I. INTRODUCTION: FROM IMMIGRANT CINEMA TO NATIONAL CINEMA

In September 2010, Maghrebi-French filmmaker Rachid Bouchareb’s seventh feature film, *Hors-la-loi*, a gangster film set against the backdrop of the Algerian war for independence, was released across cinemas in France. Made for a budget of €20m, released on more than 400 prints and starring Jamel Debbouze – a French-born actor of Moroccan immigrant parents and one of French cinema’s biggest stars – *Hors-la-loi* enjoyed the kind of distribution and marketing conditions reserved for only the most high-profile French mainstream productions. The film aimed to capitalise on the success of Bouchareb’s Second World War epic, *Indigènes* (2006), which attracted over three million spectators in France and received an Academy Award nomination for best foreign film (admittedly as an Algerian rather than French film). If *Indigènes*’ message to its French audience was simultaneously confrontational and conciliatory, holding successive French governments to account for freezing the pensions of North African colonial soldiers at the same time as it argued for the rightful place of the French-born descendants of these colonial veterans in France, *Hors-la-loi* proved far more controversial. At the film’s premier in Cannes in May 2010, a group of protestors including veterans of the Algerian war, supporters of the far-right and *harkis* (Algerians who fought for the French in the war for independence) gathered on the Croisette to oppose what they saw as *Hors-la-loi*’s historical distortion of colonial history. Pressure was put on the organisers of the festival as well as French distributors and exhibitors to boycott the film that was attacked as ‘anti-French’ by Lionel Luca, a member of the centre-right UMP party (Jaffar 2010: 38). For his part,
Bouchareb responded to these attacks by claiming that it was precisely because he was a French citizen that he had chosen to expose this contested period in Franco-Algerian colonial history (Bouchareb in Santucci 2010).

As this opening example shows, directors of Maghrebi origin working in France have come a long way since the appearance in the 1970s of a handful of militant, low-budget films by immigrant directors located on the margins of the French film industry and the small but influential number of films made by French directors of North African immigrant origin in the 1980s that became known as Beur Cinema. These earlier decades undoubtedly produced some critically acclaimed work, including *Les Ambassadeurs* (Ktari, 1977), *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* (Charef, 1985), *Cheb* (Bouchareb, 1991), *Hexagone* (Chibane, 1994) and *Bye-bye* (Dridi, 1995). However, the films were somewhat limited in terms of their wider impact on French audiences. Indeed, until the crossover success in the late 1990s of two comedies, *Les Deux papas et la maman* (Smaïn and Longval, 1996) and *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* (Bensalah, 1999), both attracting over a million spectators in France, the most successful Maghrebi-authored French film had actually been one of the earliest examples of Beur Cinema, Mehdi Charef’s *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* (516 487 spectators in France) released more than ten years earlier. During the 1980s and 1990s, the artistic scope of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré directors was, arguably, further restricted by two factors. On the one hand, a reliance on consensual comedy aimed at diffusing rather than pronouncing the difference of the Maghrebi immigrant protagonists. On the other hand, the dominance of social realist narratives of beur and banlieue filmmaking that were, for the most part, resolutely located in the multicultural, working-class estates of the deprived urban periphery. The prevalence of these two trends in the 1980s and 1990s suggests the urgent need for directors of Maghrebi origin to address the socio-political realities facing the North African immigrant community in France by offering alternatives to the stereotypical images of immigrants as victims, delinquents or criminals found in mainstream French films during this period. However, it also raises the possibility of the ghettoisation of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers, in the sense that French producers and French funding bodies appeared more willing to back narratives that remained firmly focused on the experiences of the North African immigrant population and their French descendants. Indeed a significant portion of funding for many of these films came (and still comes) directly from organisations such as the *Fonds d’Action Sociale* (FAS), whose remit is, precisely, to promote projects that articulate the experiences of immigrant and ethnic minorities in France.1

In some respects, the situation facing Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in France during the 1980s and 1990s persists in the 2000s. Many of these filmmakers, such as the pioneering Maghrebi-French female director Zaïda Ghorab-Volta and Malik Chibane, experience the
same problems of funding and distribution, and feel trapped as ethnic minority filmmakers in the eyes of most French producers (Ghorab-Volta 2007; Bluher 2001). Others, such as Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche, seem to have made a conscious decision to resist any move towards the mainstream, preferring the artistic and political freedom that working in the auteur-led independent sector grants them. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the industry, the crossover success enjoyed by directors such as Bouchareb, Bensalah and Allouache, the near universal critical acclaim for the films of the actor turned director Abdellatif Kechiche and the emergence of bona fide French stars of Maghrebi origin such as Jamel Debbouze and Gad Elmaleh, points to a substantive and significant shift to the mainstream.

This mainstreaming is an important indication of how these filmmakers, and the characters they portray on screen, have been embraced by majority French audiences. Consequently, there has been a notable move away from perceiving Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmaking in France as solely the product of an immigrant cinema produced on the margins of the industry that only speaks to the minority ethnic communities from which it emerges. This is not simply a case of immigrant, postcolonial or accented filmmakers crossing over to the mainstream – though there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is happening in the 2000s. Just as importantly, it will be argued in this book that filmmakers of Maghrebi origin working in France in the 2000s have increasingly questioned the boundaries between national, transnational and diasporic cinema at the same time as their films demand, either implicitly or explicitly, a reconsideration of the very difference (religious, ethnic and cultural) that has traditionally been seen as a barrier to their successful integration into French society.

In contrast to earlier films by North African émigré filmmakers who, for obvious reasons, have tended to view the Maghrebi population in France as a temporary presence, with one eye on the diasporic homeland (see, for example, *Le Thé à la menthe* (Bahloul, 1984) and *Salut cousin!* (Allouache, 1996), Maghrebi-French directors have, claims Alec Hargreaves, always spanned ‘spaces that are far more diverse than those suggested by the ethnic marker *beur*’ to produce a cinema that is at once ‘locally grounded, nationally referenced and globally minded’ (Hargreaves 2011: 31, 38). There is certainly a great deal of truth in this assertion. One need only think of the range of spaces and protagonists located beyond France in Rachid Bouchareb’s work to date as well as the centrality of the multicultural *banlieue* – a location that is itself strongly influenced by (African-)American popular culture – in Maghrebi-French filmmaking since the 1980s, creating diegetic spaces in these films that are at once local and global. However, it also fair to say that, despite this transnational outlook, the majority of Beur Cinema of the 1980s and 1990s remains locked into the social realist conventions of *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking;
presenting us with Maghrebi-French characters who, ultimately, either find themselves relegated to a marginal space or state of limbo in the narrative, or remain firmly located in the localised, deprived socio-economic space of the cité (working-class housing estate of the banlieue). Moreover, given that, in terms of their politics, these films are primarily concerned with asserting the rightful place of Maghrebi-French youth in France, the most frequent response of the young beur protagonists to the North African heritage of their immigrant parents in films of the 1980s and 1990s has tended to be one of indifference or outright hostility (see, for example: Le Thé au harem d’Archimède; Cheb, Bye-bye; and Le Ciel, les oiseaux . . . et ta mère!). While such tensions do not simply disappear in the subsequent decade, this book will explore how the ‘locally grounded, nationally referenced and globally minded’ outlook of both Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in question is more fully realised in the 2000s. Not only do these films offer more nuanced and potentially enriching possibilities for exchange between the French and North African origins, locations and traditions of their protagonists than their predecessors, but they also do so in ways that seek alternatives to the diasporic axis as the ultimate determinant of the complex and often tense relationship (particularly for the second generation) between host and homeland.

Even taking into account the inherent transnationality of earlier Beur and banlieue cinema of the 1980s and 1990s identified by Hargreaves, the 2000s still represent a key decade of transition or departure for Maghrebi-French and North African immigrant filmmaking in France, and for a variety of reasons. Firstly, directors of Maghrebi origin in France have produced a greater range of films over the past decade, particularly in relation to genre. Secondly, a more diverse matrix of socio-economic spaces are occupied by the protagonists of Maghrebi origin in these films, moving beyond the banlieue as the dominant and, in some cases, what seems to be the only location for characters of Maghrebi origin in the mid-1990s (Higbee 2007a; Tarr 2005). Thirdly, there has been a notable historical turn made by directors of Maghrebi origin in the 2000s. This relates to a re-examination of a shared Franco-Maghrebi history, which itself connects to a larger debate over the memorialisation of France’s colonial past and the visibility of a history of post-war immigration from North Africa. However, with recent films such as Vénus noire (Kechiche, 2010) and Les Chants de Mandrin (Ameur-Zaïmeche, 2012), the historical reach of such films has extended beyond colonial history or a history of immigration between France and the Maghreb. Finally, in the 2000s, we witness a greater degree of access to mainstream production, distribution and exhibition networks for certain Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers on both sides of the camera.

Such advances, in particular the move to the mainstream, could be seen as distancing these directors from the very subjects and environments that led
Bosséno to describe Beur Cinema as a cinema of ‘social intervention’ (Bosséno 1992: 49). And yet, as shall be argued in the chapters that follow, despite these important developments, films made during the 2000s by directors of Maghrebi origin continue to offer key interventions into socio-political debates surrounding immigration, integration and social exclusion in contemporary France. What is more, in terms of their stylistic influences, modes of production, socio-political engagement and global ambition, Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in the 2000s have produced a cinema that, more than ever, is simultaneously local, national and transnational in its approaches, references and outlook.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to analyse these films and filmmakers via a methodology that combines the recent debates in film studies concerning questions of national, transnational and accented cinema4 with existing work by scholars in the field of French and francophone studies who engage with these films either as texts that provide insights into France’s socio-political relationship with its immigrant minorities (Tarr 2005; Hargreaves 2007; Durmelat and Swamy 2011) or as a platform for a theoretically-led analysis of the politics of inclusion and exclusion facing France’s postcolonial minorities (Rosello 1997, 2002).

However, before we examine Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmaking of the 2000s in detail, it is necessary to address two further areas. Firstly, a brief historical, industrial and socio-political contextualisation of the representation of the North African immigrant population in French cinema since the 1970s, that will allow a better understanding of the conditions that led to the key transition for Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmaking in the 2000s. Secondly, recognition of the similarities (and differences) that exist between the various directors who are included under the rubrics of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmaking in France and the problematic ‘naming game’ involved in categorising their films.

**North African Immigrant Cinema of the 1970s**

If a new generation of Maghrebi-French (or beur) directors did not emerge until the 1980s, the history of North African émigré filmmaking in France effectively begins in the 1970s. In part, immigrant filmmakers were simply unable to access the means of production prior to this period but their absence was also due to the strict censorship laws surrounding French cinema that remained in place until the mid-1970s. This made it difficult for any filmmaker (French or North African) to engage with the colonial question in a politicised or ‘anti-French’ manner in anything other than allegorical or elliptical terms, or else through narratives that offered only tangential references to events such as the Algerian war.5 As a result, the representation of North African subjects
on French screens before the 1970s remained trapped in the colonial imaginary of a cinema that introduced the Maghreb through tales of love and adventure, where characters of North African origin appeared as ‘servants, traitors or exploited sexual partners’ in an exotic colonial space, such as that found in *L’Atlantide* (Feyder, 1921); *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier, 1937); *L’Appel du Bled* (Gleize, 1942) (Sherzer 1996: 5). Of the relatively small number of French films including characters of Maghrebi-origin between 1910 and 1969 (little more than 150 features over five decades) the vast majority were located in the Maghreb and provided North African subjects with only secondary roles (Garel 1989: 68–76).

In contrast, the 1970s saw a notable increase (relatively speaking) in the presence of the North African immigrant subject on French screens, as well as the tentative beginning of documentaries and features directed by filmmakers of North African origin. Whilst between 1910 and 1969 only twelve French films involved characters of Maghrebi origin based in France, during the 1970s the number rose to thirty-four (Garel 1989: 68–76). On screen, the Maghrebi protagonist was no longer represented solely as the distant or exotic colonial subject. Instead, he (for it was almost exclusively a male protagonist) reflected the socio-economic realities of France’s post-war reconstruction, appearing as an economic migrant in the larger French cities. Such representations emerged in two distinct areas. On the one hand, in French-authored narrative features such as *Elise ou la vraie vie* (Drach, 1970) and the political narratives of civic cinema, such as *Dupont Lajoie* (Boisset, 1974), that were aimed squarely at a mainstream French audience. On the other hand, directors of Maghrebi-immigrant origin such as Ali Ghalem (*Mektoub*, 1970; *L’Autre France*, 1974), Naceur Ktari (*Les Ambassadeurs*) and Ali Akika (*Voyage en capital*, 1977) aimed, through low-budget, socio-realist and militant cinema, to highlight the racism and exploitation faced by North Africans living in France. The main difference between the two types of cinema is, unsurprisingly, narrative focus: while the former foreground the reactions of ethnic majority French protagonists to the exploitation and racism suffered by North African immigrants in France, the latter focus on the experiences of the immigrants themselves.

In spite of this tentative increase in visibility on screen and behind the camera, the presence and influence of Maghrebi immigrant directors in the French film industry remained extremely limited during the 1970s. Militant immigrant filmmakers continued to encounter great difficulties in distributing their films to a wider French public and tended to be dismissed as offering representations of Maghrebi immigrants as helpless victims of French racism (Smith 1995: 42). However, it should be noted that the uncompromising and often brutal portrayal of racism offered by filmmakers such as Ghalem and Ktari was consistent with the aims of militant and civic cinema of the 1970s (produced by directors such as Yves Boisset) to privilege political content and
social reality over the aesthetic appeal of spectacle and the escapism of fictional narrative. Moreover, by exposing the experiences of North African immigrants in France, these films directly addressed subject matter that was either denied or ignored by the majority of French society and French cinema.

Given the almost exclusive focus in the above films from the 1970s on the male North African immigrant, Ali Akika’s *Voyage en capital* is highly significant for the way in which it also opens up a space for a female, second-generation protagonist. In the film, the established focus on the male immigrant worker remains in the form of the Algerian émigré, Khader (Mustapha Mazari), whose exposure to everyday racism in Paris propels him towards political activism. However, unlike in earlier militant cinema of the 1970s, this politicisation is not presented as ‘an inevitable process’ (Smith 1995: 46). Khader initially shows little interest in allying his status as immigrant with any form of political struggle and, like the French themselves, views his presence in Paris in purely economic terms. Against this more familiar representational trope of the male immigrant worker, the experiences of a female protagonist of Maghrebi immigrant origin emerges in the form of Djamila (Naïma Hamlaoui), a young Parisian university student of Algerian origin, born in France. Though keen to maintain her links with Algerian cultural heritage, Djamila confesses in the film to feeling uncomfortable upon a recent return trip to Algeria, and further displeases her father by refusing to relinquish the independence she enjoys as a women within French/western society. Her attempt to articulate the conflicts of identity and loyalty felt by the French descendants of North African immigrants by allowing them a central position within the diegesis effectively qualifies *Voyage en capital* as a precursor to Beur Cinema of the 1980s.


Moving into the 1980s, two representational trends are noticeable. The first is the extent to which, in mainstream French cinema at least, the immigrant worker of the 1970s is replaced by the North African protagonist as a delinquent or criminal Other (Schwengler 1989: 32–5). This representational shift can perhaps be explained by the fact that, as the permanent settlement of North African immigrants and their families became a reality in the late-1970s and early-1980s, so French society could no longer perceive the Maghrebi population as a temporary, economic presence. Instead, some sought to qualify their otherness in terms of criminality and deviance. These anxieties appear most frequently in French *polars* (crime films) of the early 1980s such as *La Balance* (Swain, 1982) and *Police* (Pialat, 1985). In both films, the North African immigrant population and its descendants exist in a criminal underworld of drugs, violence and prostitution that is set apart from mainstream French society.
Despite the potentially negative connotations of such representations, for contemporary French critic Hubert Prolongeau, the emergence of the Maghrebi protagonist as member of a criminal underclass in fact represented a positive advance:

For the first time, the Arab [sic] is not defined by race alone but by his place in society. Though he is only offered the lowest rung on the ladder, he occupies it with force. The Arab of the 1980s no longer has his head smashed in by a stone, he goes to prison because he is a gangster (Prolongeau 1989: 16).

Leaving aside the simplistic description of militant immigrant cinema of the 1970s implied in the above quote, the idea that replacing the exploited and victimised worker with the drug-dealing criminal can somehow constitute a victory for the North African is rather suspect. The Maghrebi protagonist of the 1980s polar remains a largely two-dimensional stereotype and is, invariably, set against a more sympathetic and complex white protagonist; be they a cop, a confidant or even a pimp. Finally, in cultural, social and spatial terms (confined as they are to the immigrant districts of Paris) the North African immigrant remains excluded as the ethnic Other within the polars of the 1980s. Hence, contrary to Prolongeau’s claim, Maghrebi protagonists continue to be qualified by their ‘race’ in the polar of the 1980s. Rather than occupying the ‘lowest rung of the social scale’, North African immigrants are excluded from society through their systematic criminalisation, which focuses on a deviant minority in order to portray the perceived reality of a homogeneous Arab ‘community’ populated solely by drug dealers and pimps.

Beyond the criminalised North African ‘community’ of the polar, two further types can be identified in mainstream French cinema of the early-1980s. Firstly, the immigrant as passive victim of French racism, which represented a continuation from both civic and militant cinema of the 1970s and was found in concerned, liberal films such as Tchao pantin (Berri, 1983) and Train d’enfer (Hanin, 1985) (see Tarr 2005: 9–10). Secondly, and of more direct relevance to the Beur Cinema that would follow, the tentative emergence of Maghrebi-French youth as delinquent from the disadvantaged banlieue – found not only in Le Péron’s Laisse béton (1984), but also in Girod’s Le Grand frère (1982). In addition to these films by ethnic-majority French directors, a limited number of shorts and medium-length features were made by North African émigré filmmakers in the early-1980s, such as Mahmoud Zemmouri (Prends dix milles balles et casse-toi [1981] and Les Folles années du twist [1983]) and Abdelkrim Bahloul, who studied filmmaking in France in the 1970s and worked as a television cameraman before he eventually obtained funding to direct his first commercial feature, Le Thé à la menthe. The film focuses on
the exploits of Hammou (Abdellatif Kechiche), a young Algerian immigrant, whose life is disrupted by the unexpected arrival of his mother in Paris.

Even though he inhabits the same space within Paris (Barbès and Pigalle) as the Maghrebi-immigrant protagonists of La Balance, Hammou is far removed from the violence and ruthlessness of the polar. Instead he is shown to be a likeable opportunist, whose criminal activities are the actions of a resilient, streetwise figure who refuses to be victimised – much like the beur protagonists of Bâton Rouge (Bouchareb, 1985) and Le Thé au harem d’Archimède that would follow soon after. Bahloul’s portrayal of a young, dynamic and largely westernised immigrant protagonist forces audiences to reconsider the stock representation of the male immigrant worker in the 1970s as an isolated and passive victim of French racism. Elsewhere, stereotypical notions of the Algerian immigrant as a threatening presence and inter-ethnic tension between immigrant and host nation are subverted in the scenes where Hammou’s mother crosses a busy lane of traffic to offer a pot of mint tea to a policeman who is directing traffic. However, the potential integration of the Maghrebi-immigrant into wider French society is essentially closed down by the end of Le Thé à la mènthe. The final scene of the film shows Hammou boarding a plane at the airport, having been deported to Algeria with his mother after stolen goods are found in his apartment, the suggestion being that the young immigrant’s future is in Algeria rather than France.

Beur Cinema: « Un film qui cherche des interlocuteurs »

The 1980s mark a watershed in the representation of ethnic minorities in French cinema, due largely to the emergence of a cluster of independently released features labelled as Beur Cinema. Beur is verlan (a politically charged inverted slang) for Arabe, and the term emerged in Paris in the late 1970s as a positive form of auto-designation for the descendants of Maghrebi immigrants who had either been born or raised since a young age in France (Hargreaves 1995; Durmelat 1998). Beur Cinema thus refers to a limited number of short-films, video documentaries and commercially released feature films directed by French filmmakers of North African immigrant origin, whose narratives focus on the experiences of young beur protagonists and are largely dominated by themes of integration, racism, delinquency, identity and belonging in France. It is defined by French film critic Christian Bosséno (1992: 49) as a ‘cinema of social intervention’ and by beur filmmaker, novelist and activist Farida Belghoul as the work of an excluded minority trying to enter into a dialogue with the dominant societal norm: ‘un film qui cherche des interlocuteurs’ (Belghoul in Dazat 1985: 18). The emergence of a putative Beur Cinema first came to the attention of a wider French public with the crossover success of Mehdi Charef’s Le Thé au harem d’Archimède. The film was an adaptation of
the director’s semi-autobiographical novel about his experiences as the son of an Algerian immigrant growing up in the suburbs of Paris, and attracted over 500,000 spectators in France. As both a discursive and descriptive term, Beur Cinema thus functioned in the 1980s as the cinematic manifestation of a wider socio-political and cultural mobilisation of French-born descendants of North African immigrants who demanded the recognition of their rightful place in France as citizens of the Republic.

Beur Cinema was notable for its refusal of existing miserabilist portrayals of the immigrant as victim or Other found in the sympathetic representation of immigrant protagonists offered by militant and mainstream French directors in the 1970s and that continued into social dramas of the 1980s. Significantly, beur films also showed their central protagonists to be as much French as they were ‘Arab’. Moreover, unlike immigrant cinema of the 1970s, Beur Cinema had the potential to reach a crossover French audience (in particular a youth audience) through its mixture of social realism and comedy, as well as through the foregrounding of attractive and resilient beur protagonists.

If the overtly politicised discourse of 1970s militant immigrant cinema, such as that found in Les Ambassadeurs, is absent from the work of commercial Maghrebi-French authored films of the 1980s, so too is the sense of dual identification with North African and French culture experienced by Djamel in Voyage en capital. In Le Thé au harem d’Archimède, Madjid (Kader Boukhanef) actively resists his mother’s pleas that he turn away from France and engage with his Maghrebi heritage. Instead, it is the shared socio-economic exclusion of the young multi-ethnic gang and their collective identity as banlieusards that provides a sense of identity and belonging for Madjid, far more than any affiliation he may feel as a result of his ethnic origins. This point is emphasised by the fact that Madjid’s appearance (jeans, leather jacket and unkempt hair) is strikingly similar to that of Pat (Rémi Martin), his white French friend. Moreover, even in the face of French racism, Madjid refuses to revert to an essentialised ethnic identity and submit to the position of marginalised victim. Instead he and Pat actively exploit French prejudices that associate Arab immigrants with criminality in order to make Madjid the object of suspicion in the metro carriage, whilst Pat walks off with the unsuspecting passenger’s wallet. This narrative strategy was emphasised by Charef in an interview following the release of Le Thé au harem d’Archimède:

What I certainly didn’t want to make was a miserabilist social drama. Rather than an accusatory tone in a film designed to systematically shock the spectator, I preferred a more upbeat narrative [. . .] I didn’t want to make people, the French community, feel guilty. It wasn’t necessary to say: if the Arabs [sic] are unhappy, it must be the fault of the French. (Charef in Dazat 1985: 11)
Charef’s remarks indicate a conscious decision to distance his film from the oversimplified representation of the ‘good’ North African as passive victim of the ‘bad’ French racist found in militant cinema a decade earlier. The more sympathetic representation of the Maghrebi-French subject is, moreover, complicated in *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* by Madjid’s apparently unrepentant delinquent activities: stealing wallets on the metro; pimping a desperate alcoholic mother from the *cité* to the local building site. However, the quote also reveals the extent to which *beur* filmmakers of the 1980s used lighter comic episodes to counterbalance the harsh socio-political realities of racism and exclusion depicted in the narratives of their films. Equally, it highlights the delicate negotiation for the *beur* filmmaker in exposing the negative treatment of Maghrebi-French youth, without adopting an excessively hostile stance towards a French society in which, ultimately, they have a stake.

The significance and impact of the films associated with Beur Cinema of the 1980s actually far outweigh their number. For this reason, the corpus tends (somewhat problematically) to be extended by critics to include films by North African émigré directors – *Le Thé à la menthe* and *Un Amour à Paris* (Allouache, 1987) – as well as films directed by majority French directors – *Le Petit frère*, *P’tit con* (Lauzier, 1983), *Laisse béton* (Le Péron, 1984) – that share common thematic or stylistic traits. And yet as Farida Belghoul argued (Dazat 1985: 18), to include all of these films within the same generic category as *beur* effectively elides the different perspectives of the North African immigrant population and their descendants offered by émigré filmmakers working...
in France, the descendants of North African immigrants born or raised in France (such as Charef and Bouchareb), and finally the external perspective of majority-ethnic French directors.

As Mireille Rosello has suggested (1996: 147–51), given the ambiguities surrounding the term, compiling lists to argue over the existence (or not) of an identifiable Beur Cinema is, in many ways, a futile task and distracts our attention from a consideration of the ways in which stereotypes of the Maghrebi-immigrant subject function. Why bother, then, to compile the list at all? Why attempt to identify the work of Maghrebi-French filmmakers under the collective term Beur Cinema?

Possibly the most substantial critical discussions of 1980s Beur Cinema are to be found in the special editions of Cinématographe (1985) and CinémAction (1990) that were devoted entirely to this newly identified cinematic trend. In addition to extensive filmographies and interviews with filmmakers of North African origin, both publications offered an analysis of thematic and stylistic devices shared by a corpus of beur films to have emerged during the 1980s. The broader aim appeared to be to expose the work of these filmmakers to a wider audience, whilst consolidating their position within the French film industry. This approach was typified by an article by Fahdel (1990) for the CinémAction collection, in which he noted that, whilst the films of Charef, Bouchareb, Bahloul and Zemmouri (again the reader will notice that the corpus of Beur directors has been extended to include Algerian filmmakers working in France) may share common traits, such as the use of comedy and focus on youthful, westernised protagonists, there is no evidence of a common ‘Beur aesthetic’:

[. . .] is it possible to have films that are beur, not solely because they speak about and are directed by beurs but also because they express through their aesthetic and their images, through their sequences or in the rhythm of their scenes a cultural specificity that can be identified as beur? Nothing is less apparent. (Fahdel 1990: 147)

Significantly, whilst Fahdel rejects the notion of a beur aesthetic, he appears to accept the existence of Beur Cinema per se, continually referring in the article to films by directors of North African origin as examples of cinéma beur. Beur Cinema thus appears to be employed as a collective (and convenient) short-hand term that highlights the increasing presence (and difference) of filmmakers of Maghrebi origin; a practice which continues to this day amongst certain critics. And yet, curiously, in spite of the term’s emphasis on the ethnic origins and difference of these filmmakers as beur, many of the articles contained within the Cinématographe and CinémAction dossiers reiterate the fact that these filmmakers occupy a position within the parameters of French cinematic discourse, aesthetics and production.
In this context, the term Beur Cinema appears to function as a form of strategic essentialism, whereby a heterogeneous minority endorses an essentialised identity in order to further their collective aims and combat the oppression or exclusion effected by hegemonic discourse. However, by identifying specifically with the difference of a particular social minority, such a strategic use of essentialist discourse inevitably carries the risk of isolating the very group it intends to empower. For French critics attempting to embrace a positive notion of Beur Cinema in the late-1980s, this delicate balance was rendered even more precarious by the negative connotations of cultural difference (namely difference as a barrier to integration and a means of producing cultural and ethnic ghettos within society) that were becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary political, cultural and critical discourse in France. Perhaps most damaging of all, however, was the fact that the notion of Beur Cinema was rejected by the very filmmakers it presumed to champion. French directors of Maghrebi-immigrant origin were reluctant to associate themselves with a reductive generic category, which, rather than considering narrative content of the film, or the aesthetic vision offered by the individual filmmaker, classified films on the grounds of ethnic and cultural difference.

Beyond the commercial arena, in the early 1980s beur filmmakers were producing militant and critically acclaimed work. A range of short films, documentaries and video-based content reflecting the concerns of grass-roots political groups formed in ethnic minority communities in the banlieue began to circulate in this alternative distribution network. A collective of young French filmmakers of Algerian origin from the rundown estates of Vitry-sur-Seine (Paris) working under the name of the Collectif Mohammed directed a number of shorts on super-8 articulating the exclusion and discrimination experienced by Maghrebi-French youth. The most prominent of these films was Ils ont tué Kader (1981), a documentary exposing the racist murder of a Maghrebi-French youth from Vitry. A section of the film was screened on French television in May 1981, allowing a wider French audience a fleeting connection with the more underground and oppositional work of beur filmmakers. Another key figure from the 1980s was Farida Belghoul, who directed the fictionalised documentaries C’est Madame France que tu préfères? (1981) and Le Départ du père (1985). Rather than focusing exclusively on the question of beur youth’s successful integration into French society, Belghoul’s films analyse from a female perspective the complex relationship between North African immigrant parents and their French descendants and the fraught question of loyalty and return to the Maghrebi homeland. In contrast to the docu-realism employed by Belghoul and the Collectif Mohammed, a more abstract aesthetic can be found in Lakhdar Lachine’s Trois garçons sur la route (1983), which, despite constructing a dreamlike narrative, still manages to emphasise the social realities of life for the descendants of North African immigrants living in France.
The arrival of Beur Cinema – heralded largely it must be said by the crossover success of *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* – offered the possibility of a proliferation of Maghrebi-French authored films in the late 1980s. In the event, only a very few commercial releases focusing on characters of Maghrebi-immigrant origin materialised. The few that did appear tended to emphasise the continued exclusion faced by North African immigrants – *Miss Mona* (Charef, 1987) – and the problematic ‘integration’ of Maghrebi-French youth – *Pierre and Djamila* (Blain, 1986). While established Algerian émigré directors such as Allouache and Bahloul receive modest support from state funding for two films in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the industry as a whole (producers, distributors, exhibitors) appeared reluctant to engage with either filmmakers or audiences of North African-immigrant origin. In many ways, it seemed left to Charef alone to capitalise on the success of *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* in the late 1980s. However, even the iconic beur director showed through the choices of his subsequent features an apparent desire to distance himself from the potentially reductive ethnic marker attached to Beur Cinema. This move led to a considerable and progressive decline in audiences for his subsequent features, which perhaps (depressingly) suggests that at this time French audiences were less willing to see a beur director tackling non-beur subjects, thus reinforcing the notion of Beur Cinema as promoting an artistic ghetto for filmmakers of Maghrebi origin. Elsewhere, in Bouchareb’s second feature, *Cheb*, the upbeat ending and promise of social mobility for the young beur protagonists found in *Bâton Rouge* was replaced by an altogether more sombre and pessimistic narrative, focusing on a Maghrebi-French youth from North-Eastern France who is deported to Algeria (a country he does not know) and who subsequently struggles to return to France as an illegal alien.

By the end of the 1980s, then, the early promise of Beur Cinema appeared to have reached an ‘impasse’ in terms of funding and narrative content (Tarr 1997: 74). In this way it reflected the political pessimism of the left in France by the late-1980s, whereby the initial euphoria surrounding the election of both a socialist president and government at the start of the decade gave way to stagnation, corruption and political scandal, and led to the return of a centre-right government to power in the second half of the 1980s. And yet, less than five years later, filmmakers of North African immigrant origin would once again offer a key contribution to a rich vein of politically conscious, social realist filmmaking in French cinema. The re-emergence in the 1990s of a committed cinema, or ‘New Realism’ (Powrie 1999), was not necessarily driven by a specific ideological or party-political affiliation. It was, however, strongly associated with a group of fifty-nine directors who signed an open call to civil disobedience – published in *Le Monde* and *Libération* – against proposed government legislation against the sans papiers (undocumented immigrants) and produced a collectively authored short film *Nous, sans papiers de*
France (1997) that was screened in hundreds of cinemas across the country. While media coverage suggested that the concerns of these filmmakers were wedded to the issue of the sans papiers, the return of the political in French cinema of the 1990s was not, in fact, exclusively defined by representations of (clandestine) immigrant minorities. Rather, it covered a diverse body of films addressing a range of socio-political issues affecting contemporary France such as unemployment, delinquency, racism and social exclusion. These include, but are not exclusively linked to, immigrant narratives, ethnic minority protagonists and filmmakers of Maghrebi origin.

Nevertheless, the return of the political in French cinema of the 1990s presented the conditions for the emergence of three of the most distinctive Maghrebi-French directors: Karim Dridi, Abdellatif Kechiche and Malik Chibane. Dridi’s second feature Bye-bye, overshadowed upon its original release by the phenomenal success of La Haine (Kassovitz, 1995) but now widely regarded as a hidden classic of Maghrebi-French filmmaking, offers a nuanced and highly sympathetic portrayal of an extended North African immigrant family living in the Le Panier district of Marseille (Tarr 2007a: 33; Higbee 2001). However, despite placing ethnicity and difference at the centre of its narrative, the idea of accepting an essentialised ethnic identity is strongly challenged through the character of Mouloud, the youngest of two Maghrebi-French brothers, who violently rejects his parents’ demands that he ‘return’ to the family home in Tunisia – a country he barely knows. Similarly,
while *La Faute à Voltaire* (Kechiche, 2001) focuses on the arrival of a clandestine Tunisian immigrant in Paris, the narrative is ultimately more concerned with his integration into the wider multi-ethnic community of marginal and working-class protagonists that he encounters in a homeless shelter in Paris.

The area of 1990s New Realism in which ethnic minorities are most prevalent is undoubtedly that of the *banlieue* film. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that ethnic minorities formed (and still do) a disproportionately large section of the overall population in the working-class estates of the French urban periphery (Dubet and Lapoyenne 1992). Though French directors had been using the urban periphery as the backdrop for social dramas since at least the 1960s, the term *banlieue film* or *cinéma des banlieues* began to be employed by critics following the release of a cluster of five independently produced features over a period of six months in 1995: *La Haine; Douce France* (Chibane, 1995); *Etat des lieux* (Richet, 1995); *Krim* (Bouchaala, 1995); and *Rai* (Gilou, 1995). All of these films are located in the disadvantaged urban periphery and deal with issues of social exclusion, delinquency and violence, from the perspective of the *banlieue*’s youthful multi-ethnic male inhabitants. The significance of the historical and geographical positioning of Maghrebi-French filmmakers within the *banlieue* is even more apparent when compared to that of Algerian émigré directors such as Merzak Allouache, Abdelkrim Bahloul and Mahmoud Zemmouri. Tellingly, films such as *Le Thé à la menthe, Salut cousin!* or *100% Arabica* (Zemmouri, 1997) are located in the older, more centralised immigrant districts of Paris such as Belleville and Barbès, where established socio-cultural networks of street markets, ‘ethnic’ commerce, mosques and cafés provide a more immediate connection for these émigré directors to the Maghreb than the *cités* of the urban periphery.

Critical discussion of the *banlieue film* in the mid-1990s was disproportionately centred on Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine*, due to the film’s considerable commercial success, its multi-ethnic ‘black-blanc-beur’ trio of lead actors and the media controversy generated by its (apparently) anti-police narrative. Yet arguably the key representation of the Maghrebi-French population in relation to the *banlieue* from this period came a year earlier, with Malik Chibane’s directorial debut *Hexagone* (1994). Produced on a shoestring budget, partly funded by the community association IDRISS which Chibane had co-founded in 1985 to provide support for the local unemployed Maghrebi-French population, *Hexagone* took over six years to finance and was shot in a matter of weeks in the director’s own *cité* using a non-professional cast (with many of the technical crew working for free). Chibane’s film employs a realist aesthetic similar to that found in earlier films from the 1980s located in the *banlieue* (such as *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* and *Laisse béton*) in order to highlight the problems facing the disenfranchised Maghrebi-French youth of the disadvantaged *cité*. However, *Hexagone* is exceptional in that it provides
a hitherto unprecedented degree of agency to a variety of Maghrebi-French subjectivities, including women. The film thus affords a degree of ‘cultural visibility’ normally denied to Maghrebi-French protagonists that in turn fosters a sense of ‘illegitimacy’ (Chibane in Bouquet 1994: 11). In this respect Chibane’s approach differs from earlier examples of Beur Cinema, where the film’s protagonists actively reject or distance themselves from the perceived ‘difference’ of their North African heritage in favour of a multi-ethnic, Americanised youth culture. Differences between the Maghrebi immigrant population and the dominant societal norm are not displayed to advocate a form of ethnic separatism. Rather, they demystify the notion of cultural difference as an insurmountable obstacle towards integration. Chibane’s films, especially *Douce France*, are also significant for their non-threatening representation of Islam as an integral part of the North African immigrant population’s collective cultural identity. Finally, Chibane’s films are innovative for the greater degree of agency offered to female Maghrebi-French protagonists, reflecting the extremely limited visibility afforded to Maghrebi-French women directors in the 1990s. This fact is all the more important given the total lack of female directors of Maghrebi origin in French cinema of the 1980s and 1990s at the level of commercial feature-film production. Despite critically acclaimed video and documentary work by Belgouhl in the early 1980s, as well as short- and medium-length films made by female directors in the mid-1990s (*Le Petit chat est mort* [Delibia, 1991], *Souviens-toi de moi* [Ghorab-Volta, 1996]), a feature-length film would not be directed by a Maghrebi-French woman until *Jeunesse dorée* (Ghorab-Volta, 2001).

Much of the strength of the intersection between Maghrebi-French (*beur*) and *banlieue* filmmaking in France at key moments since the early 1980s has come from the fact that these films function as a form of implicit or explicit social criticism of mainstream French society’s prejudices towards (and apparent indifference to) the plight of the *banlieue*. However, the danger in the 1980s and 1990s had been that filmmakers of Maghrebi origin working in France became associated almost exclusively with *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking. In contrast, a select number of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in the late-1990s began making a conscious decision to move ‘beyond the *banlieue*’ both as a site of social struggle and as an emblematic space of marginality, criminality and violence that risks trapping the Maghrebi-French protagonists it portrays in the same over-determined media stereotypes they attempt to escape. The late-1990s thus witnessed an increasing diversity of representations of Maghrebi-French subjectivities by *beur* filmmakers on both sides of the camera in relation to space and place as well as an interest in the history of Maghrebi immigration to France (Tarr 2007a: 35) – trends that, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, would be more vigorously pursued by Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in the 2000s.
Projecting the Politics of the Hyphen: Defining a Corpus of Maghrebi(-French) Filmmaking

Until the mid-1970s, the migration of North Africans to France was largely characterised by the cyclical movement of a male economic workforce from the Maghreb to the Hexagone. However, following the suspension of immigration from North Africa by the French authorities in the mid-1970s, a new policy of regroupement familial was put in place that allowed Maghrebi immigrant workers to be joined in France by their immediate family. The focus of debate surrounding immigration in France thus shifted from the economic to the social sphere. Politicians spoke less of the need for cheap labour imported from former French colonies and more of how to deal with the assimilation of these immigrant families into French society. As the largest and most visible minority in France, these issues were associated primarily with the North African immigrant population. Moreover, when the question of national identity and the right to citizenship for the descendants of immigrants was debated in both 1986 and 1993, discussion focused, unsurprisingly, on French youths of Maghrebi-immigrant origin as the most visible citizens of a postcolonial, multicultural French society (Hargreaves 1988: 1–10; Rude-Antoine 1997: 101–36).

In this context, Begag and Chaouite (1991: 82) note how many of the collective terms used in France to describe the descendants of North African immigrants in the 1980s – les jeunes issus d’immigration maghrébine; les enfants d’immigrés maghrébins; la seconde génération – continued to focus on notions of the immigrant and Maghrebi at the expense of their ‘Frenchness.’ Indeed, to describe the second generation as ‘immigrants’ is incorrect, given that the majority of French youths of Maghrebi-origin were born in France and therefore have rights as French citizens. As a means of combating the negative associations of immigré and Arabe, another term began to gain currency in the late-1970s: beur. As noted earlier in this introduction, beur was first used by Maghrebi-French youth from the Parisian banlieue as a self-affirmation of their own hybrid origins (Hargreaves 1995: 105–8). However, the neologism soon came up against opposition for a number of reasons. Some Maghrebi-French youth felt that, as both a concept and a descriptive term, beur had been appropriated by the media following the Marche contre le racisme et pour l’égalité (march against racism and for equality) in the autumn of 1983, dubbed ‘La Marche des Beurs’.9 Having first appeared as a term used and conceived by Maghrebi-French youth to describe their own bi-cultural heritage, the fear was that by the mid-1980s the term beur no longer belonged to those it was aiming to define. Worse, it was increasingly seen as means of identifying the descendants of North African immigrants as not entirely French: different from and thus unable to integrate into Republican France. Nevertheless, as Mireille
Rosello has rightly observed, it would be a gross simplification to presume that all of those who objected to the use of the term *beur* were ‘craving assimilation into the dominant French culture’ (Rosello 1996: n.10, 171). Moving beyond the capital, Maghrebi-French youths from cities with large immigrant populations such as Lyon and Marseilles rejected the term as having little meaning beyond the vernacular of the Parisian *cités* from which it had originated (Durmelat 1998: 201), further emphasising the regional and localised differences that exist amongst the North African immigrant population and their descendants in France.

Despite these concerns and objections, use of the term *beur* has persisted, to the point that it has now entered everyday speech in France and to the extent that it incorrectly takes the existence of a homogenous *beur* ‘community’ as a given. Moreover, the term is not simply used by majority-ethnic French citizens. This point is well illustrated by *Beur sur la ville* (Bensalah, 2011), a comedy about a hapless Maghrebi-French youth from a working-class estate in the Parisian *banlieue* who benefits from the politics of positive discrimination to secure a job as a policeman. Bensalah, a French director of Algerian origin (and himself a member of the *beur* generation), employs the term in the title of his film as shorthand. The *beur* of *Beur sur la ville* connotes both the descendants of Maghrebi immigrants and, by association, the housing estates of the deprived urban periphery in which the majority of France’s North African immigrant population still reside. This association is amply reinforced by the poster that advertised the film at the time of its release (Figure 1.3), showing the central protagonist, Khalid Belkacem (Booder), standing behind a police cordon with arms aloft and a panicked expression on his face, against a backdrop of high-rise flats and a tag line that reads: ‘They’re going to put some colour into the police’.

Bensalah thus appears comfortable using *beur* as a means of marketing (some might even say exploiting) his film as an ‘ethnic’ product in a way that risks instantly locating its Maghrebi-French protagonists within a specific set of potentially reductive social and ethnic markers. However, most other filmmakers of Maghrebi origin are far more guarded about identifying themselves with the term. Consider, for example, an interview given by the four Maghrebi-French stars of *Indigènes*, Samy Naceri, Jamel Debbouze, Roschdy Zem and Sami Bouajila, following the film’s success at Cannes:

S. Naceri – First of all, butter [*le beurre*] is what you put on your toast to have with a cup of coffee. We are Maghrebis. *Beurs* don’t exist.10

J. Debbouze – We are actors with origins, not actors of Maghrebi origin.

S. Bouajila – I’m sorry, but we are fed up with having to always explain ourselves. *Beurs, beurs*. . . We’ll go to the moon one day and they’ll still write that we are *beurs*. 

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Post-Beur Cinema
Figure 1.3 Promotional poster for Beur sur la ville (Bensalah, 2011).
**R. Zem** – The term is pejorative, it’s essentialist.

**J. Debbouze** – It’s not far off being racist.

(Bouajila, Debbouze, Naceri and Zem in Pliskin 2006)

The above quote clearly reflects the frustration felt by the four actors at the need to constantly define themselves in relation to their Maghrebi-immigrant origins via a term that they feel is applied to pigeonhole them as performers and members of an ethnic minority. Their intense hostility to the term *beur* also illustrates how the supposedly innocent act of attaching a collective identity to the French descendants of North African immigrants is, in fact, a highly complex and politically charged process.

As a means of countering the problematic associations of the term *beur*, alternatives to the neologism have appeared, some based on regional variations, such as *Rabza* (Swamy and Durmelat 2011: 12). More recently, the term *Icissiens* has emerged as a more general term that playfully affirms the permanent presence of the descendants of all immigrants in French society.\(^{11}\) Finally, *beur* has itself been inverted to produce *rebeu*, a further attempt by the very people it designates to re-establish control for French citizens of Maghrebi origin over how they are defined, and define themselves. However, like the original term *beur* it was intended to replace, *rebeu* has now also passed into common speech in France, particularly amongst younger French speakers.

Directors of Maghrebi origin working in France have found themselves subjected to a similarly excessive, even obsessive, impulse to categorise their films. Since the 1980s, in attempts by scholars and critics to describe the bi-cultural influences seen to shape these films and filmmakers, they have been variously labelled as exponents of: Arab, North African, immigrant, émigré, Maghrebi, Maghrebi-French, second generation, hybrid, postcolonial, diasporic, national, transnational, intercultural, accented, *beur*, and *banlieue* or urban cinema. Some of these terms – for example Naficy’s more general notion of ‘accented’ cinema to describe diasporic, exilic and postcolonial filmmaking in the West (Naficy 2001) – are largely confined to the realms of Anglo-American scholarship. Consequently, they are less contentious for directors of Maghrebi origin living in France, whose work they seek to define. However, when the term *beur* is employed by French critics and journalists to define the work of Maghrebi-French directors its impact on such filmmakers is far more immediate and troublesome. As was discussed in some detail earlier in this chapter, the term Beur Cinema has, in particular, been fiercely contested by the very filmmakers it seeks to define, on the grounds that it characterises their films according to the director’s ethnic origins, rather than in relation to a consideration of the film’s genre, aesthetics and thematic or narrative approach.\(^{12}\) Indeed, for Carrie Tarr the various labels applied over the past three decades to filmmakers of Maghrebi origin in France are problematic either for the way that they
deal with the filmmaker’s origins as an excessive marker of alterity or, conversely, by eliding specific religious, ethnic and national difference through an association with the umbrella term *cinéma de banlieue* that renders their ethnic difference largely invisible (Tarr 1999: 172).

In all the above cases, what is abundantly clear is that these filmmakers have rarely, if ever, simply been identified as ‘French’. This is despite the fact that many of them were born or raised in France from a very young age, or, in the case of some North African émigré filmmakers, have spent more of their careers living and working in France than in the Maghreb. Opposition from these filmmakers to such descriptive (and, indeed, prescriptive) markers such as *beur* is heightened by the fact that, rather than constituting an empowering form of auto-designation, they are almost always applied by ethnic-majority French critics or academics who enjoy a privileged position within the dominant cultural norm. Indeed, the whole notion of distinguishing filmmakers on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, gender or sexuality actually runs counter to the Republican model of integration, which sees the manifestation of difference (religious or ethnic) in the public sphere as undermining the norms and universal values to which all citizens should aspire, and, in extreme cases, as leading to a segregationist form of communitarianism (Hargreaves in Begag 2007: xviii). Ironically, then, the consistent rejection of the term Beur Cinema by a range of Maghrebi-French filmmakers since the 1980s actually points to the extent to which many of them espouse a very French attitude to the potential ghettoisation of ethnic-minority filmmaking in France, at the same time as their films display a keen awareness of how unequal the application of the Republican principle of equality can be in the real world.¹³

This position is further complicated by the fact that, while the generic term *beur* originally referred quite specifically to the second generation of Maghrebi immigrants to France, *cinema beur* (Beur Cinema) or *cinéaste beur* (beur filmmaker) are, as we have already seen, terms that have frequently been applied to directors such as Abdelkrim Bahloul, Mahmoud Zemmouri and Merzak Allouache who are quite clearly Maghrebi émigré filmmakers. In a similar way, to speak of a ‘North African immigrant community’ or ‘North African diaspora’ in France is problematic, for while it is true to say that some of the Maghrebi immigrant population in France may share a common linguistic, religious and ethnic heritage (that of an Arabo-Islamic culture), there are also clear national differences between Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian immigrants, as well as ethnic and religious minorities within all of these national migrant populations, such as Berbers from Algeria and Morocco or Sephardic Jews from Tunisia. This situation has thus caused confusion and continues to arouse resentment on the part of North African émigré and Maghrebi-French filmmakers, as well as exemplifying the kind of careless homogenising to which the North African immigrant population are more widely subjected in French society.
Conscious of the complex and contentious ‘naming game’ (Durmelat and Swamy 2011: 12) associated with the North African immigrant population and their descendants in France, the terms Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers will be used in this study to describe and acknowledge the differences that exist between the two key groups of filmmakers of Maghrebi origin whose cinematic output in the 2000s forms the focus of this book. Maghrebi-French refers to those French directors of Maghrebi-immigrant origin who were either born in France or moved there at an early age. These directors share this experience of having spent their formative years in France, while also being influenced to varying degrees by the North African cultural heritage of their parents. The term Maghrebi-French, commonly used by a number of Anglo-American scholars (Tarr 2005; Higbee 2007a; Hargreaves 2011; Durmelat and Swamy 2011) is preferred here to alternatives such as ‘second-generation immigrant’, ‘of Maghrebi-immigrant origin’ and ‘beur’, for reasons already discussed (however, the term beur will be used as a specific generational marker when it applies specifically to films, filmmakers and protagonists from the mid-1980s).

The term Maghrebi-French undoubtedly comes with its own problems. Firstly, it can suggest too straightforward a divide between two distinct national histories, cultural identities and social realities, whose relationship (due to a shared colonial past) is contested, complex and uneven in terms of cultural, political and economic power. Moreover the term can never hope to adequately represent the myriad individual responses to this dual cultural heritage and the fact that each individual will understand and articulate the extent of his/her affiliation to either French or Maghrebi culture – which, of course, can change over time. Such contingent identifications (Brah 1996: 194) range from an almost total rejection of North African culture to a sense of self defined solely in terms of Maghrebi/Muslim consciousness, motivated by a feeling of exclusion in both socio-economic and cultural terms from the dominant societal norm. Most, however, occupy an intermediary position: feeling an intuitive sense of belonging in France, yet still maintaining a strong attachment to their parents’ North African culture (Dubet and Lapeyronnie 1992: 96; Wallet, Nehas and Sghiri 1996: 30–9). While conscious of such potential problems, the term Maghrebi-French is preferred by this author for the way that it at least attempts to articulate the bi-cultural identity of the French descendants of North African immigrants, realising that despite its limitations this group ‘share cultural and social characteristics that distinguish them in significant ways from the majority ethnic population’ Hargreaves (2011: 31). The term Maghrebi-French is therefore preferable in the sense that it can function as an umbrella term that includes but also moves beyond the generational specificity of the term beur.

As for the second term, North African émigré filmmakers, while their films may deal with similar issues and share cultural and linguistic sensitivities
with Maghrebi-French filmmakers, the relationship of North African émigré filmmakers to both France (the host nation) and the individual Maghrebi homeland is quite different to that of Maghrebi-French filmmakers who view France (for all its potential problems) as home. Even the seemingly neutral, descriptive terms North African and Maghrebi are not without their problems. The former, in French at least, carries with it colonial connotations, in the sense that *L’Afrique du Nord* was the term used to define the geographical region containing the colony of Algeria and protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia. While ‘Maghreb’ is largely free of such neo-colonial connotations, and for Brahami (2009: 7–9) the notion of *un cinéma maghrébin* refers to both a ‘real’ shared cultural, geographical and ‘imagined’ space that appears in the films themselves, it nonetheless remains a rather loose term. Indeed, it can be interpreted as one that, as Kamel Ben Ouanès wryly notes (Barlet 2010), is more visible or logical when a film or filmmaker journeys beyond the Maghreb and forms part of the diaspora. Yet even this notion of a North African or Maghrebi diaspora is problematic, in that, once again, it implies a homogenous ‘community’ where in fact there exist numerous ‘communities’ defined in relation to national, ethnic, religious and even generational difference. Where appropriate, then, the national or ethnic origins of individual Maghrebi directors will also be identified in the following chapters as a further difference that may affect the focus and outlook of these films.

It is for these reasons, then, that this book defines the notion of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmaking in the 2000s as Post-Beur Cinema.¹⁴ Post-Beur is intended to reflect the fact that to understand the cinemas of the North African diasporas in France, we need to move beyond simply locking such films and filmmakers into the category of Beur Cinema as either a temporal, socio-economic or ethnic marker – or indeed of reading these films solely through the postcolonial optic or diasporic lens that the term *beur* might also imply. It also emphasises the fact that the cinema of the North African diaspora in France consists of French filmmakers of North African origin at the same time as it does of Maghrebi émigré filmmakers and that while these filmmakers may well have shared experiences, cultural references and thematic concerns in their work, we must also understand the significant difference that exist between them. In this respect the notion of Post-Beur Cinema functions as a means of identifying the diversity of films produced by directors of Maghrebi origin in France during the 2000s. Moreover, while not necessarily rejecting outright or specifically reacting against the earlier films by directors of Maghrebi origin, the films of the 2000s are not solely concerned with thematic concerns, representational tropes, narrative trends or modes of production that characterise Beur Cinema of the 1980s and that have exerted such a considerable influence on films by Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in the 1990s. In this respect, Post-Beur Cinema of the 2000s
embraces a far greater range of narrative themes and genres than before, as well as representing a more diverse spectrum of socio-economic spaces and geographical locations. Finally, Post-Beur will also be used to designate the recent shift made by directors of Maghrebi origin firmly into the mainstream structures of production, distribution and exhibition in the French film industry. It is to this question of the mainstreaming of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers in the 2000s that we shall now turn our attention.

Notes
1. A public organisation created in 1958, the FAS provides financial assistance with housing, professional training, community and cultural projects (including film and TV) to facilitate the integration of immigrants and their families.
2. The following beur films from the 1980s and 1990s end with their Maghrebi-French characters at some sort of impasse in relation to their place in French society: Le Thé au harem d’Archimède; Cheb; Hexagone and Bye-bye.
3. While the term Maghreb can in fact include most or all of the territories of Northwest Africa to the west of Egypt, for the purposes of this study the term Maghreb refers specifically to the nations and peoples of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the former French colonial territories of North Africa.
5. Here we might list films such as Cléo de 5 à 7 (Varda, 1962), Adieu Philippine (Rozier, 1963), Les Parapluies de Cherbourg (Demy, 1964) and Muriel (Resnais, 1963). For a detailed analysis of all these films, see Dine (1994: 215–32).
7. In Miss Mona, an Algerian immigrant enters a world of transvestites and male prostitution; Camomille (1988) tells the story of a troubled (white) French youth from the banlieue, and Au pays des Juliets (1992) focuses on the experiences of three female prisoners who are let out on parole for twenty-four hours.
8. For a detailed discussion of Hexagone’s production history, see Bluher (2001).
10. Here Naceri is making a play on words between the French for butter [beurre] and the homonym beur.
11. At the same time, it echoes one of the key slogans used by beur activists in the 1980s: ‘j’y suis, j’y reste’ (‘I’m here and I’m staying’). The term icissiens is derived from the French word ici (here) and evokes the idea of belonging, of having a rightful place ‘here’, which is to say, in France. As Maghrebi-French comic, actor and film producer Jamel Debbouze (someone who is widely accredited with having brought the term to a wider public attention in France) stated in a 2011 interview with L’Express: ‘Moi, j’ai grandi ici. Je suis un “Icissien”’ (‘Me, I grew up here [in France]. I am an “Icissien”’) (Libiot 2011).
13. A similar Republican approach to difference is taken by French female directors in the 1980s and 1990s, who have publically refuse to be identified as ‘women filmmakers’ for similar reasons (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 1–2).
14. This term was first proposed at a round-table organised by Sylvie Durmelat and Vinay Swamy for the 20th/21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium in San Francisco CA, 30 March–2 April 2011.