comedy drama featuring Jean-Claude Van Damme as himself. The film was directed by French-Algerian Mabrouk El Mechri, features a cast of Americans, French, and Belgians, was filmed in the United States and Brussels, and alternates between English and French. Clearly, it is difficult to attribute one clear

nationality to the film, given the mix of cultural backgrounds that are involved in the film. And, this is only one example of many. Several other leading directors in France come from all over the world. Additionally, an increasing number of French filmmakers are filming in English or enlisting American producers and actors to bend the definition of “French” and circumvent the rules restricting government subsidies. Ultimately, this means that it has become extremely difficult to identify which films are truly French, thus challenging the notion of cultural exceptionalism and the premise upon which protective measures exist.

Naysayers of protectionism argue that there is no culturally pure product to protect, because all the components of a film, from production to distribution, represent a kaleidoscope of innovations inspired from countries across the globe. These supporters of a world or hybrid cinema claim that the absence of protectionist measures in the US has often led to the adoption of many French techniques by American directors and producers. Cowen argues that Hollywood’s strength is due in part to the variety of European producers that have brought their innovative ideas and techniques to America. Others claim that this type of cultural exchange, this constant borrowing and lending of cinematic ideas, is only achieved through the exposure to a variety of cinemas and is limited by the movement to protect a certain kind of film. Some assert that free trade has allowed American filmmakers such as Woody Allen to find critical recognition abroad, whose films, at least some of them, would remain otherwise underappreciated in the United States. This allows Europe to help promote worthy Hollywood films, thus contributing globally to cinematic diversity. Supporters of this type of cultural exchange



claim that the benefit ultimately goes to the viewer who receives a transnational product whose worth and potential is far greater than that of its comprising parts.

One of the other major arguments for economic liberalization involves the goal of cultural diversity. For some, there is a problematic paradox in the notion of cultural diversity in a country where many want to protect one type of cinema. Strobe clearly articulates this paradox: “Given the apparent wish of French elites of both the Left and the Right to limit certain cultural influences within Europe, are French policy-makers themselves not open to accusations of seeking to impose a degree of uniformity?” (71). Furthermore, French producers must produce a certain type of film that can compete with its Hollywood counterpart. Thus, critics of protectionist measures claim that films such as *Le cinquième élément* (1997) and *Les rivières pourpres* (2000) imitate an American product and contribute minimally, if at all, to a diverse body of works. Of the many movies produced in France, only a small number of blockbuster hits take “the lion’s share of receipts, leaving the underfinanced and under-promoted independent films to fight for the shrinking residue” (Buchsbaum, “The Exception Culturelle” 19). Thus, critics denounce the premise of cultural diversity, because the majority of films exhibited in France represent dominant, American-inspired genres that appeal to the masses.

### 2.3 Exportability: The International Challenge

As the term *cultural exception* has been subsumed by the expression *cultural diversity*, protectionism on the domestic front has taken a backseat, or at least a passenger seat, to the projection of French film abroad. Hollywood continues to take the largest share of the French cinema market, and French cinephiles have realized that popularizing

French film abroad may be the only recourse to ensure a competitive international presence. Although many different international markets feature French film, the US represents the largest foreign distributor of French films, so the following section will be devoted to an examination of exportability in the United States. Two broad issues color the problematic of exportability, including what I will call the “art house problem” and the issue of cultural transposition.

Generally speaking, art house films include independent, foreign, classic, documentary, cult, and mainstream films.<sup>8</sup> However, in Anglo-Saxon countries, the terms “French cinema” and “art cinema” are often used interchangeably. For purposes of this chapter, “art cinema” will represent those French films that are distributed in art houses, specifically cinematic venues that exhibit art films and foreign films that are not widely distributed. There are a number of inherent challenges in the distribution of French films to art houses. French films are distributed sparsely across the US, as art house cinemas account for only a fraction of the number of theaters. According to the 2008 Theatrical Market Statistics study conducted by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), single screen theaters account for only four percent of all theaters in the US. Furthermore, while large multiplexes are generally able to survive market fluctuations, art house venues are much more vulnerable to economic downturns and technological advances. Gina Carbone explains, “It’s the golden age of cinema morphing into the modern age of Netflix, affecting all movie theaters, but especially small, independent ones.”

Understandably, larger theaters are much better equipped to cater to consumer preference. The modern moviegoer favors a wide variety of choices when going to the

theater, so megaplexes (16 or more screens) are obviously preferable. The MPAA released statistics clearly indicating that the cinematic market is shifting toward theaters with more screens. From 2006 to 2008, the number of single screen theaters declined by .1%, and the number of miniplexes (2-7 screens) declined by 3.5%. At the same time, the number of multiplexes (8-15 screens) and megaplexes (16+ screens) saw an increase of 3.8% and 1.9%, respectively. This growth seems to reflect the well-known American adage: bigger is better (Corliss).

While the typical American moviegoer seems to prefer the amenities and wide selection that larger theaters offer, it is also the content of French films that is often cited as a discouraging factor. There is a stereotype that accompanies French films that are exhibited in US art houses. French films are categorized as “intellectually stimulating, slow-paced, with an emphasis on narrative rather than action” (Mazdon, *France on Film* 4). Added Sophie Marceau, “French films...follow a basic formula: husband sleeps with Jeanne because Bernadette cuckolded him by sleeping with Christophe, and in the end they all go off to a restaurant. How many times can you act in a film like that?” (qtd. in Martin) While this is obviously a reductive view of French films, this static and stereotypical perception remains a deterrent to many American film lovers who prefer the Hollywood product.

Given the general distinctions in preference that are present cross-culturally, it is useful to consider the possibility of a *habitus cinématique*. In *Algérie 60*, Bourdieu defines habitus as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions which function as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (vii). He elaborates in subsequent works, explaining that *habitus* is the principal determinant of practices; his

description of *habitus* has been explained by other scholars as the “thought, perception and understanding which the actor acquires as a member of a social group or class” (Cuff, Sharrock, and Francis 322). Although Bourdieu emphasizes the way *habitus* varies according to socialization and economic class opportunities, it is worthwhile to apply his theory in a cross-cultural examination of cinematic preference, since cultures may appear to be pre-disposed or conditioned to expect certain qualities in a film. The preference for a certain quality may depend in part on a particular culture’s collective values, behaviors, and attitudes or what some have called “cultural opportunities.” To this end, it is possible that ethnic identity congruence exists, where tastes and preferences of a particular cultural group align and are perpetuated, for example, through exposure to specific visual culture. In the film industry, collective cinematic preferences emerge that are identifiably particular to and reflective of a certain society. The catering to these tastes and preferences in films, through long narratives or happy endings for example, simply reaffirms and perpetuates the collective preferences, further conditioning the spectator to desire and expect certain types of cinematic characteristics. This would explain in part why film critics are able to formulate lists of qualities that are characteristic of French and American films and why these qualities resonate with specific nationalities. It is important to stipulate that the idea of a “conditioned response” to film can only explain cinematic preference to a certain extent. Many other factors come into play that impact the way a spectator receives a film, not the least of which includes cross-cultural influence and fascination.

One recent French film that highlights distinctive cinematic preference is *La graine et le mulet* (2007), directed by Abdel Kechiche. The story takes place in Sète and

involves a sixty-year-old Arab immigrant (Slimane) who has been laid off from his job at the shipyard. He uses the settlement cash and his ex-wife's culinary skills to open a couscous restaurant in a restored boat. The majority of the film focuses less on his struggling business venture and more on the complex dynamics that underscore his family life. In France, the film earned a significant amount of praise, winning eighteen awards, including four César Awards for best director, best film, best writing, and most promising actress. While reviews in the United States were far from negative, a majority of them criticized the overly long narrative scenes. The film is 154 minutes long, and a large portion of that time is devoted to lengthy discussions among family members on topics ranging from infidelity to potty-training. This type of film is consistent with the stereotype outlined earlier and is not appealing to many Americans who generally prefer movies under two hours with more action and less dialogue.

While some French producers, such as Luc Besson, have tried to overcome this stereotype and create a more "American" product for more success domestically and abroad, additional competition has come from independent American films and documentaries. The growth of the independent sector has encroached on the niche that French and other art house films once claimed. For example, "mini-major pseudo-indie productions" such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Constant Gardener* (2005) have been featured at art house venues, leaving fewer screens and increasing competition for the remaining independent and foreign films (Kaufman). In the same way, documentaries such as the widely acclaimed *Food, Inc.* (2009), *The Cove* (2009), and those by director Michael Moore provide viewers with other Hollywood alternatives.<sup>9</sup> The growing popularity of both independent films and documentaries is dually damaging to French

films: moviegoers choose these films over French films because of their domestic origin and significant publicity, and art houses continue to feature the films because they garner more revenues than their foreign counterparts.

Another one of the inherent challenges of art house cinema is the type of clientele that these venues attract. Generally speaking, art house films, and more specifically foreign films, have a reputation for appealing to a specific breed of viewers, which is typically an intellectual, highbrow crowd, very often found within close proximity to college campuses. This association with a specific audience is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it ensures a certain amount of success for the film, because these films do not target the same audience as major Hollywood films that have mass audience appeal. On the other hand, the target audience is quite specific, so opportunities for great success are limited. The marketing budgets for most art house films are so small that even the niche audience is ignorant of current films. Publicity of these films is often limited to newspaper critics and their reviews, but newspaper circulation is declining, and some critics are choosing to direct their attention elsewhere. Mark Urman, head of theatrical releasing for an art-house distributor, generalizes the growing critical disinterest of art house films “Nobody’s writing about them [foreign films], because nobody cares, and nobody cares because they don’t penetrate the culture. It’s a vicious cycle” (qtd in Kaufman).

A final challenge for foreign films is the constant struggle between dubbing and subtitles. Choosing one or the other severely limits the audience pool. Roger Ebert explains this Catch-22: “The kind of people who go to art houses in America to see French films are purists who don’t want to see dubbed foreign films. At the same time,

most of the movie-going public in the United States is quite provincial and shies away from or has never even seen a subtitled film” (qtd in Martin). Thus, keeping a movie in its ‘version originale’ attracts art film fans but discourages those viewers in the mass audience group that might occasionally consider a dubbed art house film. Most Americans prefer a passive experience at the theater, where they may listen and watch but aren’t required to read. As Lucy Mazdon explains, “The combination of venue and their subtitled format immediately renders them ‘difficult’ or ‘challenging’ to a large proportion of the cinema-going public . . .” (*France on Film*, 4).

Since the late 1940s, art houses in the US have represented a type of protected space where foreign films may be viewed. These venues have provided a place where the specificities of national cinemas can be maintained and enjoyed. However, competition from American indie films and a shrinking niche audience beg the following question: should French films adopt Hollywood qualities to ensure their presence in the US? Specifically, is cultural transposition the only option, and if so, what does this mean for *l’exception culturelle* or *la diversité culturelle*?

According to Mazdon, cultural transposition takes place when there is a shift in identity in a film, either intentionally or unintentionally (2). When intentional, this cultural transposition is usually intended to mediate cultural differences in the films in order to render the film more appealing and thus more exportable abroad. There are varying degrees of cultural transposition that can occur from production to distribution, but all of them call into question the cultural specificity of the product. The most extreme examples of cultural transposition occur at the production level. As mentioned in the previous chapter, co-productions have become an increasingly popular way to

finance film production. For example, the CNC classifies *Le Barbier de Sibérie* (1998) as a French film. But a closer look at this Russian/French/Italian/Czech co-production reveals that there is not one clear national identity. The lack of specific attribution to one national identity may be more appealing to some American viewers and equally disconcerting for supporters of the cultural exception, as such a collaborative effort may dilute the cultural specificities of each contributing member. Some directors reject this hybrid model in favor of a purely American model, which often promises even greater success abroad. For example, the movie *Taken* (2008) was very well-received in the US. French director Luc Besson chose to film in the English-language while maintaining a predominantly American cast. Though it is a French movie filmed in France, the genre (action-thriller), American stars, and language are all designed specifically to cater to American tastes. Urman explains this challenge: “The residual effect is that national cinemas don’t get a chance to gain traction. There’s no such thing as an affinity with German film, because the second you find a German director you like, then he becomes and English-language director” (qtd in Kaufman). Though Urman speaks of German directors, he describes a growing trend among French and other European directors as well. The *mélange* of location, language, actors, directors, and producers evokes the following question: can a film be French and “Hollywood” at the same time (Molia 51)?

Other types of “cultural transposition” are not as identifiable but create their own set of challenges. For example, one of the potential dangers in trying to achieve exportability can occur when a filmmaker surpasses an acceptable level of imitation and creates a product that seems overly generic, extremely imitative, or clichéd to American viewers. The film *Indigènes* provides an interesting example of this. The film follows



four North Africans who enlist in the French army during World War II, “forgotten heroes” whose origins seem more notable than their service to the French state. While the majority of critical press in both France and the United States applauded the movie for its provoking message, the film itself earned only \$317, 594 in gross revenues in the US. Some critics claim that the film presented a clichéd version of American war movies. Even the English translation for the film, *Days of Glory*, is reminiscent of other Hollywood hits and does not do justice to the more loaded French title *Indigènes* (2006).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the film contained many clichéd characters found in mainstream contemporary war cinema: “the nervous young greenhorn who ends up excelling in bravery; the grizzled warhorse sergeant whose gruffness towards his men is really tough love; the lovelorn trooper willing to brave all for his sweetheart” (Romney 53). Although the movie attempted to attract an international mainstream audience, many Americans seemed unintrigued, as evidenced by its dismal revenues. In attempting to create an international product, the film aims to be both Hollywoodien in its depiction of war and French in its specific references to social issues in France. However, attempts to create a transnational product with cross-cultural appeal may have ultimately estranged American viewers. Specifically, the poignant social message that was appreciated by some French viewers was lost on the mainstream public in the US who likely felt that they could find a similar, or perhaps better, war movie with American origins, no subtitles, and a history lesson with which they could better identify.

Some filmmakers opt for something more extreme than imitation: the remake. Remakes can be defined as films based on earlier screenplays, films made twice by the same director, Hollywood remakes of earlier Hollywood works, and Hollywood remakes

of non-Hollywood cinema (Mazdon, *Encore Hollywood 2*). The last definition – Hollywood remakes of non-Hollywood cinema – is particularly relevant to the discussion of the cultural exception and cultural diversity. Many critics lament the descent from a “valuable French ‘original’ to a debased American ‘copy’” (5). Films such as *Taxi* (2004), *My Father the Hero* (1994), *Last Man Standing* (1996), *Three Fugitives* (1989), *Point of No Return* (1993), and *Father’s Day* (1997) represent a handful of contemporary films that have been criticized for their debasement of a superior original. Many believe that the unfortunate result is a near obliteration of the cultural and aesthetic particularities of the source film. For example, Roger Ebert lamented the growing trend in which “Hollywood buys French comedies and experiments on them to see if they can be made in English with all the humor taken out.”

While certain films do lose some of the comedic or dramatic value of the original, the decision to remake a film is often just commercially driven. Since only a small portion of foreign-language films turn a profit of more than two million dollars in the US, remakes are a sound financial decision. That is, if the French films were distributed as well as their Hollywood counterparts are in France, there would not likely be as much of an incentive to film a remake (Insdorf). Certain French producers are attracted to the potential financial gain that can come from the offer from a big American studio. For example, Anne François, the producer of *Neuf mois* (1994), worked on the remake with Hugh Grant; likewise, Jacques Bar and Jean-Louis Livi, producers of *Mon père, ce héros* (1992), assisted in Disney’s English version of the original film. But the potential financial gain of this move is insufficient for other producers. Luc Besson initially expressed an interest in assisting in the remake of his film *Nikita* (1990). But he

subsequently backed out, claiming that the motives for the remake were entirely financial, thus jeopardizing the integrity of the original film and its remake.

Some critics argue that there is not always an immutable trajectory from good to bad films in their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Mazdon asserts that the negative discourse surrounding remakes is often unjustified, as the original films upon which remakes are made often belong to the same genre and have no more artistic worth than their Hollywood counterparts (*Encore Hollywood* 5). Despite her plea to look at the films separately and not as a cinematic package, the heavy criticism for the transformation of French films abounds from screenwriters, stars, and directors to film critics. Determined supporters of the cultural exception claim that remakes are simply a form of censorship in which the specificities of the French cinematic culture are sometimes molded and adapted but more often effaced in the hands of the receptor culture, leaving no trace of the original work.

## 2.4 [Re]Framing French film

The reality of the art house challenge and cultural transposition is clear: French films in their “version originale” are becoming increasingly scarce on American screens, raising the question of what makes a film exportable and successful. A handful of “popular” mainstream films in France do achieve a certain level of success in the United States.<sup>11</sup> An examination of three contemporary French films is a useful way to examine the issue of exportability within the context of the French cultural exception. Analyzing these films highlights the challenges and ultimate successes of an attempt to market a

French film in the United States, given the significant hurdles mentioned in the previous section.

The three films I have chosen to examine include *Le placard* (2001), *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (2004), and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990). These films were selected because they are classified as mainstream hits in France and also belong to an elite group of successful French films in the US. “Successful” in this context refers to the number of tickets sold in France and ticket revenues in the United States. *Le placard*, *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, are all part of an exclusive club of foreign films whose ticket sales have surpassed the four million mark in France and the five million dollar mark in the United States (Moine 38). The fact that these films were able to survive the often perilous, if not fatal, trip across the Atlantic is notable and worth examining in the context of exportability and the cultural exception.

*Le placard* is a comedy that was written and directed by Francis Veber, who is also known for several other hit comedies, including *Le dîner de cons* and *La cage aux folles*.<sup>12</sup> Briefly, the film involves accountant François Pignon who works at a rubber manufacturing plant, whose primary product is condoms. Hearing a rumor that he is soon to be fired, he follows the advice of his neighbor and concocts a scheme whereby he will pretend to be gay, believing that this admission will force the hand of the company in allowing him to remain at his job. The news of Pignon’s homosexuality has a variety of different effects on several different people, including his macho co-worker Félix (Gérard Depardieu), his teenage son, and his boss Mlle Bertrand (Michèle Laroque) who is determined to reveal his fraud. These relationships and the interaction between the

characters invite a plethora of jokes, misinterpretations, and mishaps when Pignon comes “out of the closet.”

The comedic plot was generally well received by film critics and spectators alike in both France and the US, with 5.1 million tickets sold in France and 6.7 million dollars in revenue in the US (UniFrance). The success on both fronts is unusual and begs the following question: what is the key to achieving box-office success in France and exportability and marketability in the US? And, if a film fares well in both countries, does this commonality promote *la diversité culturelle* or undermine it by diluting the cultural particularities of the source country?

There are many aspects of *Le placard* which are conventionally French and appealing to the French public. The film is a traditional French vaudeville farce, a genre which has long had mass appeal in France. Explains Troccaz of the stereotypical farce, “Un personnage maladroit dépassé par les événements avec un contrepoids pour former un duo comique.” But the series of twists and mishaps is only a partial recipe for success in France. Another reason for the film’s success is likely the caricature created by Pignon: a disgruntled mid-level manager who is struggling in the corporate world. This type of character has been popular in a number of French films and novels throughout the twentieth century; it is likely that Pignon’s representation as *un pauvre type* who eventually outwits corporate management resonates with the French movie-going public. Additionally, the topic of unemployment and its relevance as a very current social issue may be of paramount interest to the French whose unemployment rate peaked at eleven percent in 2000 when the film debuted. The plot of *Le placard* also ventures into the area of political correctness and is “designed to take shots at members on both ends of the

political spectrum – homophobes and those who espouse the doctrine of so-called ‘political correctness’” (Berardinelli). Some critics claim that this satirical quality is appealing to the French and is also a distinguishing characteristic from mainstream American comedy, which is often lacking in any poignant message.

While a farce is often defined more by its comedic situations and less by the people in it, the personnel involved in this production contribute significantly to the film’s conventionality and mass appeal. The “duo comique” is portrayed by Pignon (Auteuil) and Santini (Depardieu), two beloved stars in France whose names alone guarantee ticket sales. Two other well-known actors, Thierry Lhermitte and Jean Rochefort round out a group of A-list stars who are considered to be conventionally French in the cinematic domain. Furthermore, the screen-writer and director Francis Veber has a history of strong comedic films. Thus, many spectators were drawn to the film based on the film’s star-studded appeal and Veber’s comic experience.

While the type of film and the people involved in it proved to be a recipe for success in France, the same factors do not always culminate to produce something that is unequivocally exportable and popular in the US. However, *Le placard* proved to be the exception rather than the rule, with high ticket sales in the United States. Many critics have claimed that the theme of political correctness is one of the reasons the film was so popular, since Americans have a reputation for high sensitivity in this area. In viewing the film, however, I found that its success may have been more about those aspects of the film that were *not* uniquely French. That is, the very qualities that so often seem to annoy or estrange American viewers about French film were lacking in *Le placard*. The film is a comedy, without the serious, intellectual plot that many Americans mistakenly

associate with all French film. The film was not “obtuse or pretentious” nor was it very long (87 minutes), all of which are stereotypes that are often tied to French cinema (Berardinelli). Whereas many Americans steer away from French film because they feature obscure actors, Gérard Depardieu and Daniel Auteuil are recognizable by many Americans. Finally, the director was not a young, unfamiliar filmmaker but rather one whose films are often remade or reworked in the United States, such as *The Toy*, *Father’s Day*, and *Three Fugitives*, to name just a few. Thus, it was perhaps not what the film was, but what it was not, that helped to ensure its success in the United States.

Another, older film that had cross-cultural appeal is the 1990 romantic hit *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with 4.7 million tickets sold in France and 5.8 million dollars in ticket revenue in the US. This movie, as well as many other adaptations, is based on Edmond Rostand’s play from 1898. The premise of the movie is simple: Gérard Depardieu, playing Cyrano, is a nobleman who is in love with his distant cousin, Roxane, played by Anne Brochet. Ashamed of his ugliness, Cyrano does not attempt to express his feelings to Roxane, as he is certain they are unreciprocated. Roxane confides in Cyrano that she has feelings for his handsome best friend Christian de Neuville and asks Cyrano to encourage Christian to write a love letter to Roxane. Christian, however, is self-admittedly inarticulate, so Cyrano agrees to ghost write love letters to Roxane on Christian’s behalf. Roxane is impressed by the eloquence of the letters and consequently falls in love with Christian. When Christian ultimately dies in the war against Spain, a heartbroken Roxane retires to a nunnery, and Cyrano continues to visit her for the next fourteen years. It is not until Cyrano is dying that Roxane learns that it was Cyrano’s words and sentiments with which she had fallen in love.

The film was a hit in France, where several other adaptations had been produced before. A 1925 silent film version, a version from 1950, two made-for-television versions, and the 1987 American comedy *Roxanne* comprise a large group of various adaptations of the movie. The audience's familiarity with the storyline may therefore account in part for the film's enormous success in France. Film critics claimed that the film's principal theme, the tragedy of unrequited love, is a prime example of French romanticism, an element which typically attracts French moviegoers. Some cite Depardieu's performance, which earned him the best actor award at Cannes in 1990, as the key to the movie's success. As mentioned in the analysis of *Le placard*, his participation can almost guarantee that the film will be classified as conventional, mainstream, and/or popular. The film's portrayal of a French soldier, the literary tradition behind the film, and the use of alexandrine verse culminate in nationalistic overtones that appeal to a French audience's sense of heritage and *patrimoine*. Pidduck asserts that the film "harnesses the hero's iconic status to dramatize French identity and masculinity on a grand scale" (281), ushering in series of other French 'Quality' films such as *Germinal*, *La Reine Margo*, and *Beaumarchais* among others.

Interestingly, the characteristics that make *Cyrano* so quintessentially French are also what made the film so popular in the United States. Specifically, those qualities that render this film conventional seem to have universal appeal, which is not necessarily always the case. First, the theme of unrequited love is one with which all viewers can identify, regardless of nationality. The success of the earlier American remake of this movie, *Roxanne* (1987), predicted that American viewers' would appreciate the plotline. Explains one spectator, "It's a well-known fact that people don't necessarily embrace the



new and the original as readily as they will run after whatever it is that reminds them of something they really liked or have seen before” (qtd in Martin 14). Furthermore, Depardieu’s award-winning performance in the film was another important reason for its success in the US. As mentioned earlier, many American viewers find that Depardieu is an accessible actor with whom the audience can identify, regardless of cultural background or nationality. To this end, Depardieu’s portrayal of Cyrano has universal appeal. The character’s inner beauty, bravery, honesty, loyalty, independence, intelligence, wit, and *panache* are qualities that are widely respected by both French and Americans (Mettaluk). The universal qualities that Cyrano possesses create a sympathetic character whose plight in the film is as just as engaging and accessible as those of Hollywood romances.

It is the universal aspects of the film and the characters of *Cyrano* that are described by many critics as the common denominators in the film that transcend cultural difference and ensure a large audience in both France and the US. That said, I believe that the film also succeeds in the US by affirming the romantic version of France that appeals to the American public, or at least those with an ounce of Francophilia. As the idyllic backdrop to the film, France is the unnamed character that plays to the American stereotype of France as the country of love. In other words, I do not believe the film would have attained the same success in the United States had it taken place in a different country.<sup>13</sup> The combination of the film’s universal characteristics and the American spectator’s understanding of, or perhaps dream of, a romanticized France creates a film whose domestic success translated into success across the Atlantic.

Another example of a film that was successful in both France and the US is *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (2004), a romantic war film directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. It is based on the 1991 fictional novel by Sébastien Japrisot. The story takes place in the aftermath of WWI as Mathilde (Audrey Tautou) attempts to find her fiancé Manech, one of five soldiers who were presumed dead following their death sentence for intentionally wounding themselves on the front. The movie alternates between warfront scenes, Mathilde's search for clues about her fiancé's disappearance, and digressions to the romantic history between Mathilde and Manech.

The movie was a hit in France, where it reportedly sold 4.5 million tickets in 2004, which made it the sixth best performing movie in France for that year and the second best performing French film after *Les choristes*. It was likewise extremely popular in the United States, where it earned cumulative ticket revenues of 6.5 million dollars. The film was also nominated for two Oscars and won five Césars. The film's success in France is likely attributable to several factors. First, French director Jean-Pierre Jeunet has a history of box-office hits, including *Delicatessen* (1991), *La cité des enfants perdus* (1995), and especially *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001), which was extremely popular in both the US and in France because of its quintessentially Parisian quality. So, Jeunet's existing fan base comprised a large number of the film's spectators. The film was also based on a highly successful novel, so the story had a readership interested in seeing how the story would play out on the big screen. The star-studded appeal of the film, specifically the use of fan-favorite Audrey Tautou, is also responsible in part for the film's domestic success. It is also probable that the film's cultural specificity appealed to many French fans. The fifty-five million dollar budget

was devoted to recreating scenes that are significant and recognizable to most French viewers. Specifically, the sites and sounds of Les Halles, the images of the trenches of WWI, and the “bustling of post-war Paris” paint a uniquely Parisian picture that likely appealed to the memory of the older generation and likewise served as a visual history lesson to the younger crowd (Nesselson).

Many critics, both French and American, comment on the unorthodox approach of Jeunet in this film, specifically the way in which he combines expressionism, surrealism, and absurdism to create a unique mélange of “modernist horror, sentimental romance and gamine whimsy” (Edelstein). And although there are certainly signs of his unconventional techniques in the film, I believe that the success on the American front was due to the conventional aspects of the film that appeal to mainstream American viewers, who jokingly called the film *Amélie Goes to War*. As mentioned earlier, mainstream American audiences are generally interested in six identifiable elements, including brisk pacing (quick cutting), sexual tension, graphic violence, intrigue, a novel approach to a timeworn fable, and a happy ending (Martin).<sup>14</sup> Many of these conventional characteristics are indeed present in *Un long dimanche*. The scenes in the trenches boast “exaggerated visuals, rapid editing, dense narration” (Nesselson), and the violence of the war scenes is extremely graphic. Many of the violent scenes are reminiscent of scenes from *Saving Private Ryan*, an American favorite. The entire movie abounds in intrigue, as Tautou plays the role of detective in trying to determine the fate of her fiancé. Finally, although Manech’s wounds have caused amnesia, the couple is reunited at the end, giving the American audience the happy ending they so desire.

Thus, although the movie is in some ways distinctively French, I maintain that these characteristics are less appreciated by an American audience who is attracted more to those conventional qualities of many Hollywood films. A quick look at the film's trailer used in the United States highlights the way that the film was marketed to the preferences of American spectators. In just over two minutes, a male narrator highlights romance, intrigue, mystery, and violence as a series of images from the film are shown. An average American viewer might even suspect that the movie is a Hollywood product, so similar are the trailer's images to those of big Hollywood war films. The trailer emphasizes the American qualities of the film and downplays its cultural and artistic particularities.

*Le placard*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* all represent different genres that were box-office hits in France and also had remarkable success in the US. But a conventional plot alone does not ensure immediate success in the US. Their success is ultimately determined by the way in which the films are able to play to the average spectator's tastes *or* their mythologized vision of France. For example, *Le placard* contains many of the comedic elements of *Office Space* (1999), the popular American film about layoffs, office politics, and disgruntled employees. The humor in the movie seems to be designed for an American market. Says one critic, "*Le placard* tries to be a French comedy-drama and an American sitcom at the same time" (Travers). In doing so, the film becomes accessible to a much broader audience, including Americans. In the same way, *Un long dimanche* has been criticized for catering to a homogenous mass. Critics have denounced Jeunet's *esthétique publicitaire*, "the techniques and methods used to reach the 'minimum viewer', the one who will make

the smallest effort to follow the film's narrative, the most passive and the least patient viewer imaginable" (Scanton-Tessier 104) – in other words, the average American viewer according to many French critics. It is argued that Jeunet promotes stereotypes in familiar landscapes of France and uses archetyped characters, such as "cowards, heroes, cold-blooded killers, vengeful girlfriends and shell-shocked soldiers" in order to minimize the complexity of the film and maximize viewer understanding through familiar personalities (105). While *Le placard* and *Un long dimanche* seem to pander to a broad audience, *Cyrano* is undoubtedly quintessentially French. Argues Pidduck, "Cyrano's nationalistic overtones reproduce a certain type of national identity to be found, seemingly, in the idea of a golden age of French culture" (287). It is this type of movie, one that presents a mythicized version of French culture couched in a typical love story, which can reach a large American audience. And, Depardieu is the perfect choice for this "myth" since many Americans readily associate him with French film and France.

If these films are able to strike a common chord between French and American tastes, is this at the expense of cultural exceptionalism? That is, are the cultural particularities of French film lost or exaggerated to create a certain image that has mass appeal? Must French directors alter their artistic standards in order to achieve commercial success abroad? Doris-Louise Haineault and Jean-Ives Roy articulate their response to this question in *Unconscious for Sale*:

In order to become public, a discourse must in effect gradually get beyond its specificity and win the approval of a broad majority. As a consequence, it can count only on the least emotional or intellectual common denominator of its intended audience. As a result, it will deny

itself the human wealth of our profound diversity, all the more so  
since it will target a wider audience. (xxi)

Creating more conventional films or those that imitate Hollywood has certainly proven to be one of the most effective ways to help mitigate the growing trade imbalance in the film industry. But certain industry experts have suggested that French filmmakers may not necessarily have to choose commerce over culture. Some critics have proposed ways to *reframe* French film in the United States without conventionalizing the films. One possible solution is to develop a new fan base through organizations to promote French film. A branch of the organization UniFrance has existed in the United States since 1972 and its “mission est de fournir une assistance financière et logistique aux distributeurs et festivals qui présentent des films français récents au public américain, alimentant ainsi le lien culturel et commercial entre les industries cinématographiques française et américaine” (UniFrance). Many of UniFrance’s current festivals are held in large cities and target an art house crowd who really doesn’t need to be convinced of the value and appeal of French film. Rather, the organization should try to target teenagers, those habitual moviegoers that account for the largest and most engaged group of movie theater frequenters. Specifically, UniFrance could sponsor film festivals on college campuses to help ignite interest in French film at a younger age and dispel preconceived notions that French film is an “elitist indulgence” (Martin). October Films, a British independent film and television production company, used this type of technique to promote *Le Colonel Chabert*. They targeted French departments and history departments in high schools all over the country in order to provide Americans with exposure to French film at a younger age. Until other studios follow October Films’ example, young

Americans will continue to hold certain stereotypes of French film and its viewership. French studios, directors, and producers could also consider a collaborative marketing effort (*la publicité collective*<sup>15</sup>) that promotes French film broadly, as opposed to a specific motion picture. Some critics have recommended a montage of the best scenes or moments from well-known French movies that would serve as a “trailer” for French film in general to help generate interest and familiarity among American viewers. Many of these suggestions could be spearheaded and managed by the French Embassy’s Cultural Services whose mission is to “promote the best of French arts, literature, and education to cultural and academic institutions across the United States, with a strong focus on the contemporary.”

Others have recommended a reexamination of the “dubbing problem.” Many Americans are put off by subtitles and the distraction that they cause in viewing a film. But the alternative, dubbing, is currently unacceptable by many American moviegoers who are irritated by the lip-flapping and “dialogue bleed” that comes with a dubbed film. French special-effects companies could devote more time and resources to perfecting digital dubbing to help resolve the technical problems that the current technology poses. This new technology provides a way to alter lip movement to help reduce the incongruities between lip movement and voice: “The slight tampering with the image by adapting the movements to the characters’ lips to the dubbing script has yielded magnificent results whenever it was implemented and can ultimately solve the infamous shortcomings of lip-movement dischrony, especially in close-ups” (Karamitroglou) Thus, digital dubbing might help attract potential viewers who would have formerly ruled out a

subtitled film. The spectator's attention would be redirected to the acting and the plot of a French film as opposed to translated phrases at the bottom of the screen.

Although a number of solutions have been suggested, most industry specialists agree that there is no surefire way to resolve the growing trade imbalance in the film industry between the United States and France. The issue of exportability presents a significant challenge for supporters of French film and the French cultural exception. On one hand, catering to American tastes allows for French directors to present their work in the United States. On the other hand, creating movies with mass appeal may severely limit the potential of those films that seek meaningful differentiation from their Hollywood counterparts. One has to wonder if the successful marketing of any French product at all in the US market is more important than maintaining traditional artistic standards and those very qualities that have earned French film worldwide respect.

It is perhaps the continued use of the expression "cinematic exceptionalism" and the mentality behind it that may prove to be the biggest hurdle for both the protection and promotion of French films. The term seems to inherently imply the inferiority of all other cinematic products, and its use is typically in conjunction with some sort of reproach of Hollywood. In an era when cinematic techniques and spectator preference are constantly evolving, it may prove detrimental to overlook the unique contributions of other national cinemas and the potential success of films that incorporate a variety of cultural elements.

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<sup>1</sup> "Dumping" refers to the process of selling a good in a foreign country for less than either the price of the good in the domestic country or less than the cost required to produce the good.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the 20% tariff in France, American film companies found that it was more cost effective to have post-production work done elsewhere in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> The Blum-Byrnes Agreement was named after the two important figures who signed the pact: Leon Blum for the French government and James Byrnes, the then U.S. Secretary of State.

<sup>4</sup> The goal of the Loi Royer (1973) was to limit the construction of supermarkets and hypermarkets. Its ultimate goal was help the small business owner by limiting the growth of these large establishments.



<sup>5</sup> Figures are based on audience attendance.

<sup>6</sup> Although the terms “cultural exception” and “cultural diversity” have different meanings, as articulated earlier, many sources juxtapose the two. Furthermore, chronologically, the term *exception* was used before the term *diversity* was implemented in the 1990s. As we are dealing with concepts and mentalities and not a precise chronological analysis, each term will be used when deemed most appropriate.

<sup>7</sup> Tyler Cowen has written a number of works in which he espouses a strong belief that government-backed support of the arts ultimately hurts culture industries. To read more on his particular beliefs, see *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures*, *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, and *Why Hollywood Rules the World, and Whether We Should Care*.

<sup>8</sup> The terms “art cinema” and “art movie” are synonyms for “art house film.”

<sup>9</sup> Michael Moore is the director and producer of four of the eight highest-grossing documentaries in cinematic history, including *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Sicko*, and *Capitalism: A Love Story*.

<sup>10</sup> The title is also reminiscent of the 1957 box office hit *Paths of Glory*, an American war film by director Stanley Kubrick about soldiers in France during WWI.

<sup>11</sup> The term “popular cinema” has a variety of different, and often complex, usages. For this analysis, the definition will be the straightforward definition of a film that is viewed by a large number of people and has widespread public appeal. For a more detailed discussion on the inherent difficulties of this term, see “Genre Hybridity, National Culture, and Globalised Culture” by Raphaëlle Moine.

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, an American remake of *Le dîner de cons* will debut in summer 2010 in the US under the title *Dinner of Schmucks*, starring Steve Carell and Paul Rudd. Critics are already suggesting that the humor of the original will be lost in the American remake.

<sup>13</sup> Italy arguably shares a reputation for romance, but it is France alone that boasts the stereotype as the preeminent “country of love” for many Americans.

<sup>14</sup> Two recent award-winning films, *There Will be Blood* and *No Country for Old Men*, reveal that not all popular movies have the desired “happy ending.” These examples, however, appear to be exceptions to the rule.

<sup>15</sup> *La publicité collective* is also referred to as *la publicité d'image* or *de prestige*.

## CHAPTER 3

### *L'EXCEPTION LINGUISTIQUE: LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY*

*Those who speak the same language are  
joined to each other by a multitude of invisible  
bonds by nature herself... they belong together  
and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.*  
Johann Gottlieb Fichte

In 1782, the Berlin Academy chose for its annual essay contest the following question: “How has French become the world’s universal language?” At the time, the implication that the world’s lingua franca was French was indisputable, and contestants were asked to explain the tradition of the language’s status and its future. The essay contestants might be rather surprised at the drastically different linguistic picture that has emerged in France 220 years later. The status of French both globally and domestically is challenged by a multitude of forces, and French citizens discuss daily the role that the French language plays in their identity, security, and global image.

This great amount of debate on the subject of the national language stems from the symbiotic relationship that the French language has long held with French identity. The privileged place that language holds in France has often been argued to be one of the most profound French exceptions, a notion that has been hotly debated since the term *French exception* originated. The heavy government intervention in language policy is yet another reason why some French citizens believe that French is linguistically

exceptional. Where did this unique perspective of language originate and how is the language so bound up in the definition of French identity? What is the linguistic impact of the growing popularity of a notion of *la diversité culturelle* rather than *l'exception culturelle*? How does the French government both protect and promote the French language and what are the results of these efforts? This chapter will attempt to answer such questions by examining the historical roots of linguistic nationalism and the attempts to both protect and promote the language.

### 3.1 Birth of Linguistic Nationalism

The French Revolution was a turning point for linguistic policy, inspiring a linguistic revolution in France. Before the revolution, in a country filled with a number of regional dialects and languages, French was certainly not spoken by the majority nor was it the official national language of France.<sup>1</sup> It was the 1789 Revolution “and the consequent transfer of power in France to a rising industrial bourgeoisie that French truly became the national language of France – a symbol of Frenchness and a necessary attribute of all citizens of the new Republic” (Battye, Hintz, and Rowlett 35). The dialects and regional languages of France had been viewed with some hostility throughout the early and mid-eighteenth century, but linguistic heterogeneity helped to prevent certain feudal territories from conspiring with one another under the monarchy (Grenoble and Whaley 6). It was the ideology of the Revolution that transformed these non-standard varieties into serious threats of national, political, and certainly linguistic unification. Linguistic diversity was viewed as a potential weakness against external threats at the nation’s borders, and a need for a *français standard* was born.<sup>2</sup> A standardized language

also countered domestic threats, as dialects and regional languages were often associated with counter-revolutionary conspiracies. With a developing centralized government, a standardized language facilitated the communication between officials in Paris and local inhabitants in small towns and villages across the country. Ideologically, the use of a standard language supported the description of the French republic as *une et indivisible*, two of the principals espoused in Article 1 of the French constitution. Thus, the French language, or at least one variety of it, became a symbol of Frenchness, national unity, and stability in the new Republic.

The linguistic ideals spawned by the Revolution could not have been put into practice without the help of its institutional child, the *école républicaine*. Through *instruction publique*, the presence of *instituteurs* in the classroom allowed for the widespread instruction of national standard French. Under Jules Ferry, the then-minister of Public Instruction, education became free, mandatory, and secular between 1881 and 1882, and the French classroom became a vehicle of ideals of classicism and language purism. In addition, the switch to French as the standard national language created a *culture de masse* in the nineteenth century as well as a novelty in the history of a language that had formerly been used exclusively in urban, aristocratic, and bourgeois circles (Nadeau and Barlow 176). As school children were instructed with an idealized-bourgeois version of French, a purist ideology was born. An emphasis on *bon usage* and a single version of the language *sans fautes* were ingrained in children's heads through grammar drills and dictations.

The linguistic ideals born of the Revolution and spread by public education in the late nineteenth century were strengthened by the French geographer Onésime Reclus. He

emerged in the nineteenth century as an individual who clearly recognized the symbiotic relationship between language and nation. In his book *France, Algérie et colonies* (1883), Reclus invented the word *francophonie* in his reflection on the future of France, specifically in the context of French colonialism. Reclus bestowed upon language great cultural importance with regard to a nation's identity. Famous for championing the major world languages, Reclus commented "Dès qu'une langue a 'coagulé' un peuple, tous les éléments raciaux de ce peuple se subordonnent à cette langue. C'est dans ce sens qu'on a dit : la langue fait le peuple (*lingua gentem facit*)" (114). Sharing his view of linguistic patrimony and his newly-coined term *francophonie*, Reclus opened the Republic's eyes to the vast network of French speakers worldwide, thereby attaching a sense of greatness and universalism to the French language and instilling in French citizens a sense of linguistic pride.

Though the belief in a standardized language yielded widespread support, especially by *purists*, the standardization would not have been successful without significant government invention. Governmental language planning has been the trademark characteristic in the protection and promotion of standardized French, and such intervention has not been limited to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as is often believed. Scholars actually date the birth of government intervention in language planning as early as the sixteenth century. In August 1539, François 1<sup>er</sup> established the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts, which required the use of French instead of Latin in legal rulings. In 1635, Cardinal de Richelieu created the Académie française, an institution whose primary responsibility at the time was to create clear rules for the language and protect its "purity." This organization was one of the only institutions of

the Ancien Regime to survive the Revolution and is still famous for its prescriptive language policies today. In 1883, the Alliance Française was created to encourage the instruction of French language and literature in the colonies and elsewhere.

Over the last five centuries, governmental intervention in linguistic matters combined with a “purist” movement in schools have propelled the place of language to a privileged and exceptional place in French culture, cementing the ties between a standard language and French identity. Robin Adamson argues that “language is readily accepted as the main symbol of identity in France not because other features are lacking or threatened, but because of the unique role played by language in creating and maintaining a unified nation” (154). It is this unified nation that Fernand Braudel refers to when he speaks of “la vraie France,” implying that a static idea of French culture and language exists and survives time and change (18). This is of course a mythological concept, for there is no way to reduce France to a monolithic definition. Still, the idea of a pure French language, free of neologisms, has roots in French history and has caused significant debate over the *exception culturelle*.

### 3.2 *De l'exception française à la diversité culturelle*: Protecting and Promoting the French Language

With a long history of government intervention in linguistic matters and an established symbiosis between French identity and a standardized language, the French entered the twentieth century seemingly well-equipped with a defined language policy. The efforts of Jules Ferry in the late nineteenth century in public schools nationwide had yielded the desired results; by 1880, the number of primary schools had increased from

1,700 to 75,000, and 6.5 million French children were attending school regularly (Nadeau and Barlow 174-75). Thus, most French children had been exposed to some standard French at this time. In addition to a growing domestic interest in a national language fueled by the *école républicaine*, the popularity of geographer Onésime Reclus and his global message revealed a developing interest in French beyond the hexagon (Adamson 10).

The French humorist Pierre Daninos employs a metaphor to delineate Frenchness in the twentieth century, and this metaphor has been aptly applied to the French language as well (Reynolds and Kidd 130). Daninos has commented that the situation for Frenchness, and undoubtedly for its language as well, is two-fold. On one side, there is *relèvement*, as represented by the French figure Joan of Arc, and on the other side, there is *rayonnement*, as represented by Napoléon. The use of these two classic French figures provides a useful framework by which to situate views of a standardized French language throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As indicated earlier, a strong centralizing spirit which is often associated with Napoléon was certainly present during the nineteenth century, as the Revolution inspired ideals and values for standard national language that were put into practice by the state school system. If the language ideology of the nineteenth century embodies a Republican spirit inspired by Napoleon, Joan of Arc is a more appropriate symbol for Frenchness in the twentieth century. Known for inspiring the defense of an English invasion, the image of Joan of Arc describes well the defense of French that has occurred throughout much of the twentieth century. Using these two traditional French figures as a framework can facilitate an understanding of the

oscillation between language protection and promotion that has occurred throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

One of the largest recognized threats to the French language, and certainly French culture, in the twentieth century has come in the form of globalization. The term “globalization” became popular in the latter part of the twentieth century and has often been linked to Americanization, Europeanization, or “Brusselization.” The effects of globalization and American influence were observed by the French early in the twentieth century as economists and business leaders worldwide championed the liberalization of trade, emphasizing economic integration. Following World War II, concerns about the spread of American culture grew for several distinct reasons. America’s presence in Europe mounted, which made it a potential target in the wake of an extremely destructive war. A campaign for the “Defense of Peace” spurred anti-American support among the French, as the US involvement in World War II was described as warmongering. Furthermore, economic growth, urbanization, and modernization began to change France; in the throws of an identity crisis, the French looked to America as a primary offender. As the French entered a period of decolonization, many believed that the power and influence they were losing in the colonies would be assumed by the United States.

Philippe Roger has commented that “Au XXe siècle, la France fut envahie par les Etats-Unis” (439). The invasion to which he refers is not the US presence in Europe during the World Wars. Rather, he reveals a common feeling in France during latter half of the twentieth century. Roger asks,

Que reste-t-il à défendre de la France ? Il reste la *francité*: non plus le territoire, mais le sens du terroir; non plus notre puissance, mais notre



sagesse; non plus nos devises envolées, mais nos valeurs toujours aussi élevées; non plus la vitalité bien entamée, mais notre mode de vie inégalé; non plus la patrie en danger, comme en 1792, mais notre patrimoine convoité, nos cloîtres démontés et nos châteaux exportés. Pour le discours antiaméricain, c'est une révolution : sa révolution culturelle. (439)

Many French citizens echoed Roger's words, believing that unrestrained globalization threatens "the country's statist political tradition, commitment to social equality, special attachment to language, culture, and identity..." (Gordon and Meunier vii.). In France, the consequences of globalization have triggered widespread angst among ardent language defenders over the possible contamination of the language and, in turn, French identity.

During the post-war era, a type of Anglomania was born, with the abundance of English loan words implying imminent American domination.<sup>3</sup> In 1964, René Étiemble published the landmark book *Parlez-vous franglais?* that articulated the fear of American linguistic influence in France. As the *porte-parole* for such uncertainties, Étiemble's book warned against the impoverishment of the French language, suggesting that the French language would devolve eventually into a debased mixture of French and English (Adamson 13). Although Étiemble's predictions were greatly exaggerated, the message resonated with many French citizens, and the term *franglais* came to embody both linguistic and cultural invasion from the United States (Martin 213). Étiemble's message inspired a flurry of government-driven measures during the latter part of the twentieth century. It also motivated organized movements led by well-known language purists,

such as Philippe de Saint-Robert and Jacques Le Cornec, both of whom were intensely devoted to the establishment of organizations driven to safeguard *le français standard*.

One of the principal reasons that standardized French was threatened by English terminology the rapid industrialization that took place in France during the post-war era. As industrialization welcomed a plethora of technological innovations at an unprecedented speed, words that had not formerly existed in the French language had to be created. Generating new French terminology at such a rapid speed proved problematic, and adopting the established English terms was often an easy, although sometimes unwelcomed, solution. Imported products often come with a set of instructions in English, emphasizing again the expanding role of English in France's consumer society. During the late twentieth century, the media, and especially young French users of it, have been influenced by the growing presence of English in telecommunication mediums. Truchot explains that the media is often the way that the English language permeates France's linguistic barriers:

Les médias écrits, électroniques et informatiques, les produits médiatiques, comme le disque, le cinéma, les programmes télévisés jouent un rôle fondamental dans la diffusion de l'anglais...Pour un enfant ou un adolescent, le temps passé devant l'ordinateur ou à écouter de la musique anglo-américaine est bien plus long que celui passé dans la classe d'anglais. (173)

Truchot's comments touch on the growing linguistic gap so evident in the French youth and the older generations. The media-obsessed youth in France are not only bombarded by English through the burgeoning use of electronic products, but they also are relying

much less on written French as a means of communication, a subject that will be explored further in the next chapter.

Another area of linguistic anxiety during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been the fear that the European Union (EU) might abandon French as its official language. A report conducted by the Assemblée nationale in 2003 revealed that the use of French in the documents of the European Commission had fallen from 58% in 1986 to 30% in 2001 (Adamson 37). The reported advantages of the use of French in EU institutions include the following:

- French enjoys leading status, and preferential legal protection in European countries and institutions;
- It is one of the official and formal working languages, one of three informal working languages of the administrative institutions;
- French is the first language of institutions such as the Commission and the Court of Justice;
- Until recently it had been the only language of Press conferences;
- French or Francophone civil servants still form the largest group of functionaries. (Ager 180)

Unfortunately, the disadvantages of the use of French in EU institutions proved to be just as numerous. Some of the major drawbacks cited include the following: English, not French, is often used in foreign affairs and in the preliminary stages of discussions; the enlargement of the European Union means that more non-Francophone countries are admitted, necessitating the use of a common language other than French; and French is being used less by Commissions and supporting staff than it has been used in the recent past (180). The diminishing role of French in the EU has created a divided perspective of

the European Union in France. As the seat of many international bodies, French-speaking Brussels has simultaneously promoted the use of French and challenged it as a booming international metropolis. Many French citizens see European integration as a buffer against globalization, allowing countries with similar value systems to work together and implement protective measures against the worst effects of globalization. Others view the European Union as a simple variant of globalization that may likewise supplant French culture. A potential European melting pot, the EU has been likened to globalization because of its potential to eliminate national particularities such as language.

The number of challenges to the survival of standard French has contributed to an overall feeling of *déclinisme*, which unlike many of the previously discussed external threats, originates within the boundaries of the hexagon. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, many culture scholars attribute this feeling to France's declining position as a global power, its weakening role within Europe, issues of integration, and a deterioration of essentially French characteristics, such as a standardized national language. Linguist Claude Hagège maintains that "the decline of the French language is inseparable from the decline of the French nation" (qtd. in Gentleman). In 2004, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* asked the country to define what it was to be French, and the picture that many citizens gave was dismal at best. The series of articles that ensued revealed that many French citizens were able to define French identity in the past but struggled to find an accurate description of it today. Furthermore, they demonstrated that the challenges to French linguistic identity were only exacerbated by feelings of insecurity. French author

and journalist Denis Tillinac argues that: “The enemy of France is less Brussels or Washington than its propensity towards self-denigration” (qtd. in Gentleman).

As discussed earlier, several attempts were taken in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to confront the challenges to linguistic unity in France. Throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the motivation to protect the language both within and outside of France has strengthened as globalization, perceived Americanization, and modernization have threatened to jeopardize the use of French and its role in modern French society. As a result, several initiatives have been taken to counter the lexical effects of these forces. Adamson outlines two major defensive measures in the area of language protection: legal measures and the development of official and non-official organizations (13). These can be used as a general framework within which to discuss the protection of the French language.

Few major legal rulings were passed during the first half of the twentieth century relating to the French language. The most noteworthy legal measures were taken during the latter half, including the Loi Deixonne (1951), Loi Bas-Lauriol (1975), Loi constitutionnelle (1992), and Loi Toubon (1994). Although the Loi Deixonne was passed in 1951, it was not enforced officially until 1969. Its purpose was to encourage the study of regional languages. While this law is regarded as a defense of regional languages, it is often interpreted as a defense of French: “the law encouraged the study of regional languages only in so far as they may help in acquiring a better knowledge of French” (Adamson 31). In local schools, this simply meant that the local language could be used but only when it was helpful to the study of the French language.

The Loi Bas-Lauriol was the second major law to be passed to help defend the French language. This law required the use of French in the advertisements of goods both orally and in written form and applied to documentation of goods sold in France. Foreign goods were thus exempt from the law, provided their names were well recognized. All information transmitted through the radio and on the television was required to be in French. Contracts covering work conducted in France were to be strictly in French; absolutely no foreign words were permitted. Finally, French was to be the only language used in written documents relating to the official public domain. In practice, this law proved difficult to enforce and ultimately did not curb the use of English among multi-national companies.

In 1994, the Loi Toubon, the most well-known of the French language laws, was passed. Named after Jacques Toubon, the Minister of Culture and Francophonie, the Loi Toubon updated the Loi Bas-Lauriol, which had proven to be ineffective. The first measure under the law was to change the constitution to decree that the French language was “un élément fondamental de la personnalité et du patrimoine de la France.” The Loi Toubon mandated fines or even prison sentences for those who used French in advertisements or public announcements. Furthermore, it required that a translation into French exist for any public announcement in another language.

Recent linguistic legislation has related less to the fight against Anglomania, as have many of the government’s intervention policies, and more with migrant languages of France. In September 2007, the French National Assembly adopted a bill requiring a French language test for visa candidates in France. This was be the third French law in

five years to tighten immigration policy and was strongly supported by President Nicolas Sarkozy, who stated the following in his speech entitled “Pour la France”:

Connaître le français, c’est avoir accès à un patrimoine littéraire d’une exceptionnelle densité, à un pan majeur de la culture mondiale. C’est un trésor qu’il ne faut pas assécher en l’entourant de barrières, mais qu’il faut cultiver parce qu’il est une chance pour la France et un besoin pour le monde. Défendre le français est un devoir moral, politique, économique. Nous l’avons reçu en héritage comme une des grandes langues du monde. Nous ne pouvons assister à sa régression sans réagir. Si la France ne défend pas le français, personne ne le fera à notre place. Sa disparition de la scène internationale serait une faute pour la France et un appauvrissement pour le monde.

His words conflate national and linguistic identity and suggest as well the need for legal measures to defend such traditional pillars of French heritage from external threats.

Sarkozy’s message carries a modern message that certainly has historic roots. Official agencies charged with the protection of French date back to the Académie française (1635) and the Alliance française (1883), as discussed earlier. In more recent times, these organizations have adapted their missions to present day concerns. Often viewed as traditional and even reactionary, the present Académie française is not only concerned with the rules of the French language but is also considered to be the primary watchdog of the French language. As such, it creates appropriate neologisms, invented words that provide an alternative to the English equivalent, and manages financial support programs to defend against the influence of English words. Comprised of 40

members, known as *immortels*, one of its primary responsibilities is to publish periodically an official dictionary of the French language.

Another organization, the Alliance française (1883), is often considered to be the “friendly face” (Adamson 55) of the French language and is second only to the Académie française in age. Each Alliance functions independently; during the latter part of the twentieth century, its emphasis on language transitioned to a broader respect of civilization. It is uniquely positioned in several different sectors, as it is both a private (non-profit) and a government-funded association, as well as both French and foreign.

In 1966, the Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues (DGLFL) de France was created. The purpose of the DGLFL includes the use and spread of the French language and the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity. In 1976, a private group called the Association générale des usagers de la langue française (AGULF) was formed to try to help the enforcement of the Loi Bas-Lauriol. According to the organization’s president M. Michel Fichet, the members had assembled the group with the goal “d’unir sur le modèle des groupements de consommateurs, les usagers de la langue française, soucieux de défendre leur commun patrimoine linguistique et culturel et d’en assurer le rayonnement” (Judge 22). As a type of linguistic watchdog, the group quickly turned to litigation to penalize those organizations who violated official language laws. For example, they sued the Société Photo-Europe in 1981, as the group had sold materials that had instruction leaflets and guarantees which were not in French (Judge 22). Many other similar lawsuits ensued, and although they were quite successful in the courtroom, their funding ultimately dwindled. Like many other private organizations that delve into language policy, it has nearly dissolved today.



In the 1980s, language policy seemed to infiltrate other culture domains, as quotas were implemented in the area of music and cinema. Although these efforts were primarily to protect France from an overall cultural invasion, there were certainly linguistic implications. As a result of music and film quotas, French citizens had less exposure to non-French words. As a result, additional organizations were assembled to assist in the effort to protect and promote the language. In 1986, another well-known organization was created, la Francophonie. Its mission is to support the use of French on a global scale. Today, la Francophonie is comprised of 50 member states, of which France has one of the most active roles. Created in 1988, the Conseil Supérieur de la langue française (CSLF) was established as the supreme body for language policy in France, replacing the Comité consultatif and the Commissariat général à la langue française which were both established by President Mitterrand in 1984.<sup>4</sup> Like the DGDLF and the Académie française, it is one of three governmental bodies charged with maintaining the development of the language, and more specifically, it is responsible for ensuring the “use, management, enrichment, promotion and spread of French in and outside France and policy towards foreign languages” (qtd. in Ager 158).

In addition to these four major official organizations, there are approximately 200 non-governmental organizations that share a belief that the France language is being threatened. These private and semi-private groups have formed alliances, ranging in political affiliation and size, to create a more effective movement to protect and promote the language. There are three groups that have currently obtained legal status as associations of legitimate public interest, and these include the Association pour la sauvegarde et l’expansion de la langue française (ASSELAF), the Défense de la langue

française (DLF), and the Avenir de la langue française (ALF). Of these groups, the ALF often receives the most media attention. Established in 1993, its mission is the following: “contribuer à la défense et à l’expansion de la langue française gravement menacée aux plans national et international” (Avenir de la Langue Française). Although its members claim to be concerned about any threat to the French language, they are particularly interested in the impact of English on the language, seeking to convert those who submit to the “language of the dollar” (qtd. in Martin 217). They also claim some responsibility for the successful lobbying efforts that led in 1992 to the language clause addition to the French Constitution which states that “La langue de la République est le français” (French Const. titre 1, art. 2).

The ALF is renowned for its annual guide, *Le guide de l’usager*, which explains how to interpret the Toubon Law, and for its satirical academy, L’Académie de la carpette anglaise. Every year, this parodist organization awards *La Carpette anglaise* to the French person or group who most offends the ALF with his/their use of English. In 2007, the award went to Christine Lagarde, minister of the Economy, for her use of English with her personnel in her department. Specifically, she was accused of annotating the reports of senior officials in English. As a result, the ALF has bestowed upon her the name “Christine The Guard,” a sarcastic, and certainly very poignant, jab at the English translation of her name. In 2008, Valérie Pécresse, minister of higher education and research, received the award for having stated that the French language was in a state of decline and for suggesting the mandatory instruction of English to all university students. Most recently, the 2009 award was bestowed upon Richard Descoings, director of the Institut d’études politiques de Paris, for requiring that certain

instruction be exclusively in English and for corresponding in English with a high school in Madrid.

Though *La Carpette anglaise* cloaks the seriousness of the ALF in humor, the award does represent the concerns of many of the afore-mentioned organizations, ranging from governmental to private, official to non-official, all charged with the protection of the French language. The abundance of organizations devoted to language protection as well as the significant amount of government intervention in language policy account for part of the reason that language protection has fallen under the umbrella of France's cultural exceptions. In 1996, when Canadians reacted against the booming American magazine industry in their country, France found an ally in another country devoted the protection of its culture, and most certainly its language. The Canadians not only provide a model and comrade to France in their shared quest to protect language, but they also helped France define a shift in the movement to protect the language by introducing to the French the term *diversité culturelle*. The term, although adopted by the French only in the late '90s, described a trend that had long co-existed with protectionist measures. Though the term was applied to all culture symbols, including language, film, music, books, and food, it resonated especially with the linguistic sphere due in part to the cultural diplomacy movement that originated during the post-war era. During this time, language became a tool with which the government could demonstrate that French language and culture were of global interest and importance (Nadeau and Barlow 265). Several of the afore-mentioned groups were and are responsible for both language protection and promotion, since the two goals are certainly not mutually-exclusive. For example, the Alliance française is an organization which aims to protect the status of

French as a world language by promoting French on a global scale. For the first time in French history, the French government established an organization whose mission was to coordinate the linguistic efforts abroad and work with groups such as the Alliance française: the Délégation générale des relations culturelles et des oeuvres françaises à l'étranger (DGFFR).

Unlike the Académie française, the Conseil Supérieur, and the DLF whose focus is primarily on the quality and control of the language code, groups such as the DGFFR are interested in increasing the “influence and prestige (*le rayonnement*, literally ‘radiance’) of the language within France and around the world” (Shelly 309). These efforts to spread French throughout the world are very impetus behind the notion of *diversité culturelle* and cultural diplomacy. The organizations that share this ideal of *rayonnement* create a network of global institutions that attempt to maintain and grow French’s status as a world language.

One of the most successful attempts to spread French throughout the world has been achieved through educational efforts. In the early 1900s, French universities in Grenoble and Toulouse established partnerships with universities in other European countries to plan conferences and courses on the French language and culture. Several years later, these efforts were institutionalized, creating *centres culturels* or *instituts* throughout the world. These establishments thrived in those areas where the Alliances françaises were absent. Today, there are 151 *centres culturels* or *instituts français* that complement the work of the 283 Alliances françaises.<sup>5</sup> Together, these establishments have a presence in 150 countries worldwide.

The Mission laïque française, established in 1902, has also relied on education as a vehicle for *rayonnement* and cultural diplomacy. Formed by a group of French teachers and university professors, this group aimed to spread the French language and culture throughout the world and ultimately hoped to open more French schools outside of France. The Mission laïque was the first organization involved in French cultural diplomacy to receive subsidies from the government. The organization still exists today, which states the following as its goal: “La MLF est une association dont le but est la diffusion de la langue et de la culture françaises par le moyen de la scolarisation à l’étranger.”

This goal has been adopted by the *collèges* and *lycées* which also have a long history of cultural diplomacy efforts, with the earliest founded in 1689 in Berlin. During the post-World War II era, many of these schools were opened by French expatriates, who wanted their children schooled in French. Today, the schools function under the direction of the Agence pour l’enseignement du français à l’étranger (Agency for French Teaching Abroad) which oversees 410 écoles, colleges, and lycées français in 125 countries, accounting for the education of 235,000 children worldwide. The work of the Agency for French Teaching Abroad contributes to the billion dollars spent every year by France to strengthen its cultural diplomacy efforts and spread the French language and culture throughout the world.

The emphasis on a standardized language reveals the historical importance of linguistic unity in France, and it is clear that the French language has long been tied to French identity. In the 1800s, the belief in a standard language became one of the principle tenets of the Revolution and informed many of the subsequent laws and

educational requirements. Many French citizens, previously divided by their linguistic differences, were drawn to the idea of linguistic nationality and believed that language exceptionalism could and would promote collectivity within the state as a nation-building tool.

The twentieth century, however, has certainly challenged the notion of a monolingual community in France. Globalization, modernization, immigration, and the spread of the English language all represent external forces that have threatened and altered the traditional linguistic landscape in France. As a result, many individuals and organizations have reacted in an attempt both to protect and to promote the French language. Where the inspiration for these measures is often cited as French tradition and patrimony, the vitality of the movement seems to be rooted in the resistance against the English language. Ironically, these efforts may prove to be counterproductive as the taboo nature of English has added a “cool” factor to its use and may in fact promote its popularity, especially among the younger generation. Recently, attempts to protect the language have been thwarted in part by the growing linguistic challenges within the hexagon. Those who previously claimed to be waging a linguistic war against English are now faced with the prospect of waging that same war against their neighbors. The discussion of linguistic exceptionalism has thus become more intimate, and perhaps more intensified, as the next chapter will reveal.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *dialecte* and *patois* are two linguistic terms that are often confused. Both are used by non-linguists to describe local varieties of French. However, the term *dialecte* has a more favorable connotation than *patois*, which is often used to describe a debased form of the standard language spoken in rural areas of France. For a more in-depth discussion of the social implications of the usage of these terms, see Batye, Hintze, and Rowlett 260-261.

<sup>2</sup> The term *français standard* will be used interchangeably with *français institutionnel*, *français normalisé*, *français commun*, and *français international* throughout the dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Anglomania is defined as an “absorbing or pervasive interest in England or things English” (“Anglomania”).

<sup>4</sup> The Comité consultatif and the Commissariat général à la langue française replaced the Haut comité de la langue française, which was established under President Pompidou in 1973. The Haut comité de la langue française replaced the Haut comité pour la défense de l’expansion de la langue française which was created by Pompidou during his term as Prime Minister in 1966.

<sup>5</sup> The *centres culturels* or *instituts français* are subsidized by the government, while the *Alliances* are private organizations.

## CHAPTER 4

### *L'EXCEPTION LINGUISTIQUE: A LANGUAGE IN CRISIS?*

*Those who speak the same language are  
joined to each other by a multitude of invisible  
bonds by nature herself... they belong together  
and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.*  
Johann Gottlieb Fichte

As the previous chapter noted, claims of linguistic exceptionalism in France are becoming increasingly challenged by a variety of external factors. An explosion of protective and promotional measures has marked the past century, as defenders of a *français standard* have collaborated to counter such threats. More recently, however, the notion of monolingualism has been questioned by a linguistic struggle that stems from internal dissent. In the following chapter, I will examine the linguistic battle occurring among Frenchmen themselves.<sup>1</sup> I will then examine Laurent Cantet's film *Entre les murs* (2008) in the context of linguistic amalgamation and transformation to reveal how the film speaks to linguistic exceptionalism in France.

#### 4.1 Linguistic Challenges in the Hexagon

While the challenges facing the future of French are often external in nature, as the previous chapter highlighted, the re-vitalization of minority languages, migrant languages, and regional languages has been one of the major challenges to traditional



monolingual policies in France. The major regional languages in France (Breton, Alsatian, Occitan, Catalan, Corsican, Oïl, and Franco-Provençal) have coexisted with French since French (*français standard*) was itself a regional language. Following the French Revolution, teachers were required both to teach the French language and to exclude regional languages and local dialects from school grounds, although students often continued to speak the regional dialects at home. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

regional languages were banned through hatred, fear and suspicion of what they symbolized and the message of political fragmentation they carried, while French alone was to be the language of freedom and universal values, and act as the doorway to be the language to the future and to individual development within the Republic. (Ager 28)

The efforts to eliminate other languages in the name of monolingualism were only partially successful in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many publications in support of regional languages began in the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with particular attention paid to Breton, Occitan, Corse, and Provençal. These languages continued to be spoken in homes, and private movements in their defense were launched in the early twentieth century.

The French region of Brittany (*Bretagne*) provides an illustrative example of a movement to resist the monolingual language policy characteristic of the last three centuries. Following World War I, Breiz Alao (*Bretagne toujours*) was established; although its name has since changed several times, the group exists today and its efforts have been paralleled by other groups supporting Occitan, Corse, and Tahitian (Adamson

30). The spirit of the regional movements has also inspired similar movements by migrant-language speakers, such as those speaking Arabic as a second language, and by lower-income citizens. The jargon of the *cités* in France has developed into popular forms of argot; verlan, for example, reverses syllables and rearranges them phonetically. For example, *flic* becomes *keuf*, *mère* becomes *reum*, and *père* becomes *reup*. Many French citizens view verlan as a modern threat to a monolingual society, challenging the mindset of language purists or *résistants* who insist on a standardized national language free of variation. Adamson explains that verlan is the “popular, resolutely non-‘beautiful’, counter-cultural and widely used French slang of many of the young who feel dispossessed in today’s France [and] . . . an example of the importance of language in the identity debate” (154). Thus, verlan presents a linguistic irritant to monolingualism as well as mainstream French culture and identity.

A similar concern stems from the increasing popularity of *le langage SMS* (Short Message Service), comparable to American texting. Studies of slang and the language of SMS reveal that as French children rely less on literature to develop correct French grammar, French writing imitates speech significantly more than speech imitates writing. As a result, it has been found that a large portion of adolescent French use incorrect grammar, have an increasing use of slang in their expressions, and often use phonetic rather than proper spellings. All of these changes challenge the status of standardized French.

The rampant use of cell phones and the internet and the corresponding use of *le langage SMS* have brought a discussion of the importance of French spelling, *l’orthographe*, to the forefront. In the early eighteenth century, spelling of French words

became fixed as dictionaries were published. Although there were some contradictions among various editions, a “norme orthographe” was established. Since that time, a significant part of every French student’s education has been devoted to the study of spelling. In the 1850s, dictations (*dictées*) became a popular tool with which to test a student’s command of French spelling and grammar rules. These tests have become so integral to the French education system and French society at large that *concours de dictée* are held regularly and are a nationally televised event, the most famous being the Dicos d’or, hosted by Bernard Pivot. These competitions can be likened to American spelling bees, but are arguably more culturally significant due to the value that the French have historically placed on language and the respected difficulty of French spelling rules. The longevity of French spelling rules and the *dictées* that test them reveal what some have called “une passion française pour l’orthographe” (Closets). Danièle Manesse explains the cultural value of the *dictées*: “Comme elle est d’une complexité indiscutable, la maîtrise de l’orthographe se pare d’un grand prestige et le brillant orthographeur est fêté en France comme de haut niveau” (23). The way in which linguistic achievement, specifically in spelling and grammar, is tied directly to French values and a notion of self-worth: “une personne qui a une mauvaise orthographe court le risque de n’être pas estimée fiable” (23).

With the advent of the internet, SMS, blogs, email, and electronic spell-check, the respect traditionally given to French spelling has diminished most noticeably over the past decade. Moreover, banlieue language has transformed the spelling of certain words to the point where they no longer bear any sort of trace of the original word. These trends among others motivated a study of the French spelling in schools in 2005 through

the analysis of a *dictée* administered to a class of ten to sixteen year olds. The study first began in 1987 when linguists André Cherval and Danièle Manesse delivered a dictation to a group of students that had been located in the archives of the city of Paris. It was the same dictation that was administered to 3000 school children between 1873 and 1877. The linguists made comparisons of the results and published their findings, concluding that the two subject groups performed similarly. As a result, many linguists concluded that the language aptitude of French adolescents during the 1980s had not declined as significantly as previously thought.

In 2005, Cherval, Manesse and several other linguists revisited their study, administering the same dictation to a similar subject body. Unlike the previous study, the results in the 2005 study differed significantly from those achieved in 1987. The researchers concluded the following: “La maîtrise de l’orthographe des élèves du CM2 à la troisième, évaluée dans le cadre de la dictée *Les Arbres*, a régressé en un peu moins de vingt ans de manière notable” (Cogis et al 216).<sup>2</sup> The results indicated without question that this subject body possessed inferior language skills when compared to the similar subject body tested in the 1980s.

The authors suggest that less time is currently devoted to spelling in French schools, contributing in part to the poorer performance on the *dictée*. It is plausible, though, that the devaluation of spelling in schools reflects a broader societal trend to challenge the importance of spelling. Such changes to the spelling of words have made some French citizens question the importance of the strict rules that have dictated spelling for the last two centuries. Others have suggested that the complex nature of French spelling rules creates an academic inequality that the *défavorisés* find difficult to

overcome. In other words, it has been argued that spelling, and specifically the testing of it, has a discriminatory characteristic and may result in academic problems for those students who might otherwise achieve academic success.

In light of these arguments, a movement to evaluate the spelling of French words has recently occurred. The group Érofa (Études pour une rationalisation de l'orthographe française aujourd'hui) provides such an example; the members offer the following as their objective on their website: "de procéder à des recherches portant sur un petit nombre de points mais qui touchent un grand nombre de mots" (Érofa). The website also offers the following comparison to highlight the complexity of French spelling and the need for reform: "L'orthographe du français est comparable au Paris d'avant 1850, un ensemble de rues, de ruelles, et d'impasses qui s'enchevêtrent, dans lesquelles on ne s'aventure jamais sans redouter quelque embuche au coin de chaque rue." The members of the group try to illustrate the illogic of certain spellings, such as the seemingly arbitrary use of the letter "n" in *paysanne/partisane* and *patronner/patronage*. Supporters of spelling reform emphasize that any suggested modification would be modest and reasonable. Additionally, they claim to be baffled by those who obstinately defend the traditional spelling of word, complaining of their conservatism and outdated inflexibility: "Ils [spelling reformers] s'agacent du conservatisme de ceux qui entretiennent l'idée d'une orthographe sacrée 'patrimoine national,' irréformable" (Bensimon).

Advocates of such reform argue that the changes made to the spelling of words would have multiple benefits. They claim that it would make *l'orthographe française* more accessible to the francophone world at large. Secondly, such modifications would likely appeal to students, such as those analyzed in the afore-mentioned study, those

“pauvres gosses qui doivent apprendre tout cet embrouillamini” (Bensimon). As a result, spelling might reassume a larger role in the schools’ curriculum. Finally, proponents of this movement claim that spelling changes might render the language more attractive to foreigners who are often discouraged by the study of French spelling and grammar, which have been claimed to be among the most difficult in the world. In this way, modifications would actually contribute to the marketability of French culture and the French language on a worldwide scale.

The reaction to such a movement has evoked a vigorous response on the opposing side. Many of those who share a passion for spelling and the French language are unwilling to accept changes made to the language. Although the arguments against spelling reform are varied, they are generally tied to identity issues as well as to the social and practical implications of such reform. When François de Closets, a journalist and producer of French television and author of *Zéro faute: L’orthographe, une passion française*, appeared on France 2 in September 2009, his endorsement of spelling reform provoked many comments regarding French linguistic identity. Those who opposed such modifications argued that the spelling of French words has deep ties to French history and Francophone identity as well:

En réformant brutalement l’orthographe, on s’attaque à la racine des mots, à l’histoire des mots, et donc à la possibilité de les associer entre eux, d’en toucher leur parenté de pouvoir en jouer. Et ça heurte aussi une partie de notre identité francophone. (“De l’orthographe”)

This quote suggests that the spelling of French words is particular, unique, and deep-rooted in the French *patrimoine*. Those who share Closets’ views perceive language as

something sacred, an immutable force that binds a group together. Others have highlighted the practical implications of such modifications, arguing that such changes would make the great authors of French literature inaccessible to students who might not recognize modified words or their derivatives. Furthermore, some argue that the knowledge of the French language, with all its grammatical and spelling rules, could be better viewed as a leveling, as opposed to a discriminatory, tool. Regardless of socioeconomic stature, all students have access to the French language, *un patrimoine immatériel*, as some have called it.

The recent debate over spelling reform might appear rather heated for what has been proposed as modest change. The intensity of this particular debate and the impassioned reactions it has elicited underscores the divisive nature of language policy. The many changes to standardized French in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have had polarizing effect, creating a fracture between those who wish to preserve the language and those who welcome linguistic diversity and change.

#### 4.2 *Entre les murs*: A Linguistic Warning?

A recent film by Laurent Cantet, *Entre les murs* (2008), has brought many of the previously detailed concerns to the forefront and provides an excellent context from which to discuss the emotionally-charged debate over linguistic exceptionalism. The film is based on the novel by the same name, written by François Bégaudeau in 2006. In the movie, author Bégaudeau plays a French teacher in a ZEP junior high school in the 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement.<sup>3</sup> The film follows the students throughout an entire academic year, with most of the film shot in the actual classroom. The movie appears documentary-like, due

to the unique filming and the lack of one coherent storyline.<sup>4</sup> As a result, a multitude of issues emerge from the dynamics of the ethnically-diverse classroom; most of these issues are rooted in cultural and socio-economic differences, intergenerational misunderstandings, and questions of authority between *professeur* and *élève*. And while the film touches on a variety of contemporary topics, it is through *language* that each of the issues is evoked. That is, the French language, and the deviations from it, serves as the tool that reflects, engages, provokes, and stifles each of the topics broached in the class.

The strong focus on language in a classroom, or more broadly in a school, is itself worth examining from a historical perspective. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the French school system has traditionally served as the institutional example of Republican ideals. In the nineteenth century, the school's primary responsibility was to instruct students on geography (primarily that of France) and, most importantly, the "purest" form of the French language. Ironically, the very institution that was responsible for promoting a sense of geographical and linguistic unification reveals something very different in the twenty-first century academic atmosphere captured in *Entre les murs*. The multi-ethnic body in the school seems extremely fractured, and many of the students seem to identify with their specific ethnicity or the country of their parents, as opposed to France, despite François' pronouncement to one student: "tu es française" (*Entre les murs*). For example, one of the many skirmishes in the film involves a discussion of soccer teams. Students from Mali, Morocco, and the Caribbean engage in a heated debate over the potential success of the soccer teams from their respective countries, and references to the French soccer team are noticeably absent. Through these types of



discussions, a feeling of cultural and geographical divisiveness is established, creating a stark contrast from the notion of geographical unity and Frenchness promoted in nineteenth-century schools.

The various backgrounds of the students are apparent not only in their allegiance to sports teams but also in their dialect, register, and language use. As previously mentioned, a majority of the classroom debates revolve around proper language use and the value or the worthlessness of learning and speaking a *français standard*. In one of the most memorable scenes involving language, the students question the importance of using the imperfect subjunctive when the form is not used in spoken French. Student Sandra explains: “Ta manière si nous on l’utilise, j’allasse ou j’sais pas quoi, tout l’monde va dire: ‘Hou là, qu’est-ce qui font, là? Ils sont malades ou quoi ?’” (Bégaudeau, Cantet, and Campillo 31). Khoumba, another student in the class, echoes this sentiment: “Ouais, ça nous sert à rien. Alors, pourquoi on perd du temps avec ça? ” (31).

This type of subversive behavior is legitimized in the real life story provided in *Tableau noir: la défaite de l’école* (2008) by Iannis Roder. In the book, Roder details his experiences as a teacher in a ZEP *collège*. His students also argue the worthlessness of learning *français standard*: “Mais ça sert à rien, vos mots là,” “Personne ne parle comme ça, personne comprend rien” (121). The author summarizes their justification : “Si un terme n’a pas d’usage au quotidien, il est inutile” (121). In the same way that the students in *Entre les murs* assume that learning the imperfect subjunctive is a futile exercise, the real-life students in Roder’s class question the importance of studying

standard French, since their day to day language use appears entirely sufficient without these seemingly outdated grammatical forms.

The constant bickering between teacher and pupil in *Tableau noir* and depicted fictionally in *Entre les murs* has served as the subject of debate among many spectators, film critics, and pedagogues. Some felt that the movie was an accurate depiction of the French school system and demonstrated a serious and immediate need for reform. Others felt that François' teaching was admirable and revealed the best possible way to instruct this particular group of students. Equally debated is the role of language in the film. Supporters of linguistic exceptionalism have bemoaned what they view as the decay of the French language. Alain Finkielkraut, staunch defender of the traditional *école républicaine*, reacted to the film in a poignant assertion of the importance of safeguarding traditionally linguistic conventions:

Car la civilisation ne demande pas à la langue d'être efficace, d'être directe, de permettre à chacun de dire sans détour ce qu'il a sur le cœur ou dans les tripes, à l'instar de ce magistrat qui a conclu son réquisitoire contre un accusé terrifiant par ces mots: "À gerber!" La civilisation réclame le scrupule, la précision, la nuance et la courtoisie. C'est très exactement la raison pour laquelle l'apprentissage de la langue en passait, jusqu'à une date récente, par les grands textes.

Others see language deviation as a divisive tool that causes irreparable fractures. States Alain Bentolila, a linguistics professor at the Sorbonne, "ils [les différents registres du langage] séparent, cantonnent, opposent, excluent." He argues that *la langue des banlieues* does not create unity among certain cultural groups but instead fosters division

between minority language speakers and those who speak a *français standard*: “Elles [les populations immigrées] se sont rassemblées sur ces territoires de plus en plus isolés non pas parce qu’elles partageaient un héritage culturel et historique, mais au contraire parce que, année après année, elles savaient de moins en moins qui elles étaient, d’où elles venaient et où elles allaient.” His remarks parallel those of other scholars who have suggested that linguistic division may reinforce exclusion and social marginalization. They assert that instruction of a *français standard* in French schools creates a foundation of linguistic unity which in turn promotes collective cultural unity and a sense of inclusion.

Beyond the social ramifications of linguistic fracture, defenders of *le français standard* cite many practical reasons for supporting linguistic homogeneity. Many pedagogues encourage students to learn and adhere to standardized French because *la langue des banlieues* creates a type of linguistic prison from which it is difficult to emerge. This, then, has severe repercussions personally, academically, and professionally for those students who continue to reject French in the name of their own particular language. In *Entre les murs*, the Malian student Souleymane (Franck Keita) provides a telling example of the type of consequences that linguistic marginalization can have on a student. Souleymane has great difficulty in school, specifically with reading and writing in French. Neither of his parents speaks French, and it is obvious that he has no interest in learning it either. When asked to write his auto-biography as a homework assignment, he chooses to capture aspects of his own life on camera rather than on paper. As a spectator, I was initially impressed at the innovative approach to the assignment and felt myself silently congratulating him for discovering a unique approach to such a

classically traditional assignment. François, the teacher, shares my response in the movie, as he presents Souleymane's photos to the class, a gesture that seems to create a sense of unity, understanding, and belonging in the class. However, this "feel-good" moment is short-lived, as Souleymane's subsequent disruptive behavior reminds the spectator that his photographic auto-biography was not necessarily a creative approach but perhaps his only recourse, given his significant linguistic limitations.

Ultimately, it is language itself that leads to Souleymane's own undoing. Following a class dispute involving François' use of the word "*pétasse*" toward two of his students, Souleymane erupts and uses the "tu" form with François. He leaves the classroom, accidentally hitting a classmate on his way out of the room. This event leads to a formal evaluation of Souleymane's behavior and his ultimate expulsion from the school. Souleymane's mother is present at the hearing and speaks emotionally in her native Malian tongue, forcing her son to translate for her. Souleymane is visibly embarrassed, and the irony is palpable: Souleymane's linguistic limitations ignited his academic trouble, and yet he appears truly ashamed of his mother's communicational limitations among French-speaking academics. The linguistic barrier between Souleymane's mother and the committee members creates an awkward atmosphere and seems to accentuate the already existing tension. The spectator is forced to wonder whether or not the result – Souleymane's expulsion – might have been different had Souleymane's mother been able to convey her thoughts and explanations in French.

Many critics assert that Souleymane's case exemplifies the afore-mentioned consequences of linguistic limitations. Specifically, they maintain that the constant refusal to learn and practice a *français standard* does more than damage *le patrimoine*

*linguistique*. It also creates linguistic inequality, in which those who refuse to learn the language are imprisoned and relegated to an inferior position that ultimately impedes future academic and professional success. In the book *Orthographe : à qui la faute?* (2007), a group of French academics explain this link in reference to past studies: “Nous montrions que les élèves de ZEP, fragilisés par leur grande insécurité linguistique, couraient le risque de ne jamais pouvoir entrer de manière fructueuse dans la logique des nouveaux programmes” (Manesse 11). For Souleymane, the consequences were undoubtedly more severe. At the end of the film, several students suggest that Souleymane’s expulsion from school will mean a forced return to Mali. Thus, for Souleymane, the trajectory from French student to outcast was quick and severe: what began as linguistic limitations quickly spiraled into behavioral problems and ultimately his physical marginalization from French society.

#### 4.3 A Linguistic Model: Language Change and Diversity in France

Those who use Souleymane as an example of the practical implications of linguistic limitations are often opposed by those who believe that *le français des banlieues* is unfairly stigmatized and framed by dominant discourse. This point of view is generally consistent with Leftist and sociolinguistic points of view toward language policy in France. Advocates of *banlieue* youth language view minority languages and dialects as creative ways to express identities “which stand outside the binary categories of mainstream discourse, allowing youths to define and express themselves through a linguistic bricolage that mirrors their sense of identity as mixed, evolving, and drawing from multiple cultural and linguistic sources” (Doran 499-500). Moreover, this bricolage

creates an alternative space in which youths may feel safe in their differences from dominant French culture. Thus, what is viewed by the dominant culture as linguistic difference and marginalization may actually afford minority groups a sense of linguistic belongingness and collectivity.

This point of view has been the subject of research for many sociolinguists who support an evolving language and welcome linguistic change.<sup>5</sup> Scholars in the field of sociolinguistics are often cited for their views on language evolution and variation, which challenge the traditional views of complete linguistic uniformity. They describe language as a living entity whose changes and developments are actually a sign of life. These scholars do not believe that French will ever be replaced by English or by a “degenerated” form of French, and in the face of widespread paranoia and strong measures to protect its form, insist on the positive side of French language evolution. Accordingly, it could be argued that France’s linguistic exceptionalism may not lie in the attempt to protect and promote one standardized form both domestically and abroad, but rather the development of a diverse variety of dialects and a truly heterogeneous linguistic landscape.

According to sociolinguistic scholars, there is no such thing as “the French language today” since language is in a constant state of change (Durand 281). In fact, the *français standard* that is known today was at first one of many regional dialects in northern France. It was only because this region was associated with the seat of power during the twelfth century that this particular dialect was standardized. “Thus, the descendants of the dialects of medieval France aren’t substandard forms of French, for

they predate the very notion of a standard. They were merely the unsuccessful rivals of Francien in the moves to establish a standard” (Battye, Hintze, and Rowlett 261).<sup>6</sup>

Understanding that *français standard* is only one of many dialects that happened to undergo a process of codification and national standardization can facilitate comprehension of the modern language views of sociolinguists. Sociolinguists argue that minority and regional languages should not be pitted against *français standard*, because opposing a ‘dialect’ and a ‘language’ makes the false assumption that dialects are a debased form of language. Although many sociolinguists claim to understand the necessity of a *français standard* for communicative efficiency, they find it erroneous to believe that “linguistic norms are anything but artificial constructs, that the standard variety is linguistically ‘better’ than non-standard varieties, and that complete linguistic uniformity can ever be brought about” (Lodge 14). The written form of French, as prescribed by the artificial linguistic norms determined by the Académie française, is the most static form of the French language and often does not describe the reality of modern language use and evolution. For example, the Académie française will not include the word *récré* (shortened form of *récréation*) in its dictionary, since it is believed to be a neologism.<sup>7</sup> However, the term is widely recognized and used among French speakers in France, demonstrating the gap between prescribed and practiced language.

As an important aspect of a language’s health, linguistic variability in French is determined by a number of factors, including geography, social class, ethnicity, and age. Sociolinguists stress that such interspeaker variability is not only necessary for the health of the language, as explained above, but also quite valuable on a social level. For example, the *fautes* attributed to verlan and argot may well be ways to account for gaps in

*français standard*. As Munro notes, “the outstanding characteristic of *argot* is its linguistic playfulness and inventiveness, its constant capacity to renew itself” (Kidd and Reynolds 137). Certain words created in *argot* and *verlan* also add new meanings and tones to the words. For example, the word *téçi*, verlanized for *cité*, expresses not only a city or a town but also bears an affectionate tone, as does the English word homeland. Some scholars say that *verlan* represents more than just linguistic creativity, but also a way for minority speakers to “reverse” mentalities about ethnic and religious differences, non-French identity, and nonstandard speech (Stille 1). Linguistic ownership translates into cultural ownership, and language serves as an interface by those groups who have would not share a language (3). Verlan has become so popular that it has appeared in film dialogue, advertising campaigns, political speeches, French rap and hip-hop music, mainstream media, and even certain dictionaries. Many argue that verlan brings linguistic variety to the French language landscape by creating new meanings and bridging cultural gaps.

Sociolinguists have also argued that there is great value in linguistic diversity for the survival of French worldwide. As France has espoused cultural diplomacy and the spread of French as an international language, it must be recognized that the survival of French may rely on the recognition and promotion of variants. This is particularly meaningful in the context of Africa. Suzanne Lafage notes that “it seems to be increasingly accepted that the survival of French as an international language depends on its development in Africa” (215). Lafage’s research has shown that variations of the language as a hybrid language or a form of Creole are widespread in Africa, with many young Africans blending the two official languages together. Lafage echoes the



arguments of sociolinguists when she makes a plea for an open linguistic attitude toward adaptation of a language in other civilizations. According to her, French cannot claim to be an international language without acknowledging that vehicular languages, such as African French, may vary drastically from an idealized *français standard* (236).

Many sociolinguists agree that the survival of French and all its variants depends on the development of a *glottopolitique*, an appropriate language policy for a multilingual society. Under a Glottpolicy, a society must make a distinction between “defending and promoting a language and defending and promoting a language system which dominates all other systems with which it competes” (Laroussi and Marcellesi 98). Further, such a policy must recognize and promote language minorities of all kinds. Carol Sanders argues that such a policy will be effective in France only if political leaders are informed and if there is an ongoing dialogue that encourages the discussion of linguistic issues. An example of such a Glottpolicy can be found in the use of English in Australia. Multilingualism, pluralism, and multiculturalism are part of Australian life and allow for effective language policy and cultural developments.

The debate on the role that minority languages should play in academia as well in everyday life has become increasingly intense, especially in light of the heated dispute involving immigration. The immediate success of *Entre les murs* and the multitude of reactions to it revealed the uncompromising and polarized sides of the argument, specifically between Conservatives and those who favor the Leftist, sociolinguistic view. Laurent Cantet, producer and director of *Entre les murs*, was encouraged to comment on such a debate, when asked “Le langage des jeunes, très imagé et fleuri, est l’honneur. Faut-il y avoir une richesse ou un enfermement?” (5). Cantet responded diplomatically :

“Le film ne fait jamais l’apologie de ce parler-là. François Bégaudeau leur rappelle sans relâche qu’il existe différents niveaux de langue. Et que, sans cette capacité à passer d’un niveau à un autre, on est perdu en société” (3). Cantet’s remarks touch on the paradoxical question that appears in most discussions of linguistic exceptionalism: how can the French encourage a multiplicity of languages without compromising the value of a *français standard*?

#### 4.4 Une crise d’une langue exceptionnelle?

The 1835 preface to the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* stated that

...une langue, c’est la forme apparente et visible de l’esprit d’un peuple; et lorsque trop d’idées étrangères à ce peuple entrent à la fois dans cette forme, elles la brisent et la décomposent; et, à la place d’une physionomie nationale et caractérisée, vous avez quelque chose d’indécis et de cosmopolite. (Dictionnaire de l’Académie IX-X)

The fear of that which is “*indécis*” and “*cosmopolite*” would perhaps be described in different terms today, but the anxiety over linguistic threats is still present. Moreover, language guardians still champion the “spirit” that is cultivated by linguistic exceptionalism and protective policies in France. Have their efforts to protect and promote a unified language been successful, or does French have a “glorious past” and “endangered present” as some argue?

Assessing the success of twentieth and twenty-first language policies in France is not a scientific endeavor. It is only possible to look at results of certain initiatives to gauge how linguistic policies have fared. Cited as one of the major corrupting forces of

the French language and the impetus for many protective measures, Anglicisms are still used by many young people in France, a fact which the ardent defenders of the language lament. *Cool*, *le marketing*, and *un email* were only a few of hundreds of English terms to flood French vocabulary during the late twentieth century. Some English words are Gallicized, or “made French.” Other existing French words acquire new definitions, influenced by their English counterpart. Pseudo-Anglicisms, such as *brushing* (blow dry) and *baskets* (sneakers) have also become increasingly popular. Thus, English influence on the French language is not limited to adopted words; rather, the presence of English is pervasive and has a variety of manifestations in French.

The Académie is faced with the very daunting task of trying to preempt the creation and assimilation of Anglicisms on a daily basis. In 1999, the French media adopted the English term “Euroland” in reference to the eleven European Union nations that had adopted the *euro*. The Académie reacted quickly in a communiqué that stated that the Académie encouraged the term “*zone euro*” as opposed to its much more popular English counterpart. In a similar decree, the Académie discouraged the use of “online chat” and promoted the terms *causette* or *parlotte*, neither of which gained much currency. However, certain neologisms, such as *ordinateur*, *télécharger*, and *logiciel* have had much success and their English equivalents, “computer,” “download,” and “software” are almost never used in spoken or written French. Broadly speaking though, the attempts of the Académie to preempt or eliminate the spread of English terms have not been enormously successful.

Other initiatives, such as the *Loi Toubon*, have revealed the limited efficacy of governmental intervention in linguistic policy. The *Loi Toubon* has been met with much

criticism, as French citizens have mocked the seeming impossibility of applying the law, especially in the media domain. The law has been sarcastically dubbed the law “all good,” a sarcastic play on the English translation of the word and the law’s apparent ineffectiveness. As with other laws, the *Loi Toubon* relies heavily on the enthusiasm of heads of administrative departments which often varies drastically, resulting in inefficiencies in its execution (Adamson 152). Furthermore, such laws cannot prevent the amount of English that floods the internet, a medium that can be accessed by all French citizens. In 2005, the head of the National Library, Jean-Noël Jeanneney warned of the “Google challenge” in Europe following Google’s announcement to scan 15 million English-language books. Among other things, Jeanneney feared “the continued expansion of Anglo-Saxon culture driven by the strength of the English language” (Riding). As a counter-attack, Germany and France collaborated in 2006 to develop *Quaero*, an internet search engine that would run head to head against Google. Criticism has arisen in response to the effort over the lack of funding and long timeline; many argue that the French search engine will always be a generation behind the search engine market. Mike Lynch, of the research firm Autonomy, called the plan “a blatant case of misguided and unnecessary nationalism” (qtd. in Chrisafis, “Chirac unveils”). Like Lynch, many critics argue that such an initiative would be ineffective, underfinanced, and ultimately unprepared to counter the English language’s growing influence.

Initiatives to defend the French language have also revealed a growing division among the French population. For example, Sarkozy’s support of the new immigration law and its language requirement has been met with widespread criticism from all segments of the political spectrum, as citizens argue that France is, or should be, a

country of immigrants and linguistic diversity. Other similar issues have arisen in response to the Académie's strict hand in language policy. As discussed earlier, *verlan*, especially in the *banlieues*, has come to represent a "form of political correctness expressing solidarity with and awareness of the immigrant community at a time of anti-immigrant politics" (qtd. in Stille 2). While many *verlan* words have been integrated into mainstream French culture and were even used by former French President François Mitterrand during some media appearances, the Académie refuses to include even the most common and popular of *verlan* terms. Many *verlan* speakers and linguists argue that a dictionary should reflect the language that is actually spoken, so that all French citizens may have access to the definitions of such terms (Stille 4). The refusal to admit such words further excludes the sub-cultures who use these terms, creating additional linguistic and cultural distinctions that are often perceived as negative.

The results of language policy have not been entirely ineffective or negative. In fact, many scholars insist that *une crise du français* is not an entirely accurate assessment of the linguistic realities in modern-day France. As indicated earlier, certain linguistic scholars describe language as a living entity whose changes and developments are actually a sign of life. Many linguists argue that the threat of such "degeneration" of the French language has been exaggerated by purists who want to make their case against any linguistic diversity. On an international level, French continues to maintain a formidable presence. It is spoken in thirty-five countries, second only to English which is spoken in 45 countries (Quid 2008). French is more widely spoken throughout the world now than at any other time in history, and the numbers of learners of French as a second or foreign language continues to grow (Adamson xvi.)

One of the most realistic assessments of the status of the French language is that the linguistic situation itself is full of paradoxes and best described as oxymoronic. On an international level, there is a campaign to promote “linguistic diversity” throughout the world, part of the *rayonnement* efforts to spread French language and culture. Domestically, there is still, however, a strong movement to promote monolingualism at the expense of minority and migrant languages as well as any other non-standard slang or youth languages. Many find the universal ideals espoused by language purists to be incompatible with a plurilingual agenda that is marketed on the international front. Sharon Shelly asks, “Can the defenders of *la Francophonie* reasonably condemn the ‘homogenizing’ effects of cultural and economic globalization mediated by English, while promoting French on the basis of “universal” values presumably encoded into the language?” (315).

This paradox that Shelly aptly underlines damages the credibility of the popular term *diversité culturelle*, as the term seems to apply exclusively to the promotion of *français standard*. That is, the same value placed on the French contribution to global diversity is not applied to minority languages or dialects domestically. Overall, there appears to be an ideal to which purists cling, a principle of *fixité* of the French language that persists in the face of true linguistic usage and realities. Extreme language purists seem to maintain an archaic view of the country’s makeup, aspiring for all citizens to be prototypical French speakers of the 1900s, when the current reality is significantly different. The French language, at least as championed by purists, has become a true “pillar” in the physical sense of the word - rigid, static, and inflexible. As in other cultural domains, there is also the notion of linguistic marketability that some language

purists seem to overlook. The verbiage used to describe the French language – exceptional, universal, standard, pure, etc. – may very well alienate those who speak a “non-standard” language, intensifying the cultural and linguistic divides that already exist. Finally, the increasing use of English by some government officials in France suggests that there is a linguistic hierarchy at work, whereby certain languages are more culturally and socially acceptable than others - certain “exceptions” to the notion of linguistic exceptionality.

It is clear that a linguistic divide has developed in France, clearly distinguishing those who subscribe to traditional views of language exceptionalism from those who believe that a linguistically purist stance cannot be reconciled with the linguistic realities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A new viewpoint has emerged from these so-called *réalistes*, in which France’s exceptionalism lies not in her unique protective measures but in the future of linguistic diversity within her borders. Dismissing the negative expression *le français en crise*, a new expression has emerged: *le français en transition*. With this expression comes the hope on the part of the *réalistes* that the twenty-first century will bring new language policies and a change in traditional mentalities that have dominated the last six centuries, while others still cling to language as a necessary and immutable pillar of French cultural specificity and Republican values.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term “Frenchmen” is intentional in this phrase, as it has been asserted that the knowledge of the French language turned peasants into “Frenchmen.”

<sup>2</sup> CM2 is the abbreviation used for “cours moyen deuxième année.” This particular grade is generally composed of students between the ages of 10 and 11.

<sup>3</sup> ZEP is the acronym for *Zones d’Éducation Prioritaire*. The ZEP have existed for 20 years and encompass both primary and lower secondary schools. Additional funds are allocated to ZEP-schools so that they may provide an environment that can cater to the special needs of socially disadvantaged or undereducated students.

<sup>4</sup> Three different cameras were used when filming the classroom, including one focused on the teacher, one on a particular student, and one roaming the entire space of the classroom.

<sup>5</sup> A variety of definitions for “sociolinguistics” are available; for purposes of this dissertation, “sociolinguistics” is defined as “a study of linguistic behavior as determined by sociocultural factors” (“Sociolinguistics”).

<sup>6</sup> Francien is the name of the medieval Oïl dialect of the Ile-de-France region in Northern France which evolved over time into *français standard*.

<sup>7</sup> The Academy distinguishes between “new words” and neologisms. A new word is used to describe something new for which there is no existing term; a neologism is a word that describes something which has an existing word.



## CHAPTER 5

### *L'EXCEPTION GASTRONOMIQUE :* CULINARY IDENTITY AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

*La destinée des nations dépend de la façon  
dont elles se nourrissent.*  
Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

On October 13, 2009 the French kicked off their twentieth annual *Semaine du goût*, a festival devoted to cultivating gastronomic experimentation and awareness. The festival began as a *Journée du Goût* in 1990 with 350 chefs who provided lessons on taste to students in elementary schools. It has since evolved into a week-long celebration of food, with “*Le Goût pour tous!*” providing the 2009 culinary theme as well as the twenty-year celebration of this event. As top chefs, cooks, writers, and restaurateurs come together in this unique festival, French citizens and timely tourists enjoy an array of cooking workshops, demonstrations, and gourmet exhibitions across the entire country. For one week, gastronomy takes a front seat to all aspects of French culture, as the festival exalts foie gras and other classically French fare in the face of the seemingly omnipresent fast food frenzy.

A week devoted to what the French term *le patrimoine culinaire français* is an occasion that many other countries might struggle to understand.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps an idea most foreign to Americans who might find difficulty in establishing and justifying a

week-long celebration of national cuisine. This increased importance placed on food in France is part of a late twentieth and twenty-first century movement that seeks to combat the modern pressures of globalization and the resulting impact on France's gastronomic sovereignty and argued exceptionality. In *L'Exception culinaire française: un patrimoine gastronomique en péril?*, Alexandre Lazareff argues that gastronomy is exemplary of one of France's cultural exceptions that has found itself under attack in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, threatening her "patrimoine culturel" (13).

In this chapter, I will examine the role of gastronomy in French culture and the reasons for its evolution into a culture field that is often asserted as a distinctly unique national symbol. This chapter will explore the symbiotic nature between food and French identity, that unique association that prompted Brillat-Savarin to utter the much celebrated phrase "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es" (23). In addition to commenting on this symbiosis, Brillat-Savarin predicted that gastronomy had such a unique place in French culture that it would soon have its own set of academicians, universities, professors, and prizes. This chapter will examine how the development of gastronomy as a culture field launched it into a place where Brillat-Savarin's prediction would ring true in the century following his death. Specifically, my goal is first to trace the origin of gastronomy's asserted exceptionality: how and why the historical context of French cuisine has transformed it into an essential component of France's culture and global image. I will then consider the principal threats to France's gastronomical sovereignty in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, initiatives taken to counter these threats, and ultimately evaluate the arguments for gastronomy's exceptionality today in

the next chapter.

### 5.1 Rise to Gastronomical Distinctiveness: Roots of a Culinary Patrimony

The word *gastronomie* first appeared when poet Joseph Berchoux used the word in 1801 as the title of a poem, *La gastronomie, ou l'homme des champs à table*.

Although Berchoux is credited with the first use of the word in print, the term *gastronomie* was used in spoken French years before it appeared in print. The word's etymology is linked to the Greek word for laws (*nomos*) and the stomach (*gastro*).

Although the term achieved widespread currency in the nineteenth century, several centuries of growing interest in food paved the path to the modern culinary culture which is “anchored in both *cuisine* – a culinary product – and in *gastronomy* – a given practice of consumption” (Ferguson 84). The modern use of the term *gastronomy* often conflates the terms food, cooking, gastronomy, and cuisine, though each has a decidedly different definition and historical basis. “Food” is the material substance that humans consume to thrive, “cooking” is the first step in the process to transform food into something ready for consumption, “cuisine” is the “formal and symbolic ordering of culinary practices” and “gastronomy” suggests dining with sophistication and the understanding of the true art of eating and appreciation of *cuisine* (Ferguson 3).

The distinction between these terms took centuries to develop as France developed a national culinary culture. And although the nineteenth century provides the crucial period in the development of gastronomy in France, the steps toward a national cuisine in the preceding centuries laid the foundation for France's culinary identity. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, exploration in the New World contributed many

staples to the French diet that would continue to revolutionize French eating in the following centuries. The foodstuffs domesticated by the Aztecs, the Mayas and the Incas were passed on to European explorers. As Coe notes, these foodstuffs “have spread around the world and become part of the culinary heritage” of many European communities (247). Some of the most important New World contributions to the French diet included potatoes, tomatoes, artichokes, wild rice, strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, maize, turkey, cocoa beans, and a variety of spices. The great impact that these items had on the French diet was due not only to the introduction of new foods but also to the invaluable lessons in cultivation and preparation that the Indians provided the European voyagers.

The arrival of New World foods impacted many European communities in different ways, but a common medieval cuisine was popular throughout Europe in the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was during the mid-sixteenth century when certain European cuisines began to distinguish themselves. In France, culinary art began when Catherine de Medici brought several of the best Italian chefs to France for her marriage to King Henri II. Food preparation in France was heavily influenced by Italian cooking, and quality and delicacy took precedence over quantity as gastronomy replaced gluttony (Horn 98). As French chefs learned from their southern neighbors, they began to improve upon their culinary lessons and adaptations to the point where French cuisine began to make a name for itself.

While the sixteenth century is credited with introducing fine eating to the French, it was the reign of Louis XIV during the seventeenth century that began to change the face of French gastronomy and gave rise to a classical form of *haute cuisine* (high or

courtly cuisine) for which France is well-known (Trubek 11). In fact, many culinary critics cite the publication of *Le cuisinier françois* by François Pierre de La Varenne in 1651 as the moment when the French truly began to distinguish themselves among their culinary competitors elsewhere in Europe. Varenne's cookbook reflected three major changes to the Italian model that had dictated French cuisine in the preceding century: sweet odors and the color of gold<sup>2</sup> were nearly eliminated from the food; native herbs supplanted spices and the salt-acid taste<sup>3</sup> from the Renaissance was used to envelope these new tastes; and food, particularly the sauces used on foods, were construed as more sensual than mysterious<sup>4</sup> (Peterson 164). Equipped with this new culinary direction, Varenne became famous for creating dishes that were lighter than their medieval predecessors. His modest presentations of food certainly did not preclude his burgeoning fame, as royal families and nobles elevated the status of their chefs to near "superstars." Debates over the best dressed tables in Paris were common, and the pressure on the chefs responsible for such feasts was paramount. Several anecdotes illustrate the mounting pressure on chefs to demonstrate French culinary superiority on the royal table. In one particular tale, chef François Vatel<sup>5</sup> was said to have committed suicide in 1671, so distraught was he in hearing that there was an insufficient amount of fish available for the King's reception.

As chefs endured mounting pressure to dress the best table, the resulting competition created an environment where the artistic side of cuisine began to flourish. As a result, the French culinary art began to set an example for the rest of Europe. The elimination of sweet odors, the development of new sauces, and the use of pepper and parsley and other native herbs proved to be successful ingredients for French cuisine, and

imitation by other European countries was far from rare. However, rather than give credit to the French for their exceptional culinary techniques and the innovative chefs that inspired them, many countries called the cuisine their own, and the underlying French origin was often unacknowledged.

As the seventeenth century came to a close, two separate and arguably divergent culinary movements emerged. Promoting a cuisine that was more *recherchée*, the first movement emphasized the visual importance of food, often at the expense of taste. The other movement was a strong reaction to the heavy accentuation on aesthetics and instead stressed “freshness, simplicity, and lightness,” ushering in the development of a type of *nouvelle cuisine* (Horn 98).<sup>6</sup> Antonin Carême (1784-1833) was a chef who dabbled in each of these movements in his own way. Known fondly as the “King of Chefs,” he was famous for his elaborate presentations of pastries, often relying on his architectural expertise in his sophisticated *pièces montées*.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Carême simplified many of the sauces used in French cooking and aimed to simplify the process of cooking for aristocrats and non-aristocrats alike, primarily through his culinary texts and the codification of the culinary art.

Born just six years before the French Revolution, Carême’s success was in part due to the timeliness of his lifespan. Just as Carême was beginning to make a name for himself in the culinary world, France was experiencing the gastronomic effects of the Revolution. The French Revolution freed France from the culinary exclusivity characteristic of *la grande cuisine* that had defined the Ancien Régime. As described earlier, chefs were responsible to their patron and circulated among noble tables before the Revolution. The food prepared by these chefs was restricted to the noble elites. The

Revolution changed this system as *La Grande Cuisine* transformed into gastronomy and the popular culinary venue moved from the royal tables and *hôtels particuliers* to the restaurant. The political ideals spawned by the Revolution inspired *une cuisine universelle* and the belief or hope that the culinary art would be accessible to all.

Understanding that France was on the threshold of the beginning of true gastronomic equality, Carême was also driven by an entrepreneurial spirit and thus understood that his many cookbooks would be more profitable if he could expand the readership and interest in the culinary art. Carême's attempts certainly did not reach the peasant class of the time, but he was able to extend his influence, and thus an awareness of French culinary practices, to the bourgeois public.<sup>8</sup>

As the ideals of the Revolution made their way into the culinary arena and *la cuisine universelle* was born, the symbolic nature of food strengthened. Food, and specifically bread, has long had biblical associations with life, and the Revolutionary spirit highlighted this connection. The food shortages of 1788 and 1789 fostered a new relationship between the French people and food, one in which food, and specifically bread, were associated with survival. Authors Ronald Sheppard and Edward Newton note that "A shortage of bread has been suggested as the cause of the fall of Rome, the French Revolution, and the Russian Revolution of 1917" (58). The 1983 French film *Danton* by Andrzej Wajda underscores the connection between food and life through a series of scenes that pit the well-liked populist leader Georges Danton against Maximilien Robespierre. In the film, the two clash politically, as Danton develops a more moderate perspective and expresses increasing opposition to Robespierre and his policies of extermination during the Reign of Terror. The striking differences between the two

figures transcend political ideology and are played out in both their physical attributes and personalities. Danton is portrayed as an exuberant man who loves life and socializing with women and friends. Many scenes throughout the film highlight his healthy, robust figure and show him laughing and smiling, surrounded by friends. In contrast, Robespierre is represented as independent and antisocial. His demeanor suggests an intensely serious personality. In this film, he is pale and thin and suffers from some malady, which is never identified.

The physical and social differences between the two men are significantly highlighted by their relationship with food throughout the film. In the first scene, Robespierre refuses food that is brought to him in bed while he is ailing and obviously needs the nourishment for strength. Danton, on the other hand, is shown indulging in food and wine throughout the film. In their only meeting in the movie, Danton has an extravagant meal prepared for Robespierre in an attempt to “wine and dine” him into moderating his rigid views. When Robespierre arrives at the meeting, he promptly rejects every dish, and takes only one sip of wine, whereas Danton begins to devour the elaborate dishes and ultimately drinks to inebriation. During this meeting, Danton accuses Robespierre of not understanding the French citizen’s basic needs, emphasizing eating in particular: “Ce que veulent les gens, c’est de manger et dormir en paix” (*Danton*). He continues, stressing the transcendent role of food: “Là où il y plus de pain, il y a plus de loi, plus de liberté, plus de justice, plus de République” (*Danton*). Elsewhere in the film, the contrast between the two men is equally accentuated. In scenes with Robespierre, food is rarely shown and seems incidental to his political cause. In scenes with Danton, food is often displayed in the center of the screen in a variety of



brilliant colors; as such, it is presented as a necessary element of life and something to be enjoyed and appreciated. Ultimately, through the juxtaposition of these two characters and their relationship with *cuisine*, food acquires a symbolic value. Food and the consumption of it represent not only nourishment but the people themselves and their life in a liberated Republic. On the other hand, Robespierre's rejection of food, his demeanor, and his appearance symbolize death, with which he and the Reign of Terror were certainly associated. The portrayal of the two men and French society highlights the importance of food and access to it, revealing how the Revolution and the years following helped ignite an appreciation of food that would eventually transform into exuberance for the culinary art in the ensuing century.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the "gastronomical torch" had been passed to every type of government in France, from monarchies to republics (Pitte and Gladding 101). The emphasis placed on gastronomy by the highest dignitaries was a sign to all classes of its growing importance. It was often the preferences or motives of royal figures that dictated some of the most popular French ingredients and recipes. For example, Louis XVI (1754-1793) used his prestige to help popularize the potato. The potato had been imported from the New World, but had been consumed exclusively by peasants and farm animals during the seventeenth century. Realizing the potential benefit of the potato to help control many of the famines that had plagued eighteenth-century France, Louis XVI worked with naturalist Auguste Parmentier to plan an elaborate royal meal featuring many potato recipes. With the King's blessing, the potato became an overnight sensation in French gastronomy, transforming from animal feed to a culinary staple. Louis XVI was not the only gastronome to appreciate Parmentier's contribution,

as a metro station in France bears his name today, a small sign of Parmentier's great culinary contribution and influence on both aristocratic and peasant diet.

## *5.2 De la grande cuisine à la cuisine française: L'ingrédient distinctif de l'identité française*

As change abounded across the political and social landscape of France in the late eighteenth century, Carême predicted that the ensuing century would reveal the exceptionality that would be forever ascribed to French gastronomy: “Je le répète sans crainte, la cuisine française du dix-neuvième siècle restera le type du beau de l'art culinaire.” (Carême 13). And while the Revolution certainly provided the ideals of equality necessary to support Carême's goals, several other forces came together during the years following the Revolution that would give credibility to Carême's prediction, ushering in a century of unprecedented culinary exuberance.

The advent of the restaurant in the years following the Revolution was a development that enabled French cuisine to move beyond the walls of royal residence and into the mouths of French citizens that fell beyond Parisian elite circle. The world's first restaurant was opened in Paris in 1765 by Monsieur Boulanger, though cabarets, cafés, inns, *tables d'hôte*, and caterers had long existed as informal dining establishments before this opening. Despite the opening of the first restaurant in the mid-eighteenth century, it was a combination of specific historical, geographical and social conditions that culminated several decades later to give rise to the explosion of restaurants in the nineteenth century. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the population of Paris

doubled, which provided the necessary economic motivation to restaurateurs to set up shop in Paris.

The social scene in Paris of the late nineteenth century was also known for its large number of resident bachelors, and these men were among the increasing number of those who dined out and in some cases decided to convert their residence into a restaurant in order to avoid isolation. The nineteenth-century French novelist Joris Karl Huysmans often commented on the way a restaurant would help fill the void of bachelor solitude (Higonnet 212-214). In *A vau-l'eau*, Huysmans describes Jean Folantin, a middle-aged bachelor residing in Paris. Folantin is consumed on a daily basis by one decision: where to eat his dinner. Encumbered by his many misfortunes in life and certainly love, Folantin wanders from restaurant to restaurant, hoping to find a meal that satisfies both his physical and emotional hunger. In this way, Folantin makes an association between good food, achieved through the dining experience, and a good life. In spite of his meager earnings, he eats his way through a plethora of Parisian restaurants, in the hopes of happening upon the best meal for the lowest price. Huysmans uses excruciating detail in his description of some of the less appealing dishes and venues tried by Folantin in his quest:

Et tout aussitôt il déserta le gargot où il mangeait d'habitude; il hanta d'abord les bouillons, eut recours aux filles dont les costumes de sœur évoquent l'idée d'un réfectoire d'hôpital. Il y dîna quelques jours, et sa faim, déjà rabrouée par les graillonnants effluves de la pièce, se refusa à entamer des viandes insipides, encore affadies par les cataplasmes de chicorées et des épinards. Quelle tristesse dégageaient ces marbres froids,

ces tables de poupées, cette immuable carte, ces parts infinitésimales, ces bouchées de pain ! (53).

The popular novel, though enjoyably fictional, reveals many historical truths, including the developing interest in good food and restaurants experienced by all social classes of the late nineteenth century. Folantin's casual *tour de restaurants* – “En voilà assez...essayons d'autre chose” (54) – highlights an important change in the public culinary scene. An enthusiasm on the part of the consumer and his ability to choose between a variety of locations, fares, and prices, was spreading throughout France, even among the lower classes. Furthermore, Folantin's culinary quest brings to light the notion of a true hierarchy of restaurants in which the quality of the food served was largely determined by the quality of the venue.

An increase in restaurant attendance combined with an entrepreneurial interest in restaurants led naturally to unprecedented growth in the restaurant industry. In *Essai sur la sensibilité alimentaire à Paris au XIXe siècle*, Jean-Paul Aron notes that the number of restaurants in Paris before the Revolution was less than 50; by 1820, approximately 3,000 restaurants were estimated to be in service (15). The obvious population influx in urban areas gave rise to this restaurant boom, but the popularity of the restaurant was also in part due to its reflection of Revolutionary ideals. The transition of the culinary focus from court to restaurant mirrored the transfer from aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and the restaurant served as the culinary institution that would underscore this social transformation. Clark comments that “In distinction to the private home, the club, or the court, the restaurant is open to everyone and anyone. Commensality has always connoted equality” (Clark, “Thoughts for Food, I” 38). Although many of the restaurants catered

to the upper-class, several Parisian restaurants began to offer meals that were *prix fixe* to poor industrial workers (Horn 102). The food served in these restaurants was anything but the elegant fare served in the more expensive restaurants, but the process of eating out, eating together, and eating publicly inspired a growing interest in the culinary art and specifically France's culinary specificity.

If the Revolution and its culinary child, the restaurant, ignited the transition from *la grande cuisine* into *la cuisine nationale* or *la gastronomie française*, it was the nineteenth century and the gastronomic discourse of that century that firmly demonstrated a developing culinary nationalism and identity in France. Many critics argue that such discourse has both reflected and shaped France's culinary distinctiveness. Patricia Ferguson comments on the symbiotic relationship between discourse and food: "The central place of French cuisine in the West for some three hundred years is very much a function of the extent and depth, the prestige and authority, of the culinary discourse that it sustains and by which it is amplified, magnified, glorified, and spread" (19). As with any cultural movement, there was no single ingredient that cultivated this discursive space of which Ferguson speaks. Like a good French stew, the totality of the finished product was much more savory than its individual components. The democratization of the culinary art, the increased use of French among inhabitants, and a growing print culture were several factors that enabled the many manifestations of gastronomic discourse to have a broad readership and large impact across the nation. The far-reaching discourse about food contributed to the rise of the status of cuisine in nineteenth-century France and transformed it into a real symbol of Frenchness.

One of the most important manifestations of gastronomic discourse was the codification of culinary practices through cookbooks that helped transform gastronomy “from a practice and a technique to a topic of general interest in polite society” (Ferguson 96). As chefs were no longer responsible to a single patron, a desire was born to spread culinary knowledge throughout France. From Grimod de la Reynière’s *Almanach des Gourmands* (1803-12) to Brillat Savarin’s *Physiologie du goût* (1826), a wide variety of cookbooks and culinary commentary emerged in the nineteenth century. These texts became quite popular and helped reveal the true difference between the sin of *gourmandise* and gastronomy.<sup>9</sup> The culinary works of the nineteenth century not only transformed the perception of *gastronomy* but also promoted a discourse of culinary patrimony through their circulation and readership. In fact, it was as early as 1651 that François Pierre de La Varenne laid claim to the exceptionality of French cuisine in *Le cuisinier français*. The idea of Frenchness through French cuisine was asserted, as the authors of the texts argued that culinary affairs in France “were not only different from but better than elsewhere” (Ferguson 36).

There were several important developments that resulted from the codification of culinary practices. Through cookbooks, recipes and culinary critiques, professionals in the culinary field were able to develop a reading public that was not based purely on class or geographical location. More than just spark interest, these texts helped bring the French culinary art to the home as recipes were replicated and even improved. With the proliferation of these texts, the diverse network of existing foodways throughout France was revealed, and regional foods were no longer as marginalized by the royal tables of Paris as they were in the eighteenth century: “c’est le moment où la spécialité alimentaire

locale...s'inscrivent dans une pédagogie du territoire national" (Csérge 184). The result was a move toward integrating the provinces into the nation through an acknowledgement of unique culinary contributions everywhere. One text that helped this movement was the first *carte géographique gourmande*. Cadet De Gassicourt published the first of these maps that featured the typical foods of each town across France. The result was two-fold: it helped to increase awareness of regional culinary particularities and also helped inspire a national movement, a type of *patrimonialisation* of gastronomy that was not tied to any particular location in France. A unifying notion of Frenchness inspired by widespread interest in the culinary was thus sparked. The diversity of food products displayed in the map testified to France's temperate location and diversity of climates and settings, which together allow for the cultivation of a widely diverse group of products. Julia Csérge explains:

Accompagnant le déplacement du discours et de la primauté gastronomiques de Paris vers la province, cette littérature favorise le processus de la valorisation patrimoniale d'un pays autour de la table et de son histoire, et ce à travers la notion de spécificité locale: spécificité d'un sol et de ses ressources, mais aussi spécificité d'une mémoire et de sa transmission à travers la perpétuation d'un savoir-faire qui affirme comme le produit d'un génie singulier. (188)

At a time when cartographic representations of France were rare, the fact that this one was based on culinary particularity is notable and indicative to some as reflective of the exceptionality of the culinary art in France. Csérge argues: "Que la vulgarisation de la représentation du territoire se fasse, aussi prématurément, à travers la gastronomie fournit

en soi une indication de la place qui sera la sienne dans la représentation et la connaissance globale du pays” (186).

The benefits of a cartographic representation of France’s culinary gifts in the nineteenth century were strengthened by the publication of the *Guide Michelin* in the early twentieth century. With the growing popularity of the restaurant and the developing professionalism in the field came a desire to discuss and critically rate the food served in restaurants. As the automobile attracted tourists to the countryside, the Michelin tire company published the *Guide Michelin* which served primarily as an advertisement of their tires and secondarily as a restaurant guide of France to facilitate travel for tourists. From 1900 to 1920, the *Guide Michelin* was published free with the purchase of tires, but it was distributed for sale in the open market in 1920. In 1926, the well-known restaurant guide began assigning stars to the restaurants, based on culinary rankings. Just as the *carte géographique culinaire* promoted regional cuisines, the *Guide Michelin* popularized formerly out-of-the-way destinations by classifying them as culinary attractions deserving of a trip. The ranking system established in 1926 still exists today: one star designates a restaurant as *une très bonne table*, two stars indicates that the particular restaurant is *vaut le détour*, and a three-star ranking implies that the restaurant is deserving of its own trip (Abramson 124). As the Michelin star system developed, so too did other discourse in support of gastronomic tourism. Novelist Marcel Rouff and celebrated food writer Curnonsky published 24 volumes in their *Tour de France Gastronomique*, which was evocative of the *Tour de France* bicycle race established in the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Like the *Tour de France*, this publication provided glimpses of all areas of France, but the focus was less on landscape and more on



gastronomic attractions. The consequences of the discourse surrounding gastronomic tourism were numerous; beyond personalizing the restaurant and popularizing regional and provincial cuisine, the publications served as a global advertisement of French food, welcoming French citizens and foreign visitors to sample the distinctive qualities of French food and spreading France's culinary reputation beyond the borders of the hexagon.

Cookbooks, culinary commentary, and restaurant rankings not only led to a respect for the regional products available outside of Paris and the widely diverse geography of France, but they also paved the way toward the professionalization of the culinary field for which France is often given exclusive credit. As chefs were elevated to near celebrity status, they devoted much of their time outside the kitchen, establishing formal training for their profession. It was during the late nineteenth century that the very first French culinary school was established. Under the patronage of the Minister of Commerce, the *Ecole Professionnelle de Cuisine et des Sciences Française* was founded. Successful completion of the curriculum resulted in a certificate of culinary studies. There were strict criteria for entry into the program: students were required to be French citizens and be between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The nationality requirement was intended in part to keep a developing professional program within the borders of the hexagon in an attempt to strengthen France's culinary superiority.

The legacy of culinary professionalization started in the nineteenth century influenced the twentieth century as the number of culinary schools grew rapidly. French chefs began some of the first professional associations devoted to the culinary art. *Les Maîtres Cuisiniers de France* was an organization founded in 1951 that exemplifies the

high standards adhered to in this profession. For chefs to even be considered for entry into the association, they must hold an apprenticeship for three years under a master chef trained in classic French cuisine in the style of Auguste Escoffier. The rigid requirements for both professional schools and associations have established credibility for the profession that is arguably unparalleled. In fact, some culinary historians argue that France is uniquely responsible for inventing the cuisine of culinary professionals, and it was specifically the French cuisine developed in the nineteenth century that established an association with professional mastery.

The codification of the culinary art had a variety of positive results, from helping to nationalize French cuisine to establishing a competitive professionalism in the field. But the discourse surrounding French cuisine has not been limited to cookbooks and culinary journals or magazines. Specific examples in fictional literature further demonstrate how the discursive space in fictional contexts can reflect a national conception of Frenchness through the culinary art. The circulation of certain literary texts in the nineteenth century helped to “diffuse the values and traditions of this culture field, providing a vital means to securing the sacred position of gastronomy in French society” (Schehr and Weiss 35). Honoré de Balzac provided countless examples of food and feeding in his novels, focusing on the emerging role of the restaurant and even enabling gastronomy take the role of an actor in some of his texts. In Emile Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877), a huge feast anchors the novel and cuisine seems to mirror Gervaise’s life from her successes to her demise.

Among the numerous and growing examples of intersecting points between literature and cuisine in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French literature, it is

perhaps Marcel Proust's novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) that provides one of the more telling constructions of Frenchness through a reclaiming of the past and a symbolic celebration of France's culinary identity. The mere number of references to food is indicative of cuisine's elevated role in this novel; in *Combray*, there are 142 different references to food or drink, and 71 different dishes, foods, or beverages are acknowledged (Collin 244). "Food nostalgia" is evoked in the novel through a "national culinary landscape that reconciles province and capital, periphery and center, a landscape in which the French recognize an idea of country" (Ferguson 112). Food can be viewed as the way in which the Narrator moves through life and or society, punctuating his presence at receptions, dinners, lunches, restaurants, and picnics. Many literary critics argue that food in Proust's works is elevated to the role of many other arts, such as music and architecture. The most celebrated culinary incident involves the Narrator's tasting of the *madeleine* which conjures up memories of Combray and a simpler time when village life, and the events and people in it, revolved around the preparation and consumption of food. Through food and its power to invoke memories of time of place, Proust underscores the idea of culinary specificity, juxtaposing the culinary associations of Combray with those of Normandy. But the elaborate focus on food and its associations with certain geographical locations do not detract from the focus on a national French cuisine; rather, it serves to strengthen it as Proust's diverse culinary landscapes all "fit within the project of creating, sustaining, and inspiring a national community" (120).

In addition to the numerous novels that explore the role of gastronomy in French life, other forms of fictional discourse emerged in the nineteenth century that promoted a focus on food and revealed how certain food items and dishes evoked a sense of

Frenchness. *Le hareng saur*, a poem written by Charles Cros in 1872, can be analyzed in several ways as a commentary on the role of food and Frenchness in nineteenth-century France. The poem follows:

Il était un grand mur blanc – nu, nu, nu,  
Contre le mur une échelle – haute, haute, haute,  
Et par terre, un hareng saur – sec, sec, sec.

Il vient, tenant dans ses mains – sales, sales, sales,  
Un marteau lourd, un grand clou – pointu, pointu, pointu,  
Un peloton de ficelle – gros, gros, gros.

Alors il monte à l'échelle – haute, haute, haute,  
Et plante le clou pointu – toc, toc, toc,  
Tout en haut du grand mur blanc – nu, nu, nu.

Il laisse aller le marteau – qui tombe, qui tombe, qui tombe,  
Attache au clou la ficelle – longue, longue, longue,  
Et au bout, le hareng saur – sec, sec, sec.

Il redescend de l'échelle – haute, haute, haute,  
L'emporte avec le marteau – lourd, lourd, lourd,  
Et puis, il s'en va ailleurs, - loin, loin, loin.

Et depuis, le hareng saur – sec, sec, sec,  
Au bout de cette ficelle – longue, longue, longue.  
Très lentement se balance – toujours, toujours, toujours.

J'ai composé cette histoire, - simple, simple, simple,  
Pour mettre en fureur les gens – graves, graves, graves,  
Et amuser les enfants – petis, petits, petits. (158)

The poem was originally based on a story that Cros wrote for his young son to help him fall asleep, and although Cros purports that his poem is “simple, simple, simple,” an analysis of the poem and the impact it had reveal that the poem’s inherent complexities and ultimate impact belie the authorial assertion.

The poem is considered by many to be one of the first modern monologues, which became a popular genre in the ensuing years. It was famous for its rhythm and repetition

and was therefore memorized and recited by French schoolchildren across the hexagon as a popular learning tool. The meaning of the poem is subject to a variety of interpretations. In terms of its culinary associations, the poem can be viewed as homage to a fish that had long served as a significant part of the French diet. Herring became popular in France in the Middle Ages, especially in Normandy. Called the “fish king” or “prince of fish,” it provided an economical option for meals during difficult times. Thus, it was considered by some in the late nineteenth century to be a staple in the French diet, and Cros’ poem and the subsequent memorization of the poem across the hexagon revealed a widespread appreciation for this important source of food. It is likewise possible that the image of the herring hanging alone indefinitely at the end of the poem reveals a theme of loneliness and conjures up images of eating alone. Written at a time when the number of bachelors was increasing in Paris, as mentioned earlier, it would not be surprising that such a connection could be drawn. Regardless of the interpretation, this upper Normandy special, once considered to be a staple of the poor man’s diet, was transformed in the nineteenth century into a dish found in reputable restaurants throughout France. This is perhaps due in part to widespread familiarity with the words in Cros’ poem. In fact, today “La Foire Aux Harengs” occurs annually in Dieppe, France offering a wide variety of preparations of the herring fish, including of course *le hareng saur*.

### 5.3 *Un patrimoine en danger?*: Modern Threats and Challenges to Gastronomical Sovereignty in France

Although the culinary discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries combined with the unanticipated success of the *Guide Michelin* ushered in increased interest in French food on the domestic and foreign levels, the two world wars resulted in stagnation in the culinary scene as part of the *lean years*. Interest in the culinary arts took a significant back seat to foreign and domestic affairs. By the time France emerged from the devastation of both world wars and two colonial wars, the culinary scene was much different than that of the previous century. Specifically, the second half of the twentieth century was fraught with a variety of challenges that threatened the unique role of gastronomy in France. Among the many broad challenges are the globalization of trade and perceived Americanization of French culture as well as the modernization and consequent industrialization of food production. All of these forces have descended simultaneously upon twentieth- and twenty-first century France, threatening to undo the unique connections that had established what many claim as *l'exception culinaire française*.

Each of these factors deserves attention as a potential threat to France's claim to distinctive cuisine. Cited as one of the largest threats to France's gastronomical sovereignty, globalization is a worldwide condition that has had a definitive effect on gastronomy in France. As a natural result of globalization and free trade, food stuffs have flowed more easily from country to country. This understandably puts the consumer at risk for a variety of health reasons. Food scares have made the French realize that they cannot always control the quality of what comes in and out of their

borders as much as they are able to do domestically. One of the results of globalization is the increased presence of foreign foodways. With the influx of other international foods, diners naturally discovered other tastes. Since 1980, a noted behavioral shift has occurred: many young people want to explore new, exotic flavors when dining out and are considering other options - *la cuisine "ethnique"* - instead of the traditional meal at the local bistro (Trubek 132). As a result, the survival of the traditional French bistro has been threatened. As diners turn elsewhere and the costs of running a *grand restaurant* increase, certain restaurant owners are forced to close their doors. In the first quarter of 2008, 3000 French restaurants closed, and the number of French restaurants filing bankruptcy rose by 25% for the entire year. The number of traditional cafés forced to close their doors was up by 56% for 2008 (Chrisafis).

These statistics invite a variety of interpretations. Some analysts suggest that the failure of such restaurants is due to consumer preference and the growing desire for foreign foods; traditional French restaurants cannot survive with the reduced clientele. Certain restaurateurs claim that there has been a drop in the consumption of wine, especially by young French citizens since 1980, and this has in turn jeopardized the bottom line for many traditional French restaurants (Macle). Financial analysts claim that the global financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 is in part to blame. Regardless of the various explanations, the results remain same: there is less demand today for distinctively French cuisine, so diners continue to appease their interest in "World Food" which is becoming increasingly more available. Furthermore, as French diners have indulged their increasingly global palate, some top restaurants have compromised their quality in response to the diminishing interest by regular patrons. As a result, many of the highly

ranked restaurants in the Gault Millau and Guide Michelin guides have been downgraded from their previous rankings.

Though modern culinary competition in France is attributed most often to America, France's southern neighbor is often cited as one of the culinary beneficiaries of culinary globalization. Lazareff explains that "dans tous les pays où les sondages sont organisés sur les habitudes alimentaires, la cuisine italienne apparaît en tête des cotes d'amour, la française étant soit seconde, soit troisième derrière la chinoise" (52-53). The success of the Italians, at least when compared to their French counterparts, has been attributed to their marketing efforts and global strategy. They seem to be able to capture and maintain the essence of the authentic Italian vacation in their restaurants; by staffing their restaurants primarily with Italians and providing their clientele with authentic products at reasonable prices, diners are able to relax as they would on vacation. Lazareff cites this vacation-like atmosphere as a stark contrast from the French restaurants that populate the globe:

Car ces restaurants ont compris qu'ils devaient conserver cet air de vacances, rester moins formalistes et moins chers que les nôtres. Alors qu'un grand sommelier français risque de vexer sans le savoir un client texan en lui faisant comprendre qu'il ne connaît rien, un Italien le fera tout de suite sourire et lui placera une bouteille peut-être moins raffinée, mais certainement aussi agréable. (54)

Other countries have likewise proven competitive; famous Spanish chefs such as Santi Santamaria and Ferran Adria are as recognizable as many French chef-celebrities, and Spanish cuisine has the potential to compete directly with French cuisine and wines in



France as well as on a global scale. German food likewise provides a modern threat, with many German chefs obtaining their culinary training in France. Finally, many food critics argue that the attention on Western European cuisine has waned in the face of an emerging culinary power in East Asia. Consumers in the late twentieth and twenty-first century are drawn to the multitude of diverse regional cuisines, ranging from Indian and Thai to Japanese and Chinese. Part of the success behind these foods may actually be attributable to their marketability in foreign markets and the way they easily adapt to the tastes and dining preferences of the foreign consumer. For example, Italian pizza in the United States has become a hybrid of American tastes and a small remnant of authentic Italian cuisine, and the same is true for many other cuisines. Some critics suggest that it is not really essential Italian, German, Spanish, or Chinese food that has become so popular but merely the “international food” that results as dishes are adapted to local markets.

With the explosion of international foodways that has occurred as a result of globalization has come what many French culinary critics term “World Bouffe” and the consequent “banalisation du goût.” The first attempts of culinary fusioning are often credited to Wolfgang Puck who successfully combined European and Asian cuisine in his popular California restaurants. Hoping to likewise profit from this new type of food, French restaurateurs followed suit, pairing California and Thai food, French and Japanese food, and all types of Asian food to cite only a few examples. But many claim that the movement has gone too far, resulting not in *fusion* but *culinary confusion*. Though the premise of culinary collaboration is theoretically a promising one, allowing chefs to select the very best tastes of a wide variety of cuisines, objectors to this type of cuisine

argue that boundaries are often crossed at the expense of the underlying cuisines. Chefs often combine ingredients that should not be mixed together or try too hard to create something innovative, resulting in a mixture of unsavory flavors (Vogel 2). Furthermore, some argue that the tendency is to combine from each culinary culture what is most simple and least savory, thereby creating something which is less satisfying in its totality than the culinary value of its contributing parts. French dissidents of “World Food” assert that this mixing results in a global *banalisation du goût* where each restaurant features essentially the same menu. They argue that the privilege of choice should be preserved, allowing the very best qualities of French cuisine to remain intact, rather than being diluted by combination with their global counterparts.

The wine and champagne industries likewise face challenges in this era of growing globalization. Wine has long served as a symbol of French national identity, and wine labels were used historically as a tool both to establish and to promote national sentiment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Haran 1). Discussions of wine and nationalism often evoke the use of the term “*terroir*” which has no clear one-word translation in English. *Terroir* is best defined as every component that contributes to food and wine authenticity, ranging from soil and climate to the entire production process. In the nineteenth century, the widespread belief in the importance of *terroir* led to the conviction that one consumed the essence of the earth, specifically the French earth, when drinking wine. For this reason, wine has been awarded near-food status in many western European countries, including France. The important role of wine has its earliest roots in Catholic mass and has thus been long considered as something sacred in France, a traditionally Catholic country. The respect given to wine and the country’s

historically low level of alcohol abuse are perhaps in part the result of its history with the church and the fact that wine was consumed on a regular basis but only in small quantities. In fact, *binge drinking*, the American-born concept of drinking with the sole goal of inebriation, is an idea foreign to most French youth, and no exact translation currently exists for this term in French.

In order to protect the wine industry, the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) was created in 1919, when the Law for the Protection and the Place of Origin (Loi Relative à la Protection des Appellations d'Origine) was passed which established the region and commune where specific wine products were to be manufactured.<sup>11</sup> This came after many years of strong lobbying efforts on the part of wine growers. Guy suggests that French wines deserved national protection stemmed from the belief that “wine appeared to be something exceptionally French, to be protected against global market shifts” (188). The AOC seal was mandated by laws in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and the AOC’s rules dictate which grape varieties and winemaking practices are to be permitted in the hundreds of appellations across France. Haran emphasizes the symbolic importance of the AOC’s establishment: “The creation of a federal [sic] institution [Institut National des Appellations d'Origine] to protect trademarks, as well as to define strict regulation regarding the production process, enabled wine to transition from a simple commodity to a recognized national symbol” (2).

Through the importance the French have placed on wine labels and *terroir*, many have claimed that wine occupies a unique position in France’s national and global identity. It is thus ironic that the immense global popularity and exportation of this symbolic product have led to one of its biggest challenges in the twentieth century. In

1957, the Treaty of Rome established the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which would serve as a regulating body for agricultural matters that had no existing controls. As the European Community has grown, so too has the CAP in an attempt to sustain the European farming community amidst the mounting pressures of globalization. One of the CAP's principle goals has been to dispose of surpluses and thus render the European wine market more globally competitive and profitable. To this end, the European Commission approved a proposal in 2007 relating to wine production. The reform's purpose included the following, as quoted by Haran:

eliminating emergency practices that discard excess wine; decreasing vine land by encouraging unproductive farmers to leave the industry; ending planting restrictions and several subsidies by 2014; promoting environmental protection; and improving labeling regulation. (7)

The most controversial aspect of the reforms involves a "grubbing-up" scheme which is an attempt to reduce the European surplus of wine. The scheme allows winemakers to abandon their profession in exchange for a buy-out package. The resulting vine land is then to be grubbed-up and ultimately turned over to other, more competitive farmers who are seeking to expand. Thus, many small vineyard owners will naturally succumb to the more profitable wine giants. Another critical reform has involved the transformation of wine labels, as each wine label must now bear the name of the geographical unit, the grade of the wine, the name of the bottler, and the vintage year (see *Fig. 1*). Critics of the new label requirements feel that this new look will prove problematic for the marketing of their product and unsettling for consumers accustomed to the traditional packaging.

France has not traditionally used varietal labeling on their wine labels, which makes French wine bottles visibly distinctive and identifiable.



Figure 1. French Wine Label. *Chateau-fuisse.fr*. Château-Fuissé, n.d. Web. 5 May 2010.

Coupled with the challenges that these reforms pose to this iconic industry are the annual economic sales figures for wine released from 2008 which indicated that wine exports had decreased by approximately ten percent in volume, according to France's export development board Ubifrance. The global economic downturn has been blamed for the significant drop in sales figures. Increased governmental efforts to control rising levels of alcoholism and abuse, such as a proposal to increase the legal age to buy alcohol from sixteen to eighteen, a ban on happy hours and open bars, the possible outlawing of free wine tastings, and the new "Zéro alcool pendant la grossesse" logo now required on

wine bottles represent just a few of the domestic pressures that, when combined with the pressures of globalization outlined earlier, have created a substantial threat to what has long been considered as the proud symbol of national identity (Agence France-Presse).<sup>12</sup>

While globalization and Americanization are two words often uttered in the same breath, the American influence on French food has presented very distinct challenges to France's gastronomical sovereignty. Although many French citizens blame the US for the birth of fast-food and the international spread of poor eating habits in the twentieth century, a historical analysis of American eating habits reveal that American food has not always carried such a negative connotation. In his book *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, author Harvey Levenstein details the changes in social conditions from 1930 to the early 1990s that critically impacted the American diet and Americans' willingness to indulge in the abundance of foodstuffs available to them. He argues that the American and European diets were not so dissimilar at the beginning of the century, but that several important historical and social events significantly altered the American culinary landscape. Specifically, Levenstein demonstrates that Prohibition nearly destroyed fine dining in most major US cities; with the exception of a few major metropolises, he argues, the fine dining experience never rebounded. In the 1930s and 1940s, the extreme financial challenges of the Great Depression caused a spike in the consumption of cheaper, processed foods in the US (25). During World War II, traditional and fine dining were impacted by rationing and labor shortage; the old ways of dining seemed "unpatriotic or impossible" (89). Levenstein notes as well that the military service was responsible for the homogenization of the tastes of servicemen due to the bland food that it provided. During the years following World War II, a

transformation in women's roles outside the home once again led to poorer eating habits, marked specifically by an increased consumption of processed and restaurant foods. Misconceptions about certain foods and their health benefits or risks were often exaggerated by the media throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. This led to misunderstandings related to diet and nutrition, what Levenstien terms "Negative Nutrition." Levenstein also explains that the quick rise in popularity of fast food, and specifically McDonald's, was not a function of poor eating habits, but rather a desire for a quick meal and a developing obsession with restaurant hygiene. Much to the surprise of today's fast food critic, the first McDonald's restaurants actually assuaged the growing consumer fear of what was "behind the swinging kitchen doors" (228).

While Levenstein provides several insightful reasons behind America's deteriorating eating habits over the twentieth century, the overwhelming condemnation of fast food imperialism and its association with Americanization persist in France. Most critics agree that fast food is the culinary symbol of globalization, with McDonald's as its most recognizable commercial manifestation. Sociologist Michel Crozier states that "For many French people there is an association that good food is French and fast food is American and foreign and bad" (qtd. in Gordon 54). What is particularly disconcerting for many French citizens is that despite the outward admonishment of McDonald's and fast food, patronage of fast food restaurants has increased, as reflected in the skyrocketing number of fast food chains in France.

The first McDonald's was constructed in France in 1979, and France (population 65 million) now claims the sixth most McDonald's restaurants worldwide, with 1,161 functioning outlets reported in December 2009 ("Franchise McDonald's"). By

comparison, Germany (population 81 million) has only slightly more (1,333), and Spain (population 47 million) has only 393 McDonald's restaurants (Workman). Since 2002, the number of McDonald's opened in France has increased by thirty to forty per year ("McDonald's Succeeds"). The influence of McDonald's and obvious appeal of American fast food has encouraged the establishment of fast food overall. As the French have grappled with their love/hate relationship with McDonald's, many French entrepreneurs have attempted to capitalize on the growing appeal of fast food through opportunities at McDonald's or other increasingly popular fast food chains.

Recently, "capitalizing" on McDonald's popularity has surpassed an unacceptable level, according to some French citizens. In September 2009, the French press reported that a McDonald's would be built in the underground approach to the Louvre, known as the Carrousel du Louvre. The announcement has embittered many French citizens, who could not fathom such an unlikely coupling: "Lovers of France's two great symbols of cultural exception – its haute cuisine and fine art – are aghast at plans to open a McDonald's restaurant . . ." (Samuel). While this McDonald's would be the 1,142<sup>nd</sup> McDonald's in France, a Louvre employee articulated why this specific one was unsettling to many: "This is the last straw. This is the pinnacle of exhausting consumerism, deficient gastronomy and very unpleasant odours in the context of a French museum" (qtd. in Samuel). Museum officials have claimed that the McDonald's will be a "quality" one whose image will be consistent with that of the museum. But skeptics are not optimistic, still reeling in disbelief that the culinary icon of American fast food will be in such proximity to a recognized symbol of the French patrimony.



Despite the outrage over the Louvre McDonald's, patronage of the American fast-food restaurant continues to increase. Such appeal is not only a function of American culinary influence but of the American work style as well. Longer work weeks coupled with economic hardships make fast food the most attractive option for many working French citizens. As the French have begun to adopt Anglo-American working practices, they have likewise imitated Anglo-American eating practices. The average meal time for French citizens has decreased by almost 53%, from one hour and twenty-two minutes in 1978 to thirty-eight minutes in 2008 (Rifkind). Motivated by the growing American trends, many budding restaurateurs have created fast food à la française in chains such as Quick, FreeTime, and Magic Burger among a plethora of others.<sup>13</sup> The food still meets the needs of the clientele: it's fast and inexpensive *but* it's French.

The challenge that McDonald's poses for French citizens is deeply rooted in the economic and cultural imperialism often associated with Americanization. Many fast-food critics bemoan the way in which McDonald's specifically undermines the gastronomical history and sovereignty in France by successfully marketing a low-quality type of food to compete with, or perhaps conquer, the traditional meal served at the local French bistro. Jean-Michel Normand, political journalist for *Le monde*, explains the sentiment of many French citizens toward this American culinary icon:

Le pavillon rouge et jaune de McDonald's est la nouvelle version de la bannière étoilée de l'Amérique, dont l'hégémonie commerciale menace l'agriculture et dont l'hégémonie culturelle mine insidieusement les comportements alimentaires, effets sacrés de l'identité française. (qtd. in Marks and McCaffrey 56)

This idea that fast food, and specifically that of McDonald's, threatens national identity is often associated with the crisis of *gastro-anomie*, a term first coined by José Bové, suggesting that McDonald's represents "the power of globalization to generate deterritorialized, anonymous forms of culture" (Marks and McCaffrey 59). Thus, French food takes on a symbolic function as the specificity of national fares is pitted against the culinary hegemony of global giants, such as McDonald's.

For others, the critique is less about the quality of this culinary invasion and more related to the cultural inequality that it presents in the culinary field. In the article "Fast Food in France," Rick Fantasia describes this unequal cultural exchange. He highlights the way in which French *boulangers* and *patissiers* marketed in the US have not been faithful to traditional techniques, materials, and recipes in their production for the US (234). In this way, the Americanization of the culinary domain presents a challenge that is doubly destructive to traditional French fare by both eliminating French food on French soil and adapting French food to American tastes in the US.

McDo, as the fast food giant is often called in France, likely paved the way for the establishment of another American giant, Starbucks. In 2006, twenty-three Starbucks opened in Paris, offering a product that was and continues to be baffling to many French residents. In a country where shots of espresso are often associated with long, enthusiastic, intellectual conversations, the takeaway Tall, Non-Fat, No-Whip Caramel Macchiato might seem out of place, if the order itself is not completely lost in translation. Defenders of France's *patrimoine culinaire* argue that like McDo, Starbucks represents the worst of American imperialism, a coffee giant trying to eliminate the traditional French café and attempting to undo the classic, often photographed, image of a French

couple reading the paper for hours over several espressos. What's worse, according to some critics, is that these American coffee houses are just bad imitations of an Italian product or creative fabrications of a nonexistent Italian drink, so any culturally significant element, be it American, French, or Italian, is lost in the commercialism of the endeavor.

Some of the greatest claims of the decline of French gastronomy transcend specific culinary institutions and reflect instead developing socio-economic behaviors that have impacted French culinary behavior, such as the shorter meal times discussed earlier. Many French citizens feel that the American style of life has invaded France, and culinary practices are no exception. To this end, critics assert that manners of eating have been affected by their American counterparts. In her bestseller, *French Women Don't Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure* (2005), Mireille Guiliano highlights the many cultural differences that distinguish the French from the Americans in the culinary arena. According to Guiliano, there are two broad eating habits that distinguish the French culinary culture: eating in moderation and eating "right." By "right," Guiliano means eating fresh ingredients from the local market when possible. And although the French market still maintains a veritable presence in France, the mounting pressures of time and money have reduced the number of fresh market purchases and increased sales of foreign and prepackaged foods. In 2006, French frozen food sales had increased by 3.8 percent from the previous year and France ranked second for sales of frozen food products in Europe (France: Retail Sector report 2007). Many of the frozen food bestsellers – fish and seafood, meat, and vegetables – were precisely those items that Guiliano recommends buying fresh and locally. In order to remain competitive in a globalizing market, the French food industry has industrialized and invested in "agribusiness," which

has led to new unorthodox agricultural methods that have profit as their primary incentive. Locally produced food is not as common as it was in the past, and there is thus a greater distance between the producer and consumer. Has eating fresh become a cultural ideal in France? Guiliano's critics have suggested that it is perhaps the French, and not the Americans, who should be reading her book.

Though the tenets of Guiliano's book are debated, her enthusiasm for French food and its uniqueness is indicative of a "culinary zeitgeist" that is at the very root of claims to gastronomic exceptionalism in France. The motivation behind these claims seems to have undergone a significant transformation from the nineteenth to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; specifically, the energy to cultivate a culinary patrimony has been channeled into a desire to prevent or diminish the American influence in French food culture. But, if the motivations behind past and present culinary movements differ, does it really matter? In other words, if the vitality of the French culinary sphere is now more a reaction to an American presence, does this indicate anything meaningful about French society? Undoubtedly, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have revealed the anxiety that is felt among many champions of culinary exceptionalism who view American food, such as McDonald's, as more than just a burger. For many citizens, it is a way for Americans to overtake French bodies and minds.<sup>14</sup> The angst seems less related to the food itself, especially given its popularity among French consumers, and more related to what it may potentially represent culturally and ideologically for France.

*Le patrimoine culinaire* has long been a part of French national identity, and many maintain that it is still one of the most prominent French exceptions. From France's long history of culinary discourse to world-renowned chefs and regional

delicacies, the country has developed a culinary reputation that is respected by French citizens and foreigners alike. But, like any culture industry, the gastronomic sphere has found itself vulnerable to other culinary influences as a result of industrialization, globalization, and a growing American food presence. The true test of French culinary spirit and its tenacity may lie in its capacity to reconcile these influences with the traditional image of French cuisine.

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<sup>1</sup> *Le patrimoine* is a word that is difficult to define with precision. *The Larousse Concise Dictionary* translates *patrimoine* as “inheritance or heritage,” while *Le Robert Micro* defines *le patrimoine* as “ce qui est considéré comme une propriété transmise par les ancêtres.” For purposes of this chapter, I will use the following definition: “Le patrimoine est l’héritage commun d’un groupe ou d’une collectivité qui est transmis aux générations suivantes. Il peut être très divers : culture, histoire, langue, système de valeurs, monuments, œuvres artistiques...” (“patrimoine”).

<sup>2</sup> Highly spiced and golden food indicated wealth and indulgence and were as a result very popular during the Renaissance. A variety of foods were flavored with sugar and colored with saffron to attain a “rich” look.

<sup>3</sup> At this time, salt was preferred over all other condiments, because it was viewed as an appetite stimulant. Therefore, salted fish, meat, and vegetables were commonplace at meals.

<sup>4</sup> Spices and golden hue were thought to link humans to the divine and were used in alchemy and astrology. As such, they were associated with spiritual mystery.

<sup>5</sup> During this period, freelance cooking for the royal family was fairly common. Since these chefs were not subject to any guild, they could be called, or even bribed, to prepare meals at the royal court at any moment.

<sup>6</sup> Although many scholars associate the term *la nouvelle cuisine* with the 1960s and 1970s, the term has been applied at various times throughout the past four centuries to describe food that rejects the traditional and often more complicated form of cooking in favor of a lighter, and often simpler, fare.

<sup>7</sup> *Pièces montées* refers to pastry dishes that were presented in an extremely decorative or ornate manner and were often arranged in stunning architectural forms.

<sup>8</sup> For additional biographical information on Marie-Antoine Carême, see Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson’s *Accounting for Taste*, specifically pages 49-71.

<sup>9</sup> The word *gourmandise* had existed since the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a reference to the Deadly Sin. Diderot was the first to provide an alternative definition to *gourmandise*: in his article for the *Encyclopédie*, he introduced the idea of moderation to the term. Later, after the term *gastronomy* was created, Pierre Larousse made a clear distinction between *gourmand* and *gastronome*. In his dictionary-encyclopedia (1866-79), Larousse clearly delineated the two, defining the *gourmand* in physical terms and the *gastronome* in intellectual and artistic terms.

<sup>10</sup> Curnonsky was the pen-name for Maurice Edmond Sailland (1872-1956). Often called the *Prince-élu de la Gastronomie*, he was well-known for his gastronomic writings that contributed significantly to the explosion of gastronomic tourism in the late nineteenth and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1930, he helped co-found and serve as the first president of the Académie des gastronomes which was inspired by the Académie française.

<sup>11</sup> This law was established on May 6, 1919, specifying the region and commune in which a product was to be produced. It has since been revised many times.

<sup>12</sup> The warning is accompanied by the silhouette of visibly pregnant women drinking wine and the universal red slash mark across her body.

<sup>13</sup> Quick is also the fast food chain that has been the recent subject of controversy, as the restaurant has started serving halal-only food in certain branches. Bacon and other pork products have been replaced by smoked beef in many entrees. This specific change represents a broader trend: the growing presence of Muslim-friendly food on French soil. Many supermarkets have started to cater to a growing Muslim clientele, stocking their shelves with halal food and sparking talk of what some have provocatively termed the “Islamization of French food.” The growth of the halal food market in France is a particularly contentious subject, since the French claim to have developed the art of *charcuterie*, the branch of cooking devoted to the preparation of meat products from pork.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Willging.

## CHAPTER 6

### *L'EXCEPTION GASTRONOMIQUE :* PROTECTING AND PROMOTING GASTRONOMIC EXCEPTIONALISM

*La France est la mère patrie des Amphitryons;  
sa cuisine et ses vins font le triomphe de  
la gastronomie et c'est le seul pays pour  
la bonne chère ; les étrangers ont  
la conviction de ces vérités.*  
Marie-Antoine Carême

The previous chapter highlighted the numerous threats that have emerged, most notably in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, to challenge the notion of *l'exception gastronomique* in France. Many French citizens and foreign “foodies” alike lament what may seem to be an imminent culinary transformation in France. This chapter will trace the movement to resist this transformation, revealing the numerous organizations and individuals that are attempting to resist this change by protecting and promoting France’s culinary heritage. I will also examine the role that the French government has taken in helping to cultivate, preserve, and protect the culinary sector. Finally, I will assess the present state of *le patrimoine gastronomique*, revealing how the attempts to safeguard French food culture have fared against the mounting internal and external threats to the culinary pillar of French identity.

## 6.1 Reactions and Initiatives to Perceived Culinary Threats in France

Economic motives are often at the heart of government intervention in any culture industry, but the increased pressures of the twentieth century, including globalization, Americanization, and industrialization, have inspired the establishment of competitions and festivals in an attempt to protect and promote this cultural institution. In 1924, the Meilleur Ouvrier de France competition was organized to reveal talent in culinary activities, such as pastry-making, cheese-making, and chocolate-making. The winner then boasts the prestigious title “Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France” for the rest of his or her life. Georges Castelain, the first president of this organization, explains the need to protect this culture field and those who participate in it: “Nous devons faire de notre association une grande famille et nous considérer entre nous comme des frères, issus du même père ‘le Travail’ et de la même mère ‘la France.’<sup>1</sup> Comme de véritables frères, nous devons nous aider, nous protéger, nous soutenir dans toutes les circonstances de la vie” (La société nationale des meilleurs ouvriers de France).

While there have been several similar attempts to promote and protect French gastronomy in the twentieth century, it was only in 1989 that an official organization was established for this purpose. In 1989, the then-Ministry of Culture established the Conseil National des Arts Culinaires (CNAC), which was charged specifically with the protection and promotion of French gastronomy and culinary heritage. The creation of this organization has been credited by many as the first step in truly institutionalizing *la patrimonialisation culinaire*. To this end, an annual Semaine du goût was created in 1990 in France to promote food diversity and protect French gastronomy. As mentioned



in the previous chapter, citizens are educated on different ingredients and tastes, depending on the particular theme for that year. In order to target not only adults, but also the budding McDo generation, 2000 chefs are dispatched to 6000 classes in CM1 or CM2, reflecting one of the principal “valeurs” of this event: “Développer l’éducation et l’apprentissage du consommateur, notamment du jeune consommateur” (“Les valeurs”).<sup>2</sup> Another part of the week’s events is entitled “Des Repas entre Voisins” in which individual households in neighborhoods are invited to cook a dish and feature it on a table in front of their house. Sharing a meal with neighbors is an initiative that attempts once again to counter the fast-food culture of the late twentieth century in which French citizens eat increasingly on the run and alone. The week then concludes with a culinary competition that recognizes seven professionals based on their remarkable culinary talents. With major celebrations occurring in both urban and rural settings, this weeklong event consistently earns widespread media coverage, boasting the cultivation of France’s interest and pride in gastronomy and sending a strong message to the rest of the world about the future and sanctity of French gastronomy.

The CNAC is also responsible for launching the Inventaire du patrimoine culinaire de la France, which has served as an inventory for culinary landmarks throughout France that are deserving of preservation (Ferguson 123). For example, the inventory details the sites where Roquefort cheese, Dijon mustard, and other distinctively French food products are produced.<sup>3</sup> The first edition of this work appeared in 1992, reflecting ten years of culinary research conducted by Alexandre Lazareff and Alain Senderens. This initiative may have also inspired Francis Chevrier, director of the Institut européen d’histoire et des cultures de l’alimentation (IEHAC) which was founded in

2002 in Tours, France. In 2008, he asked President Nicolas Sarkozy for his support in an attempt to inventory the culinary patrimony of Europe, arguing that a detailed account of Europe's gastronomic treasures would preserve the culinary specificity that is being eroded by globalization: "Face à la mondialisation, ce patrimoine constitue un trésor irremplaçable. Il s'agit d'un véritable capital immatériel..." (qtd. in Solal).

Government intervention in culinary affairs has not been limited to the development of culinary-inspired organizations and initiatives. As mentioned earlier, the globalization and industrialization of the second half of the twentieth century has established an international food network in which France is certainly a participant. However, many French citizens are increasingly wary of the food items and their minimally detailed labels that enter the European Union without regulation. A plethora of legal actions have been taken over the past fifteen to twenty years to prevent certain foods from entering the country in an attempt to protect French culinary specificity as well as the health interests of its citizens. In 1999, the EU supported a ban on the import of meat treated with growth hormones, and the US reacted with 100% tariffs on \$116.8 worth of European imports, including fruit juices, mustard, pork, truffles, and Roquefort cheese. More recently, there has been increased concern over the importation of dioxin-contaminated chicken feed and genetically-modified produce. The increased anxiety over the quality and safety of food has added impetus to the anti-globalization movements in France, which argue that stricter regulation is needed to avoid the importation of certain goods that fall below the government's food standards.

Other initiatives have assumed a more domestic focus. With obesity rates rising in correlation with the ever-increasing consumption of fast-food, junk-food, processed

foods, and pre-packaged frozen dinners, it is easy to see why many French citizens are searching for the perpetrator. In 2001, in an attempt to reverse these trends, the French government established the French National Nutrition and Health Program. Initially planned to last from 2001 to 2005, the program has been extended through 2010. The program outlined nine objectives: to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, increase calcium intake, reduce the average consumption of total fat intakes, increase complex carbohydrate intakes, reduce alcohol intakes, reduce mean blood cholesterol levels in the adult population, reduce systolic blood pressure in adults, reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity in adults, prevent the increase in prevalence among children, and increase daily physical activity. Each objective is associated with some sort of measure; for example, the program aimed to increase fruit and vegetable consumption by reducing the number of “low consumers” of fruit and vegetables by 25% (Chat-Young, Chauliac, and Hercberg 69). In order to work toward these objectives, a number of public health actions concerning nutrition communication, education, research, and nutritional surveillance were planned and executed. As of 2005, studies showed that 75% of the public health actions were accomplished, but final statistics expected at the end of 2010 will reveal the overall success of this endeavor.

In 2002, the government took another step to promote healthy eating among French youth. In one of the most aggressive health decisions taken in Europe and the world, the French government required all automatic vending machines to be removed from public schools in 2002 in an attempt to reduce the consumption of sweets and sugared drinks. That same year, a 1.5% tax was also placed on advertisements for “unhealthy” foods that lacked an approved health warning. Schools have also been

encouraged to acquire one water fountain and require thirty minutes of physical exercise for their students on a daily basis.

Initiatives to protect France's gastronomical sovereignty have not been limited to governmental and organizational initiatives. French farmer and syndicalist José Bové provides a famous example of a grass-roots attempt to protect France's food identity. In August 1999, Bové was arrested and charged with the destruction of the construction site of a new McDonald's restaurant in Millau. He argued that his actions represented a protest of globalization and free trade and were specifically a reaction to America's increased import duties on Roquefort cheese. The publicity of this stunt garnered support among French citizens, as Bové became a symbol for the fight to preserve French identity and culinary traditions. Even Bové's appearance plays a meaningful role in his fight against globalization. With his long mustache, Bové is often likened to Astérix, the beloved Gallic comic hero who fights against Roman occupiers. Bové is often championed as the real-life French hero fighting against globalization, American hegemony, and industrialization.

Although Bové's actions received much press and support, it was the ideals espoused by this individual that bolstered his popularity in France. In 2000, he and François Dufour, General Secretary of the French Farmers Confederation, published *Le monde n'est pas une marchandise* which was translated the following year into English under the title *The World is Not for Sale: Farmers against Junk Food*. In this book, they examine the important issues that fueled Bové's controversial actions. The sentiment that Bové conveys is often associated with that of the Confédération Paysanne, which is a small-farmers' trade union in France that seeks to find alternatives to free-market

globalization and the industrialization of agriculture. Founded in 1987, the “Conf,” as it is affectionately called by some, is concerned specifically with the negative social, economic, and nutritional impacts that free-market globalization and industrialization have on agriculture worldwide. The ideology of this group is anchored in a strong belief in a very basic connectedness between farmers, land, food, and the consumer. Members of the “Conf” support *une agriculture paysanne* that emphasizes respect of land and quality of agricultural products. It is interesting to note that the ideology of this group does seem to evoke the “retour à la terre” reform espoused by the Vichy government during World War II:

For the Vichy regime, the notion of a return to “peasant values” was a fundamental part of its moral programme to “rebuild” France. The rural exodus, the decline in peasant numbers, the abandonment of farms in some parts of France was for many traditionalists in charge of the *Corporation Paysanne*, especially at regional and local level, symptomatic of the political and moral collapse of the Third Republic. (Cleary 249)

Pétain, in particular, was very vocal about his rural vision of France and his denouncement of urban life and modernity (Kedward 15). Though the “Conf” is organizationally and principally different from the Vichy governmental body, their reactionary ideologies regarding rural life, their peasantist discourse, and their admonishment of modernity and industrialization are arguably similar.

The ideology espoused by the Confédération Paysanne has been marketed to many French citizens, specifically through the efforts of Bové. He has served as the

spokesperson of this organization and has traveled around the world to promote the social ideals espoused by the Confédération Paysanne. His book *The World Is Not for Sale* illustrates as well many of the issues targeted by this group. Bové and Dufour highlight the unhealthy, and, according to them, tasteless food that results from industrialization and globalization.

But, the message in their book is not entirely about blame. In the foreword, Canadian author Naomi Klein discusses the symbolic importance of food for the two authors: “José Bové and François Dufour have come to stand for a way of life in which our relationship to food is more than bodily fuel; it is ritual, relationship, family, love and tradition and so much else” (vii). The references to a French culinary identity and a tradition of food have resonated with many French citizens and have helped define the two authors as near folk heroes (Astérix and Obélix). One of Bové’s most notable reactions to the challenges of globalization and modernization came from his popularization of the term “malbouffe.”<sup>4</sup> Used at first to reference McDonald’s, it was later associated with the destruction of taste through the consumption of industrialized food. In 2001, it was included in *Le Petit Larousse* for the first time. An analysis of linguistic properties of the word provides additional insight into its rampant use. As quoted by Taylor in “Food in France: From la Nouvelle Cuisine to la Malbouffe,” journalist Gilles Luneau captures the true sense of this word and the physical repulsion it evokes:

Un article féminin devance un préfixe masculin accouplé à un mot féminin fleurant l’argot: l’ensemble a une allure étrange. On fait tourner le mot en bouche sans trop oser le laisser sortir. Une impression bizarre, de faute de

langage. A l'entendre, et plus encore à le prononcer, on a déjà un début de nausée. De celles qui peuvent vous assaillir à la vue du plateau-repas d'un fast-food. Et on se dit que le mot sonne juste. (52)

The term *la malbouffe*, and specifically the way in which Bové used it, drew a link between society and the destructive power of food when it functions in a way that runs contrary to a country's culinary ideology. This idea of *un culinaire destructif* has been applied retrospectively in discussions of the 1973 French-Italian film *La grande bouffe*. Although the film was produced 27 years before the publication of Bové's book, the message about the destructive nature of food was already present in it. In the film, four male friends embark on a weekend retreat with the purpose of eating themselves to death. In one scene, the four men and their female guests devour an elaborate feast, paying little attention to the quality of the food or their actual physical need for food. The bulimic-type behavior continues until all four men ultimately die because of various ailments related to over-consumption. Spectators agree that the film presents an extremely repulsive image of food and of the human relationship with it. Many cinematic critics claim that one of the central messages of the film was in fact to critique the destructive relationship between man and food, especially in an increasingly globalized and consumerist society where malnutrition and obesity are simply accepted as part and parcel of *la modernité alimentaire*. Priscilla Clark comments that "*La grande bouffe* updates the metaphor of society eating its way to destruction" (*Thoughts for Food*, II 201). Whether comically presented as a critique of consumerism in *La grande bouffe*, or critically identified as *la malbouffe* in Bové's work, both works demonstrate a growing

awareness and reaction among the French against the culinary challenges inherent in a modernizing and globalizing world.

Although José Bové provides one of the most recognizable individual reactions against the impact of modernity on food and French national identity, others have been publicly vocal about similar concerns. In his book *L'exception culinaire française*, Alexandre Lazareff, former president of the CNAC, laments what he sees as the decline of an exceptional French gastronomy and asks the public to recall the importance of gastronomy to French identity as a recognized and indispensable *lieu de mémoire*:

J'aimerais terminer cette évocation de l'exception culinaire française par un appel à l'indispensable devoir de mémoire. Les grands cuisiniers, les producteurs de talent et même les auteurs de livres gastronomiques ont doté la France d'un patrimoine culinaire exceptionnel. Nous devons préserver et faire fructifier cet héritage. (159)

In her article “La constitution de la spécialité gastronomique comme objet patrimonial en France,” Csergo echoes Lazareff’s assertion that gastronomy is indeed a *lieu de mémoire* of France and expresses his fear of its obliteration because of “la modernité industrielle et l’internationalisation des échanges” (190). But unlike Csergo, Lazareff offers a unique solution to the impending crisis. In order to react against *la banalisation du goût*, he insists upon the importance of educating young French citizens through the Semaine du goût and other pedagogical programs offered by the CNAC. He also insists on a dialogue between the mothers/grandmothers and their children/grandchildren to help renew the gastronomical values in children and to safeguard this *lieu de mémoire*. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Lazareff focuses more on reacting against modern culinary



challenges through a psychological transformation that must occur with the youngest generation.

## 6.2 *Entre l'ennui et le nouveau*:<sup>5</sup> The French Culinary Paradox

In *Accounting for Taste*, Priscilla Ferguson poses several difficult questions in her final chapter that have preoccupied many authors interested in France's culinary future today: "Does culinary Frenchness exist with integrity today? Or is it one of many culinary languages? Are the glory days gone?" (165). "Integrity" is a word that is difficult to define in this context; does the explosion of global food and the decline of the French bistro mean that this *integrity* is jeopardized? Or is widespread interest in the annual Semaine du goût a testimony to France's culinary distinctiveness and strength? It is perhaps Alberto Capatti's description of the constant state of French cuisine "*entre l'ennui et le nouveau*" which best underscores gastronomy's wavering path in the late twentieth century and anticipates its uncertain future in the early twenty-first century. In *Le goût de nouveau: Origines de la modernité alimentaire*, Capatti uses this expression to describe the constant state of gastronomical flux in France between periods of "discontent followed by moments of great innovation" (qtd. in Tomasik 242). Are there still claims to French gastronomical exceptionalism in this fluctuating state, or is any claim merely clouded by inconsistencies? An examination of certain trends and opinions reveal that the response is anything but clear.

Certain facts reveal that the reactions to modern challenges to this culture field have not been tremendously successful. In the French food industry, attempts to protect gastronomical sovereignty have had questionable results. Fast food is still gaining

popularity in France, but fast food chains *à la française* have recently started to outnumber foreign burger outlets, and the results speak for themselves. In 2008, the number of jambon-beurre sandwich sales outnumbered burger sales eight to one; sales of the popular sandwich increased by eleven percent from 2007. Although this change reflects an aggressive response to American commercialism in France, it may also indicate a powerful American influence on fast-food sales in France. Or, perhaps the growth of French fast food chains reflects the economic downturn of the 1990s which encouraged French citizens to dine on much cheaper fast food fare than finer restaurant fare in an attempt to budget. Similarly, the recent spike in jambon-beurre sandwich sales in France might reflect the economic crisis of 2008 which has driven many French citizens to make purchases based solely on price, regardless of the food's origin or inspiration.

The best-seller *French Women Don't Get Fat* attempted to reaffirm the dietary "genius" of the French as an innate characteristic that has long distinguished the French from their diet-obsessed American counterparts. Although the book had record sales in the US, certain French women have disputed certain assumptions made by the book. Clotilde Dusoulier points out the generalizations made in Guiliano's book:

First of all, not all French women are slim: Our obesity rate may be lower, but it is creeping up. It would also be a mistake to think that we are all happy with our weight and serene about our eating habits. If you ask around, women will tell you that they have X kilos to lose (whether or not that's objectively true), and many of them are on a perpetual diet or semi-

diet, watching what they eat and worrying that they've eaten too much.  
(qtd. in Friedland)

Testimonials from French women are not the only source of evidence that belies the “French paradox” touted in Guiliano’s book. A sharp rise in obesity has occurred in France over the past two decades, with obesity rates increasing from six percent in 1990 to twelve percent in 2007 (Elash). Although this number is still about one third of the US obesity rate, the climb in recent years has proven troublesome for a nation unaccustomed to concerns over growing waistlines. Sales of Weight Watchers and other diet products in France have likewise skyrocketed in recent years, indicating that the traditionally healthy French diet might be succumbing to the trend of over-consumption and fad dieting popularized by Americans or reacting to an increasingly sedentary society.

Efforts to renew interest in local cooking, such as the *Semaine du goût*, have also had debatable results. Indeed, this culinary-focused week has gained widespread popularity in France and has often boasted its “return to the traditional” ideals. But, the *Semaine du goût* may have achieved very little in the way of promoting the *petits commerçants* of the twenty-first century. The breadmaking profession is just one area where this is evident. Each year, an estimated four hundred traditional *boulangeries* close their doors in France, succumbing to the increasing sale of manufactured bread in grocery stores. Often viewed as the culinary soul of France, the disappearance of the *boulangier* and his freshly made *baguette* represents not only a commercial loss but also a symbolic wound to France’s rich culinary history.

This loss of tradition and what is often claimed to be the gastronomic exception in France is highlighted by contrasting interpretations of the 1987 film *Le festin de Babette*,

produced by Gabriel Axel. Although the film takes place in the nineteenth century, it was produced in 1987, and its celebration of French gastronomy and its near mythical-status found an appreciative audience. In this film, Babette Hersant, a middle-aged French woman, arrives in a small Danish village in Jutland, fleeing Paris after the execution of her husband and son in the 1871 commune. Two Danish sisters welcome her into their home and allow her to work as a cook in their household. Informed one day that she has won the French lottery, Babette cooks a real French meal for the Danish community, using all her winnings to fund the elaborate preparation. The hours of preparation and the artistic presentation of the food produce the pinnacle scene of the film. Nineteen minutes, almost one-fifth of the film, are devoted to the presentation and consumption of the food, as the camera attempts to capture the sensory capacity of food. The food itself and the use of authentic French culinary terms paint a glorious picture of Babette's France and the land from which the food came.

Certain critiques of this film suggest that the focus on an authentic French meal in this particular context reveals a desire to preserve an exceptional part of national identity against the challenges of globalization. Gantrel explains:

Par opposition à ce qu'on appelle désormais "la malbouffe" – nourriture industrielle, générique, produite en masse – la gastronomie, elle [the food in the film], voudrait être le lieu et le moyen d'une fidélité à l'histoire et à la nature, en conjuguant savoir-faire ancestral et produits certifiés d'origine. (706)

In the film, French food is certainly presented as something more colorful and distinctive than the lacking culinary tradition that is metaphorically represented by the bleak

background of the small Danish town. It could thus be viewed by spectators as a call to action to preserve what is presented as exceptionally French in the movie. Others claim that the film represents only a mythical image of France, one that has disappeared in the plethora of challenges that modernity has posed. In this way, culinary France is presented more as an ideal, a revival of a “country that is no more” (Ferguson 201). According to this interpretation, the focus on cook and consumer, production and consumption, eating and dining, and *terroir* and cuisine, is merely an attempt to construct a fallen image and to celebrate, but not resurrect, the culinary France of the past.

The two varying interpretations of the film provoke the following question: has France’s distinctive culinary heritage been relegated permanently to a *lieu de mémoire*, or does the memory of gastronomy renew itself *de nouveau* against the pressures of modern society? In *L’exception culinaire française*, Lazareff argues the latter of these two options, convinced that there are certain *signes d’espoir* for France’s distinctive gastronomy, anchored in a strong desire for “un retour aux sources” (119). He suggests that claims that France’s superior culinary image are waning in the face of modern pressures are most often contested by trends in consumer choice and professional training in the culinary field.

Lazareff’s claim is supported by many historians, chefs, and gourmets outside of France who have indicated that the quantity and quality of specialized food that is readily available still distinguishes French cuisine from others (Trubek 133). These culinary experts comment on the availability of items such as cheeses, vegetables, breads, and sausages in France as a definitive sign of culinary superiority. One cited example of this is the longevity of the French *marché* and its obvious appeal to both French citizens as

well as other countries. Often described as exceptional, *le marché* serves as the meeting place between producer and consumer, ensuring authenticity and *la traçabilité* for French consumers. So important is this institution in France that it was featured as the theme of the 1996 *Semaine du goût* (“Cent plus beaux marchés de France”), indicating that there is still something sacred about this aspect of the French food system. Many other cities have outwardly admitted their admiration of the French market and tried to replicate it with varying levels of success. In Britain, a project to create *les marchés à la française* failed because the over-regulation of the endeavor would have created a very non-market-like, and thus non-French, atmosphere.

If imitation supports France’s claims to enduring gastronomic exceptionality, then the rise of the French restaurant in the US demonstrates that consumers beyond France’s borders continue to respect the country’s distinctive food and wine. Like the French language, there seems to be evidence of a diffusion of French culinary expertise and habits around the world and most certainly in the United States. In the past few years, the Michelin Guide has ranked the best French restaurants in the United States. Patronage at these restaurants remains high, indicating the appeal of French food amidst the plethora of other options available in the dining world, specifically the extremely accessible American fare. It is plausible that a portion of the success of French restaurants is due to the distinctively French fare that is offered. As Ferguson explains, the US has “no cultural product on which to base a field, because there is no American cuisine, that is no culinary configuration identified with the country as a whole” (633). Although it could be argued that certain foods, such as Tex-Mex or Cajun cuisine, are representative of American food, American food does not possess the culinary unity required for a

gastronomic field. French *haute cuisine* on the other hand is readily identified with its *pays d'origine*. The preference for French food over any other type of cuisine and at any cost represents a consumer mentality that has been described by some American chefs as Eurocentric.<sup>6</sup> American chef Mark Miller claims that this preference for French food translates directly into the success of a restaurant chain. He explains that his popular restaurants are never as full as the lesser-known French restaurants in the same city and that a French restaurant can always charge more, because its “Frenchness” allows it to do so (Trubek 131). So, although classic French restaurants in France may be threatened by the presence of foreign restaurants, the popularity and established reputation of French food, at least in the United States, continue to grow.

Assertions of French gastronomic exceptionalism also stem from France’s claim to the development of a superior culinary profession, strengthened by the culinary discourse of the nineteenth century discussed earlier in this chapter. The development of *la Nouvelle Cuisine* in the twentieth century propelled French chefs into a very distinct and elite group of people. This served as yet another giant step for France in developing a distinctive identity in the culinary world. According to Alexandre Lazareff, “le succès de la Nouvelle Cuisine a conduit les chefs au pinnacle” (37). The international focus on France as a unique culinary center was evidenced by Chef Michel Guérard’s appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1976. In 1987, the *Sunday Times* named him one of the twenty most notable people of the preceding decade and a half. This type of attention bestowed upon French chefs is arguably incomparable, and many French citizens recognize names such as Gouffé, Dubois, Ozanne, and Escoffier as readily as Napoléon. Modern day chef-stars such as Bernard Loiseau are renowned in France, with young

children often requesting his autograph. The status awarded to culinary experts reflects a distinctive relationship between the French and the culinary experts and expertise behind the food.

The admiration of French chefs in France and worldwide reflects France's achievement in the culinary profession, achievements that are claimed by some to be unparalleled. Trubek argues that expertise in the profession today is based on the techniques and methods that were inspired by the development of classic French haute cuisine. And, while the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen a rise in other national cuisines, they tend to be recognized more for their contributions to flavor, as opposed to developments in techniques and methods often attributed to the French. As quoted by Trubek, American chef Mark Miller states that "French food in its technique and recipes is seen as superior: dominant is the given and superior is the assumption" (130).

Many critics point to France's strong culinary history as a sign of its enduring strength, but some also entertain the idea that French enthusiasm for food is rooted partially in French physiology. The "French Paradox" is an expression that has been applied for years to describe the low heart rate in France despite the relatively high consumption of saturated fat. In 1819, the Irish cardiologist Samuel Black observed this phenomenon, noting that the French had lower heart rate deaths compared to the Irish and concluding vaguely that it had to do with their character and way of life. What Black couldn't accurately articulate was later studied in the 1970s when it was determined that moderate intakes of alcohol were associated with a low rate of coronary heart disease. In the 1990s, Dr. Serge Renaud coined the term "French Paradox" after studying French



middle-aged men in Bordeaux and finding a long life expectancy despite a diet high in saturated fat. Given some of the regional specialties, the high intake of saturated fat is unsurprising. For example, two of the local Bordeaux favorites include *magret de canard*, which refers to the breast of a fattened Moulard duck, and *foie gras* (fat liver). Both of these dishes are exemplary of the high-fat diet regularly consumed by locals. In analyzing the high-fat diet as well as other past studies, Renaud concluded that the moderate intake of alcohol and antioxidants was in part responsible for longevity in France; his findings resulted, not surprisingly, in a 40% increase in red wine sales in the United States. Despite numerous studies, many experts assert that there is still “no conclusive evidence as to why with a diet high in saturate fat the French live longer” (Parker). This perplexing question contributes to the mythical status that France continues to maintain as a world-renowned culinary beacon, the idea that the exuberance the French continue to show for food, its cultivation, preparation, and presentation may simply be in their blood.

It is worthwhile to return to the opening question of the previous section: is French gastronomy in a permanent state of decline or merely oscillating between *l’ennui* and *le nouveau*? As demonstrated earlier, the arguments on both sides are based on a variety of factors, so it is difficult to arrive at a uniform response. It is true that certain figures demonstrate that French cuisine is succumbing to the modern pressures and challenges of industrialization and globalization. However, it may be too hasty a conclusion to claim that such pressures have combined to create a complete *banalisation du goût* in France and an eradication of those characteristics that first distinguished French gastronomy from that of other cultures. Some gastronomic critics assert that

France's gastronomic exceptionalism has passed its glory days in the face of relentless modern pressures but will always remain a vestige of France's great culinary heritage. Gastronomic hopefuls will look to the perception of French cuisine that persists today as well as recent efforts, such as the Semaine du goût, to counteract the challenges of modern times.

But, as with other cultural institutions, festivities such as the Semaine du goût may suggest that support of culinary exceptionalism is more a reaction to culinary threats than the pure cultivation and exaltation of the traditional culinary spirit in France. Terms such as *exceptional*, *distinctive*, and *superior* imply that French cuisine is in a culinary league of its own. While there is no doubt that French cuisine has achieved global popularity, these adjectives seem ill-suited when the protective measures and movements today appear to be more a reaction to the changing culinary arena and less about the cultivation of French culinary particularities. Moreover, the term *la diversité culinaire* could be criticized as an inappropriate description for those traditional restaurants and chefs that snub international cuisine, which is, by definition, diverse.

Despite these critiques of *l'exception culinaire*, the plethora of movements to support this aspect of French culture, from publications to organizations and significant government intervention, testify to the resilience of this culture field and the seeming French culinary spirit of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. And although there are many modern challenges to this culture field, the deep-rooted reputation of French gastronomy and the national discourse surrounding it bear witness to its strength today. Furthermore, as some scholars have noted, it is the self-awareness of these threats that have strengthened this cultural field and transformed it into a site of cultural resistance,

where individuals, organizations and the government are inspired to protect this aspect of their cultural patrimony. Still, the situation of French gastronomy is perhaps best viewed as a crossroads, and the twenty-first century will dictate what course French gastronomy will take. Consumers and producers will likely watch with interest to see how Carême's celebrated prediction – that French food would forever remain the world's gastronomic model – will hold up in a globalizing world.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Castelain's words are evocative of the Vichy ideology, evident in the Vichy motto: "Travail, famille, patrie."

<sup>2</sup> CM1 and CM2 refer to the last two years of elementary, or primary, school in France before students begin junior high (*le college*). Students in CM1 are typically 9-10 years old, and students in CM2 are typically 10-11 years old.

<sup>3</sup> As a tribute to the regional and national importance of this *trésor gastronomique*, the city of Dijon boasts a museum, le Musée de la Moutarde de Dijon, devoted entirely to the history, production, and appreciation of Dijon Mustard.

<sup>4</sup> Although the term *la malbouffe* was popularized by José Bové in 2000 and added to *Le Petit Larousse* in 2001, it was first used in 1979 in a book by Stella and Joël de Rosnay, entitled *La malbouffe. Comment se nourrir pour mieux vivre*. The title of the book was inspired by the film *La grande bouffe* and the problem of malnutrition. The book highlights the paradox in the modern world related to the availability of food, pitting those who are under- or malnourished against those who choose to eat poorly or in excess. Of particular interest to the couple are the latter group and the growing problem of obesity in the world.

<sup>5</sup> This expression was inspired by Alberto Capatti's *Le goût de nouveau: Origines de la modernité alimentaire* (1989).

<sup>6</sup> "Eurocentric" implies a belief in the supremacy of European culture. In this context, it is a belief in the preeminence of French cuisine.

## CONCLUSION

The development of each of the “exceptional” domains examined has been gradual and historically significant. The contributions of French cinema, language, and gastronomy to the French *patrimoine* have been critical to the development of French identity and the conception of Frenchness both domestically and globally. As cultural paradigms, these institutions are claimed to anchor French citizenship and promote the revolutionary ideal of *fraternité*. Each of these culture fields endured a key moment, or moments, in history that ultimately cemented their ties with French identity, seemingly securing their role in the cultural nationalism of the country and legitimizing their power as mechanisms of identity construction. For example, the Lumière brothers and their legacy gave to French cinema what many other nations claimed but arguably have never celebrated to the same extent. The claimed birthright to this industry and the continued exaltation of these two men and their cinematic contribution has endured and continues to be recognized annually at the Lumière film festival in Lyon. The French revolution and the resulting educational reform spearheaded by Jules Ferry helped to promote a linguistic nationalism that would contribute to attempts to unify the regionally fractured country. Finally, the gastronomical discourse born of the nineteenth century established a powerful national narrative that transformed the culinary heritage of the nation and demanded its global recognition as a culinary beacon.

The sociocultural value of each of these “pillars” and how they contribute to the “nation-ness” of France is unquantifiable yet palpable, as Benedict Anderson maintains:

...nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. (4)

The “changing” of meanings that Anderson describes is perhaps one way to describe the ways in which each of the cultural pillars examined has been challenged and in some cases has been forced to evolve, especially during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. And although many argue that these institutions continue to represent a privileged place that has “emotional legitimacy,” such challenges have jeopardized the traditional notion of these institutions; for some, the threats to the cultural patrimony of France have endangered the traditional idea of Frenchness and the exceptionalism of the core culture upon which it rests.

One useful way to view the trajectory of these culture fields is through a music metaphor. It could be argued that French cinema, language, and gastronomy all endured a cultural crescendo, a period in which their significance and relatedness to French culture grew exponentially. Each sector seemed to reach a pinnacle, at which point their cultural melody and its fortitude was the most profound and brilliant. But, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have introduced a variety of other “tunes” that have muddled the clarity of the original melody. Some view this change as the

decrescendo and imminent silencing of the traditional tune. Others see that the score has just changed, and that a new, evolved melody should be appreciated in its own right.

In less abstract terms, it has been argued that American cultural and economic hegemony, industrialization, globalization, change within the hexagon, and the resulting defeatist discourse represent pillars of modernity that are equally as strong and powerful as the cultural pillars in their ability to “deconstruct” the traditional idea of the French nation. Many who share this view support government intervention as well as private support to help protect these vulnerable domains. Others perceive the pillars of modernity as necessary agents of modernization that create a diversified landscape, a valuable *bricolage* of films, food, and language that is adaptable and marketable to a changing world.

The research and analyses presented in the preceding chapters have revealed the polarizing views on the issue of cultural exceptionalism and diversity and highlighted some of the seemingly self-contradictory arguments. Many of the claims are burdened by a number of paradoxes that seem to complicate, rather than clarify, the matter. One of the most cited contradictions involves the call for cultural diversity. As mentioned in preceding chapters, the increasing popularity of the seemingly diplomatic term “cultural diversity” has actually elicited strong criticism. Opponents of the French cultural exception point to the hypocrisy of a government that calls for cultural diversity and simultaneously suppresses the change and diversity within by rejecting the aforementioned agents of change. For example, it is argued that movie quotas in France prevent the showing of a diverse body of films and “program” what the French are able to see. Others find it problematic that *français standard* is promoted at the expense of

minority languages and dialects. Finally, in the gastronomy domain, some feel that protecting French cuisine limits worthwhile exposure to international food.

Supporters of the cultural exception respond to this critique with examples of American hegemony. There is a widespread belief that the complete liberalization of each of these domains will provide a *carte blanche* to American influences, completely obliterating the French culture and thus eliminating any French contribution whatsoever to global diversity. Patricia Goff effectively summarizes the importance of maintaining this cultural particularity: “They [the French] are interested in promoting social cohesion, a sense of belonging, and cultural particularity, which are, in turn, linked to broader political efforts to consolidate relatively loose federations and to negotiate regional, cultural, linguistic, and economic heterogeneity” (6). Thus, advocates of the cultural exception and cultural diversity in France do not see their assertions as self-contradictory nor part of a universal agenda. They view the protection of these fields as a way to ensure the very existence of French and other cultures and the only recourse to avoid inevitable and irreversible American homogenization.

Yet another paradox appears in the social ramifications of cultural exceptionalism. In the past, film, language, and food were all used at one point or another to unify the country by promoting a collective sense of patrimony and an idealized heritage. For example, the Lumière brothers were used during World War II to remind French citizens of their collective cinematic heritage. The French language was used to help transform “peasants into Frenchmen” and provide linguistic nationalism among a variety of regional cultures and languages. Even French gastronomy was used to highlight the shared culinary strengths in seemingly diverse regions in the nineteenth

century. Beyond these specific instances, the protection and promotion of these fields was intended, according to Anderson, to provide a collective sense of “communion” and a “deep, horizontal comradeship” despite the “actual inequality and exploitation” present within the country (Anderson 6, 7).

Opponents of the cultural exception argue that the very cultural pillars used to unify now separate and exclude. That is, those fields that were an integral part of the building of the nation and that fostered a sense of cultural heritage are now vulnerable to their own undoing. Language provides the most telling example of this paradox. For example, the different languages and dialects that existed at the time of the French Revolution were not only associated with counter-revolutionary ideas but were also associated with social, cultural, and linguistic division. Many revolutionaries argued that the wide variety of languages spoken in France ran counter to the constitution’s principle of “Égalité.” Freeman Henry articulates this feeling: “the concept of one language for all would certainly eliminate the inequities associated with regional speech” (66). Thus, it was believed that an “imagined community” could be cultivated through the adherence to one language; in short, linguistic unity would be the catalyst to national unity and fraternal equality. This belief provided part of the impetus behind Jules Ferry’s efforts in educational reform and language instruction.

Paradoxically, the notion of a *français standard* is regarded by many today as a divisive mechanism that devalues the diversity of languages that exist in France. States Meredith Doran, “Such a devaluing of diversity is consistent with a long-standing republican ideology of assimilation which views plurality as a source of balkanizing conflict and therefore as an unwelcome threat to national unity” (499). In her article



“Alternative French, Alternative Identities,” she argues that *banlieue* youth language provides a valuable alternative to mainstream French and is a tool for “forging, negotiating, and expressing identities which stand outside the binary categories of mainstream discourse” (498). Accordingly, these alternative languages allow minority groups to cultivate their own linguistic communities that promote a sense of belongingness and unity. Doran emphasizes the important identity creation that linguistic alternatives offer: “these include a sense of racial and ethnic diversity as the unmarked norm within the local social sphere; a sense of shared working-class and multicultural values of solidarity, hospitality and egalitarianism” (505). Although many do share Doran’s Leftist sentiments, there are others who, like the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century, believe that the promotion of minority languages actually undermines the national community. As described in Chapter Six, some conservative language purists believe that linguistic diversity fractures national unity and has a host of negative social and practical implications for minority language speakers. The debate is not limited to language but rather has a broader scope: the intense discussion on language protection reveals how the evolving makeup of France has fostered new perspectives that are diametrically opposed to traditionally held principles. Ultimately, the power of culture to unify is thrown into question by the power of the privileging of one culture over others.

The cultural zeitgeist demonstrated by both sides of the debate surrounding cultural exceptionalism begs the following question: is there any type of compromise? One suggested solution is a delicate balancing act based on the idea that an acceptable amount of cultural compromise is the only thing that will ensure the very survival of these cultural institutions. This type of mentality can be described as well as an “adapt or

perish” outlook. It is the assertion that the survival of French culture and its exceptionalism may reside in the willingness of traditionalists to strike a compromise between the classic characteristics of these fields and that which is “popular” in a globalizing and diversifying country. Those who support this type of compromise assert that the rigidity and inflexibility of traditionalists will ultimately lead to the extinction of these culture fields, and that negotiating cultural particularity and global pressures might be the only path toward continued existence for all cultures, be they dominant or minority, within the hexagon.

This type of compromise has been described in a variety of ways. Hungarian intellectual Karl Polanyi described such a compromise as “embedded liberalism.” Polanyi suggested that market and cultural concerns must be addressed simultaneously, and that the economy should “be “embedded” in society, or made subordinate to its collective purposes” (qtd. in Goff 13). He lobbied for global interaction *and* domestic protection, believing strongly that liberal openness and domestic interventionism were not mutually exclusive ideals. A similar argument, that of “la globalisation maîtrisée,” was presented by Pascal Lamy in 1999 when he served as the European Trade Commissioner. Though the specific tenets of this belief are complex and deserve a separate body of research, one of the fundamental principles of managed globalization is that countries must shape, or control, globalization and not merely react to it, becoming “actors in the production and dissemination of culture, not simply consumers” (Kimmelman).

Though much of the focus of these two strategies is couched in economic terms, the crux of the ideas is applicable to each of the cultural institutions discussed. That is,

there are significant examples of ways that the French state could take a proactive position to mediate economic and cultural goals as well as global, state, and regional interests. In the film industry, those films that have universal appeal are often those that succeed in France and abroad; they are able to somehow maintain their “Frenchness” and mass appeal, achieving great success both domestically and abroad. Other films, such as *Le pacte des loups*, demonstrate how France can retain cultural specificity by stamping an international product (read Hollywood) with its own authentic brand of Frenchness. Charlie Michael argues that these transnational films that deviate from formulaic Hollywood hits are part of “a resistant culture of cinephilia, working hard to put a distinctive spin on a marketable style” (56). In other words, a French film can be both transnational and identifiably French without succumbing entirely to the pressures of American influence and globalization.

Linguistically, it has been suggested that a compromise could be attained through the concurrent instruction of both dominant and minority languages. In this way, *français standard* would continue to be taught, but other minority languages and dialects would be presented to students as well in an attempt to foster awareness and appreciation for alternative linguistic identities and cultures. With regards to the English language, many feel that the best solution is simply to approach new words on a case-by-case basis, rather than with unreserved assimilation or immediate rejection. Certain neologisms have proven successful, while others, too late or too artificial in their construction, have failed next to their English counterpart. Informed by what has been called “un réalisme exigeant,” some scholars claim that the best compromise is a language policy that is neither indulgent nor purist but falls somewhere in between.

Finally, in the gastronomy domain, a recent international initiative called “Le Fooding” perhaps exemplifies best a negotiation between international and domestic pursuits. Le Fooding, whose name provocatively combines the English words “food” and “feeling,” is a French culinary organization and movement created in Paris in 2000 by gastronomic journalists Alexandre Cammas and Emmanuel Rubin. The principal motivation behind their idea was to jettison the “conformity and conservatism of French food culture,” that was meant to “épater la bourgeoisie,” and transform it with an updated look, or taste rather (Gopnik 36). The group has even published a popular “Fooding guide” that competes head-on with the much respected, traditional Michelin guide.<sup>1</sup> Much to the dismay of ardent language defenders, the guide features tips in English to help the tourist better navigate the culinary landscape of France. The Fooding guide has become such a part of the mainstream culinary scene of France that it earned a very complimentary review from the well-respected and conservative French newspaper *Figaro* in 2009.

In addition to producing an annual guide, the organization sponsors mass picnics (“Foodings”) where “French chefs, long separated from their diners by a kitchen door and centuries of decorum, offer good food in casual, high-spirited settings” (Gopnik 36). According to the founders of the movement, this transformation of traditional cuisine and atmosphere is not an attempt to insult the culinary expertise earned by the Michelin guide but rather a way to synchronize the positive impact of American influence, globalization, and modernization with French food preferences. For many Fooding fans, the movement represents the only acceptable way to break from a fossilized ideal of gastronomy and revitalize French food without completely sacrificing the unique Frenchness of it. It

exemplifies the desire to maintain a sense of Frenchness while remaining open to the change inherent in a globalizing world.

The suggested adaptation described in each of these fields has perpetuated the ongoing dialogue, or debate, surrounding the French cultural exception. Supporters of French cultural specificity find themselves faced with a cultural quandary that is not easily resolved. Some, like those just mentioned, believe that globalization and maintaining Frenchness are not mutually exclusive ideals and are supportive of such a compromise. Yet, the cultural chauvinism of many rigid traditionalists has not wavered. The idea of “cultural negotiation,” even on the smallest scale, is very problematic for staunch supporters of the cultural exception who perceive such a compromise as a serious threat to global diversity and national identity (Vanderschelden 48). They believe that adapting to the pressures of a globalizing world will lead to hybridization or one step in the wrong direction toward the complete transformation or eradication of the culture fields and the particular “nation-ness” of France. It is argued that any type of compromise, or sacrifice, would undermine the very idea of cultural specificity, for those very things that have made French culture so identifiably French – cinema, language, and food - might be altered, perhaps, to a point beyond recognition. On the other hand, that which is “French” may need to be redefined in an era of national and global change; it may very well be the adaptability of French culture that truly determines its future. Traditional views of cinema, language, and gastronomy may need to evolve in order to ensure their very existence and guarantee their privileged place among the cultural pillars of French culture.

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<sup>1</sup> The latest fooding guide shows King Kong destroying a massive restaurant and feasting on the bourgeois diners within, a poignant jab at the traditional culinary scene in France and a visual portrayal of a need for reform.

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