# 1

# Introduction

In a dreary Paris office, a Tamil man, woman and child sit across a desk from a French immigration officer. Newly arrived from war-torn Sri Lanka, the family must plead their case for asylum in France. As the man relates his family's suffering, of how they came to be in Europe and why they deserve asylum, an interpreter of Sri Lankan origin translates his speech from Tamil into French. So begins a crucial scene in Jacques Audiard's 2015 Palme d'or-winning film, *Dheepan*.

Unknown to the officer, these three people are not exactly who they claim to be. They had purchased the identity of a murdered family before fleeing Sri Lanka, paying a people smuggler to transport them by boat to India and on to France. They are virtual strangers, three individuals banded together in desperation. Though they are true victims of the Sri Lankan civil war, their stories are murky, their backgrounds mysterious, their identities unknown even to one another. The girl is an anonymous orphan, the woman an unidentified victim of the conflict. The man is a former Tamil general with a controversial history. Each has lost their entire family. Each risks immense danger, and even death, should their application for asylum in France be rejected. Yet this is not the story the man, Dheepan, tells to the immigration officer and the interpreter. 'I was working for an NGO. I was a journalist and peace activist. The Sri Lankan government accused me of …' The interpreter stops Dheepan in his tracks. 'I know your story. The one about you being a peace activist. Did your smuggler feed you that story?'

The refugees have been told that such a sanitary and noble story would be sure to curry favour with the French authorities. But the interpreter has heard this canned response many times, and knows the French officer has as well. In a relaxed, level voice, the interpreter tells Dheepan that to use such a story would be to reveal himself as a liar. In response to the lengthy, untranslated exchange, the French officer interjects and asks what is being said. The interpreter feigns confusion, explaining that he doesn't understand, implying differences in dialect between the two men. He asks Dheepan his true name, and when Dheepan responds Savidhasan, it becomes clear the

interpreter has heard of him. Taken aback, he exclaims, 'I thought you were dead.' However, the officer has picked up on the word 'Savidhasan' and asks its meaning. Without missing a beat, the interpreter tells him Savidhasan is the name of the family's home village in Sri Lanka. He then concocts a more convincing story for Dheepan to use, insisting he will have more success with the grittier tale. 'Say that the Tigers recruited you by force, that the Sri Lankan army captured and tortured you and that they tried to kill you.' The interpreter then relays the story in French. The asylum request is granted.

This scene presents a rich and complex picture of language relations. Of course, in a legal sense, the French immigration officer is the individual with the institutional power to accept or reject Dheepan and his family's claim for asylum; to allow or deny them legal admittance into the French nation. Yet the interpreter, the only person in the room who is fluent in both French and Tamil, is able to control the situation in a unique way, to place the family in an advantageous position and to concoct a narrative designed to ensure their acceptance into France. In this situation, the ability to speak multiple languages is a distinct advantage. The Tamil language becomes a disguise the interpreter can exploit in order to protect his fellow compatriots, and a tool for controlling the outcome of the exchange.

In *Dheepan*, language is a barrier between monolingual groups, and a challenge for the film's Sri Lankan characters to surmount. Monolingualism (in either Tamil or French) is a hindrance to social interaction, and even what Claire Kramsch calls a 'handicap' (2006: 102) preventing cultural integration. Yet multilingualism – the ability to learn, use and transition among multiple languages – is an opportunity. This scene, and the film in general, is about cultural difference, language barriers, the politics of migration, tensions between the First and Third worlds, the moral ambiguity of war and the trauma of displacement. But it is also about social power, as enacted through strategic use of language.

In a cinematic landscape increasingly characterised by multiculturalism and linguistic diversity, a number of contemporary French films are beginning to represent multilingualism as a means of attaining and exerting social power. In multilingual film, language functions not only as a vessel of meaning, but also as a loaded and complex tool. Characters actively exploit their multilingualism in order to exert symbolic power: they may switch into a language other characters cannot understand to conspire, exclude or intimidate, or flaunt their competence in a certain language to gain access to a particular cultural group. Language learning expands characters' skill sets and opens up new possibilities for accessing knowledge and control.

Beyond the inclusion of languages other than French in film dialogue, this phenomenon is remarkable for its foregrounding of language not only as a theme or narrative device, but as a weapon to be harnessed and deployed in the pursuit of power.

In contrast to more traditional, twentieth-century portrayals of multilingualism, contemporary French multilingual films often portray language difference as a narrative device in itself, and a means of obtaining and wielding influence over others. The twenty-first-century French cultural landscape is one shaped by globalisation and postcoloniality. As migration towards metropolitan France booms, postcolonial legacies continue to make themselves felt in social, cultural and economic contexts, cities strain under the weight of tensions between urban centre and fractured periphery, the global refugee crisis intensifies, Paris reels from unprecedented terrorist attacks and the European Union struggles to maintain and define itself, language is coming to the forefront of cinematic representations of multicultural France. Contemporary French films frequently concern themselves with spaces of social and cultural tensions, with what Mary-Louise Pratt calls 'contact zones': 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today' (1991: 34). In the language contact zones of locations like Paris, other large cities like Lyons and Marseilles, the port regions of the English Channel and the Mediterranean, cross-cultural international spaces like other European cities or former French colonies and the *banlieues* in which many communities of international origin or background reside, multilingualism is a fact of everyday life, and many contemporary French films investigate these loaded spaces with and through language.

Despite depicting a more realistic cultural and linguistic landscape than many monolingual films, multilingual dialogue is not only included in contemporary films as a means of representing realism, and language choice is rarely arbitrary. Instead, multilingualism is a central thematic concern and, frequently, a plot device in itself. As Carol O'Sullivan explains, 'subtitled foreign dialogue is no longer used merely as ornament, to mark location or nationality, but becomes a vehicle for plot and character development' (2008: 84). Languages are not simply modes of communication, but sociocultural elements and tools that can be used to exert authority, infiltrate cultural groups and manipulate others. In a wide range of situations, the ability to understand and speak multiple languages, and especially the ability to move strategically among multiple languages, is of distinct benefit to even the most marginalised characters. Knowledge of French is

essential, but knowledge of other languages, from English to Arabic to Bambara and beyond, is not a hindrance, a disadvantage or a point of shame, but an asset, an advantage and an opportunity. Thus, contemporary French multilingual film places the relationship between multilingualism and power at its core.

Beginning in the early twenty-first century and flourishing from approximately 2005 onwards, multilingual cinema is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in French film. This book is the first sustained project to map out and analyse this rich group of films, using transnational film discourse to focus critical attention on eight core case studies ranging in date from 2007 to 2015. This book is informed by Foucault's vision of power as 'strategy' from his 1976 *Histoire de la sexualité I*, and by the theoretical framework of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's polycentric multiculturalism, which 'is about dispersing power, about empowering the disempowered, about transforming subordinate institutions and discourses' (1994: 48–9). It approaches contemporary French multilingual films from a non-hierarchical, non-Eurocentric perspective, in order to uncover the many possible fields of social power at play in multilingual scenes. This cinema does not ignore the imbalances of social power that continue to impact multicultural communities in contemporary France. In his manifesto 'Cinéma-monde?' Bill Marshall points out that polycentric multicultural theory 'does not elide the inequality of media power relations, but places them in a recognised and often contradictory plurality' (2012: 37). Instead, within this inherently imbalanced historical context, it envisions multilingual interaction as being driven by 'a systematic principle of differentiation, relationality, and linkage [in which] no single community or part of the world, whatever its economic or social power, is epistemologically privileged' (Shohat and Stam 1994: 48). When examined from this standpoint, the power relations at play in dialogue between, for example, French and Tamil characters (as in *Dheepan*) or Guernsian francophone and Malian francophone characters (as in Rachid Bouchareb's *London River*) reveal themselves to be far more complex than a Eurocentric standpoint might reveal. According to Jan Blommaert's conception of language and globalisation, 'authority emanates from real or perceived "centres", to which people orient when they produce an individual trajectory in semiosis' (2010: 39). Contemporary French multilingual films resist monopolistic centrings of authority and situate multiple language use within correspondingly polycentric French and global spaces.

Films such as *Polisse* (Maïwenn 2011), *Entre les murs* (Laurent Cantet 2008), *Un prophète* (Jacques Audiard 2009), *Dheepan* (Jacques Audiard 2015), *Welcome* (Philippe Lioret 2009), *La Graine et le mulet*

(Abdellatif Kechiche 2007), *London River* (Rachid Bouchareb 2009) and *Des hommes et des dieux* (Xavier Beauvois 2010) thus re-envision the role multilingualism has to play in contemporary French culture. In her analysis of *beur* and other multicultural French films, Carrie Tarr writes that films can 'destabilize and rearticulate the "national" of French cinema, and invite spectators to acknowledge the multicultural nature of contemporary, postcolonial French society' (2009: 291). Engaging with the work of French and transnational film scholars like Tarr, this book delves into the above eight films to investigate their representation of multilingualism in the contemporary universe and how they show the potential for languages to afford social power. Subsequently, the book will reveal how these films are emblematic not only of how multilingualism is being foregrounded, but of how the once-monopolistic role of the French language is being revised in French film.

Historically, languages other than French have occupied a marginal position in French cinema, besides a handful of exceptions such as Jean Renoir's 1937 *La Grande Illusion* or Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 *Le Mépris*. Despite the many historical periods of multilingualism which have marked French history, including colonisation and decolonisation, the First and Second World Wars and the large-scale migration waves of the twentieth century, the vast majority of French cinema has been monolingual. When other languages began to appear on the French screen in far greater numbers in the 1980s, they found themselves locked into a sociolinguistic hierarchy. In these films of the 1980s and 1990s, languages associated with colonisation or immigration are portrayed as dominated by French, isolating, undesirable or even endangering. If languages other than French do appear in earlier films, they are usually relegated to background noise and unsubtitled, stripped of their semantic meaning. Characters who elect to speak in a language such as Turkish or Arabic are frequently maligned, and those who fail to learn French invariably suffer. Language learning may occur in such films, but this usually involves migrant characters learning French to survive. The acquisition of new language by French characters is generally limited to other Western European tongues, such as Italian or English, and even then remains quite rare.

In contrast, in post-2005 cinema, multilingualism does not merely function as a secondary, trivial or decorative element. Instead, language is a central narrative component, a 'thematic fulcrum' (Gramling 2010: 353) and a means of establishing authority, gaining leverage or exerting control. The characters of these films knowingly exploit their multilingualism in order to exclude, infiltrate, negotiate,

persuade or manipulate others. Sequences depicting interpreting and translation, language classes, individual or informal language learning, cross-cultural intimate relationships, conflicts between different cultural groups (including between religious and political factions), intertextuality and code-switching are at the heart of these films, revealing complex social hierarchies among characters. Inevitably, these hierarchies reveal themselves along class-based, racial, sociocultural, politicised, gendered and (post)colonial lines. However, such hierarchies do not remain fixed and multilingualism is not a static attribute of these films. It is used by characters, even those in a position of submission or oppression, in order to renegotiate hierarchical relations. Reflecting Claire Kramsch's scholarship on critical multilingualism, such films 'diversify the notion of communicative competence and empower multilingual speakers to use language in ways that might differ from those of monolingual speakers' (2012: 116). Thus, in a fresh and innovative way rarely seen in French cinema prior to the contemporary period, multilingual French films do not cement their characters in immovable power structures, but equip them with tools to reshape them.

## Multilingualism, French cinema and power

This book investigates a phenomenon that finds itself at the nexus of three fundamental terms: multilingualism, French cinema and power. The following sets out the field of study for this book, and the ways in which I propose to approach the complementary concepts of multilingualism, cinema and power.

### *Multilingualism*

On the most basic level, the term 'multilingual cinema' refers to films whose dialogue is composed of several languages. However, it would seem absurd to label a film which includes a smattering of words or phrases in a different language (a 'bonjour' or an 'Inch'Allah' uttered here and there, without any full multilingual sentences or conversations) as a 'multilingual film'. Chris Wahl pinpoints this distinction by labelling minor or superficial instances of multilingualism in cinema as 'postcarding' (2005: 2), as distinct from the meaningful engagement with language seen in what he calls 'polyglot cinema'. (Other terms in circulation include 'plurilingual', 'polylingual' and even 'heterolingual', however 'multilingual' is the most versatile and universal designation.) Such language use is generally for decorative effect or shorthand for identifying a character as 'foreign', rather than being part of a meaningful linguistic exchange.

While 'multilingual' is a common term, its definition is in fact rather subjective. Dictionary definitions merely describe the term as relating to several languages; 'using or able to speak several or many languages with some facility/spoken or written in several or many languages/ dealing with or involving several or many languages' (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2011), yet such definitions do not define what a 'language' itself is. As a result, whether or not a text can be defined as multi-lingual is dependent on what we understand a language to be. Is a language a distinct linguistic system that can be identified as an official or national tongue (French, Mandarin, German)? A regional dialect, pidgin mix or slang (*tchatche*, *verlan*)? A non-verbal yet stand-ardised system of communication (Sign Language)? Can a definition of language be stretched so far as to include body language, silence, lip-reading, music or even physical violence? No dictionary defini-tion of multilingualism, in English or in French, tests the definition sufficiently to explore the limits of the systems of signification we call language. Due to this confusion, multilingual film scholars often feel the need to clarify their own understanding of the term. Translation scholars Delabastita and Grutman, for example, are explicit about their inclusion of semiodiversity (i.e. variations within taxonomic languages) in their understanding of multilingualism, acknowledging the slippery nature of defining language itself:

> The simplest possible definition of a multilingual text would be to say that such a text is worded in different languages, but that still begs the fundamental question of how one should understand the concept of 'language'. We favour a very open and flexible concept which acknowl-edges not only the 'official' taxonomy of languages but also the incred-ible range of subtypes and varieties existing within the various officially recognised languages, and indeed sometimes cutting across and challenging our neat linguistic typologies. (2005: 15)

Delabastita and Grutman are thus concerned not only with the fact that definitions of multilingualism may encompass either 'the "official" taxonomy of languages' or the 'subtypes and varieties' within these, but also with the difficulty of separating the two. This complicates the meaning of multilingualism even further. We see this conundrum in the 2004 film *L'Esquive* (Abdellatif Kechiche), in which three dispa-rate versions of French are spoken – standard French, *banlieue* street slang (almost unintelligible to many mainstream French viewers) and the antiquated, floral prose of Marivaux. These codes are used in wildly different ways, and each is relevant only in specific contexts. In this way, they function much like distinct taxonomical languages: the label 'French' does not take into account the profound semiodiversity of the film's dialogue. Though the film includes a few Arabic phrases,

*L'Esquive* would not typically qualify as 'multilingual' according to a dictionary definition of the term. Yet the heteroglossia inherent in almost every scene of the film bubbles to the fore in the tense and complicated relationships between characters of varying cultural backgrounds and linguistic competencies. In this book, I propose to view semiodiverse films such as *L'Esquive* as multilingual in their own, if murky, ways.

In multilingual films, it is not so much the mere presence of multiple languages on the soundtrack that is significant. Instead, it is the portrayal of characters adept at moving among different languages and using them to strategic effect, which renders these films so important for French film studies. This movement between languages is studied in a number of forms, particularly code-switching and translanguaging. Focusing on back-and-forth switching between languages, code-switching in film refers to passages of dialogue in which characters engage in 'the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation' (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2011). Code-switching is characterised by linguistic and sociocultural boundary-crossing: as Sharon Deckert and Caroline Vickers explain, the practice involves 'a form of switching languages or language variations … in a manner that reflects movement across perceived social or ethnic boundaries' (2011: 13–14).

A code-switch can be undertaken for a multitude of reasons, and in any number of situations. Switching between languages can be banal, practical or innocuous. However, in contemporary French multilingual film, code-switching often constitutes a calculated and strategic act. Code-switching is a linguistic event; however, this dialogic phenomenon can also bring about important sociocultural shifts in relationships between characters. As Alison Smith explains, 'there is more at stake in filmic employment of code-switching than mere fidelity to a previously established external reality … the decision to employ multiple languages in film represents a strategy for critical assessment of linguistic and social hierarchies' (2010: 37–8). Thus, multilingual characters may use their mutual familiarity with two languages, and undertake code-switches between them, in order to exert authority over one another.

Alongside code-switching theory, it is also helpful to refer to the newer concept of 'translanguaging' (Forsdick 2014: 252; García and Wei 2014), which privileges a more dynamic and multidirectional language use over a unilateral switching back and forth. Of this new way of considering linguistic diversity, Otsuji and Pennycook admire how it allows us to 'look at *translingual practices* where communication transcends both "individual languages" and words, thus

involving "diverse semiotic resources"' (2015: 56). Translanguaging thus involves moving among language and using language in diverse ways. As they move among French and other languages like Arabic or Tamazight, multilingual characters call upon different languages to advance their positions, underlining the complex interplay between language, culture and power the practices of code-switching and translanguaging can entail. This places language, and the complex and loaded act of switching between distinct languages – and thus identities – at the heart of the film.

### French cinema

It is no small challenge to define the nationality of multilingual (often transnational) films, which by nature are 'made and received between and across national, linguistic, and cultural borders' (Koos 2012: 317). Much like the term 'multilingualism' conjures questions regarding the definition of language, the term 'French cinema' also begs an interrogation of the concept of national film. As Dale Hudson writes, 'cinema and nation have always had shifting, problematic functions with regard to one another and to the larger arena of world culture' (2006: 217). Transnational cinema studies have made considerable progress in dismantling the now largely outdated notion of monolithic national cinemas, acknowledging instead the diverse cultural exchanges which occur in film narratives and cinematic production practices.

   As might be expected, multilingual film is particularly susceptible to the problems surrounding a label like 'French film', considering that the presence of languages other than French entails the contribution of actors, characters and crew of varying nationalities, as well as of international production elements, filming locations and narrative settings. These films often fall into what Alice Burgin, Andrew McGregor and Colin Nettelbeck identify as 'a transnational auteur cinema emerging from France that extends the traditional concept of cultural diversity beyond French/European borders, incorporating transcultural narratives and promoting various forms of *cinémas du monde*' (2014: 397).

   In many cases, multilingual films are created under co-production agreements. They may not be shot on French soil (such as in *London River*). More broadly, they may not subscribe to dominant French ideals or represent the perspective of French nationals (*Dheepan*). France may not be the home, dream or ultimate destination of the characters (*Des hommes et des dieux*). The film may not be written or edited in France. The title may not even be in French (*Welcome*), or may itself play with linguistic ambiguities (*Polisse*). However, in the

case of all these films, several defining characteristics serve to identify these films as French. Such identification is decided primarily at an institutional and financial level, though the film's narrative and ideological identity is also crucial to its labelling as French.

A key association responsible for the identification of a film's French nationality is the government-run CNC, or the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée. A markedly different film production system to most other countries' (especially other dominant Western cinemas such as the US Hollywood model) the CNC offers seed funding to finance French films. To be eligible for this funding, films must qualify for an *Agrément de production*, whereby, according to numerous criteria,[1] a film is effectively given a score which reflects how 'French' the project promises to be. A second association involved in the public determination of a film's nationality as French is the national motion picture awards organisation, the Césars. The annual ceremony is prestigious and observed by the French film industry and national French press. In order for a film to be eligible for consideration by the Césars board (a committee composed of esteemed actors, directors and other film professionals) it must be funded by French production companies (if the film is made under co-production, a co-production agreement must be signed between France and at least one other country with France contributing at least 50 per cent to the film's production) and recognised as French by the CNC.

In order to understand the extent to which the CNC and Césars influence the cultural identification and subsequent domestic success of a French film, it is enlightening to consider the case of Jean-Pierre Jeunet's commercially significant 2004 film *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*. *Un long dimanche*, perhaps more than any other contemporary French film, demonstrates how important financing is considered in the classification of a film as 'French'. Upon first observation, the film's Frenchness appears undeniable. The film was directed by an established French filmmaker known for such national successes as *Delicatessen* (1991) and the stereotypically Parisian confection *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001). *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* included a French cast, French-language script, France-based narrative and focus on a key moment in French history. The film's plot was adapted from an eponymous French-language novel written by a French author (Sébastien Japrisot 1991) in France. The film included such recognisable French stars as Audrey Tautou (of *Amélie*) and Gaspard Ulliel (star of films like *Saint Laurent*, Bertrand Bonello 2014). Indeed, the only well-known non-French actor in *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* is Jodie Foster, who appears in a cameo role. Foster's dialogue, however, is entirely in French.

Nonetheless, the high-budget, USD$47 million *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* was largely funded by a France-based, but Hollywood-owned, production company. Though it had offices in France, the studio's funds originated from Warner Brothers. The fact that the film received funding from an American source, a fact discovered by the CNC after the film was made, disqualified it from receiving an official French identification. The film was deemed ineligible for nomination at the Césars, and the film's producers were ordered to return the original funds the CNC had provided them (Jäckel 2007: 27–8). In her analysis of *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* and its problematic labelling, Isabelle Vanderschelden remarks on the film's paradoxical identity. On the one hand, the film operates as a French cultural artefact. On the other, it is an American commercial product. A transnational approach is thus required to understand this conundrum:

> Adopting a transnational perspective can help resolve the ambiguity surrounding *Un long dimanche*. The debate is not so much linguistic, artistic or thematic as commercial. The Frenchness of the film's content is not in question, and may even partly explain its moderate worldwide success. The locations and period setting, the French dialogue and cast, all enhance its Frenchness. Even the presence of Hollywood star Jodie Foster in a cameo role as a French woman is played down; she is hardly recognisable, speaking fluent French in a role taking her away from her usual star persona. What causes ambiguity is the financial package, or rather the fund transfer strategy underlying the film's production. (2007: 42)

Vanderschelden's insistence on the film's Frenchness, despite its consideration by the CNC as non-French, pinpoints a certain intangibility surrounding the concept of 'French film'. There is no hard-and-fast rule for identifying a French film as such, especially a multilingual one and let alone a co-production, as it will inevitably possess multiple multicultural elements and international influences. As Carrie Tarr acknowledges, 'the identity of any given film or filmmaker is becoming increasingly difficult to pin down in purely national terms, as the case of Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* … exemplifies' (2007a: 4). Yet the CNC's power to determine a film's label as 'French' or 'not French' (a label which has a direct impact on its eligibility for César consideration, resultant distribution and other French cinema industry privileges), and to grant or withdraw funds accordingly, demonstrates how important a film's 'financial package' (Vanderschelden 2007: 42) is to its cultural identification, however problematic such an identification may prove to be.

Another interesting case in the identification of a film's nationality is Michael Haneke's 2012 Cannes Palme d'or winner, *Amour. Amour*

is considered to be a French film (indeed its cast, language, majority funding and setting are French), although the filmmaker, Michael Haneke, is not. This is not particularly remarkable in itself, as many directors of French films, from Krzysztof Kieslowski (*La Double Vie de Véronique* 1991) to Amos Gitaï (*Désengagement* 2007, *Free Zone* 2005), are not of French origin. However, the Austrian-born Haneke also directs films which are considered to be Austrian, such as *Das weiße Band – Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (2009) and the original German-language *Funny Games* (1997). Indeed, Haneke won the Palme d'or in 2009 for *Das weiße Band*, an Austrian project, three years before receiving the same award for France for *Amour*. Haneke's 2001 *La Pianiste* is even set in Vienna, yet filmed entirely in French and starring the French actor Isabelle Huppert as a Viennese musician. Haneke and his films cross back and forth between nationalities, flirting with Frenchness and Austrianness (as well as Americanness, with his 2007 US remake of his own film, *Funny Games*) in a different way with each project. Haneke, however, has not encountered the slippery cultural identification conundrums of Jeunet, despite films like *La Pianiste* being inarguably less French than *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* on a narrative and sociocultural level.

A relatively young field of research, transnational cinema studies has made considerable progress in confronting the problems of national cinemas. This is not to ignore the usefulness of the term 'national' (Hayward 2000), but instead to move beyond a potentially constricting approach. In the early twenty-first century, transnational cinema studies has emerged as a means through which to discuss films marked by international aspects, without ignoring the concept of the national. As Higbee and Lim explain:

> A variety of terms (some more politically engaged than others) have emerged since the 1980s, which attempt to describe the cultural production of diasporic film-makers, including: accented, postcolonial, interstitial, intercultural and multicultural. All of the above could potentially be subsumed by the term 'transnational', due to their association with modes of film production that transcend national borders and bring into question the fixity of national cultural discourses. (2010: 11)

This framework acknowledges the diverse cultural exchanges which arise within individual films and around their production processes. Transnational cinema also offers a way of articulating a multilingual film's identity; as Higbee explains, 'postcolonial discourses in film are concerned with challenging fixed, Eurocentric assumptions around cultural identity and the nation' (Higbee 2007a: 51). To resolve this conundrum of the 'French' and 'foreign' inherent in multilingual cinema, I turn to works such as Natasa Ďurovičová and Kathleen

Newman's 2009 *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, which provide a frame through which to view the exchange between cultures in film, without confining films within, or ejecting films from, a strict national frame. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden's 2006 edited volume *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* remains perhaps the most widely referenced work on transnational film. Their introduction to the concept of the transnational remains an eloquent and widely cited one:

> The transnational at once transcends the national and presupposes it. For transnationalism, its nationalist other is neither an armoured enemy with whom it must engage in a grim battle to the death, nor a verbose relic whose outdated postures can only be scorned. From a transnational perspective, nationalism is instead a canny dialogical partner whose voice often seems to be growing stronger at the very moment that its substance is fading away. This recognition of the essentially imaginary nature of any notion of cultural purity is not, however, unilateral and untroubled. The space of the transnational is not an anarchic free-for-all in which blissfully deracinated postnational subjects revel in ludically mystified states of ahistoricity. The continued force of nationalism, especially nationalism grounded in religious cultures, must be recognised as an emotionally charged component of the construction of the narratives of cultural identity that people at all levels of society use to maintain a stable sense of self. (2006: 4)

Ezra and Rowden define transnational cinema as straddling multiple cultures, as interstitial, as existing 'in the in-between spaces of culture … between the local and the global' (2006: 4), a definition which encapsulates the hybridity of multilingual cinema. This allows multilingual film to at once reside within the French canon, while simultaneously reaching beyond it, moving towards the foreign while also drawing the foreign into the French. In similar ways, Hamid Naficy's book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), interrogates the representation of minority groups and the language of the 'other'. Naficy draws language into his conception of what has come to be understood as transnational cinema, in his coining of the term 'accented cinema'. Seeking to 'unpick the fixities of stable notions of cinema and national identity' (Phillips 2003: 343), Naficy explores the inherent hybridity of accented films' identities, emphasising the importance of voice in films defined by cultural plurality. In his germane piece 'Situating accented cinema', he writes that 'most accented films are bilingual, even multilingual, multivocal and multi-accented' (2006: 120). Naficy does not enter into specific analyses of multilingual dialogue in film, yet his in-depth study of the 'interstitial' and the multicultural in cinema is valuable nonetheless.

An analysis of French multilingual cinema therefore benefits from approaching the label 'French film' from this hybridised standpoint. Exploring the symbolism of the prefix in 'transnational', Hwee-Song Lim poses the question: 'can transnationalism valorise the "trans" at the same time as it reinforces the national?' (2007: 41) and this question remains at the heart of much transnational scholarship. Lim's question is fundamental. On the one hand, transnational film theory allows us to acknowledge the inherent cross-cultural, 'trans-' nature of multilingual film, while on the other hand continuing to propose labels of national cinema as useful, if problematic.

Such a conceptual framework therefore helps us to resolve the cultural paradoxes that arise between the French and the foreign in the analysis to come in this book. In similar ways, discourse on globalisation also provides helpful frameworks through which to examine the flows of social power between different cultural groups. For example, Jan Blommaert's *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (2010) sees language and globalisation as intertwined in the contemporary age. Film scholars such as Kate Ince use globalisation terminology in their film analysis, such as 'glocal cinema', to examine the conflicting forces which characterise multilingual film (especially co-productions). The dramatic tension developed in multilingual films such as *Welcome* hinges on the conflicting pull of the global and the local, the internal and the external, the French and the foreign. These films, in their concern for both the French and the foreign, are in a state of continual identity crisis, using multilingualism to articulate their identities as both French products and ones bound up in the complexity of the globalised world. Ince's 'glocal cinema', which highlights the paradoxical 'Frenchness of the multiculturalism [that multilingual] films examine' (2005: 92), allows us to unpack the conflicting forces at play in these films, forces which so often express themselves through language.

Despite these tensions between national and transnational, 'French cinema' as a term still holds valuable currency in the contemporary age. Indeed, Andrew Higson writes in his 2006 article 'The limiting imagination of national cinema', a response to his own 1989 'The concept of national cinema':

> It would be impossible – and certainly unwise – to ignore the concept [of the national] altogether: it is far too deeply ingrained in critical and historical debate about the cinema, for a start … in some contexts it may be necessary to challenge the homogenising myths of national cinema discourse; in others, it may be necessary to support them. (23)

Thus, while national cinema identifications are slippery and fallible, they also provide a crucial framework through which to examine films that may or may not challenge traditional conceptions of language, nation and society. To speak of a French cinema is not to box French films into a narrow, monocultural definition, but to acknowledge the plurality of voices, identities and modes of production that characterise the cinema of twenty-first-century France.

## *Power*

> Par pouvoir, il me semble qu'il faut comprendre d'abord la multiplicité des rapports de force qui sont immanents au domaine où ils s'exercent, et sont constitutifs de leur organisation. (Foucault 1976: 121–2)

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization. (Foucault 1998: 92)

Power is a paradoxical concept. It is at once universally comprehensible and resistant to definition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines power at its simplest as 'the ability to do or act', yet its scope reaches far beyond this 'ability'. It is also described as an 'influence or authority', 'political or social ascendancy or control', 'authorisation, delegated authority', 'an influential person, group, or organisation' and succinctly: 'influence'.

Ability, authority, force, control, influence: the conception of power is at once a fundamental and an elusive one. Power is amoral and apolitical; it can manifest in seemingly positive senses (strength, protection) and ostensibly negative ones (oppression, manipulation, violence). Power is ubiquitous, social and relational. It affords agency, and can be won and lost. However, the most fundamental defining element of power is not that it exists, or that it can be had, but that it can be used. Power is not static, but enacted. A king is not simply powerful because he calls himself so. Institutional power is gained and earned through social action; through kingly behaviour, assertion of authority, command of obedience and subjugation of others. As a result, a king can in fact be powerless, should he fail to exert his authority and serve merely as a puppet for those who can control his actions from behind the scenes. In his *Histoire de la sexualité I*, Michel Foucault pinpoints the fact that power is not an object that can be held or owned. Instead, power is strategy, action, process; resistant to hierarchical notions of a single centre of domination; 'relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are "matrices of transformations"' (131, 'les relations de pouvoir-savoir

ne sont pas des formes données de répartition, ce sont des "matrices de transformations"' (1998: 99)). In such a picture of power relations, language or discourse is at the forefront of such strategy:

> Il faut admettre un jeu complexe et instable où le discours peut être à la fois instrument et effet de pouvoir, mais aussi obstacle, butée, point de résistance et départ pour une stratégie opposée. Le discours véhicule et produit du pouvoir; il le renforce mais aussi le mine, l'expose, le rend fragile et permet de le barrer. (133)

> We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (101)

For Foucault, power is a volatile, ever-shifting process of establishing and enacting role relations (what he calls 'rapports de force' (1976: 121)), rather than a static object or state to be held by one agent over another. As Céline Spector summarises, in Foucault's writings 'le pouvoir est stratégie et non substance' ('power is strategy, not substance', Spector 1997: 68) and thus is enacted, enforced and exchanged through social action, and namely through language. Some theorists, like Pierre Bourdieu, speak of 'possessing' power (1991: 106), yet it is Foucault's concept of enacting power, emphasising that it 'exists only when it is put into action' 1982: 788 ('le pouvoir n'existe qu'en acte' 2001: 236)), that allows for a clearer understanding of the social power at stake, and at play, in multilingual dialogue.

The possibilities for using languages to exert power are endless in contemporary French film. In *Un prophète*, the Arabic language is used to manipulate and control, while Corsican is used to eavesdrop, infiltrate into otherwise closed groups and ascend rank in the mafia. In *London River*, French language use (along with English, Arabic and Mandinka) allows a pair of non-French characters to unite, investigate and access information that would otherwise be unavailable to them. In *Human Zoo*, Serbo-Croatian language becomes a tool for threatening one character and reassuring another at the same time. In *Dheepan*, Tamil becomes a secret code for negotiating strategies to gain legal passage into the French territory. In multivalent, situated and messy scenarios, characters of French, mixed and foreign backgrounds use languages as tools (and at times as weapons) for attaining their goals. Such power is amoral in itself, and may be used for moral or immoral ends (for protecting one's family or trapping one's enemy). Yet this is beside the point. If power and language are

social action, then strategic use of multiple languages, by even the most socially disenfranchised, is the ultimate manifestation of power as 'strategy and not substance'. Shohat and Stam's polycentric multi-culturalism, then, allows us not only to see language use as social action, but to envision the multitude of potential spheres of social power that can be opened to cultural and social groups in contemporary France. Thus, despite the immense weight of socio-economic disadvantage experienced by the Tamil characters in *Dheepan* or the Arab characters in *Un prophète*, even in their most vulnerable moments, language can present itself as an opportunity for advancement and control.

## French film and social frames

For the vast majority of cinema history, multilingualism has been absent from French films. Even those films which deal with multiculturalism and international movement in which multilingual dialogue could be expected to proliferate, such as travel and war, remain eerily monolingual. However, in the early twenty-first century, and especially from 2005 onwards, this has begun to change. According to CNC records of annual film data, in 2005 the number of multilingual films released in France leapt from under ten to forty-four,[2] a number which has continued to rise. Well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, both cinema and film scholarship are catching up to the multilingual reality of the contemporary French world.

### Beyond France

Multilingual cinema is a particularly salient phenomenon in France, both in terms of production and reception. Cinema scholarship on multilingual French films is also considerable, when compared with the dearth of research into other multilingual cinemas. However, multilingualism is not a trait confined to French cinema alone, as such international multilingual films as *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino 2009, USA), *Babel* (Alejandro Iñárritu González 2006, USA/Mexico), *Sotto Falso Nome* (Robert Ando 2004, Italy) and *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola 2004, USA) attest. Many prominent non-French multilingual films also include French-language dialogue, including *Babel*, *Inglourious Basterds* and Tarantino's 2004 film, *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. There is also a frequent overlap between French national and broader European filmmaking practices. Co-production is a clear example of such an overlap, and results in as a number of multilingual Franco-European 'superproductions' (Danan 1996: 74)

such as *Joyeux Noël* (Carion 2005). There are also other European cinema regulation bodies, such as the EU-wide film-funding association Eurimages, which directly affect multilingual filmmaking. Associations such as Eurimages often encourage collaboration between EU members, leading to pan-European dialogue.

It is also important to acknowledge the embedded multilingualism of certain national film industries such as India's Bollywood, whose historical relationship to the English language (i.e. British colonisation), domestic multilingualism (in Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Dari, etc.) and reasons for producing multilingual films are so complex and singular that it would be unwise to group them under that umbrella term of 'world cinema'. Nollywood and its use of both English and local Nigerian languages is also significant in this respect, as is South African cinema and its mix of African languages, English and Afrikaans (UNESCO 2012: 2). I cannot pretend to provide meaningful insight into such film industries, which are distinct in so many ways from French cinema history. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of the language dynamics at play in films from these regions, in order not to over-emphasise the uniqueness of multilingual French cinema on the contemporary global stage.

### Why 2005?

A year during which France's complex multicultural identity and hybrid social fabric was thrown into the spotlight, 2005 was a crucial time for multilingual film production in France. As multilingual films were released in their dozens, issues of cultural fracture and racial disconnect came to a head in many other areas of French society. This played out through such widely publicised events as the revolts which began in October and proliferated in many of the nation's multicultural and socio-economically disadvantaged *banlieues*. These demonstrations arose in response to suspected police discrimination which led to the deaths of two Clichy-sous-Bois teenagers of Malian and Tunisian descent, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré. During the revolts, a state of emergency was declared across the country for three months, three people were killed, many police were injured, almost 3,000 people were arrested and over 10,000 cars and many public buildings were set alight (Rearick 2011: 147). As Carrie Tarr reports, the reaction to this social unrest was vitriolic, with then-Minister of the Interior, soon-to-be President Nicolas Sarkozy publicly labelling the rioters as '*racaille*', an offensive and racially charged slang term loosely translatable as 'scum' (2007b: 34).

For much of the second half of 2005, public discussion in France was marked by the disruption of these manifestations which, while

spreading across the country, remained centralised in Paris's most culturally fractured *cités*, such as Clichy-sous-Bois and La Courneuve (Nettelbeck 2007: 316). The political and cultural importance of the 2005 riots should not be underestimated. While the violence lasted for three weeks after the 27 October deaths, long-term instability led to the events: as Nicolas Bancel writes, 'the riots of 2005 in France must be understood as the logical upshot of the social and economic disaster that are the French *banlieues*. But they also express the anger of populations – for the most part postcolonial minorities – doomed to abandonment and marginalisation, and with no mechanism for voicing their concerns' (2013: 215). The subsequent announcement from right-wing politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy of government crackdowns on immigration only fuelled the tension driving long-term socio-economic and cultural issues in France. Indeed, not only did the effects of the riots linger for far longer than the official state of emergency, but their causes stretched far back into colonial history. Saer Maty Ba notes 'occurrences such as the Paris *banlieues* (housing estates) uprisings of 2005 may not be grasped without a prior understanding of the multi-directional migration flows and refugee movements between Europe and Africa' (2012: 295). The 2005 appearance of films which work through the complexity of such issues, including *La Petite Jérusalem*, *Caché* and *13 Tzameti* (Géla Babluani), are therefore of great importance.

As a counterpoint to these divisive events, 2005 also saw the appearance of progressive transnational themes in French cinema. Guy Austin identifies 2005 onwards as a period in which the (de) colonisation of Algeria became increasingly represented in French film, citing such examples as Rachid Bouchareb's *Indigènes* and Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2009: 115). Bancel even writes of 'the legacy of 2005', arguing that 'the year 2005 marked a turning point and a moment of a paroxysmal crisis in France in terms of the redefinition of the nation's rapport with respect to its own identity and to the imaginary representation of its community' (2013: 208). Thus, as multilingual films began to appear in far greater numbers from 2005, so too did awareness of multicultural issues intensify in the socio-cultural and cinematic French climate. The popularity of such films logically followed, with a steadily increasing number attracting more than a million box office entries in France. In particular, 2014 was a banner year for commercially successful multilingual films. In that year, the three highest-grossing films in the French box office, *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au bon dieu?* (Philippe de Chauveron, 12.3 million entries), *Supercondriaque* (Dany Boon, 5.3 million entries) and *Lucy* (Luc Besson, 5.2 million entries) were all French (most years at least

one Hollywood film is in the top three) and all included dialogue in languages other than French.

*Figure 1* Percentage of multilingual films with 1m+ French box office entries
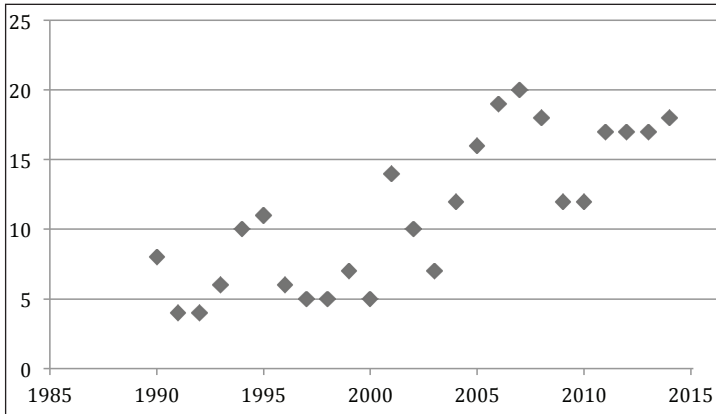


In 2005 alone, France either fully funded or co-produced a total of forty-four films whose dialogue included languages other than French. Of these forty-four films, a number are particularly significant for their narrative and thematic foregrounding of multilingualism. These include such important secondary case studies as Christian Carion's *Joyeux Noël* (English, French, German, Latin), Jacques Audiard's *De battre mon cœur s'est arrêté* (English, French, Mandarin, Russian, Vietnamese), Karin Albou's *La Petite Jérusalem* (Arabic, French, Hebrew), Djamel Bensalah's *Il était une fois dans l'oued* (Arabic, French), Cédric Klapisch's *Les Poupées russes* (English, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish), Merzak Allouache's *Bab el web* (Arabic, French), Eran Riklis's *La Fiancée syrienne* (Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, Russian) and Radu Mihaileanu's *Va, vis et deviens* (Arabic, French, Hebrew). France's financial contributions to the two major multilingual Hollywood productions of the year, *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Russian) and *The Interpreter* (Sydney Pollack, Arabic, English, French, Portuguese) are not without their significance, either.

Of course, 2005 scholarship cannot logically focus on the films of the same year. This of course confirms that multilingual film existed before 2005. French multilingual film began to gain momentum at the advent of the twenty-first century, with films such as Michael Haneke's *Code inconnu: récit incomplet de divers voyages* (2001), *L'Auberge Espagnole* (Cédric Klapisch 2002) and Tony Gatlif's Franco-Algerian road movie *Exils* (2004). However, the quantity

of multilingual films released in the 2000–4 period, not to mention the extent to which these films engage on a thematic and narrative level with multilingualism, is distinctly less significant than that of the post-2005 period. Concrete lines can rarely be drawn in cinema history, and certain films released in 2004 and over the end-of-year period, including *L'Esquive*, *Le Grand Voyage* (Ismaël Ferroukhi), *Exils* and *Ma Mère* (Christophe Honoré), are also linguicentric films.

Yet the release of important films is not the only reason 2005 was a crucial year for French multilingual cinema; a range of scholarship exploring multilingual film also appeared that year. Chris Wahl's was one of the first to speak of the concept of multilingual film. While Wahl does not concentrate in detail on issues of power, he does make explicit reference to how 'the power of language' permeates multilingual cinema (2005: 5). The year also saw Tessa Dwyer analyse 'polyglot cinema' as indicative of 'a new global sensibility' (2005: 295). Like Wahl, her analysis hinges on a number of case studies from various cultures. While neither Wahl nor Dwyer refer primarily to French cinema, the former being based in German studies and the latter translation studies, both identify France as one of the chief producers of multilingual films. Alongside this scholarship, Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman also cast a critical eye over the increase in multilingualism in cinema, the workings of diegetic interpreting and the 'interpreter's power to "make a difference"' (2005: 22) as well as their role as cultural and linguistic 'bridge-builder' (25), and the implications of this complex position. The translation studies standpoints of scholars like Delabastita, Grutman and Dwyer (plus the later work of Carol O'Sullivan (2008, 2011)) lend a perceptive critical eye to multilingual interaction in films, especially in the loaded interpreting sequences that appear in so many multilingual films.

Any examination of French cinema scholarship from 2005 would be incomplete without reference to Carrie Tarr's influential monograph *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France*, published in that same year. While Tarr's primary interest is in Maghrebi-French film production and reception, rather than in multilingualism, her work engages with language in multiple ways. In particular, Tarr explores the role of multilingualism in the construction of (multi)cultural and (multi)national identity. *Reframing Difference* continues to bring issues of alterity and linguistic difference to the forefront of French cinema studies, paving the way for more sustained examinations of the role of multilingualism in this context. In her foregrounding of multiculturalism in French cinema, Tarr is joined by others such as Tim Bergfelder, Elizabeth Ezra and Antonio Sánchez, all of whose work was published in 2005 as well.

The year 2005 was thus a markedly prolific one for French multi-lingual film production and scholarship on multilingual cinema. Of course, issues of language and multiculturalism have long made their presence felt in cinema studies, as shown by such seminal earlier works as Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001). However, prior to 2005, dedicated analyses of French multilingual films were few and far between, usually focusing on 1930s films or Western European co-productions. Diverse, politically charged and culturally complex multilingual films, as well as scholarship reflecting on them, took off in France halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first century in an unprecedented way.

### Postcolonial legacies

Any study of relations between French and other languages (particularly those of South-East Asian and North/West African tongues) in the contemporary era must take into account the legacy of colonialism. Mary-Louise Pratt writes that 'colonialism produces a multilingualism structured in relations of domination and subjugation' (2012: 24) and colonial-era film usually perpetuates such relations. Contemporary cinema departs in almost all ways from such linguistic representation. Yet while the portrayal of the interaction between French and (post) colonial languages like Arabic in contemporary multilingual films differs vastly from that of colonial films and even later neo-colonial films like *Indochine* (Régis Wargnier 1992), it would be naive to consider contemporary language relations as existing in an ideological vacuum, severed from the language politics of the past. Colonial power structures may no longer officially exist, but they remain in palimpsestic ways that continue to impact relationalities between Western and North African or other decolonised communities. As Shohini Chaudhuri suggests, 'post-colonial theory looks at the after-effects of the age of empires as well as the ways in which those power relations have not been fully transcended' (2005: 10) and postcolonial studies of French and francophone communities are thus relevant to this book.

Providing a background to this conundrum, Caroline Eades takes on the representation of French and other languages in colonial film in her book *Le Cinéma post-colonial français* (2006), in which she considers power as a central factor in all colonial linguistic exchanges. Unlike the power dynamics at play in contemporary films like *Polisse*, *Entre les murs*, *Un prophète*, *Dheepan*, *Welcome*, *La Graine et le mulet*, *London River* and *Des hommes et des dieux*, however, the power relations observable in colonial film are unilateral. Examining the case of 'colonial' cinema (whether originating from the colonial age itself or from a more recent era, depicting an earlier period), Eades remarks

that the role of indigenous languages is primarily a decorative one, with languages often relegated to background noise rather than meaningful dialogue (313). She underlines how colonising French characters will often ignore the existence of languages other than French, save for a smattering of linguistic tags (such as orders to plantation workers or passing comments to native house staff (315)). In these films, French remains the primordial, if not the only, functional language at play in colonial life. Eades emphasises the correlation between this sidelining of native languages and the reinforcement of French as representative of colonial power. She sees the relegation of colonised characters (and therefore the speakers of colonised languages) to those of servants, concubines or other dominated figures as feeding into the notion of the French language as power:

> Le fait que ces films continuent à n'octroyer qu'un rôle secondaire aux personnages colonisés et à mettre l'accent sur leur position de sujétion et de service envers le colon renforce la place presque exclusive de la langue française.
>
> The fact that these films continue to provide only secondary roles to colonised characters and to emphasise their position of submission and service towards the coloniser reinforces the almost exclusive place of the French language. (315)

Eades's analysis, in many ways, treats very different films to those examined in this book. Yet it is nonetheless important to examine the role of French in colonial film. Eades emphasises how the linguistic homogenisation which occurred throughout colonisation spawned a legacy which would become immensely difficult to shrug. The elimination of native language learning in favour of French and the trivialisation or prohibition of native language use contributed to an enduring portrayal of French as culturally superior to colonised languages, silenced the native voice and equated the French language with historical power. In films as chronologically and geographically disparate as the Berber resistance tale *Itto* (Jean Benoît-Lévy and Marie Epstein 1934) and the Indochina war film *Indochine*, even when French is depicted in a negative light (as dehumanising, impersonal or an instrument of cruelty), it is still represented as more powerful, influential and useful than the indigenous languages of the colonised.

Contemporary language relations are no longer always inscribed within such a rigid, legalised and pervasive hierarchy of oppression. Multilingualism can appear in many contexts and under many guises in twenty-first-century film. Yet it would be foolish, in the postcolonial era, to consider the fallout of colonialism as existing entirely in the past. As Shohat and Stam insist in 'The cinema after Babel: language, difference, power':

> If all languages are created equal, some are made 'more equal than others'; inscribed within the play of power, languages are caught up in artificial hierarchies rooted in cultural hegemonies and political oppression. (2006: 107)

This legacy has made itself felt well into the postcolonial era. Following on from this philosophy of the absolute centrality or superiority of French is the idea that French cinema is defined by its link with the French language. This suggests an inherent link between the French language and 'the Frenchness of French cinema', to borrow Ginette Vincendeau's term (2010). Michel Chion's influential 2008 book *Le Complexe de Cyrano: la langue parlée dans les films français* suggests that the French language is embedded in the concept of the very identity of French cinema as a whole.[3]

There is, of course, great value in examining the lingering hegemonic influence of the coloniser's language and culture on those of the once-colonised. The risk in adopting a Eurocentric approach to an analysis of multilingual French cinema, however, is that we may impose a Franco-centric understanding of power relations on contemporary multilingual films, without acknowledging the range of potential power sources at play within them. Multilingualism is a form of knowledge and as Edward Saïd claims in his seminal book *Orientalism*, 'to have knowledge over a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it' (1978: 32). Yet multilingual cinema is beginning to show that this form of knowledge is not confined to knowledge of only French or other Western tongues. Instead, all languages have the potential to empower their speaker in specific situations. In treating the centralised nucleus of metropolitan France as our sole vantage point, we risk losing sight of what is at play in alternate spaces.

## Superficial versus strategic multilingualism

The conundrum of quality versus quantity is central to defining a corpus of contemporary French multilingual cinema, and in distinguishing between those films which articulate the relationship between language and power and those which do not. As is to be expected, not all films which include even substantial amounts of multilingual dialogue are automatically relevant to this book, nor do they all engage with linguistic power dynamics. Instead, multilingualism can appear as an exoticising marker, as a source of reductive humour or as shorthand for labelling secondary characters as non-French.

As a general rule, the more multilingual dialogue a film contains, the more likely it is to engage in a meaningful way with language

as a central concept. However, it is important not to be led astray by the amount of multilingual dialogue, when examining the actual importance of language in a film. Carol O'Sullivan demonstrates how the quantity of multilingualism in a film is not always telling of its importance: 'the significance of textual heterolingualism is not necessarily a function of the quantity, but of the nature and quality, of foreign-language use in a text' (2011: 70). For example, in *Polisse* the majority of scenes take place in French. Nonetheless, the few multilingual scenes the film contains are remarkably rich. On the other hand, a number of Hollywood films show us that a film can contain a large quantity of multilingualism, without engaging with the concept of language in any considerable way. Films such as *Munich*, *Triage* (Danis Tanovic 2009) and *The Tourist* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck 2010), while they share Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Kurdish, Russian, Spanish and Swahili dialogue between them, use language solely as decoration or exoticism. This means that the identification of a multilingual film as such rests not only with auditory characteristics (that is, with the fact of multiple languages being audible in a film). For in contrast to Wahl's 'postcarding', the film must *engage* with multilingualism on a thematic and narrative level. In other words, the film must not merely be multilingual, it must be about multilingualism.

How can one identify such a quality? For one, many multilingual films draw explicit attention to their multilingualism. Characters may conscientiously and strategically code-switch in an exchange. They may overtly refer to the importance of linguistic understanding and the value of speaking multiple languages. They may complain about not being able to understand one another, often in a pidgin mix of languages, struggling to communicate their frustration. They may explicitly engage in the process of language learning, either in the institutionalised arena of the language classroom, a solitary venture through a pocket dictionary or audio tape, or informally from another character. They may solicit the services of an interpreter. In whichever manner it is represented and to whichever end, multilingualism is an essential thematic concern, plot device or narrative element in these films. Ultimately, the identification is an informed, yet subjective, one, and requires close viewing and scrutiny of the film's themes and its treatment of language difference.

In a banal yet potentially damaging portrayal of multilingualism, languages can be used not to define interpersonal power dynamics, nor even for their basic semantic meaning, but as 'foreign' sounds which signal a character's non-French background. Often, foreign dialogue used for this purpose will be brief and unsubtitled. Foreign

language may be used as an identification of nationality, to give a character an exotic flair or as background noise to legitimise a scene's location in a foreign setting. This can be observed in the unsubtitled babble of Vietnamese voices in the plantation of *Indochine* (Régis Wargnier 1992). Often, the multilingual dialogue is more important for its sound than its meaning in these cases.

Dialogue in languages other than French can be used to denote otherness and to distinguish foreign characters from French ones. Such manifestations often carry a sinister and unsettling tone. Non-French dialogue, rarely subtitled, serves to show how far a French character is from home; to contrast the comfort and familiarity of the French-speaking world with the alien discomfort of the foreign. The incomprehensibility of language is often presented as threatening or isolating for the protagonist. An example of this is Luc Besson's *Lucy*, in which the monolingual anglophone protagonist is imprisoned by a Taiwanese underworld gang, whose menacing nature is reinforced by their babble of Chinese dialogue and refusal to translate into English for her benefit. In one of these scenes, Mandarin script is scrawled on the dirty walls of the gang's hideout, yet Mandarin-speaking viewers have revealed the script itself translates to disjointed food-related words ('orange', 'tomato' and even 'keep hygienic' (Sibor)). It is not the semantic meaning of the written Mandarin text that is important for Besson, but its symbolic threat of otherness. *Lucy* thus uses language difference both as shorthand for 'foreignness' and a means of imposing distance and alienation.

Multilingualism is also often represented as humour in cinema. It may be cast as amusing due to characters' inability to understand each other, or through the discrepancy between an excerpt of foreign dialogue and its translation. (The American protagonist's exasperation with a loquacious photographer's Japanese instructions, and the incompatibility of his interpreter's sparse translation, in *Lost in Translation* comes to mind.) Dialogue in languages other than French may simply be portrayed as what Derakhshani and Zachman call 'comical representation of linguistic misunderstanding' (2005: 134), playing on the ambiguous sound of words across language barriers. For example, in *L'Auberge Espagnole*, when the English character Wendy attempts to conduct a conversation with her flatmate's French mother, she is horrified by the woman's use of the word 'fac' ('faculté', or 'university'), believing the woman is swearing 'fuck' in English at her. In concerning ways, films will even make attempts at humour by suggesting that a language sounds inherently funny, such as the mockery of the Picard dialect around which Dany Boon's 2008 blockbuster comedy *Bienvenue chez les*

*Ch'tis* revolves.

The above categories do not preclude the possibility of power dynamics or politics coming into play. Humour, for instance, may be at the expense of a speaker of a non-dominant language by implying a level of ridiculousness or ignorance sprouting from their use of their own language and not the French protagonist's. It may also serve to crystallise class differences between characters, such as in the 2011 international success *Intouchables*. Also, as John Kristian Sanaker has remarked, situations in which multilingualism functions as an element of realism may, paradoxically, work to silence speakers of non-dominant languages (2008: 150), favouring a linguistic 'in-group' (Delabastita and Grutman 2005: 174). A key example of this is Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937), in which a Parisian gangster takes cover in an Algiers kasbah. In the absence of an interpreter, the many Arabic-speaking inhabitants of the kasbah cannot communicate with the French protagonists and therefore find themselves allotted no dialogue beyond background chatter. Likewise, multilingualism as cultural 'flavour' often results in a relegation of non-dominant language dialogue to secondary, accessory or artificial passages, often unsubtitled, which function more as auditory decoration than as meaningful communication. This, of course, implicates the language at play in these situations in a linguistic hierarchy which positions the film's dominant language (French) as more important, complex and meaningful than the film's secondary languages.

Nonetheless, despite the lingering shadow of power in these examples, these representations of multilingualism remain distinct from those of interest to this book. The function of multilingualism in this study is not as exotic speech, decorative noise or humorous chatter, but as a crucial narrative element, a tool and a strategy for wresting, maintaining and redistributing power among characters. Multilingualism in contemporary French cinema is valorising, legitimising, empowering.

## The multilingual corpus

Contemporary French multilingual cinema contains a plethora of films composed of multiple languages. Postcarding is still a phenomenon which appears in the contemporary era, but strategic and meaningful multilingualism has overtaken superficial renderings of language difference. The eight films which make up the corpus of this book are some of the most complex, illustrative and revealing contemporary multilingual films. Indeed, each explores the politics of

multilingualism and power in unique and profound ways.[4]

Part of the justification for selecting these eight films as a primary corpus is related to the films' critical and commercial reception. It is important that the films under examination are not minor, neglected or marginal films; each represented an important film event in France, either in relation to box office success, film festival circulation or recognition from critics or awards ceremonies. *Un prophète*, *Welcome* and *Entre les murs* each drew more than a million box office entries. *Polisse* garnered a substantial 2,306,000, making it the eighteenth highest-grossing film in France in 2011; and *Des hommes et des dieux* drew a massive 3,159,866, fourteen of all films for the year 2010. Naturally, some films experienced greater financial success than others, yet each had a significant impact on the French cinematic landscape. Not only have each of the key case studies in

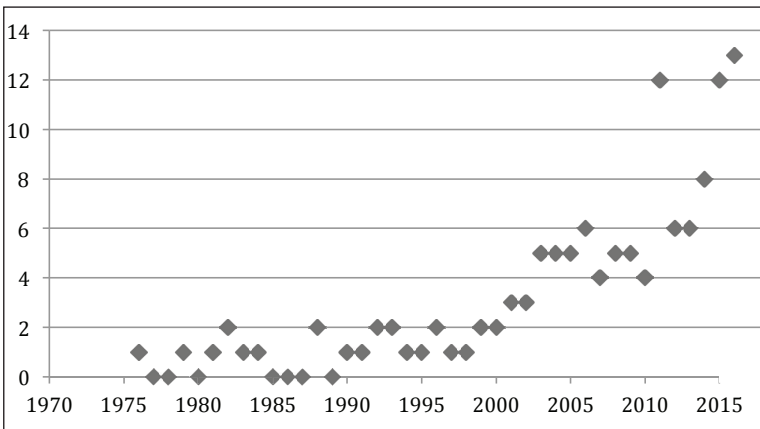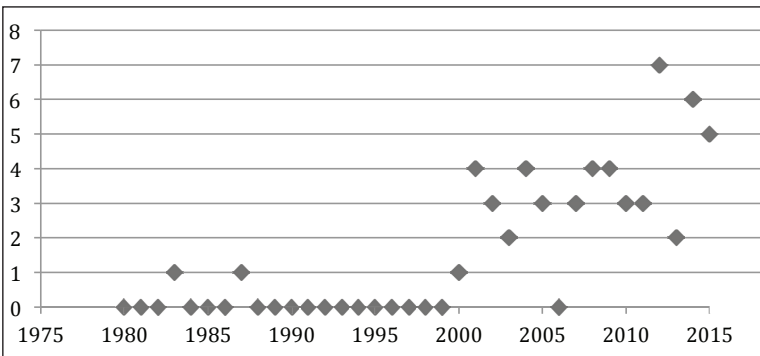*Figure 2* Number of multilingual films nominated, Prix César



*Figure 3* Number of multilingual films nominated, Prix Louis Delluc

this book attained impressive box office numbers in France, they have also attracted considerable critical praise. The two most prestigious French film awards are the Césars (founded 1976) and the Prix Louis Delluc (founded 1937). As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the number of multilingual films awarded at these ceremonies has swelled in the contemporary era.

Part of what makes these films relevant is this reception: each struck a chord with French audiences and critics. Accompanied by their commercial and sociocultural success, this critical influence establishes the corpus as a collection of high-profile, 'successful' French films. Figure 4 is a breakdown of the eight films' critical success in France and in the most prestigious international film award arenas; the Cannes Film Festival, the BAFTAs, the Venice and Berlin film festivals and the Best Foreign Language Film award at the Academy Awards. The choice of a multilingual film for nomination for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar is particularly telling, as the film has been selected by France to represent the best French cinema has to offer.

| Film | Césars | Delluc | Lumière | Cannes | Oscars | Euro Film | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Polisse* | 2 wins +10 noms. | | 2 wins +4 noms. | Prix du jury +5 noms. | | | |
| *Entre les murs* | 1 win +4 noms. | Nom. | 2 wins +2 noms. | Palme d'or | Nom. | 1 win +1 nom. | |
| *Un prophète* | 9 wins +3 noms. | Win | 2 wins +2 noms. | Grand Prix +10 noms. | Nom. | 2 wins +2 noms. | BAFTA 1 win +1 nom. |
| *Des hommes et des dieux* | 3 wins + 8 noms. | Nom. | 2 wins +2 noms. | Grand Prix + runner-up Palme d'or | | 2 noms. | BAFTA 1 nom. |
| *Dheepan* | 9 noms. | | 2 noms. | Palme d'or | | | |
| *La Graine et le mulet* | 4 wins +1 nom. | Win | 2 wins +1 nom. | | | 1 win | Venice Silver Lion +5 wins +1 nom. |
| *Welcome* | 10 noms. | Nom. | 1 win +4 noms. | | | | Berlinale 2 wins |
| *London River* | | | | | | | Berlinale Silver Bear +2 noms. |

*Figure 4* Awards, primary corpus

These films are thus important contributions to the French cinema of the twenty-first century. As the preceding data show, they have made a considerable impact on the cinematic landscape in France. Yet beyond their ostensible commercial and critical success, these films are also valuable for the ways they interpret the linguistic complexity of our 'multiscalar, polycentric world of signs and symbols' (Kramsch 2012: 123). Language use in such films is not simply a matter of convenience, and French (or any Western tongue) is not the only language of value. Instead, contemporary French multilingual films use language difference to articulate tensions between colonial and postcolonial France, between French and other, between the mythical concept of a monocultural France and the complex reality of the contemporary globalised universe. As this book will reveal, in such films, the possibilities for using multilingualism as a tool and an asset are endless.

## Notes

1 These include nationalities of cast and crew, locations of shooting and editing and, most importantly, languages used.
2 See Appendix A.
3 Chion's pioneering research on the role of the auditory (ambient sound, music and language) in film has contributed to laying the groundwork for sustained studies of film dialogue, a historically maligned object of study compared to the dominance of 'visucentric' studies (2003, 2005).
4 While none of the eight case studies are from 2005, many of the multilingual films released in that year will be referenced throughout this book.