

In the quarter century since second-generation Maghrebis in France first began making full-length feature films, there has been a vigorous and ongoing debate about how best to categorize and label them. The two most commonly used labels — “Beur” and “banlieue” cinema — are grounded respectively in ethnic and social markers that are specific to the multiethnic fabric of contemporary French society (Hargreaves 1999; Tarr 2005). Others, such as “postcolonial,” “diasporic,” “transnational,” and “accented” cinema, embrace the work of filmmakers of diverse origins in many different countries and are not unique to filmmaking in France by directors of Maghrebi origin (Naficy 2001; Shohat and Stam 2003). There is disagreement not only over the relative merits of different labels but also over the corpus of work denoted by each of these terms. These disagreements stem in part from a lack of consensus concerning the most salient aspects of films when it comes to categorizing them. Are films best categorized and labeled with reference to the ethnic origins of their directors, their diegetic content (i.e., their story lines), or the location of production companies and/or target audiences? Depending on whether “Beur” cinema is understood to reference films that are *by*, *about*, or *for* an ethnically defined group, the corpus denoted by this label varies considerably. Similar variations mark the use of other terms employed in this debate. My purpose in this chapter is less to argue for or against particular labels (though I will endeavor to clarify these in the course of my analysis) than to situate more clearly the body of work at issue in this debate. While delineating the cinematic corpus discussed here with reference to the ethnicity of its directors, second-generation Maghrebis raised in France by immigrant parents, I will argue that diegetically and intertextually (i.e., in its allusions to and borrowings from other films) this body of work extends far beyond ethnic markers of this kind.