ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: HER GAZE, THEIR VOICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE DOCUMENTARIES BY YAMINA BENGUIGUI, ALICE DIOP AND AGNÈS VARDA

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This thesis is a stylistic analysis of three feature-length documentaries by three French filmmakers: Yamina Benguigui, Alice Diop, and Agnès Varda. The three documentaries are *Mémoires d'immigrés : L'héritage maghrébin* (Benguigui, 1997), *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuses* (Varda, 2000), and *Nous* (Diop, 2021). The analysis is divided into three chapters: Voice, Image, and Structure. The purpose of this analysis is to shed light on contemporary aspects of style in French documentary cinema.

HER GAZE, THEIR VOICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE DOCUMENTARIES BY YAMINA BENGUIGUI, ALICE DIOP AND AGNÈS VARDA

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2024

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Introduction

In this thesis, I will compare the approaches to documentary filmmaking of Yamina Benguigui, Agnès Varda and Alice Diop. Specifically, I will focus on one film from each filmmaker: *Mémoires d'immigrés : l'héritage maghrébin* (Benguigui, 1997), *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (Varda, 2000), and *Nous* (Diop, 2021). While these films share certain thematic elements, principally in consideration of underrepresented or unacknowledged groups within modern French society, they are not directly related in terms of subject matter. Nevertheless, I have chosen to associate them as they relate to a specific topic in French studies: approaches to style in contemporary documentary cinema in France. I consider this specific choice of films pertinent insofar as they are representative of recent French documentary cinema of the last three decades. On this note, I specifically chose films that varied by release date to reveal any consistent trends or significant changes to the style of documentaries. Furthermore, I chose them because they have very different approaches to style. Additionally, in hopes of developing current research on French documentary, I chose films from three filmmakers who are relatively well-known and emblematic of this category of cinema. Lastly, these films are recognized as influential, leading to a better understanding of the most prominent stylistic aspects of French documentaries today; however, since Diop's film is relatively new, it is impossible to know the influence it might continue to have in the future.

The choice of these filmmakers is also significant, regarding their similarities and differences. For instance, they all happen to women; and while I will not specifically analyze their films as they relate to issues of feminism or feminine identity, this initial grouping could lead to an analysis of this sort in the future. The three filmmakers are also children of immigrants. While only Benguigui and Diop's films directly address immigration, perhaps this

fact sheds light on all three filmmakers' propensity to focus on underrepresented and marginalized groups of French society.

It is precisely by acknowledging this common link between the three films which has brought me to my principal analytical focus. In recognizing that all three films attempt to "represent the underrepresented," I examined what could be said of their different strategies for accomplishing this task which expresses itself in the form of their stylistic approaches. In questioning how a filmmaker chooses to represent their subjects, I have been led to considerations of representation in documentary as it relates to notions of realism and authenticity. I have come to contemplate how their stylistic approaches influence the depiction of those featured in each film.

The thesis is organized into three chapters. The first considers the presence of "voice" in each film. It describes how and when the voice of the filmmaker makes itself heard, if ever. For this portion of my analysis, I rely heavily on the work of Pascal Bonitzer and Mary Ann Doane. Their work influenced my understanding how the voice of the filmmaker influences what is shown, i.e. the image, especially when the voice is used in the form of voice-over or voice-off. This chapter also examines the significance of the voice or voices in documentary cinema, relying on the work of Jean-Louis Comolli. Ultimately, this chapter sheds light on how each filmmaker's use of voice can be an imposition on its subjects or, conversely, an aide to expression for the subjects, which impacts the authenticity of their depictions of what is inherently assumed to be representations of reality.

The second chapter discusses what I generally describe as the "image" of each film, i.e. what the viewer sees on-screen. This chapter applies Bill Nichols' conceptions of realism and

documentary realism. This chapter reveals how each film's stylistic approach amplifies or undermines its link to reality as works of documentary.

The third chapter focuses on "structure" of each film. This could be understood, in part, as the editing of the films; however, this chapter does not focus on certain aspects of editing, such as shot selection within specific sequences, which is touched on in chapter two. Instead, chapter three examines a broader element of editing, which is the ordering of sequences in each film. This chapter uses the work of Jaimie Baron to broach the use of archival material in these films as well as to provide a brief consideration of the function of archives in cinema more generally. In contemplating the broader structures of the films, this chapter explains how structure relates to effectively developing a particular rhetoric. In this way, it analyzes how the message of each film is inferred, supported, or, otherwise, made apparent through this concept of structure.

Yamina Benguigui's documentary *Mémoires d'immigrés: l'héritage maghrébin*, debuted on French television in 1997 and had a theatrical release the following year. It is primarily composed of interviews with Maghrebi immigrants and their children living in France, as well as interviews with French state officials who worked on immigration policy in the mid-20th century. The film is divided into three episodes: *les pères, les mères,* and *les enfants,* each concentrated on the testimonies of individuals who represent one of these familial roles as it relates to the experience of being a Maghrebi immigrant. The film makes use of talking heads, where interspersed through the film are portions of interviews with individuals framed in a medium close-up, facing the camera. Benguigui takes this style to an extreme, as some featured interviews last up to five or ten minutes with few inserts of other footage or photos and no musical score. Most notably, the featured interviews do not depict any interaction between the

subjects and Benguigui, the presumed interviewer. Rather, each interview acts as a sort of monologue where the subjects offer their testimony unprompted. There are never any questions or interjections from an interviewer. Generally, between interviews, the film features transitional sequences, using archival footage and music.

Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* premiered at the Cannes film festival in 2000, having a television premiere and theatrical release in that same year. The film depicts the many facets of modern-day gleaning in mainland France. Varda relies heavily on a handheld camera, herself filming the footage, as she travels across the country in search of current examples of gleaning as well as to conduct interviews which vary in subject matter, but which generally tend to focus on recounting the ways in which people gleaned in the past. Varda uses voice-over narration to comment on what she observes and to guide the narrative, being sometimes digressionary. The voice-over acts as a consistent reminder of Varda's presence as the filmmaker; it also renders the film more personal or intimate, which has led certain scholars and critics to describe it as an essay film.

Lastly, Alice Diop's *Nous* initially premiered at the *Cinéma du 4eel* film festival in Paris in 2021. It had a television debut and a theatrical release the following year. For the film, Diop drew inspiration from the logbook written by François Maspero, titled *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express*. The film focuses on several locations situated off the RER B regional train line which runs through Paris from the northeast to the southwest, servicing an extensive portion of the surrounding suburban area. The film's main conceit is to show the many aspects of life for those who inhabit this specified area, creating a detailed and varied depiction of society. For example, Diop follows Ismael, an undocumented immigrant from Mali who works as a car mechanic. Diop also follows her sister, Ndeye, who works as an at-home caregiver. As Diop herself was raised in

the region, she includes archival footage of her parents who are since deceased, associating them with the theme as they, too, were once inhabitants of the area. The film's style is observational and contemplative. Even as Diop's presence is felt on occasion through voice-over and by appearing on-screen, the style remains unintrusive as Diop does not offer commentary about those whom she films.

Varda is the oldest of the three filmmakers, born in Brussels in 1928 to a French mother and Greek father. She died in Paris in 2019. After studying fine arts and working as a photographer, she wrote and directed her first feature fiction film, *La Pointe Courte*, in 1955. Given the period during which her career as a filmmaker began as well as her propensity to experiment in terms of style and narrative, she has often been associated with the *Nouvelle Vague* movement in Paris of the late 50s and 60s. On occasion, she has even perplexingly been anointed "the grandmother of the *Nouvelle Vague*". Such a title is misleading, however, as she was a contemporary of the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers, and, thus, did not necessarily influence them as a sort of predecessor. Nevertheless, her first film predates the debuts of the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers; moreover, with her debut, there are examples of the type of formal and thematic innovations which would be recognized and admired more widely in the films of the *Nouvelle Vague*. More precisely, Varda is associated with the concurrent film movement in Paris referred to as the *Rive gauche*, with which filmmakers such as Alain Renais and Chris Marker are also associated. Generally, the *Rive Gauche* was more formally experimental and more thematically political than the *Nouvelle Vague*. Varda went on to have a long and highly productive career, making twelve feature fiction films, about 20 documentaries, and several shorts as well as films and series for television. Although Varda created documentaries throughout her lifetime, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* marks a turning point in her career, after which she exclusively worked

in documentary, notably creating the autobiographical *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008) and the inventive road film *Visages, villages* (2017), co-directed by the artist JR.

Yamina Benguigui was born in Lille in 1955 to Algerian parents. After briefly working as an assistant director, her first feature film was a three-part documentary titled *Femmes d'Islam*, premiering on television on the channel France 2 in 1994. After *Mémoires d'immigrés*, she made several more documentaries, most of which premiered on television. She has also made two feature fiction films: *Inch'Allah dimanche* (2001) and *Sœurs* (2020). In the mid-2000s, she launched a career in politics, working most notably for the mayor's office of Paris as well as serving as a deputy minister of *Francophonie* for the national government during the presidency of François Hollande.

Lastly, Alice Diop was born in Aulnay-sous-Bois in 1979 to Senegalese parents. After studying visual sociology, she began making films. To date, she has made eight documentaries, and she premiered her first feature fiction film, *Saint-Omer*, in 2022. While still relatively young, she has already garnered much attention and praise for her films, which includes being awarded the Best Film prize in the "Encounters" section at the Berlin Film Festival in 2021 as well as the Silver Lion and the Best First Film prizes for *Saint-Omer* at the Venice Film Festival in 2022.

It is perhaps of interest to recognize the fact that all three filmmakers are children of immigrants, which might partially explain their long-time commitment to the representation of the underrepresented and marginalized in French society. It could even be argued that this has been the principal motivation of the three of them throughout their careers: to give a voice and representation within the space of cinema to those who, otherwise, would not be afforded the opportunity. At the same time, the fact that each of them are of different generations and of different origins helps one understand the differences in their preoccupations. As is the case with

Varda, she is less concerned with questions of identity, integration, or assimilation, and focuses more consistently on the lifestyles of individuals which render them outside of societal norms. On the other hand, both Benguigui and Diop reflect on "French" identity, especially in terms of immigrants and the children of immigrants. However, Benguigui often considers questions of identity in French society as they relate to Maghrebi immigrants as well as certain Islamic practices and traditions, whereas Diop most often reflects on identity as it relates to the experiences of those who inhabit the greater Parisian area, especially in terms of their diverse origins. Thus, this study may ultimately help to conceptualize the evolving and diversifying sense of French identity through the depictions of those featured in the films from the perspectives of filmmakers who, likewise, represent this fluid identity.

Chapter 1: Voice

The Voice Erased

At first glance, or at first listen rather, *Mémoires d'immigrés* seems to give voice to its subjects by allowing them to speak for themselves. This is certainly not an insignificant description, especially as it pertains to a minority group of French society, such as immigrants, which is often underrepresented in the public sphere, particularly in media (at least when the film was released); however, the subject of immigrant life has not necessarily been underrepresented in media in France or elsewhere, at least when considering French documentary cinema. For example, one can note particularly sequences in *Chronique d'un été* (1961) by Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, which focus on Landry's experiences as an African immigrant in Paris. Nevertheless, *Mémoires d'immigrés* is noteworthy due to its extended duration and precise focus on individuals from a particular period of Maghrebi immigration to France. Furthermore, the documentary exclusively entrusts the storytelling to its subjects. More specifically, the film dedicates most of its 160-minute duration to the presentation of the immigrants' accounts. In assuming that the immigrants are generally underrepresented in media[1], especially in the sense that individuals have fewer opportunities to describe their experiences, the film is emancipatory as it liberates the voice of the "Maghrebi immigrant." More precisely, it offers the freedom of expression to its subjects, the immigrants whom Benguigui interviews, instead of following a more traditional structure of documentary that uses voice-over to manipulate the context in which images and sounds are presented. But is it enough to conclude that *Mémoires d'immigrés*

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[1] See Alec G. Hargreaves, "La représentation cinématographique de l'ethnicité en France : stigmatisation, reconnaissance et banalisation."

is entirely emancipatory through this act of “giving voice”? And does Benguigui truly help the liberation of immigrants' speech? It is challenging to assume the liberation of speech for an entire group based on what is ultimately a very small number of individuals appearing in the film. But is this at least a liberation of speech for these individuals? I fear this conclusion might be too simplistic. Although the interviewed individuals are allowed to speak for themselves in all instances, there is not one unique way of allowing an individual to express themselves. Ultimately, speech is not the same in every context. Benguigui indeed provides a voice to immigrants and children of immigrants in the documentary, and it is a voice that holds a certain power and demands recognition when heard on television or in cinemas. But what is the precise nature of this speech?

To better understand the function of speech in the film, one can refer to the work of with Jean-Louis Comolli and his concept of filmed speech (*la parole filmée*). Several of his writings on the subject highlight the aspects of speech in film which encourage an emotional response from the viewer. Consequently, speech is one of the most significant formal choices and this choice contributes greatly to the importance of *Mémoires* d’immigrés regarding the history of Maghrebi immigration in the 20th century. At the same time, Benguigui alters the speech of her subjects through a formal approach that aligns with Pascal Bonitzer's analyses of the function of voice-over in documentary cinema. It might seem off-topic to consider voice-over in a film that does not employ it, but even if the voice-over does not appear in the final cut, does that mean it did not exist before? Hence, Bonitzer's conclusions reveal the source of the influence that Benguigui maintains over the immigrants' speech.

In several articles about *Mémoires d'immigrés,* the role of each subject's speech is not recognized for its emotional effect. Rather, emotion is seen as anchored in the shot selection for

each interview. This idea is clearly explained by Sylvie Durmelat in her article "Transmission and Mourning in *Mémoires d'immigrés : l'héritage maghrébin*: Yamina Benguigui as 'Memory Entrepreneuse'" where she writes that it is the framing of the subjects in the documentary that allows Benguigui to evoke the sympathies of the viewer (180). Carine Bourget, in her article "Claiming integration, performing exclusion: Yamina Benguigui's Documentaries," echoes Durmelat's viewpoint and adds, "The viewer cannot miss the tears that are shed in Benguigui's documentaries; the camera always closes up on the face of victimised people, thus reminding the viewer that some government policies impacted real people who endured various hardships, including emotional ones, as a result" (180). It is evident that Durmelat and Bourget consider the act of showing testimonies in close-ups centered on the subject's face to establish an emotional connection between them and the viewer. In Bourget's case, this connection is established through proximity in the sense that the viewer sees the immigrants' tears more clearly when they tell their stories, and observing these tears in a close-up elicits an emotional from the viewer.

There is no reason to dispute the effectiveness of this film technique, which is legitimate; however, one should not overlook the emotional effect brought about by speech. The emotional response of the viewer primarily comes from what each interviewed person says, or it come from, at least, the combination of formal processes (such as sound effects, music, and framing, i.e. mise en scène) with the details stated in a testimony that produces an emotional response.

In the case of *Mémoires d'immigrés,* in addition to its mise en scène, the spoken details which deal with immigrants' past experiences following their arrival in France evoke sympathetic emotions in the viewer because these details illustrate a life full of challenges. Such a conclusion, however, underestimates the specific importance of speech in cinema. In their article "Voices Unveiled," Mark Ingram and Florence Martin underline the power of the specific

speech of Maghrebi immigrants who, until then, had rarely been represented in various media in France (105). It is necessary, thus, to further contemplate the notion of the importance of speech in the narratives of *Mémoires d'immigrés*, considering its function in cinema.

In his article "L'action parlée," Comolli observes that speech in cinema is an action like any other action performed by a character. Like the action of crying, for instance, the action of speaking accentuates the physical reality of the character or, as Comolli writes, "filmed speech creates a more profound impression of the body to which it belongs" ("*[la] parole filmée donne effet de chair au corps filmé qui la porte")* (76). Furthermore, since speech is auditory, it resists the current trends of commercial cinema that seek to mainly accelerate visual actions (76). Unlike the physical elements observed in the images, which may be subject to cutting during the editing process, while still retaining their emotional effect, reducing, accelerating, or amplifying the action of speech in the soundtrack risks altering the meaning of said speech.

To provide a concrete example from Benguigui's documentary, early in the episode of *Les Pères*, Khémais Dabous, an immigrant from Tunisia and a former employee at Renault, recounts his arrival in France. It is the first emotional climax of the film: Dabous describes his complete isolation and the absence of warmth and fraternity expressed to him from the French when he arrived in Marseille. For over two minutes, an immobile close-up lingers on Dabous' face without any insert or non-diegetic music; the viewer sees only his face and hears only his voice. While recalling feelings from his distant past, Dabous starts to cry but continues his narrative. Precisely, it is his own speech that evokes his emotion and causes his tears. One must assume it is the same for the viewer. By hearing the description of his emotions and noticing the change in the quality of his voice affected by that emotion, the viewer is invited to sympathize with Dabous. Thus, the spoken action, this physical act that renders Dabous physical presence more

real to the viewer, lies at the core of emotional communication between Dabous and the viewer. If one were to watch the sequence without sound, specifically without Dabous' voice, although the emotion is clearly visible on his face, it would be challenging to imagine the viewer reaching the same level of sympathy by only seeing Dabous' face in a close-up shot. Moreover, this sequence is notable because Dabous' face is out of focus in the shot; it remains blurry throughout this part of his testimony. Benguigui herself refers to the mistake made by her cinematographer in a video interview[2] where she explains that, despite the error, the emotional impact of the sequence was too strong not to keep it in the final cut. How else could one better symbolize the importance of filmed speech at the emotional level? This would contradict Bourget's idea that the viewer sees the subject's tears better. Indeed, the tears in this sequence are less visible, yet it is one of the most emotional moments in the film.

The approach to presenting the testimonies of other immigrants is identical to that of Khémais Dabous. In the episode of *Les mères*, Yamina Babu Aïssa recounts the strict rules imposed on her by her family. Lasting about five minutes, using only two close-ups of varying degrees of Aïssa, and showing only a few archival photos and brief inserts of her home, the sequence describes the disturbing details of a forced marriage at the age of 14 and her late "liberation", some twenty years later. As in Dabous' sequence, Aïssa's does not require many visual elements to convey her emotion. Above all, everything begins with the spoken action, as Comolli writes, "filmed speech animates the body" ("*[la] parole filmée agit le corps"*) (78). Ultimately, the act of giving a voice to immigrants in the film permits the expression of their emotions. Through this act, the humanity of the immigrants underlined by their emotions is

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[2] The is included in the extras of the documentary's DVD distributed by MK2 Éditions and released in 2004.

delivered through their speech, which is a physical act that renders each subject more real to the viewer. Speech is the humanizing factor in the testimonies of these individuals.

While one can find many examples of filmed speech or spoken action, as defined by Comolli, throughout *Mémoires d'immigrés*, there remains the notable absence of one voice: that of its director, Yamina Benguigui. In certain interviews, such as those by Sarah E. Mosher or Olivier Barlet, Benguigui herself acknowledges her absence as a deliberate choice, not wanting to act as an intermediary between her subjects and the viewer (Barlet 38, Mosher 96, 100). In Ingram and Martin's article, this fact is not considered entirely problematic; on the contrary, in their view, Benguigui's absence contributes to a higher level of intimacy between her subjects and the viewer (112). Durmelat even suggests that the documentary produces a sense of objectivity due to Benguigui's absence, which would otherwise impose a subjective perspective (180). However, in his article "Bougnoul for What?," Kenneth W. Harrow emphasizes the problematic aspect of this approach that masks reality. What is seen in the documentary arises from the interviews between Benguigui and her subjects; they are artificial "soliloquies" constructed during the film's editing process (102-103). Whether advantageous or problematic depending on one's viewpoint, Benguigui's absence alters the way the viewer perceives the speech of the interviewees. Perhaps she intended to avoid the presence of her voice off-screen since it would represent a voice-over/voice-off. Drawing on Pascal Bonitzer's description of the function of voice-over/voice-off in his book *Le regard et la voix,* could one surmise that Benguigui did not wish to exert control over her subjects?

It is essential to clarify here that Bonitzer describes the tendency of documentaries in a classic system to use voice-over as a commentary to guide the viewer's sense of reality. The voice-over possesses an assertive and authoritarian quality since it is ambiguous and unlocatable,

being off-screen and often non-diegetic, thus no one can criticize it (29). Due to its position, the voice-over also holds significant power over the image, altering its meaning and operating as *la voix-maître* (36-37). In addition, in following the example set by Mary Ann Doane in her article, "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," it is necessary to recognize the distinction between voice-over and voice-off where the former refers to a voice intended to be non-diegetic, such as a narration, whereas the latter is intended to be diegetic, though from a source that is not visible within the frame. This distinction is particularly important as the original French term employed by Bonitzer, *la voix-off*, can refer to either voice-over or voice-off depending on the context.

Following these descriptions, *Mémoires d'immigrés* does not relate to voice-over/voice-off and its alteration of the meaning of images given the absence of either in the final cut. Additionally, as Comolli would describe it, by allowing the interviewed immigrants to speak for themselves, it is evident that the subjects possess a certain freedom to guide the discourse as they wish. Through relinquishing the responsibility of guiding the discourse, the director's main concern becomes to draw the viewer's attention to the subject's discourse ("*la mise en écoute*") (*L'action parlée* 77). Moreover, Benguigui's documentary bears no resemblance to the example of voice-over cited by Bonitzer (himself quoting another article by Serge Daney in *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 250) about a short film on prisons where the voice-over cancels out the prisoners' voices twice over: first, by not allowing them to speak and, second, by substituting their voices with another (34-36). Obviously, *Mémoires d'immigrés* does not attempt to cancel out the immigrants' voices through a voice-over narration.

In the case of *Mémoires d'immigrés*, however, the absence of a voice-over, more precisely of a voice-off, does not imply non-existence. On the contrary, to encourage responses

from her subjects, Benguigui's voice was necessary to ensure one side of the conversation. In her interview with Sarah E. Mosher, Benguigui explains that she spent three years conducting research to gather what was needed for the film. After removing her presence from the film, she decided to transform her personal perspective on the interviews into a book based on the documentary (96). Later in the interview, Benguigui explains her motivation when she decided to separate the documentary and the book: the former is solely dedicated to the immigrants to avoid complicating or even distorting the narrative by presenting two perspectives (theirs and hers), whereas the latter goes beyond the film to present her personal journey (100-101). Nevertheless, is it not this process of removing Benguigui's voice that distorts the speech of the individuals in the film, rather than the other way around? That is to say the removal of Benguigui's voice for the final version of her film, which was present in the form of a voice-off in the dailies, masks the reality of the filming of the interviews, which involved two speakers. In fact, the immigrants' speech depended on its relationship with Benguigui's to be brought forth.

What is, then, the reason for this separation of voices and, more specifically, the removal of Benguigui's voice-off? When Benguigui explains that she did not want to distort the viewpoints of the immigrants interviewed with her presence, one must conclude that her voice is crucial in guiding how the viewer perceives the narratives. As previously mentioned, this removal functions as a strategy to validate the truthfulness of the documentary by creating a sense of objectivity through the absence of the voice-over (Ingram and Martin 113, Harrow 119, Bourget 182). Conversely, Benguigui's voice-over reveals traces of her subjectivity, and the removal of her voice aims to erase this; however, her subjectivity is already engraved in the immigrants' testimonies simply because of her choice of subjects (who she chose to interview and who she did not), the questions she posed to them, and the final cut that retained only three

hours from the three years of work Benguigui put into the making of the film. Finally, with or without her off-screen voice, her subjectivity reveals itself in the assembly, sorting, and cutting of the narratives, which produce a singular discourse.

Despite the liberation of the speech and emotions of the immigrants in the documentary, the fact that Benguigui used her voice to direct this speech reveals that she partially benefited from the power held by voice-over in a film. Despite the removal of her traces, Benguigui's off-screen voice existed beforehand to alter the final meaning of the images and the immigrants' speech that the viewer receives; therefore, the speech in the film is not part of an entirely liberated expression, and Benguigui's choice ultimately falls between the two extremes (liberated speech and the voice of the master, *la voix-maître*) that determine the meaning of the images according to Bonitzer.

In addition to the removal of the voice-off, another element suggests that the subjects' speech is not entirely liberated in the film. It is simply the choice of the language used by the subjects. This element might seem inconsequential since the film is a French production produced by Canal+, a French audiovisual group, and directed by Benguigui, who was born and raised in France. Except perhaps for the subjects in the third episode, the children of Maghrebi immigrants, however, one must assume that French is not the native language of most immigrants appearing in the film. Then why does everyone speak French during the interviews? It is possible that French was not imposed on the subjects during filming and was the individual choice of all participants; however, it seems more likely that the producers and Benguigui preferred the use of French for each person to provide linguistic and stylistic consistency across the three episodes of the documentary. If, indeed, the target audience was generally adult television viewers in France who predominately speak French, it would be logical for the

documentary's subjects to speak exclusively in French to avoid extensive subtitling. The choice to use French is not simply a matter of form, however. As Pierre Bourdieu explains in *Language and Symbolic Power*, one should not only consider a language through a structuralist approach in the tradition of Saussure, which separates the study of language from the social context in which language is used (8-9, 103-105). Bourdieu adds that "[…] linguistic exchanges are also relationships of symbolic power where the balance of power between speakers or their respective groups is actualized" (*"[...] les échanges linguistiques sont aussi des rapports de pouvoir symbolique où s'actualisent les rapports de force entre les locuteurs ou leurs groupes respectifs")* (14). In other words, when using a language, there exists a power hierarchy among speakers; moreover, if French was imposed on immigrants during filming, the act of giving them a voice is not entirely liberating as it specifically imposes French on them. Benguigui also imposes a hierarchy in language usage between native speakers and second-language speakers, as the viewer may have expectations of how French *should* be spoken which is aligned with native speakers. One must consider *who* speaks French, *how* they speak it, and *to whom* they speak. As speakers of a second or third language, which is French in the case of the interviewed immigrants, a power hierarchy is imposed on the subjects and creates a contrast in speech between them and the native French speakers appearing in the film. Although there are countless ways to speak a language and one should not generalize a division between second language speakers and native speakers because neither category consists of a homogeneous group, the use of French by everyone in the documentary evokes this type of categorization. What forms is a contrast between the interviews with the state officials and those with immigrants where subtitles appear, despite these individuals speaking in French (specifically Yamina Amri and Khadija in the episode of *Les Mères* and Hamou Goumid in the episode of *Les Pères*). The choice of using

French thus accentuates the fact that immigrants do not speak their native language in the film. Consequently, the viewer must consider that a frequent challenge for immigrants is having to learn a second language to navigate the foreign society in which they find themselves. This challenge faced by immigrants leads to a value judgment in the viewer's mind about an immigrant's ability to adapt to French society; however, this is not an idea that would necessarily arise in the viewer while listening to native French speakers.

What is ultimately interesting about the role of speech in *Mémoires d'immigrés* is its hybrid nature: the speech of immigrants is to some extent emancipatory, as they are placed front and center facing the camera and directed straight at the viewer, while Benguigui's speech is erased and cannot be identified. The decision to speak in French is also a tool to make the voices of the immigrant population in France heard, but this same speech highlights the inevitable disparity between the French of native speakers and that of second-language speakers. Perhaps it reveals the hybrid nature of Benguigui's identity herself, oscillating constantly between her foreign family origins and her existence in France. As a child of Maghrebi immigrants like those she interviewed, she is often considered foreign to traditional French cultures; however, having grown up in France, it is the society to which she belongs. She even insists in an interview that she maintains a certain detachment from her parents' country of origin, Algeria, and acknowledges that France is her motherland (Mosher 97). Furthermore, considering the use of French in the film, she and the children in the third episode belong to the category of native speakers, exemplifying a process of integration. On the other hand, completely freeing immigrants' speech would be a total transgression towards the dominant French culture to which she belongs, a rejection of the idea of integration, an act which Benguigui would be unwilling to commit as a French citizen.

Mary Ann Doane's article "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space" is in direct conversation with Bonitzer's theories, seeking to expand upon them by further explaining how and where voice operates in cinema, specifically as it pertains to the reconstituted body which Doane refers to as the *fantasmatic* body (33-34). What is most important to extract from Doane's article is her conceptualization of cinematic spaces, for which she defines three: the space of the diegesis, the visible space of the screen and the acoustical space of the theater (39). With this conception of spaces, however, Doane considers mainly how voice-off functions in classical narrative (i.e. fiction). On the other hand, Doane limits her consideration of documentary to how it pertains to voice-over, much like Bonitzer. This leads one to wonder how voice-off might function in documentary film according to these cinematic spaces and how it might differ in terms of the effect from the use of voice-off in fiction films.

Doane initially describes the traditional use of voice-off as "[…] a denial of the frame as a limit and an affirmation of the unity and homogeneity of the depicted space" (37-38). She continues by stating, "[f]or the screen limits what *can be seen* of the diegesis (there is always "more" of the diegesis than the camera can cover at any one time)" (38). In other words, voice-off implies the existence of the diegesis of a film that expands limitlessly beyond the borders of the screen, as the source of the voice is interpreted as simply being located outside the view of the camera. Doane further explains, "[t]he voice-off deepens the diegesis, gives it an extent to which it exceeds that of the image, and thus supports the claim that there is a space in the fictional world which the camera does not register" (40). As it relates to fiction film, this effect of voice-off is then invaluable since it contributes to an overall sense of legitimacy of the diegesis, allowing the viewer to feel immersed in the fictional universe and fully invested in the emotion of various characters. Doane acknowledges, nevertheless, that the use of voice-off risks revealing

the material heterogeneity of the cinema (40). In attempts to push the viewer's sense of the diegesis beyond what is depicted on-screen, they could also become aware of the heterogeneous nature of the medium of cinema, disrupting the illusion of being immersed in what is most often a fictional universe.

Regarding documentary, would it be possible, then, to apply the same logic? If diegesis for a fictional film refers to its depiction of its story-world or story-universe both visually and audibly, would the concept of diegesis for a documentary refer to what humans might generally agree to be our objective reality? If so, the use of voice-off in documentary would not necessarily be as effective, assuming the viewer adheres to the concept of existing in a collective reality in which all elements of the documentary also exist. In other words, how could voice-off expand the viewer's sense of the diegesis which is our reality, contained in a universe that is forever-expanding, scientifically speaking?

For a given documentary film, the use of voice-off does not contribute to any illusion of the expanse of a diegesis which is fictional but, instead, directly unveils the heterogeneous nature of the cinema. Through voice-off, the viewer must be considerate of the reality in which we all exist; to be considerate of this reality is to be aware of its unlimited potential for nuance, complexity, and contradiction in everything one might observe. Voice-off for certain documentaries is problematic if their goal is to present a specific, coherent message or an interpretation of events as indisputably factual and objective. For if the fiction film seeks to expand its diegesis as much as possible to immerse the viewer in the illusion of an independent story-universe, the message-driven documentary seeks to bring the viewer to understand a particular element of our expansive reality in a reductive manner. In this regard, whereas the fiction film might generally desire to add as much detail as possible about its diegesis, rendering

its story immersive and worthy of the viewer's attention, certain documentaries would act selectively, molding specific information into a coherent thesis.

In consideration of *Mémoires d'immigrés*, the concept of documentary reducing the diegesis, which happens to be our collective reality, is crystallized when thinking of Benguigui's historiographic desires. *Mémoires d'immigrés* was novel at the time of its release, giving a voice to individuals who experienced first-hand immigration from North Africa to France and all that followed as a way of shedding light on what could be considered up until that point an underrepresented part of France's history in the 20th century. Benguigui took it upon herself to inscribe this history into our collective knowledge through the medium of cinema; moreover, as the inscriber, she is also the one who writes the formal history of the event. As the writer of this history, Benguigui was obligated to be selective in terms of what she depicts, as in what parts of the history she recounts. Despite the documentary's extensive runtime, Benguigui could have never conveyed the endlessly varying immigrant experience in its entirety.

Doane's conception of the effects of voice-off coincides with Benguigui's decision to avoid its use in *Mémoires d'immigrés*; if voice-off expands the viewer's awareness of the complexities of a diegesis, in the context of a documentary which intends to develop a concise understanding of a moment in history in the viewer, one would avoid voice-off which could undermine this goal by evoking an awareness of the complexities of a historical event which took place in our collective reality. In other words, in *Mémoires d'immigrés* Benguigui elects to maintain the limits of the frame by erasing all traces of voice-off. Although, this avoidance of voice-off produces the inverse effect regarding the limits of the frame that Doane describes; this avoidance seems to share the ideal of homogeneity which fiction films attempt to achieve using voice-off. As cited above, Doane recognizes the contradictory effects of voice-off where it can

serve the appearance of homogeneity of a film by expanding the diegesis beyond the frame, but it also risks revealing the heterogeneous nature of the cinema by drawing attention to the fact that the source for voices and sounds differs from that of images (38, 40). In the case of *Mémoires d'immigrés,* the risk of exposing the film's heterogeneity outweighed any benefits afforded by voice-off.

To expand on this idea of homogeneity in documentary, one must also acknowledge that a fiction film and a documentary do not necessarily achieve it with the same approach. In a fiction film, by adding acoustic elements both diegetic and non-diegetic, the viewer's immersion into the diegesis is increased, mainly because these acoustic elements contribute to what Bill Nichol's describes as realism in his book, *Representing Reality*, which I will go into further in the next chapter. It suffices to acknowledge here simply that Nichols describes three main types of realism (empirical, psychological, and historical), all of which could be supported through the acoustic elements of a film (170-175). For example, if the narrative of a film takes place in a busy urban area, all the featured diegetic sounds, such as cars honking in the street, police sirens, overheard conversations of people on the sidewalk, construction noises, etc., would contribute to the sense of empirical realism. If the protagonist of said film also happened to be rushing through the crowded urban space to prevent some kind of crime from occurring, for instance, and if a non-diegetic musical score which was intense and suspenseful was added, then that music would contribute to the psychological realism of the film. Lastly, though probably occurring less often with acoustic elements, if the film was set in New York City in the 1970s and if one imagined that police sirens happened to sound different than they do now, that detail featured in the film would contribute to its historical realism. In other words, these elements help to render what is shown in the film to feel more "real" or believable to the viewer. Consequently, the viewer only

considers the fully integrated diegetic world, albeit from an often-omniscient perspective where they can more easily grasp characters' emotional states because of aspects such as psychological realism. This specifically refers to works of fiction where the viewer must be convinced enough to emotionally engage with the imagined scenario and ignore the heterogenetic elements of cinema, i.e. how the film is made and presented; however, since the diegesis of a documentary would be our collective reality, would not all aspects of the documentary, including the means of producing it and presenting it, belong under the same homogeneous umbrella which is reality? In documentary, there is no heterogeneity to be masked for the benefit of the impression of the homogeneity of the diegesis, as is the case with fiction. Instead, the "diegesis" is our reality, in which also exists the cinema apparatus as well as all those involved in the production of the documentary. Within the confines of the theater, there is no heterogeneity between the diegesis, the acoustic space, and the visual space, unlike how Doane explains in her article (39).

In effacing Benguigui's acoustic presence to avoid drawing attention to the heterogeneity of the film, and, in doing so, emphasizing what appears to be the homogeneity of the film's diegesis, *Mémoires d'immigrés* works to mask an element (heterogeneity) which is technically irrelevant in documentary cinema; however, if one supposes that Benguigui drew more inspiration from fiction films, hence desiring to avoid placing any attention on the cinema apparatus from in within the "diegesis," she would, then, be obligated to recreate this situation of the play between homogeneity and heterogeneity and of isolating and emphasizing the diegesis.

Finally, to adhere to these principles, it seems the film needed to construct its own diegesis, which would become what is presented in the film as a contained history possessing a definitive start date, concrete causes, and universal experiences. It is possibly the nature of most historic documentaries, especially those which rely on interviews and limited archival footage.

The historic documentary is generally obligated to construct its own diegesis to effectively present a moment in history; however, such a statement could be challenged, especially when considering a concept on the function of archives like Jaimie Baron's "archive effect" (which I will examine in detail in chapter three). For the use of archives can easily disrupt homogeneity in a documentary, likely drawing attention to many qualitative differences between the archives and the original footage of the film (such as differences in image and sound quality or in historic detail); although, perhaps the sense of homogeneity in historic documentaries is retained more easily, even with the use of archives, based on the viewer's expectations. The viewer may be excepting of the "existence" of archives within the diegesis of a historic documentary.[3]

For documentaries which take place in what one may call the present or the recent past, there is the benefit of the viewer possessing some understanding of the context of the time period in which the subject of the film is set, whether because the viewer personally lived through the moment in history or because it is analogous enough to their own experiences and conceptions of reality. For a documentary set in the more distant past, most, if not all, of the context must be developed and explained, like how a work of fiction must start with nothing, then invent and provide the viewer with all pertinent details.

Both *Les Glaneurs* and *Nous* benefit from being made in the relevantly recent past, and, more importantly, focus on current situations in French society which the films were able to capture in real-time and on-location. As a result, neither film shows much concern for the containment of a moment in history, which would require an isolated diegesis in which all

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[3] This idea could be elaborated further, perhaps drawing from Stephen Neale's work on genre and assumptions of genre, if documentary could be considered a genre.

relevant information is presented. Without a reliance on a separate diegesis, both films can liberally use voice-over and voice-off without affecting any sense of homogeneity, as it is irrelevant. When applying Doane's concept to documentary, one realizes that the "rules" for the three heterogenous spaces are inverted. Nichols arrives at the same observation, which he uses to define the characteristics of documentary realism (*Representing Reality* 180-185). Consequently, voice-over and voice-off in documentary could also be used to enhance the sense of realism by bringing attention to the cinema apparatus.

The Emphatic Voice

Throughout *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, Varda uses both voice-over and voice-off as effective tools for providing and directing the information presented. In some instances, the use of one occurs immediately after the use of the other, causing them to be indistinguishable. Likewise, in certain moments, given the difference in quality of the audio for Varda's voice-off when she asks someone a question and that of the audio from the person who responds, the voice-off seems to have been redubbed in postproduction, which would technically make it a voice-over, presumably to improve the quality and to make the question more audible. This difference could have serious consequences, for instance, if the voice-off that poses a question in the original was replaced by a voice-over posing a different question, it could entirely change the nature of the response, skewing the intention of the one speaking in frame. In any case, it would be difficult to know whether Varda made such a change; thus, one must trust Varda to be a filmmaker acting in good faith who did not alter her questions in postproduction.

Varda begins her film with expository voice-over, presenting to the viewer the concept of gleaning. In these first moments, the voice-over resembles Bonitzer's descriptions. Indeed, Varda

speaks on gleaning from the comfortably ambiguous position of off-screen. Using a series of shots of a dictionary on the page featuring the definition of "glean," Varda summarizes the entry and quickly references the paintings of gleaners by Jean-François Millet. Then, truly acting as the *voix maître,* Varda guides the film to the Musée d'Orsay where one of Millet's originals is held. Varda's voice acts like the force which conjures the film into existence and, simultaneously, guides its trajectory. Following the brief sequence which depicts visitors in front of Millet's painting at the museum, there is a cut to a woman who describes how she gleaned as a child in the fields with her mother. This testimony progresses without any interjection from Varda who is also not seen in the frame; however, at the end of this sequence, as the woman finishes giving her testimony, from behind the camera, Varda thanks the woman for her participation. This instance, while not necessarily having an impact on the rest of the film, is particularly significant. It is the first use of voice-off. Since Varda's voice is used both as voice-over and voice-off, the voice-off immediately undermines the position and authority of the voice-over*,* which had just been established in the preceding sequence. Henceforth in the film, the voice-over never regains its dominant position because the voice used for the voice-off reveals that Varda is a physical being who exists within the space of the film. Returning to voice-over cannot reestablish its position since Varda's voice has been recognized as a participant who interacts with the subjects. The film, therefore, reveals in one way how the problem of voice-over as *voix maître* may be resolved. In *Le Regard et la voix*, Bonitzer writes: "[…] … la voix off interdit les questions de son énonciateur, de son lieu et de son temps. Le commentaire, en informant l'image, l'image en se laissant investir par le commentaire, censurent de telles questions" (33). Certainly, Varda's initial use of voice-over acts as the entity which speaks for the image; however, the voice-off, which reveals itself from behind the camera in the second sequence and which continues to

express itself through the film, is a voice which does not comment on the image and, rather, inhabits the same space that the image depicts, only out of frame. Unlike the voice-over described by Bonitzer, the voice-off functions primarily by asking questions which serve as the bridge between subject and filmmaker. This is to suggest that the voice-off acts as a counterbalance to the voice-over when they are used in tandem in a film, though it seems a less common stylistic choice. Beyond recognizing this effect, what could explain Varda's decision to use both voice-over and voice-off? Voice-over must be recognized as possessing a unique influence over a film, which would be principally expository. Voice-over offers commentary thereby guiding what details the viewer receives and how they receive them. Therefore, Varda uses voice-over as a tool to speak directly to the viewer and subsequently affect their attention. Conversely, Varda counters the use of voice-over with voice-off, as well as by appearing in the frame on occasion, so that she is also implicated within the film's narrative. She refuses to hide within the ambiguous space of authority where the *voix maître* operates.

Beyond voice-over and voice-off being used in tandem to undermine the *voix maître*, Varda's specific application of voice-over also disarms it in different ways. For example, in a sequence which features the young chef, Edouard Loubet, whilst preparing a meal in the kitchen, Varda in voice-over paraphrases a question concerning what he does with left over ingredients. If what had followed this initial comment was Varda again in voice-over, paraphrasing Loubet's response, the authority of the voice-over would have been validated; to ask and answer a question would be another form of dominating commentary over the image. Varda, however, permits Loubet to offer his own response, which he does while still cooking. Even more importantly, Loubet looks far to the right off-screen, presumably to where the physical Varda stands within the space; thus, her voice-over proves to be permissive, allowing the image "to

speak for itself," or, at least, allowing the subject in the image to speak for himself. This permissive gesture also destroys the usually untouchable and superior position of the voice-over outside both the space within the documentary and the space where the film is shown; this is the case because the voice-over virtually elicits an interaction with the subject. While it can only be an indirect interaction, it is still significant because it acknowledges that both the voice-over and the subject can be placed on the same conceptual plane. Lastly, in terms of the interaction, as Loubet almost certainty responds to the off-screen Varda, this clear positioning, while being a visual indication, also takes away from the authority of the voice-over because it reiterates the voice-over's link to the physical, locatable Varda.

The Reserved Voice

In *Nous,* Diop makes use of both voice-over and voice-off. Although, in contrast to *Les Glaneurs*, the use of both is limited rather than prevalent. For instance, Diop strictly uses voice-over in sequences that feature archival footage of her parents. Voice-over is almost never employed in the footage made for the film when individual subjects are present. Like the strategy of alternating between voice-over and voice-off, Diop's conservative use of voice-over also restricts its authority over the film and its subjects. This is true as it is used only with personal archival footage, as in the footage of her parents which belongs to Diop's family. Diop uses voice-over judiciously, choosing only to provide commentary over images that a specifically linked to her past experiences. In this sense, the only individuals for whom she speaks are her two parents, now deceased. To put it simply, Diop chooses only to use voice-over as how it would occur "naturally" in real life: one can imagine Diop commenting on images of her mother and father while flipping through a family photo album in the same way that she comments on

the footage of her parents. It is an example of voice-over that does not speak for individuals who could otherwise speak for themselves; therefore, it cannot be considered as a dominating force in the way that Bonitzer describes. As will be revealed in the following chapters, it is apparent that this justified use of voice-over aligns with Diop's overall stylistic approach to the film, as she searches for the most morally sound methods of observation.

Similarly, the use of voice-off is limited, but to an even greater extent. In fact, there is only one example of voice-off in the film. It occurs at the end of a sequence which depicts the routine of Ismael, an undocumented immigrant originally from Mali who works as a car mechanic. For almost the entirety of the sequence, there is no voice-off from Diop nor any other interaction between her and Ismael; however, once Ismael finishes a phone conversation with his mother where he speaks generally on his current situation, Diop speaks to him from behind the camera. There is not much to explain why only this moment of voice-off is featured in the film, especially since Diop commits to an observational and unintrusive style. The use of voice-off goes counter to the commitment which otherwise remains consistent throughout the film. The only reason it is featured is because Ismael initiates the interaction with Diop which subsequently invites her to ask certain questions for context following the phone conversation, such as asking where exactly his mother lives in Mali. While the extra context elicited by the voice-off is informative for the viewer to have a better of idea of Ismael's background, it does not seem necessary to the film. In fact, in most other sequences, all lacking voice-off, Diop prefers to limit the context as much as possible beyond what can be understood through silent observation.

Chapter 2: Image

Inverting the Techniques of Realism in Documentary

By "image," I am referring to all that the viewer *sees* on-screen; however, without certain precisions, "image" might seem too general of a term. More specifically, I wish to consider first and foremost how the quality of the "image," as in the collection of images used in each film, corresponds to the gaze of the filmmaker. Although in many instances, especially in the case of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,* the filmmaker is literally behind the camera as its operator and faithfully replicating her gaze as the image seen in the film, it cannot be assumed that the image always reveals the literal vantage point of the filmmaker. In fact, each film used multiple camera operators; thus, the images at a given moment could relate to the vantage point of one of many individuals. Nevertheless, as the filmmakers exercised a certain level of authority in the production of these films, consenting to all the images featured in the final cut, I can assume that the images ultimately correspond to the subjective gaze of the filmmakers, be it literal or figurative. In analyzing the gaze of the filmmaker through the qualities of the image, I intend, above all else, to consider the role of each filmmaker. In doing so, I hope to reveal how the role of the filmmaker varies from film to film, and what consequences these variations of the role of the filmmaker may produce — specifically, consequences relating to the treatment and depiction of the individuals featured in each film.

As is the nature of cinema, as described by Robert Bresson in his *Notes sur le cinématographe*[4], images in cinema do not exist on their own; rather, cinema almost always makes use of images in a sequence, which is generally considered an element of film editing. In this sense, to consider examples of the image on their own, as if placed in a vacuum, would be counterproductive to understanding how it functions in each film. In making a broad consideration of the nature of the image, it is necessary to understand, for example, how one shot transitions to the next, as in the techniques of editing employed. Thus, I will also closely consider elements of editing in this chapter. While editing as it pertains to the transition among images is treated similarly in fiction and documentary cinema, it is important to remark how the effects of editing and, more generally, the "image" differ depending on whether appearing in fiction or documentary. It is most useful to refer to descriptions of realism in cinema, particularly of "documentary realism," presented by Bill Nichols in his book, *Representing Reality.* On the distinction of how realism functions in fiction versus in documentary, Nichols writes:

> In fiction, realism serves to make a plausible world seem real; in documentary, realism serves to make an argument about the historical world persuasive. Realism in fiction is a self-effacing style, one that de-emphasizes the process of its construction. … The "vision" of the documentarist is more likely a question of voice: how a personal point of view about the historical world manifests itself. (165)

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[4] "Il faut qu'une image se transforme au contact d'autres images comme une couleur au contact d'autres couleurs. Un bleu n'est pas le même bleu à côté d'un vert, d'un jaune, d'un rouge. Pas d'art sans transformation" (Bresson 16).

Per Nichols, the goal of realism in fiction is to attempt to conceal aspects of the cinema apparatus from the viewer so that the illusion it presents may be more immersive and convincing. For documentary, however, as everything it depicts takes place in our collective reality, to conceal the fact that it is a film, that depictions of our reality pass through a medium to be presented to the viewer, is unnecessary. As Nichols suggests, counter to realism in fiction a sense of realism in documentary is even emphasized by bringing the viewer's attention to the fact that they are watching a film. Nichols writes:

> Realist style undergoes an inversion in documentary. Rather than bringing the sensibilities and vision of the filmmaker to the fore, it situates the filmmaker in the historical world. The helpless, accidental, humane, interventionist, and professional gazes testify less to a metaphorical vision of the world than to the real presence of the filmmaker in the face of historical events beyond his or her control. (184)

What would be considered as going against the development of a sense of realism in fiction regarding the image and other aspects of production, such as an unstable/handheld camera, characters acknowledging the camera and the filmmaker/crew, the lack of continuity editing (which generally seeks to conceal the transition from one image to the next and the mixing of sounds), etc., when featured in documentary, these qualities can contribute to a sense of realism by emphasizing the presence of the filmmaker at a particular historical event, therefore seeming authentic or truthful. Likewise, when the gaze of the filmmaker is acknowledged or made obvious, it can contribute to the viewer's awareness that an individual (the filmmaker) or a group (the crew) were present in a real time and space to produce the footage. This is particularly true in the case of Varda in *Les Glaneurs,* but also in her other films, where she insists on her

presence being felt both behind and in-front of the camera, emphasizing her role as filmmaker and participant.

Conversely, for *Mémoires d'immigrés*, Benguigui approached the making of her documentary with the principle of self-effacement on all levels. As she explicitly expressed in her interview with Olivier Barlet in the journal *Africultures*: " … c'est ma façon de réaliser mes documentaires. Je crois qu'ainsi, la personne est avec vous : il n'y a pas quelqu'un au milieu, pas d'intermédiaire ! De la même façon, il n'y a pas de commentaires" (Barlet, *africultures.com*). After which she goes on to say: "… j'avais un regard plus cinématographique que reportage. … On y rentre comme dans un film." By "cinématographique" Benguigui implies wanting to achieve a sense realism in fiction per Nichols; moreover, the equating of her "cinematic" approach in *Mémoires d'immigrés* to the qualities of realism in fiction confirms Nichols' description of an effacing style, dissimilar to the qualities of documentary realism. Nevertheless, it is not as if *Mémoires d'immigrés* resembles the typical fiction film since, for example, it does not depict a narrative with characters and dialogue. Even during an initial viewing without knowing anything about the film, given its dependence on interviews and archival footage, the viewer would recognize it as a documentary. It does not suffice to claim that Benguigui's film simply replicates the sort of realism one can find in fiction films; instead, the film serves as an example of what Nichols would call a documentary with a "zero-degree" style; as in "(a) style (that) effaces itself sometimes in favor of the domain of individuated characters … generally in favor of the historical world and the representations made about it … " (174).

Beyond the erasure of Benguigui's own voice, one finds examples of this "zero-degree" style in the image. Firstly, as a strategy to prepare the viewer for the onset of each interview with one of the immigrants, Benguigui makes use of B-roll footage, as in supplementary footage of a

location and/or of a subject in a location. Benguigui does not employ the same strategy for interviews with state officials, however. For instance, in the episode of *Les Pères*, the interview with Khémais Dabous is prefaced by a panoramic bird's eye shot that sweeps across the exterior of an automobile manufacturing plant; this shot gently crossfades to a medium shot of the silhouette of whom the viewer will soon learn to be Dabous who faces away from the camera, gazing from a window oversaturated by daylight. This shot quickly crossfades to a longer shot, revealing Dabous to be seated at a table, still gazing out the window presumably of his apartment. Within this brief sequence of images, the desire to maintain an effacing style is evident. In fading from one shot to the next, for example, the abruptness of a direct cut is avoided, suggesting a calm entry into the space which Dabous occupies[5]. The transition from the panoramic shot to Dabous' silhouette also implies a matching of his gaze in the form of shot-reverse shot, where it is implied that the bird's eye view of the plant is what Dabous sees from his apartment[6]. Likewise, the gentle fade from the silhouette to a more distanced view of Dabous maintains spatial continuity while revealing his physical situation. As a result, the viewer is led with maximum subtlety into Dabous' personal space, first revealing his distant surroundings (the plant), then revealing his immediate surroundings (the apartment). This sequence creates what Nichols might describe as psychological realism, which "[…] conveys the sense of a plausible,

[5] It should also be acknowledged that a traditional use of fading between shots was to suggest a spatial or temporal ellipse, hence the feeling of a calm or subtle entry into Dabous' space.

[6] Likewise, this is another traditional editing technique which helps create spatial and temporal cohesion.

believable, and accurate representation of human perception and emotion" (171). The viewer is aligned principally with Dabous' perception of his surrounding area, creating a sense of realism[7].

By this traditional and recognizable approach (which also makes it highly effective) to introducing the viewer to Dabous through the alignment of perception, the quality of the image is understood as effacing the presence of the filmmaker and the acknowledgement of the film itself. One could imagine, for instance, an inverse approach to preface Dabous' interview where Benguigui arrives at his apartment followed by a camera operator who records the proceedings in one continuous shot. While this approach would still manage to situate Dabous in a physical space, the viewer would be made aware of the presence of Benguigui, literally visible in-frame, as well as the fact that they are viewing a film due to the persistent movement of the camera. There would be no sense of psychological realism in alignment with Dabous as the viewer would maintain a level of awareness of the cinema apparatus above all else. With this imagined opposite approach to introducing Dabous, there would not necessarily be a lack of realism. On the contrary, this approach would likely contribute to the sense of documentary realism as cited above. What is most important to acknowledge here is not that Benguigui achieves a higher or more appropriate sense of realism, but that her strategy aims to produce a sense of realism that is associated more with fiction than with documentary.

Although there are countless examples of this effacing style throughout the film, another noteworthy sequence occurs in the episode of *Les enfants*. In the first moments of an interview

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[7] This is the conclusion as it pertains to the traditional editing techniques most commonly associated with Hollywood cinema, used to create continuity and transparency as well as enhance the viewers' identification with characters in fiction film.

with the author Mounsi which takes place in what could be considered the remnants of a *bidonville*, before his testimony begins, a tracking shot from a handheld camera moves through a doorway into the alley and then crossfades to a static medium shot of a window from the exterior of a building; simultaneously, Mounsi's voice is overheard on the soundtrack, describing the space where he lived as a child. Then, there is a crossfade to a distant static shot, revealing Mounsi seated next to an older man in the interior of the building. The shot uses aperture framing, as in the two men are shown within the door frame of the building. Then, there is a cut-in to a closer shot of the men in the same position where the doorframe is still visible at the right edge of the frame, maintaining the sense of the aperture framing. With this cut, there is also a very subtle match-on-action, where the older man begins to speak and is shown opening his mouth in the first shot, after which the cut to the second shot maintains his action as he speaks to Mounsi. The conversation ends with a close-up of Mounsi which immediately zooms out to show him seated in the same space, but through a window from the exterior of the building: another example of aperture framing.

In this precursor to the interview, much like with Dabous, the shot selection places Mounsi in a specific space, which ultimately primes the viewer for the situation and subject matter of the interview. Again, the shots contribute to a sense of the realism most often observed in fiction. Although, the featuring of a handheld tracking shot would not appear to follow the general conceptions of realism in fiction, as in the imagined example for Dabous, since the constant movements of the camera could contribute to making the viewer aware of the camera itself as well as of the individual holding it. In this example, however, the shot in combination with Mounsi's voice contributes to the sense of psychological realism. This is because Mounsi's voice is the principle human element (neither Mounsi nor anyone else is visible in the frame). In

addition, as the shaky movements of the handheld camera suggest human movement (as in the steps of the camera operator cause the camera to shake), the film elicits the feeling that the viewer shares Mounsi's subjective viewpoint as he walks into the *bidonville*. Likewise, this handheld camera movement could not be considered an example of documentary realism because the presence of the filmmaker and the crew is still downplayed throughout the film. Only if the viewer felt Benguigui's presence more prominently would this shot bring attention to the cinema apparatus which creates these images. Instead, it is psychological realism which dominates.

With the shots that follow, rather than continue to develop psychological realism, there is more of a focus on empirical realism which Nichols describes as, " … devoted to the accumulation of factual detail and the accurate placement of characters and objects within specific milieus" (170). Empirical realism is developed when details such as decor, props, costume as well as setting and characters' placement within it (for instance recreating a well-known photo), all contribute to a sense of historical accuracy. In this sense, by showing Mounsi in conversation with another man, who is presumably a longtime resident of the *bidonville*, Benguigui emphasizes the accuracy or authenticity of the space. This is especially true when considering how the shots make use of aperture framing. Whereas the same conversation between the men could have been shown in close-ups, de-emphasizing the details of the surrounding space, it is the aperture framing which maintains the viewer's awareness of this space. In addition, with this awareness comes the recognition of the details which lend to the authenticity of the space.

With this recognition of psychological and empirical realism, the sense of the effacing "zero-degree" style is not fully understood. For this, it is necessary to consider the distance from

the subjects in the shots, yet the "zero-degree" style is related to the development of empirical realism because, to achieve aperture framing, distance is typically required. With this distance, along with the revealing of accurate spatial detail, there is also a sense of the absence of intrusion on the part of the filmmaker and, by extension, of the viewer. In addition, there is a sense of authenticity by maintaining a distance in the observation of the two men's conversation. The men are shown together, in close quarters, in what seems to be organic positions, while the camera remains outside of the building. There are no inserts of close-ups from within the space nor any over-the-shoulder shots. Their conversation does not appear composed or planned; there is a sense that the conversation was improvised and captured in real time.

So, why does Benguigui opt for realism as recognized in fiction rather than develop a style corresponding to documentary realism? Like her treatment of voices, including the intentional absence of her own, the avoidance of documentary realism and the pursuit of psychological and empirical realism within the framework of a "zero-degree" style is related to a desire for control. If, for example, whether explicitly expressed or hidden, the *voix maître*, to use Bonitzer's term, is the position from which Benguigui controls all that is heard in her film, perhaps, she also maintains control of all that is seen with a *regard maître*. As how Benguigui conceals the presence of the *voix maître* in the sound mix and editing, she conceals her *regard maître* by shrouding it in realism. Nevertheless, this approach to realism betrays her because it is one which was developed in fiction and does not contribute to documentaries in the same way. For if the strategies to develop a sense of realism in fiction is to hide the cinema apparatus in hopes of supporting the viewer's engagement with the work as fiction, these strategies obscure reality when used in documentary. In the context of Doane's essay, *The Voice of Cinema,* the traditional use of sound and image in narrative (fiction) cinema contributes to the sense of

homogeneity and dominance of the diegesis (the fictional world), downplaying the literal heterogeneity of the cinema which is also comprised of the visible space of the screen and the acoustic space of the theater (39-40). In this way, realism in fiction is also a tactic which serves this end: to emphasize the elements in a fiction film which seem real. The viewer is immersed in the illusion of the diegesis, distracting them from our collective reality in which one watches a film. In *Mémoires d'immigrés*, as a work of non-fiction, the downplaying of reality (as in the reality of producing a film, which requires a crew) benefits the construction of a separate contained diegesis, over which the filmmaker has complete control. This is particularly beneficial to Benguigui's goal to recount a moment in history which is contained and concise, permitting the viewer to draw concrete conclusion about the Maghrebi immigrant experience. Benguigui uses this approach of depicting those in the film and maintains a strong control over these depictions to ultimately construct a broad and definitive statement about Maghrebi immigration. This notion is illustrated by Nichols in a table that he provides which defines three categories of film, one of which is for "Classic Hollywood"[8]. With this category, he associates the development of a single, unitary world (the diegesis) along with the use of style, plot, and traditional realism, which contribute to the viewer's interpretation of a single moral. Benguigui engages in the development of realism through approaches to editing most associated with Hollywood to develop what one could also understand as a single moral related to the Maghrebi immigrant experience.

Redefining techniques of Realism in Documentary

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[8] See the table on page 166 of *Representing Reality.*

It would not be an exaggeration to state that *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* takes a drastically different approach than *Mémoires d'immigrés* in terms of the image. To state it plainly, one would be hard-pressed to find examples in the film which adhere to qualities of realism in fiction as discussed above. This is not to say that Varda lacks concern for the quality of the images or the ways in which they interact. In fact, one may notice several uses of techniques in filming and editing which other films would employ to create a sense of realism. For example, on many occasions, one can find the same technique of matches-on-action which I cited in *Mémoires d'immigrés*; the principal difference between the use of this technique in both films, however, is that *Mémoires d'immigrés* uses it to maintain spatial continuity, whereas *Les Glaneurs* uses it to associate images from different contexts. Specifically, near the start of the film, there is a sequence of images edited together in rapid succession and set to a hip-hop song which also features lyrics about urban gleaning and foraging. Each image features an unidentifiable individual who is hunched over to pick up various items left over after a street market. Their posture is the common element with which Varda associates the posture of traditional gleaners in the fields in several paintings. As the sequence goes from one image to the next, Varda matches the movements of each individual: as one person reaches out to pick something up, there is a cut to the next image which shows another person making the same movement. This match-on-action is repeated several more times, giving an impression of fluid motion throughout the sequence. Indeed, fluidity is the main concern when implementing a match-on-action in almost every context, yet this example differs from its traditional usage, which seeks to produce a fluidity in the cut between two shots which are centered on the same character or object that happens to be in motion. By creating a fluid transition of shots for a single character, the match-on-action helps to maintain continuity. It maintains spatial continuity,

where the viewer's attention on a character is not lost from one shot to the next as they can immediately resituate the character in the same space, only from a different vantage point, thanks to the fluidity of motion. In many instances, when well-executed, the typical match-on-action allows the cut between two shots to go unnoticed by the viewer (another way in which continuity is an effacing approach to style). In the example from *Les Glaneurs*, however, there is no intention to maintain spatial continuity as the matches-on-action occur between different "characters" across separate spaces. While the technique still lends to creating a fluid sequence, softening the transition between images, it does not make the cuts undetectable. Thus, the sequence does not seek to produce a sense of realism through editing for spatial continuity.

So, what does this sequence seek to produce? The matches-on-action underline the reoccurrence of a specific gesture among many people, which implies that the desire to glean is intrinsic to human nature. Acting purely as a device to make associations among several images, the function is symbolic rather than practical in terms of continuity. Furthermore, in subverting the traditional use of match-on-action, emphasizing the gesture among several people, the technique brings attention to the film itself as it rapidly associates these people across many spaces. Since this is a unique quality of cinema, when experiencing this rapid association, the viewer must be aware that they are watching a film. Finally, through this awareness, which would typically be something to avoid in fiction, hence the development of traditional realism, *Les Glaneurs* capitalizes precisely on Nichols' notion of documentary realism.

There are many more aspects of the film which contribute to documentary realism, but what is perhaps the most effective technique is the presence of Varda herself. More than simply appearing within the frame, Varda's presence is expressed in one inventive way: it is the appearance of her hand within the frame which she films herself. Her hand enters the frame in

many sequences, like when she reaches down to collect heart-shaped potatoes left behind after the harvest, or as she pans the camera over a couple postcard-sized reprints of a Rembrandt self-portrait which she purchased while in Japan. Although, the most notable example of all is sequence in which Varda playfully "catches" semi-trucks on the highway. This sequence begins with a long shot across a green field with ominous rain clouds gathering above the horizon. In the foreground, grass and cars rapidly pass across the frame from right to left, indicating to the viewer that the shot is from within a moving vehicle. Then there is a cut to another shot from within the moving vehicle; this shot only lasts for about a half second. Despite its short duration, this shot is quite significant as it features a reflection in the side mirror of the vehicle which occupies roughly the bottom third of the frame, showing Varda who is leaning out the passenger side window and recording the shot with her camcorder. Although her presence has been maintained throughout the film with voice-over and voice-off as well as with her appearance in the frame, this moment re-emphasizes it for the viewer. This is especially impactful as the following shots repeat a shot composition which has appeared several times prior. Specifically, the shots that follow are from the vantage point of the passenger side of a moving car on the highway looking at other vehicles, mainly large trucks. Beyond revealing Varda's presence in the frame, the brief shot of her in the side mirror and the shots that follow of a familiar composition underline her continuous presence as the filmmaker. By revealing her position behind the camera and by revealing how the following shots were made, the viewer can retroactively imagine Varda's position in many of the preceding shots as well as recognize her position in the rest of the film. This renders the viewer acutely aware of the Varda's presence and position as well as to recognize that they share her perspective from behind the camera. This awareness contributes to a sense of documentary realism as the viewer understands they are seeing images from an

individualized perspective, as in from one specific person. To recognize the unique, individual perspective is to also acknowledge the individual who created the images by moving through our collective reality.

What about Varda's hand? In a similar way, the presence of her hand within the frame reiterates what I have just described: it helps to maintain the viewer's awareness of Varda as the filmmaker, subsequently heightening the sense of documentary realism as it underlines the presence of Varda in the act of making a film within and about our collective reality. More could be said about her hand in this specific sequence as it pertains to documentary realism. Shot after shot Varda reaches into the frame to attempt to "catch" the passing trucks, which she refers to as being just for play. With each attempt, Varda's hand symbolizes documentary cinema because it exemplifies how the making of any documentary, i.e. recording reality, involves a certain level of embellishment from the filmmaker whether excessive or subtle. Even as Varda's subjective perspective is emphasized by the mirror shot, if one still tried to suppose the possibility of objectively observing the trucks on the highway, this idea is immediately refuted by the intrusion of Varda's hand. Varda simply does not allow the viewer to assume any objectivity in the image. That said, promoting the subjective nature of the film or of any documentary does not adversely affect the sense of realism in the context of documentary cinema. Ultimately, to recognize the inherent subjectivity is to contribute to the sense of realism because it acknowledges the inevitably of subjectivity as any film is reliant on an individual's perspective. Conversely, as seen with *Mémoires d'immigrés*, to mask the subjective perspective of the filmmaker risks diminishing the sense of realism. This is because the approach works to isolate a constructed diegesis, severing the subject matter from its origins in our collective reality. This approach often implies a sort of omniscient perspective, or what could be considered objective, for the sake of

presenting what it desires to be accepted as universal truths, such as the collective experience of Maghrebi immigrants; however, omniscience can only be formulated in a vacuum, meaning in fiction, where the filmmaker or author has complete control over all details, being the one who creates them. On the other hand, when drawing from our collective reality, as in to produce a documentary, one must rely on subjective observations, which can vary from one individual to the next. In this process, if one refutes the subjective nature of observation, it can be read as less "realistic" since subjectivity is inevitable. Consequently, to assume an "objective" stance is to promote an experience which is unnatural and inauthentic.

By never abandoning or masking her subjectivity, Varda nurtures a sense of documentary realism. Similarly, there is no reason to doubt or challenge the information which Varda presents in the film, knowing that it stems from a personal observation. Of course, it is possible to challenge or criticize Varda's interpretation of information or her approach to presenting the information, but that would be a debate taking place within the realm of opinions; it would not call into question the authenticity of her subjectivity.

With such an apparent expression of subjectivity, however, what consequences might it produce? Benguigui's attempt to remove her presence in *Mémoires d'immigrés* for the sake of the message, which she wished to communicate without obstruction, ultimately makes the viewer acutely aware of her absence and, consequently, calls into question the authenticity of the presented information; in other words, the presented information comes across as questionable since it lacks a clear author to whom it can be attributed. Conversely, as Varda emphasizes her subjectivity to such a high degree, there is a risk that whatever messages she might intend to communicate in the film become obscured. As several scholars and film critics have already remarked, such as Agnès Calatayud and Mireille Rosello, *Les Glaneurs* could be described as an

autobiography or self-portrait. This description is not surprising, given Varda's subsequent films and series, such as *Les plages d'Agnès* (2008) or *Varda par Agnès* (2019) which are explicitly autobiographical. With Varda's strong interest in self-reflection that communicates itself through her unique subjective style, there is less time and space in the film allowed for its other subject matter, namely the practice of gleaning in modern French society and the propensity to create excessive waste specifically in France. One might wonder, however, if Varda's stylistic choices were any different in the film — if there were less shots of her hand for instance —, would it be considered more productive or thought-provoking. Of course, this is a question of taste as each individual viewer responds to the content of a film in their own manner.

There are two memorable sequences where lawyers explain the legality of gleaning while dressed in their official attire, i.e. their court robes, and standing on-location, i.e. where the act of gleaning may take place. The first sequence shows a male lawyer among several rows of cabbages and clutching a red book containing the entirety of the French civil code, as he explains the precise circumstances for when traditional gleaning in completely legal, even on private property. Recognizing that the law permits only those who are "lacking" the right to glean for sustenance, the lawyer adds that those who glean for pleasure are also protected by the law since pleasure would be judged necessary in one's life. Similarly, in the second sequence, a different lawyer explains the protections afforded by the law to those who reappropriate objects left on the street, which is implied to be a sort of urban gleaning. In the same fashion, she speaks while in her robe and standing outside in front of a large collection of abandoned possessions and holding her civil code. She explains that abandoned objects are recognized as ownerless, and, therefore, taking them for oneself cannot be considered theft. In both sequences, there is nothing that particularly emphasizes Varda's subjectivity in terms of shot selection or camera movement.

Nonetheless, the shot composition for each sequence is quite inventive. A more naturalistic impulse would have most likely have depicted the lawyers from within their offices and seated at their desks, filmed in a taking head style, but Varda's personal artistic flair cannot be refused, resulting in this highly stylized presentation of the legality of gleaning in France. The only explicit aspect of the sequences which emphasizes Varda's presence and her subjectivity is her use of voice-off to ask the lawyers questions, yet her subjectivity is also felt simply in the entertaining circumstances in which the sequences unfold. No doubt, the viewer is aware of the constructed nature of the sequences, recognizing Varda's figurative hand in composing them. Thus, even in moments of the film when Varda is not physically visible, her subjectivity remains evident.

Beyond the elements of composition, these two sequences are significant in terms of rhetorical impact which also relates to Varda's subjectivity. By intentionally featuring the lawyers in a constructed setting and having them legally justify the act of gleaning, Varda reveals her personal conviction. Varda does not mask her intention to express compassion and support for those who glean in any capacity, which is made obvious by this symbolically powerful insistence on one's right to glean and to reuse. That said, there is nothing inherently wrong with this conviction. Indeed, it could be argued, rather easily, those who glean are most often morally superior to those who try to prevent it, at least when it comes to acknowledging the amount of waste produced in society. Nevertheless, by recognizing Varda's conviction, which is embedded in the film, one must also recognize that part of Varda's motivation for the film is to present a case, i.e. to convince the viewer of the merit of gleaning and concern them with society's excesses. This is no radical conclusion; in fact, it falls directly into Nichol's categorization of documentary. He generally describes documentaries as focusing attention on our historical

world, rather than one that is imaginary; from within this context, documentary offers commentary, perspective, and rhetoric via how the filmmaker conceives their film, which leaves the viewer to interpret an argument (166). On the same page, Nichols recognizes that an argument is not exclusively used to persuade the viewer; instead, it may also be reflexive. In any case, both for *Mémoires d'immigrés* and *Les Glaneurs*, each filmmaker appears to present an argument over a topic which is clearly stated. Although, the difference is that Benguigui removes herself from the film while Varda maintains her presence. Both seem to be strategic decisions to enable them to present their arguments as convincingly as possible.

A Balanced Realism in Documentary

What would result if a film diminished this element of presenting an argument, instead emphasizing a feeling of neutrality regardless of the presence of its filmmaker and their subjective perspective? If one considers *Mémoires d'immigrés* to be of a "zero degree" style which erases the presence of the filmmaker and downplays its own existence as a film to create a sense of realism which frames its narrative in a sort of bubble removed from reality, and if one also considers *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* as representing a documentary realist style which subverts traditional realism to emphasize the observation of people and events through the very particular subjectivity of Agnès Varda, *Nous* is a film in between the two in terms of its visual qualities. On one hand, *Nous* takes a "zero degree" or observational approach to depicting people, almost never intruding on the space of any given subject, which seems like an effacing quality and can be interpreted as being neutral. On the other hand, Diop does not repress her presence nor the presence of her crew, who are often acknowledged by the individuals appearing in the frame.

One must wonder for what reason does Diop maintain this observational and unintrusive approach. It is possible that, like Benguigui, she wishes to produce the impression of objectivity by downplaying her visible influence over the film, rendering it impersonal. Unlike Benguigui, however, Diop is not concerned with effacing herself to reduce the sense that there is an intermediary between the subjects on screen and the viewer. Instead, although Diop takes an observational position in filming her subjects, only interacting directly with someone (Ismael) in the frame from behind the camera on one occasion, the film also features sequences where Diop deliberately interjects; this mainly comes in the form of voice-over narration during sequence where Diop prefaces archival footage of her deceased parents. One could not claim, then, that Diop's approach is wholly impersonal nor that she avoids bringing attention to the fact that what is shown in the film comes from her subjective perspective. Conversely, Diop's approach does not place her subjectivity in the forefront in the same way as Varda in *Les Glaneurs*.

As maybe the most illustrative example of to what degree Diop's style can be thought of as observational, one sequence takes place within an archival exhibition in Drancy on the history of the internment camp established there during the Nazi occupation. This sequence is comprised of only static shots, all of which have rather long durations — the longest lasting for roughly two and a half minutes. Only once and for an instant is an individual visible in the frame. Otherwise, there is no other visible human presence. Similarly, there is no voice-over commentary nor overheard conversations; rather, the sequence unfolds in the virtual silence of what appears to be an empty exhibition. The first shot of the sequence is a wide shot from within the building where the exhibition is held; the camera points out through the window overlooking a greenspace below the building in the middle ground and a collection of high-rise apartments across the street in the background. Assuming the viewer is unfamiliar with Drancy, from this shot, there is not much

context offered to explain where the sequence takes place. Only in the greenspace at the base of the building might one notice, placed on a small portion of train tracks, sits a single cattle car. Only as the sequence progresses and the context of the exhibition is revealed might the viewer realize that this cattle car is a remnant of the occupation which was used to deport those interned at the camp in Drancy further east to the Nazi death camps.

The sequence continues with a series of static shots focused on the interior of the building, all of which are wide shots capturing the general atmosphere of the exhibition from a distance. Two shots are particularly noteworthy, both being long takes of the projection of videos in separate spaces. The first is of a silent video which shows the portraits of individuals accompanied by the names, birthdates, and the dates when they were deported from the Drancy camp. In the foreground in front of the wall on which the video is projected are three unoccupied benches, presumably where visitors could sit to watch the video. The second shot is of a video which features the last letters of children and adolescents deported from Drancy, accompanied by a voice-over which reads from the letters. While this shot is closer to the screen and takes place in a smaller and darker space, below the screen on which the video is projected, on either side, there is a bench for visitor seating. On one hand, with these shots, it is evident that Diop's intention is to show the content of the videos; however, if Diop's only concern was to show a portion of the videos, for the viewer's benefit, it would have made more sense to feature the videos in the form of an archive rather than record a projection of the videos, which adds more distance and detail, distracting from the content of the videos. On the other hand, the decision to feature the space of the exhibition along with the videos must be considered deliberate. While the videos' content seems important to Diop, equally important is the physical space in which one would theoretically watch these videos. Therefore, this sequence presents an observational style

since Diop's main concern is to present the general atmosphere of the space as faithfully as possible without any commentary or intrusion. Otherwise, if her intention were to communicate the information presented in the exhibition, for example, perhaps she would have featured more close-ups of different archival material or, even, feature testimony from individuals who visited the space.

Lastly, given the observational nature of the sequence, one might also describe Diop's perspective as neutral. This is especially true since no additional information is provided as context to help the viewer understand the importance of the exhibition or Diop's reasoning for featuring it in the film. Although, the last shot of the sequence, which is technically the first shot of the subsequent sequence as well, might suggest Diop's perspective is, in fact, not neutral. This final shot is a static wide shot from the exterior of the building which mirrors the camera angle of the very first shot of the sequence; it is a sort of delayed shot-reverse shot. With all the shots from within the exhibition, however, it is likely the viewer would need multiple viewing to catch this association. Regardless, the shot is from the greenspace mentioned above. In the far background is the building which one can now recognize as where the exhibition is held. In the middle ground is the same cattle car, this time closer to the camera and shown in more detail though somewhat obscured by shrubs. Finally, in the foreground sits a man alone on a bench, looking at his phone. Likewise, in the sequence that follows, other individuals are shown in the surrounding area, seemingly enjoying the tranquil afternoon. Given the tragic history that links Drancy to the Holocaust which had just been partially acknowledged in the exhibition, Diop's final observation of a man outside, looking at his phone while the cattle car looms behind him (a notorious symbol for the dehumanizing and horrendous actions of the Nazis) implies the general lack of awareness of history that is prevalent in contemporary society. This notion is amplified

by the fact that the exhibition is shown to be virtually empty. For that matter, the one individual shown to be present appears to be to middle aged or older. In other words, the exhibition is not shown to be filled with young people wanting to know more about such an important and tragic moment in history. Ultimately, this sequence serves as an example of how Diop's style is simultaneously observational and unintrusive while still capable of implying certain commentary on what is observed. Nonetheless, if this last shot acts as proof that Diop's gaze is not completely neutral, she still attains a level of neutrality. Since Diop does not intrude on her own observations and does not use a heavy hand to direct the viewer's attention to any specific rhetoric, it is evident her intention is still to depict this space without judgement, or, at least, the subtlety in style encourages the viewer to exercise their own judgement first.

Another sequence occurring earlier in the film employs a similar approach; however, the context of the sequence elicits more judgement from the viewer and calls into question whether Diop truly wishes to maintain a neutral perspective. As Alexandre Ruffier suggests in his review of the film in the journal, *24 Images*, one might distinguish between the presence of a "neutralité materielle" in Diop's approach versus a "neutralité morale". Ruffier refers specifically to what one might perceive as a critique of socioeconomic class; he writes: "(l)es bourgeois·e·s sont blanc·he·s, sont riches, culturellement dominant·e·s et ne peuvent pas s'en cacher. Leurs pratiques, leurs façons d'apparaître à la caméra, de bouger, de parler, trahissent qui iels sont" (online version). This interpretation could certainly be applied to the following example. As in the previous sequence, this one begins immediately from an interieur space; however, the pacing of shots is faster than that of the sequence of the exhibition in Drancy. This first shot is less of an establishing shot, showing mostly the faces of people seated in the foreground, albeit out of focus. For anyone somewhat familiar with traditional Roman Catholic spaces in France, by the

details in the background, they will recognize that the interior must be a church of some kind. In the middle ground, others walk towards the camera between the pews. After a few moments, the next shot reverses the camera angle of its predecessor to reveal from beyond the pews the ornate alter and stained glass as clergy men appear to prepare for the start of mass. What follows is a series of close-ups and medium shots of those in attendance. Meanwhile, overheard is the priest who begins a reading of the last will and testament of Louis XVI, which he wrote on the 25th of December 1792, mere weeks before his execution. What is featured of the reading is mainly the King's insistence that he ruled in good faith, his willingness to forgive his enemies, and his prayer to God to have mercy on his family, namely his wife and children. As the reading recalls the King's bleak near future when he was writing his testament, the shots of the faces of the attendees remain, as expected, at a distance and relatively static. The emotions of their faces are generally neutral, except for one woman who is shown wiping tears from her eyes. Although, a somber sentiment is evident in their expressions, perhaps a result of a certain variation on what is commonly referred to as the Kuleshov rule; however, instead of cutting from a face to an image and back to the same face to illicit a detection of emotion in the viewer, it may result from the sense of sadness in the words of the King, acknowledging his fate. Diop maintains a distance with her camera, allowing those she films to exist in their space with minimal intrusion and without any commentary; it is clear as to what Ruffier means when referring to a "neutralité materielle"; however, by taking a neutral stance in the depiction of the attendees, who express compassion for Louis XVI, possibly believing his fate was unjustified, Diop condones the presumed royalist sympathies expressed. This interpretation would suggest that Diop's approach is decidedly not morally neutral, or that it is morally ambiguous.

At this point in the sequence, following the conclusion of the reading of the testament, a clergyman invites the visitors to proceed to the basement to the Royal crypt to join him in prayer. Assuming the viewer is aware of where the Royal crypt is located and that they recall the film's thematic structure being focused on locations around Paris that are off the RER B train line, it becomes clear, if not already, that the sequence takes place in the Basilica of Saint-Denis. The sequence progresses in the same manner, simply showing the visitors passing the tomb of Louis XVI and participating in the prayer. Much like the last sequence described, however, the final shot is a drastic transition, though stylistically it remains subtle. The final shot is a static shot of the exterior of the Basilica taken from the bustling street running perpendicular to its entrance; it functions almost as a displaced establishing shot, informing the viewer not of where the next action will take place but of where the prior actions have just unfolded. This abrupt change of perspective, while possibly motivated by the desire to contextualize the sequence, creates a stark contrast in atmospheres between the interior and exterior of the Basilica. For whereas the interior is ornate and tranquil, carrying with it a historic weight, the exterior shows a typical urban space of the modern Parisian metropolitan area, including many pedestrians, cars, the sounds of engines and sirens, as well as the ubiquitous illuminated kebab sign which hangs over a restaurant's entrance. Beyond the contrast in atmospheres, this contrast also suggests a political difference as well as a class difference. If those within the Basilica represent the ancestors of the ruling elite, the former royalists, who lament the end of the French monarchy and fantasize about the opulence of past royals and nobles, in very general terms, those on the outside symbolize the masses, who would help bring an end to the monarchy in demand for rights and an improved quality of life. Along with this historical analogy, this contrast of spaces also underlines the current state of French society. Quite literally, those inside sheltered and warm, while those who

are outside are left unprotected in the cold. This contrast implies a persistence of the class divide in French society which originates far back from the time of the monarchy. Perhaps, it even suggests that not much has changed for the masses throughout history, still being subjected by the ruling class to exploitations. Finally, if this is indeed the interpretation of the viewer, Ruffier's description of the lack of moral neutrality in the film makes sense.

This sequence, as with the previous, is equally interesting in how it understates the context. Many of the context clues are subtle and could require multiple viewings to notice. With minimal context, there is also much to be said on the necessity of prior knowledge in terms of French history. If one were not aware of the execution of Louis XVI during the Revolution or of the symbolic significance of the Basilica of Saint-Denis regarding the French monarchy and the influence of the Roman Catholic church, it is unlikely they would interpret the end of the sequence as described. Consequently, did Diop make this film with a particular audience in mind? In other words, did Diop plant subtle critiques of the French bourgeoisie throughout the film, intending them only to be recognized by those who are in the know? It seems unlikely that Diop would be so fanciful. Rather, Diop's style values, above all else, a basic respect for individuals and a willingness to observe everyone with the same approach. Resulting from her "neutralité materielle," all prejudice is abandoned on Diop's part, and she encourages the viewer to do the same. Only at the conclusions of sequences, at the moment of reflection, does Diop hint at her personal opinions which invites the viewer to develop their own conclusions. In her review of the film in *The French Review,* Mariah Devereux Herbeck touches on this notion when she writes:

> With Louis XVI sandwiched between footage of the filmmaker's immigrant parents, the film's editing provocatively presents Diop's deceased parents' life stories as equal to the

> last will and testament of a French king. Repeatedly in the film, the stories of those found in the vicinity of the RER line—both those who might be considered 'des Français de souche' as well as immigrants or children of immigrants from former French colonies—are placed side by side in a retelling of the collective identity of modern French society. (247)

Diop, according to Herbeck, takes people from drastically different backgrounds and depicts them as equals, both in her approach to the image and in her approach to the ordering of sequences. This differs from Varda's approach in *Les Glaneurs*, as she does not conceal her efforts to, at once, valorize all on the fringes of society who let nothing go to waste and to criticize the faceless masses of modern capitalism who follow blindly the guidance of profiteers and, subsequently, lead a life of perpetual consumption and waste. For that matter, *Nous* also differs from *Mémoires d'immigrés* which attempts to define concretely a group of people for the sake of humanizing them and validating their place in French history and French society. For either of these two films, to put down or to elevate individuals or groups of people is not necessarily an immoral practice. Nevertheless, these differing approaches exemplify the general desire of documentary to present the viewer with an argument as Nichols describes. To achieve a more convincing argument, a certain level of judgement of those appearing in the film must be predetermined, whether it be positive or negative. Ultimately, however, this commitment to developing a convincing argument and, consequently, imbuing the film in judgement is what Jean-Louis Comolli identifies as a pernicious tendency in documentary, although he refers specifically to the tendency to depict subjects humorously, as in to present subjects at whom the viewer is encouraged to laugh by underlining their buffooneries. Regardless, the notion remains

the same, that contemporary documentaries guide a judgement of those they depict. Comolli writes:

> Ainsi les amateurs de cinéma comme ses pratiquants ont-ils à lutter contre une tendance dominante : côté salle, à concevoir le spectateur, ou la spectatrice, comme un être-réflexe, concentré d'agitations pulsionnelles venues de l'intérieur (rires, vertiges) et de l'extérieur (sursauts aux effets spéciaux, flashes, sons violents), et, côté écran, à tenir les personnes filmées pour des sortes de cobayes d'une expérience comportementaliste où l'interaction avec la caméra fait basculer les malheureux sujets de la relation dans l'odieux et le ridicule. … le spectateur que je suis est invité à rire ou à se moquer à la fois des maîtres du jeu, souvent ridicules dans leur ton et leurs manières, et de leurs victimes, parfaitement pittoresques, et ridicules elles aussi, mais surtout écrasées par ce qui leur arrive. Me voici donc placé dans une situation de maîtrise, où l'autre filmé, tantôt excessif ou insuffisant, est presque toujours risible. (*Une certaine tendance du cinéma documentaire* 31-32)

Nous, however, maybe an ideal counterexample to this tendency. Precisely, it does not attempt to elicit a laugh or any other premature, instinctive reaction. Above all else, its neutrality encourages the viewer to participate in the observation of subjects shown to be humans worthy of attention. In this way, the idea of presenting an argument as a documentary is obscured or, even, refuted. Rather than compel the viewer to hear her argument, Diop calls upon them to participate in engaging respectively with the subjects in the film. Coincidentally, this happens to be Comolli's idea of ideal cinema. He writes:

> L'éthique … porte avant tout sur les relations aux autres qu'on établit en filmant d'abord, en montrant ensuite. Connus de nous ou bien pas, ces autres, nous nous adressons à eux, à

elles, nous les impliquons dans notre travail et dans les œuvres que nous leur montrons. Ils sont nos partenaires. (61-62)

Chapter 3: Structure

The Defined Structure

One might think of structure as the ordering of all audiovisual elements. My intention is to broadly consider how each filmmaker organizes the images and sounds they acquired into a coherent and singular work of documentary cinema; however, I prefer to emphasize the notion of structure, rather than editing, as I wish to analyze the rhetoric of each film that the organization of audiovisual elements elicits more than describe their approaches to film editing. Furthermore, I hope to develop a better understanding for why each film structures its narrative in such a way to underline its motivations as a work of art with which the public engages.

Mémoires d'immigrés, while also being the oldest by release date, is the ideal film with which to begin since it presents a defined structure from the onset. The film is organized into three episodes of almost identical runtimes. Interviewees are divided among the episodes based on their familial roles, of which the film expresses three: fathers, mothers, children. Each chapter is titled with its familial role: *Les Pères, Les Mères* and *Les Enfants*. Within each episode, there is also a consistent structuring of interviews which are separated by transitional sequences, featuring music and archival documents. This consistent structure serves to formalize the overall rhetoric of the film.

The episodes are ordered chronologically. As it addresses Maghrebi immigration to France in the mid to late 20th century, it follows the flow of families based on French immigration policy concerning *le regroupement familial.* Therefore, in following this moment of immigration, the first episode is devoted to the fathers, recounting their initial experiences on arriving in France, as they were the first to immigrate as laborers without their families. It is understood that only once the practice of family reunification, specifically for Algerians — who

had been previously restricted from this right, whereas other immigrant groups, such as Italian immigrants, were not subjected to the same discrimination, — was formalized by the government in 1976 did the wives and children of these laborers begin to arrive or begin to be legally recognized as residents (Muriel Cohen, *Regroupement familial : l'exception algérienne (1962-1976),* 20). The second episode of the film is devoted to the wives who followed. Finally, the third episode covers the newer generation, the children of immigrant parents who have been raised in France.

Mémoires d'immigrés also features a methodical approach within sequences and as it transitions from one sequence to the next. There are four principal elements of this organization: the interviews, archives (footage and still photos), B-roll footage often featuring the interviewees in the frame or directly relating to the details mentioned in the interviews, and non-diegetic music. The latter three elements fill in the space between interviews in the form of transitional sequences with moderate to fast-paced editing between images that correlate to the rhythm of the featured music. As a popular phenomenon of music videos prevailed in North America and Europe in the 1980s and 1990s thanks to cable television networks such as MTV, these short interludes resemble music videos of the time. Perhaps this is a strategic decision intended to insert a sort of "entertainment" element into the structure. Additionally, as the film was initially produced for television, this aligns with the nature of television programming, which is often segmented by advertisements.

The testimonies of former state officials and other non-immigrant French citizens who contributed to the overall experiences of Maghrebi immigrants in some way possess a placement within the structure unlike that of the immigrants. Throughout the three episodes, many of the same officials reappear multiple times even across episodes. This placement of testimonies and

commentaries resembles a typical ordering of "talking heads" in documentary where they are cut into small segments and interwoven throughout a film. This treatment is in stark contrast with that of the immigrants. Whereas the immigrants' interviews progress in an uninterrupted fashion before moving on to the next sequence, commentary of the officials is summoned depending on the historical context, whether it concerns the policies of family reunification, HLMs (habitation à loyer modéré), or the funding of migrant laborers and their families' return to their countries of origin. This difference in the placement of the officials' commentaries is a strategy to generalize the role of the French State in the historical event of Maghrebi immigration. As the comments are kept brief and as the officials appear and reappear constantly, the French government is depicted as a stable presence throughout this history of immigration. This creates the impression that the State is an entity with consistent values (which are perhaps antagonistic or indifferent to immigrants), downplaying the reality of changing administrations and evolving policies. Subsequently, this depiction helps simplify the rhetoric, establishing a dichotomy between Maghrebi immigrants and the State.

While the interviews are the main concern, one should not be quick to dismiss the transitional sequences. On the contrary, in examining them in-depth, they prove to be an integral element of the film which echoes the rhetoric of the interviews. Firstly, as it often fades into the soundtrack over the final sentences of an interview and continues to play over archives and B-roll, only to gently fade-out at the start of the following interview, the music is consistently used as a transitional device. This signals the change from one subject to the next. The music helps standardize the structure of the entire film by creating a rhythmic pattern that alternates between interview and "music video." This pattern guides the viewer's attention by introducing a rhythm to the film that is recognizable and consistent, which allows the viewer to alternate between

listening actively to details given in the interviews and ingesting more passively the transitional sequences where one is to "feel" the thematic sentiments communicated through the images and music rather than receive an explicit explanation. Furthermore, as the film was initially produced for French television, this pattern might have been intended to allow for more flexibility in the screening of the film. For instance, with recurring transitional sequences, broadcasters would, in theory, have ample opportunity to cut to commercials at moments that would minimally disrupt the flow of information. It can at least be acknowledged that films intended for television normally vary in terms of structure than those produced for cinematic release simply because the viewing experiences are different. Likewise, television programming could have a drastic impact on how a film like *Mémoires d'immigrés* is viewed. For example, it is very possible that the chapters where not shown in succession and, rather, spread over several days.

More than simply being a practical way of separating interviews and signaling a transition to the viewer, the choice of music holds a thematic significance which echoes the rhetoric of each episode. The music features a wide selection of songs which vary in style, from traditional North African folk music to contemporary French pop. Although, the songs are similar in that they are most often from North African artists or French artists of North African heritage. The selection of music reflects the specificity of each episode. For example, in the episode of *Les Pères*, the music is more traditional from male artists of older generations, such as from the Algerian musicians Dahmane El Harrachi and Slimane Azem: the former worked in the popular music genre original to Algiers known as Chaâbi; the latter in the genre of traditional music from Kabylia. Their songs serve to emphasize a sense of nostalgia for the regions and cultures of North Africa and the plight of the North African migrant worker which the men interviewed in the episode represent. The choice of traditional music develops this sense of

nostalgia indirectly because it is recognized as “from another time,” and one could imagine that the immigrant fathers interviewed associate the songs with their past, prior to the hardships they experienced while immigrating and integrating into French society. The music also speaks to the experience of the fathers as migrant laborers who left their homes and families because of economic pressures, leading to isolation in a foreign land. This is explicitly addressed in the lyrics to the song “Kifehe Rah Kifeche Atbedel” by Dahmane El Harrachi, who sings: “Les souvenirs se réveillent en moi, après avoir tout oublié / J’ai tout abandonné, mon village, mes amis / Je me suis retrouvé seul, face à moi-même”. The lyrics are sung in Arabic with subtitles in French provided; however, this is not the case for all moments in the film when music features singing that is not in French. Thus, the decision to feature the French subtitles for these lyrics Benguigui’s desire to underline the rhetoric of a given sequence.

Likewise, the episode of *Les mères* includes songs from older female artists of mainly North African origin. What is most intriguing, however, is this episode prominently features the song “Helwa Ya Baladi,” by the French Italian pop superstar Dalida. While the song is sung in Arabic, Dalida is not of Arabic origin; nevertheless, she is not an outsider to North African and Arabic cultures, having been raised in Cairo by Italian parents before moving to Paris as an adult. Furthermore, as the title translates to “My Sweet Homeland,” and the lyrics express the same sentiment, albeit in a universal way that does not mention details specific to Egypt, North Africa, or other Arabic regions, the choice does not seem haphazard. The implication, like in the episode of *Les pères*, is that the mothers in the film retain a sense of longing for the home and the people they left behind. At the same time, the choice of song suggests a different association, perhaps one with the notion of a modern, mid-20th century, Mediterranean or occidental woman, incorporating a sense of physical elegance and beauty with a certain multiculturalism that Dalida

represents. Given Dalida's origins in Egypt and her journey to France where she eventually became a pop icon, the song implies a duality in the sentiments of the immigrant mothers. In one sense, the song's lyrics illustrate a longing for one's homeland; nevertheless, Dalida symbolizes for the women a process of empowerment through immigration and the adoption of French sensibilities and values which directly challenges the fathers' devotion to the traditions of their native communities, namely in the form of gender roles.

While Benguigui's position on this aspect is implied with subtilty, it is worthwhile to note her more explicit expression in the fiction feature film from 2001, *Inch'Allah dimanche.* In her interview with Adela Lechintan, Benguigui explains that her experience filming the episode of *Les Mères* was the catalyst for her going on to make *Inch'Allah dimanche* (732). She explains further that her experiences with the documentary helped her understand the societal context in which these Maghrebi women arrived. Benguigui states : "Elles arrivent en plein cœur du féminisme, de la lutte des femmes, des manifestations pour avoir la pilule. Elles arriveront dans une France émancipée, mais la France ne les voit pas" (733). Benguigui also illustrates the trajectory of the protagonist of *Inch'Allah dimanche,* Zouina, a young Algerian woman who arrives in Northern France with her children and her oppressive mother-in-law to live with her husband after the family reunification policy was recognized in 1976. She explains:

> Pendant tout son trajet, Zouina deviendra une femme indépendante. … Au moment où Zouina dit à ses enfants "Je vous emmène à l'école demain", elle prend son destin en main. … Cela ne se limite pas à la relation homme-femme. Il s'agit à la fois de la relation homme-femme de même culture, de la femme dans une société différente et de l'émancipation de la femme. (734)

Through her own characterization and analysis of Zouina and with her recognition of *Mémoires d'immigrés* as the inspiration for *Inch'Allah dimanche,* Benguigui applies the same importance to the historical role of all Maghrebi immigrant mothers and its evolution towards the societal emancipation of these women and their children which took place in France.

Lastly, in the episode of *Les Enfants*, the choice of music plays an equally important role; however, the music no longer emphasizes a nostalgia for a homeland, which most of the children would only know from a distance either as a sort of heritage tourist, visiting North Africa for family vacations, or through the memories of their parents and other family members. Rather, the music takes on an immediate quality, commenting on the experiences of French citizens of North African origin. Most notably, the episode features songs from the French Algerian artist, Rachid Taha, who initially rose to fame in the rock group Carte de séjour. The episode features his song "Voilà voilà," which directly criticizes the negative opinion of immigrants prevalent in France at the time of its release; Taha sings:

> Partout, partout, les discours sont les mêmes/
>
> Étranger, tu es la cause de nos problèmes/ …
>
> Dehors, dehors, les étrangers/
>
> C'est le remède des hommes civilisés

With the direct acknowledgement of hostility leveled at immigrants in France, "Voilà voilà" exemplifies the mission to publicly speak out against discrimination which is depicted in the film through its recounting of the *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme* in 1983 led by the organization, SOS Avenir Minguettes. The choice of song and the fact that it a song by Rachid Taha also accentuates the larger rhetoric brought forth in the final episode which seeks to establish a permanent and inherent place of the children of Maghrebi immigrants in France, as

those interviewed claim France to be the only home they have known. Beyond the song itself, the "presence" of Taha in the episode also evokes his role as a politically active artist and musician, namely as a member of Carte de séjour. Already having a politically charged name that references the processes of immigration in France, the group earned national attention first through its cover of Charles Trenet's "Douce France," which reinterprets the song by using a contemporary pop instrumentation as well as adding elements of traditional North African music. Not an innocent gesture, by covering the song, the group claims possession of France as their home despite having immigrant origins, which contradicts the extreme-right political position that claims France only for the white French of non-immigrant origin: *la France aux Français*—a motto of the far-right is seen as graffiti along a concrete wall in the archival footage that opens and closes *Mémoires d'immigrés*. Taha, as a musician, and his song in the film resonate far beyond a simple recognition of contemporary pop culture or a formal tactic to organize sequences, adding depth to the final message of the last episode which implores the public to acknowledge the rightful place of the children of North African immigrants in French society.

As the music ensues, it is met with visual support from select archives, often in the form of black and white footage. With its extensive use, it is important to consider the significance of archives as an element of the film's structure. For this, Jamie Baron's book, *The Archive Effect: found footage and the audiovisual experience of history*, is of particular use. Baron describes what she calls the "archive effect" as an "experience of reception" where archival material that is reappropriated in a film is better understood through the authority of experience rather than the authority of place; therefore, the location from which an archival document is sourced is less significant to how a viewer perceives the document within a film than the intended use for the document in this new context, which "generate particular conceptions of the past, and,

ultimately, of history itself" (7-8). The use of archival footage in *Mémoires d'immigrés*, for example, produces the "archive effect" by way of temporal disparity. This temporal disparity arises precisely through the contrast of archival footage with original footage of a given film which differs in quality, instilling a sense of "then" and "now" in the viewer where the archival footage deals with the past and the original footage takes place in the present (17-18). *Mémoires d'immigrés*, temporal disparity is evoked most often by the contrast between color footage and black and white footage, as well as the by the difference in definition and level of degradation in the images. These differences are explained as technical constraints. For instance, the prevalence of black and white footage among the archival documents is a matter of the cost of production, where in the mid-20th century, black and white film was used widely for the purposes of news productions and documentary with smaller budgets as it was greatly cheaper than color film. Likewise, for news productions or documentaries, especially those shot on-location, 16mm or even 8mm film was used as it was cheaper and lighter in weight than the professional standard 35mm film. This explains the lower definition in terms of image quality. Conversely, as Benguigui emphasizes in her interview with Sarah E. Mosher, she made a specific choice to shoot interviews for the film in 35mm rather than in 16mm or on video, which offered the highest quality image despite its increased costs (96).

By producing the archive effect and temporal disparity through the use of archives interspersed among the interviews, how, then, does *Mémoires d'immigrés* benefit? At its most basic level, the "then" of the archival footage and the "now" of the interviews is a way to contain a moment in history and render it accessible to the viewer while also imbuing the film with an aura of historic authenticity. The presence of archives illustrates the testimonies of those

interviewed, serving as proof of the details of their accounts, whether as a direct association with their comments or as an echo of the atmosphere and sentiment of the experiences they describe.[9]

What can be said of the narrative structure of *Mémoires d'immigrés* is that it is formalized and consistent throughout its three episodes. As Benguigui's desire is to remove all distance and obstructions between subject and viewer which is expressed in her approach to the sound and image, this precise structure serves the same purpose. The structure is the last element to what is a project of historiography. The precise structuring of information based on a categorization of subjects along with the echoing of rhetoric through nondiegetic music and archives contribute to the accessibility of the film's overall message. The structure is a strategy to render a representation of the history of Maghrebi immigration to France in the mid to late 20th century as clear as possible.

The Obscured Structure

The narrative structure of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* is not as immediately decipherable, yet that is not to suggest the film is lacking structure. Although, the apparent lack of structure may be Varda's ultimate intention. The structure of the film appears to be a meta-exercise in gleaning as it bounds from one sequence to the next almost unexpectedly and solely based on word association or pure chance. Take, for instance, a moment near the middle of the film where Varda and her crew happen to stop at an antique shop, which acts as a seemingly a random interlude. Seconds later, they happen upon a painting of traditional gleaners that mixes the

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[9] For a more detailed discussion on the use of archives to render films more "authentic," see Sheila Bernard's chapter "Creative Considerations" in *Archival Storytelling*.

influences of Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton on a single canvas. Being extraordinarily pertinent to the subject matter of the film, Varda does not hesitate to acquire the painting, only to continue their journey. That said, what may be a moment of pure coincidence can no longer exist as such once placed in a documentary as it can only arrive at its placement through the actions of the filmmaker. Furthermore, while the purpose of such an interlude may appear obscure, deeper consideration of the film's structure reveals its placement to be justified. At the end of the preceding sequence, the visual artist, VR2000, who creates works from trash and discarded household items, considers the ever-growing number of objects he collects; he concludes by saying: "c'est l'objet qui m'appelle parce qu'il a sa place ici." After the comment, there is only a brief pause before cutting to the antique shop "interlude," leaving little time to develop a sense of finality for the sequence with VR2000. In considering the end of the two sequences simultaneously, one realizes the second acts as a postscript to VR2000's commentary. Varda confirms the same phenomenon to be true for her in the film: the object, the painting of the gleaners, finds its proper place in the narrative on its own. To echo VR2000's comment immediately in the following sequence reveals the intentionality of the structuring of depicted events.

It is precisely this play on chance encounters with objects and people upon which the narrative structure is based. Claude-Marie Trémois observes as much in his review of the film in *Esprit*, writing: "Ce film de glaneuse est aussi le film d'une flâneuse, d'une rôdeuse, d'une penseuse et d'une joueuse. … Le hazard — ce hazard qu'elle invoque avant de commencer un film, comme d'autres prieraient Dieu — la sert bien" (186). Furthermore, the film develops only through the unique perspective of its filmmaker, on which many scholars have already commented, such as Mirelle Rosello in her article "Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*:

Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady"; in it, she describes sequences in the film as autobiographical and the entire work as self-reflexive (31, 33). Likewise, Agnès Calatayud, in her article "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Agnès Varda's Self-Portrait," evidently describes the film as an exercise in self-portraiture, which would not be the first nor only in Varda's vast array of creative works. Calatayud cites, among others things, Varda's "autobiographical experiment" *Agnès par Varda* (1994), in which are featured many examples of photographic self-portraits of Varda over many years (113-114). Thus, with its self-reflexive qualities and its adherence to an apparent structure of chance, both Ernest Callenbach in *Film Quarterly* and Trémois in *Esprit* describe the film as an essay. Callenbach considers *Les Glaneurs* as an example of the essay-film, which exists as a "mini-genre" within documentary (48). On the other hand, Trémois almost rejects the label of documentary altogether, writing: "… son film est plus qu'un documentaire : un essai." On the same page, Trémois links Varda's film to the Alexandre Astruc's theory of the "camera-stylo" as well as to her own of "cinécriture" (187). Varda elaborates on her conception of c*inécriture* in an interview with Barbara Quart in *Film Quarterly* in 1986; she explains:

> … (cinécriture) means cinematic writing. Specifically that. Not illustrating a screenplay, not adapting a novel, not getting gags of a good play, not any of this. I have fought so much … for something that comes from emotion, from visual emotion, from sound emotion, feeling, and finding a shape for that, and a shape which has to do with cinema and nothing else. (127)

Cinécriture for Varda is an instinctive approach to filmmaking which uses the camera and the microphone as the immediate tools of expression, like how one might immediately express their thoughts and observations by writing in a journal. Like in a journal, the structuring of

information, as in the ordering of events, is left open to chance based on how and when these events are experienced.

With the goal of engaging in *cinécriture*, it is not surprising that the result would be self-reflexive or autobiographical. As *cinécriture* is understood to occur through a spontaneous expression or observation not reliant on any preceding medium such as a screenplay or a novel, it can only produce something that is actively conscious of its surroundings in a mode of constant improvisation. Subsequently, a film made through the *cinécriture* approach must be acutely subjective as it requires a continuous reflection on what is being captured; therefore, Varda's conception of *cinécriture* helps explain why *Les Glaneurs* is unanimously considered a self-reflexive film.

Like *Mémoires d'immigrés*, the structure of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* can be understood through its use of archives as well. Although its use is less extensive than in Benguigui's film — Varda's film is not reliant on the continuous use of archives to organize its sequences —, the archives in the film can also be analyzed with the archive effect. Rather than evoking the archive effect through temporal disparity, however, the use of archives in *Les Glaneurs* creates an intentional disparity. In describing the occurrence of this disparity, Baron states:

> … footage taken from one context of use and placed in another may carry with it a trace of earlier intended uses. This footage generates the dominant sense of coming not from some other time but from a different intent – and this is the experience of what I call 'intentional disparity.' By this, I do not mean a disparity that is produced 'on purpose' but rather a disparity based on our perception of a previous intention ascribed to and (seemingly) inscribed within the archival document. (23)

Baron goes on to explain that intentional disparity varies greatly from one film to the next, yet all films that make use of archives produce intentional disparity since no archival document was ever originally produced with the intention of being appropriated into a film, although the degree of disparity in intention is dependent on the individual viewer's ability to recognize it (23-24). Baron also states that intentional disparity is not always obvious, and films can make use of archives in ways which either augment or repress this disparity (26). Baron uses the example of Ken Burns' documentary *The Civil War* (1990) in which the featured archives, while never imagined to be used in a film, possess an intention which does not differ greatly from that of the documentary: to historicize a particular event.[10] Conversely, the example of Emile de Antonio' s *Millhouse: A White Comedy* (1971) recuts footage of speeches given by Richard Nixon with other speeches, deliberately emphasizing the disparity between the original intention of the archives and that of the film to suggest that Nixon was a plagiarist and a hypocrite (26).

In the context of *Les Glaneurs,* the use of archives falls somewhere in between Baron's two examples in terms of the intentional disparity. While the paintings of traditional gleaners by Millet and Breton serve to historicize the act in the same way that Varda's intention in showing the works in her film is to evoke the historical context of gleaning, her film is far from being a presentation of the history of gleaning. Rather, the history of gleaning is covered only briefly at the onset to set the narrative in motion. Instead of focusing on gleaning in the past like the paintings, the film uses the paintings as a point of departure to discover all examples of

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[10] One could consider of the use of archives in *Mémoires d'immigrés* in a similar way, especially the archival footage of interviews from the past; these interviews, like the ones filmed by Benguigui, serve as testimony of the immigrant experience.

contemporary gleaning. Although some contemporary examples of gleaning resemble greatly those from the past, such as those who gather rejected potatoes after the harvest, others differ significantly from the original practice, such as artists' reappropriation of trash to create works of "high art." The intentional disparity created in the latter example therefore promotes a feeling of surprise in the viewer who witnesses how multiple contemporary actions in French society are interpreted as or associated with the traditional practice of gleaning. Likewise, the intentional disparity serves a sociological or even political purpose rather than historical. The disparity between historical depictions of gleaning and contemporary ones suggests a lack of sympathy for the marginalized today. Whereas modern gleaning is often an unencouraged or prohibited practice, gleaning in the past was permitted and depicted by such artists as Millet and Breton to the point of being valorized. At the same time, while the intentional disparity is not fully repressed, nor is it augmented in the extreme. The intentions of both the archives of which Varda makes use and of her film remain generally aligned; as in, there is no desire to refute the association with traditional gleaning.

One notable exception, however, is the painting by Rogier van der Weyden known as *The Last Judgement* (1542). In one sequence featuring the painting, the recognition of intentional disparity by the viewer is inevitable and immediate as the only apparent association of the painting with the rest of the film is that Varda happens to be passing through Beaune, where the painting is housed. Varda comments only sparingly on what is depicted, making no effort to connect it with the notion of gleaning. The painting, however, is used as an archival document to evoke a recognition of intentional disparity, encouraging the viewer to reflect on the purpose of this sequence. It is actually the recognition of the intentional disparity which leads the viewer to the potent visual metaphor between the presentation of the Archangel Michael, who judges

whether each human shall be allowed into Heaven or condemned to Hell, and the act of modern-day gleaning where an individual must choose whether their belongings are worthy of possessing or should be condemned and forgotten as trash. Ernest Callenbach describes the association succinctly in his review of the film in *Film Quarterly*, drawing on the film's rhetoric to remark that "[g]leaning redeems waste, which qualifies as a modern deadly sin" (47).

Another use of intentional disparity comes early in the film in an iconic sequence where Varda consults Jules Breton's painting, *La Glaneuse* (1877) in Arras. Nevertheless, this sequence differs in how it uses the archival document and how it handles disparity. Varda stands beside the large canvas, mirroring the pose of Breton's subject, complete with a bale of wheat held over her shoulder. This initial set up creates a temporal disparity, as the painting's presence in the museum in Arras and its quality as an image (a portrait in oil paint on canvas) evoke the sense that it is a depiction of moment in history, whereas Varda's presence has an immediacy, being that she is a figure of the present day, dressed in a contemporary style and shown as existing in the space of the museum. Therefore, the sense of "then" and "now" is in direct contrast; however, Varda's mirroring of the subject's pose in the painting also functions as strategy to repress both the temporal and the intentional disparity. Indeed, to see Varda and the subject side by side arrives at the heart of a major rhetorical point: the timelessness and universal aspect of the act of gleaning, both literally and figuratively. Nevertheless, as soon as this rhetorical point arises, Varda deepens the intentional disparity with a single gesture; in one motion, Varda relinquishes her bale of wheat, letting it fall from her shoulder, and with her opposite hand raises to her eye a camcorder which she uses to make the film. It is a not-so-subtle symbolic gesture which emphasizes the disparity between the act of gleaning for sustenance and Varda's gleaning as a figurative act to better understand the world around her. By extension, as the viewer will observe what Varda

observes through the viewfinder of her camcorder, the viewer also adopts the role as figurative gleaner.

Although the use of archives does not continue through the film, and, therefore, the archive effect and temporal and intentional disparities are not evoked continuously, using the archive effect to analyze the overall narrative structure of the film still proves constructive because it reveals Varda's ultimate rhetorical intentions. *Les Glaneurs* exists as an "appropriation film" because it is a form of media not necessarily belonging to a specific genre that repurposes materials in a way "that may produce a particular effect or evoke a particular kind of consciousness in the viewer" (Baron 9). To evoke a consciousness of the historical practices of gleaning and its contemporary renditions, *Les Glaneurs* relies on archives, such as the painting by Breton or a definition of the words "glaner" and "glaneur/glaneuse" taken from one edition of the dictionary, *Nouveau Larousse illustré.* Beyond this, however, the consciousness raised through the archive effect underlines the film's existence as an appropriation film. *Les Glaneurs* is precisely an appropriation film about the appropriation and reappropriation of objects deemed to be "junk" without monetary value; it is also about the "reappropriation" of those on the fringes of society. The film is an act of reappropriating the marginalized, who are considered "junk" with no monetary value, i.e. not contributing to the capitalist system. Therefore, the film functions as a figurative mise en abyme of the concepts of waste and (re)appropriation, which dictates the overarching narrative structure. The film is Varda's attempt to reappropriate the definition of "glaner" from her *Larousse* to reveal how the practice of gleaning has evolved with modern agricultural machinery and in urban settings as well as to illustrate how gleaning takes on many unexpected forms, such as how one may glean from a middle-aged couple's story of how they fell in love. Even Varda's use of a camcorder represents an appropriation and a new avenue for

gleaning. It is an unexpected technological appropriation as Varda adopts what was designed as a consumer-grade device to record video for her feature film, which would be shown in cinemas. Furthermore, as a lightweight camera with the capability of recording for long durations and with the capacity to simultaneously keep in-focus objects that are is extremely close and those that are distant, the viewer gleans from Varda's camera images which were before impossible to create without special effects. Namely, there are the recurring compositions of Varda's hand filmed by her other hand holding the camera. Varda underlines the importance of these shots by mentioning in voice-over: "… c'est ça, mon projet: filmer d'une main mon autre main." At the same time, to film one's own hand was unlikely an intended use of the camcorder; thus, Varda's use of it introduces another layer of unexpected appropriation.

The Relinquished Structure

Perhaps the most unique in terms of narrative structure, *Nous*, moves from one sequence to the next without any apparent association, apart from the geographic association; everything shown in the film takes place in the suburban regions surrounding Paris which are located off the RER B regional train line. Even this association remains vague, however, as the film does not recognize it in voice-over narration nor in interviews. It is only with the use of static wide shots of train tracks and the surrounding areas which express this theme. For the uninitiated viewer who would not recognize the RER B or the towns that surround it, it seems unlikely that they would understand this link. It would appear necessary for one to seek extratextual information to ultimately arrive at this understanding, such as an online synopsis for the film or from an interview given by Diop speaking on the film.

Even with this geographic setting recognized, little is introduced in terms of a guiding principle which could help explain the structure of the film. Whereas both *Mémoires d'immigrés* and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* have recognizable *raisons d'être* — the former to give voice to Maghrebi immigrants and their children and to illustrate their collective history, and the latter to deconstruct the notion of gleaning in a contemporary context where waste is abundant — *Nous* does not express any explicit motivations. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest the sequences progress chronologically.

In terms of structure, it is true, however, that the film features three sequences where archival footage is used, and which are devoted to Diop's mother and father. These sequences are quite dissimilar to the use of archives in the Benguigui's and Varda's films, especially regarding the archive effect and the notion of disparity *per* Baron. For instance, Diop keeps archival footage separate, never mixing it with footage taken for the purpose of the documentary. The possibility for temporal disparity is repressed since the archives do not over-emphasize the distance between past and present where the archives are strictly compartmentalized. Likewise, the archival footage focuses on her parents who were deceased at the time of making *Nous*; thus, the only images of them offered are from the archival footage. With the presentation of the parents in the present being impossible, equally impossible is the recognition of a temporal disparity through the contrast of images that reveal how they might have aged through the years (Baron 18).

In addition to the repression of temporal disparity, intentional disparity is also repressed, especially in the sequence that features Diop's father. As Diop explains, the footage of her father was some of the first footage she had ever shot. The original intention of these archives, to record her father explaining his experiences when immigrating to France, do not differ from her

intention for them in *Nous*. Furthermore, since the archival footage was made by Diop herself, it is almost less archival and more like miscellaneous footage from a filmmaker waiting for the right moment to use it, albeit with a significant delay from the time it was recorded to the time it was published.

With this repression, Diop's intention seems to be to maintain a lack of structure. For if a coherent structure aids in the development of a documentary's rhetoric, it functions as a device which allows a filmmaker to maintain control over the subjects. Structure is the final exercise of control that a filmmaker performs while in the role of the *maître.* For instance, if one were to consider a change in the structure of the previous two films, it would have an immense effect on the overall rhetoric. If *Mémoires d'immigrés,* rather than compile the interviews based on family identity, had, instead, ordered them based on the date on which each immigrant arrived in France, how would that have altered the overall messaging? Perhaps, it would have suggested a progression or evolution of the experiences of immigrants through time rather than suggesting a universal quality to the experiences based on gender and family role. Likewise, if Varda had organized her film chronologically based on when she filmed each sequence, perhaps the film would have felt less revelatory. The result might have been a more straightforward sort of travelogue, which would not have in itself symbolized the act of gleaning where in each sequence the idea or inspiration for the next sequence is found.[11]

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[11] This sort of coincidental structure is exemplified well at a moment where Varda encounters the Nenon family who happened to discover an unharvested and abandoned vineyard; this is followed by a sequence with Jérôme Noël-Bouton, a wine grower who allows gleaners to come to his property to pick grapes and who happens to be a descendent of Étienne-Jules Marey; this subsequently leads to a short sequence on Marey's contribution to cinema with his proto-cinematic innovations.

The lack of structure in *Nous* is a technique which seeks to avoid the filmmaker's domination of a film's rhetoric, granting (or possibly restoring) more freedom of expression to the subjects on-screen and more freedom of interpretation to the viewer. In his anthology of articles and essays, *Voir et pouvoir,* Comolli describes his past experiments in documentary filmmaking which adopted a similar objective. He writes:

> D'abord, organiser le moins possible et dans les moments de grâce ne plus organiser du tout. Laisser, donc, nos personnages, seuls ou ensemble, prendre en charge l'organisation de leurs interventions et apparitions en scène. Répondre à leurs propositions plutôt que les faire entrer dans les nôtres. Comme si, dans une fiction, au lieu de faire travailler des acteurs, on suive la logique des personnages : il ne s'agit plus de « guider », mais bien de suivre. (33)

Diop has also applied to her work this same principle of no longer guiding the organization of filming and dedicating herself to following the filmed events without interference. In doing so, as Comolli suggests, this allows for a more organic progression of events, as if they were to progress when no film was being produced. Comolli expands on this approach to filming in referencing the change in the behavior of those filmed, which, in his opinion, has been corrupted by television. He writes:

> Tout ce qui se passe à la télévision leur donne l'impression, aux gens du peuple, de n'y avoir aucune place, ou pis encore : une place fixée d'avance. Quand on s'intéresse à eux différemment, de près, quand on leur laisse la responsabilité de leur mise en scène, de la production de leur image, tout change. (36-37)

According to Comolli, another reason to relinquish direction of a film to the subjects themselves is that it encourages them to reveal more of themselves, which, subsequently, reveals deeper

truths about the individuals on-screen as well as captures a more authentic depiction of human nature.

These principles offered by Comolli reference the act of filming people and not necessarily the act of structuring a film. While this approach to filming seems evident in the sequences in *Nous,* where individuals appear to move about freely, expressing themselves and generally not acknowledging the presence of the camera, this does not directly serve as an explanation for why the structure is lacking. It must be correlated to a larger philosophy of documentary filmmaking in which neither the filming nor the sequencing of events is guided by the filmmaker; however, to arrive at such a notion of structure, one must look elsewhere.

Conclusion

Certainly, there is still much more that could be analyzed in these films which could lead to a comprehensive understanding of stylistic approaches to documentary. For instance, though mentioned in passing, an in-depth analysis of film editing would be warranted. For, in the end, no matter what production techniques a filmmaker may use, the outcome is determined by editing. Editing is the defining factor; it what brings a film back to life, as Robert Bresson describes it, writing:

> Mon film naît une première fois dans ma tête, meurt sur papier ; est ressuscité par les personnes vivantes et les objets réels que j'emploie, qui sont tués sur pellicule mais qui, placés dans un certain ordre et projetés sur un écran, se raniment comme des fleurs dans l'eau. (*Notes sur le cinématographe* 20)

A documentary, like fiction, at every level, depends on the decisions of the filmmaker, and these decisions determine how the representation of those depicted is perceived by the viewer. The subjectivity of the filmmaker is always present; furthermore, film editing will forever be an exercise in the filmmaker's subjectivity and the ultimate exercise in the process of making a film.

This would be true even if a technically film was not edited. If there were a finished film comprised only of a single long take and only featuring direct sound recorded simultaneously when filming, thus requiring no postproduction, this absence of editing is a decision made about how the film should be edited. It is like how Sartre describes the decision not to speak, to remain silent: "… le silence même se définit par rapport aux mots, comme la pause, en musique, reçoit sons sens des groupes de notes qui l'entourent. Ce silence est un moment du langage ; se taire ce n'est pas être muet, c'est refuser de parler, donc parler encore" (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature* 30). To take this a step further, editing acts as a means of communication in cinema, which the

initiated viewer has come to expect in films. To abandon this form of communication is like silence, which the viewer will almost inevitably remark.

Regarding filmmakers exercising subjectivity in documentary, there is also a question of ethics, which Bill Nicols discusses in detail in *Representing Reality.* Along with other writings, it could prove insightful to apply Nichols' commentary to the analysis of these films to elaborate on each filmmaker's approach to ethical editing. Furthermore, such considerations could lead to a wider notion of ethical editing in documentary. This could help to find explanations for questions like: when is the editing of an individual's testimony in documentary justified? And to what extent? For example, in *Mémoires d'immigrés*, is the manipulation of the voices of immigrants justified so long as it serves to present a collective history which is accepted as authentic? Or does the manipulation of one's testimony always constitute an alteration of reality in the form of the filmmaker's subjective interpretation? These questions grow continuously in importance as more and more of the global population become potential filmmakers. As the possessing of a camera becomes virtually universal principally because of smartphones, thus enabling everyone the power to record reality in the form of audiovisual documentation, the question of how and when one decides to begin and end their personal audiovisual depictions of reality requires special attention. This question can only be understood if one first analyzes the approaches to editing in documentaries such as the three discussed.

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