UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

Casablanca Belongs to Us: Globalisation, Everyday Life and Postcolonial Subjectivity in Moroccan Cinema since the 1990s

A dissertation submitted to the School of Arts and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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March 2014
Declaration of Authorship

I, Jamal Bahmad, hereby declare that this doctoral dissertation and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Jamal Bahmad

Date: 31 March 2014
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the representations of Casablanca in Moroccan cinema and their articulation of postcolonial subjectivity since the 1990s. To overcome a deep economic recession and simmering social unrest in the early 1980s, Morocco embarked on a comprehensive programme of structural adjustment policies under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund. Market reforms ushered in novel forms of spatial development and social relations in Moroccan cities over the next decades. In the cultural field, a popular cinema emerged in the early 1990s and has projected the complex structures of everyday life in urban space. The New Urban Cinema (NUC) has anchored national cinema in the everyday life and affective economy of a society in transition. The country’s largest city, Casablanca, is the setting for some of NUC’s most original portrayals of the Moroccan subject under globalisation. Taking space, affect and violence as intertwined sites of film analysis, my research project closely examines the new forms of postcolonial subjectivity that have evolved in Morocco through this cinema. Twenty films are read against the backdrop of neoliberal Casablanca and the social, economic as well as political transformation of Morocco and the world under globalisation. The dissertation combines close textual analysis with a cultural studies perspective, which situates films in their historical contexts of production and reception in Morocco and beyond. Drawing on postcolonial, film and urban studies, my aim is to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship on cinematic responses to neoliberal globalisation, and to a social history of contemporary Morocco.
Dedication

To my parents Fatima Ousinsi and Lahcen Bahmad for their constant support and affection. You will always be my role models for your courage, strong work ethic and good humour. Bba d Mma, kendi ayd igan toudert inu.

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INTRODUCTION

On 17 December 2010, a 26-year-old street vendor called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the municipal council of Sidi Bouzid, a provincial city in central Tunisia. Preferring “the risk of death to the certainty of having to obey,” to borrow a phrase from Michel Foucault (2000: 449), Bouazizi was protesting against the poverty and everyday humiliation he had suffered at the hands of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s authoritarian regime. The state media ignored the seemingly minor incident and the news of spreading protests in Sidi Bouzid and nearby towns. In contrast, online social networks were abuzz with amateur footage of the simmering revolution. Over the next few days the protests had spread to major cities and galvanised Tunisia’s disaffected youth into collective action against high unemployment, kleptocracy and political repression. Supported by the trade unions, the youth-led popular uprisings culminated not only in the ousting of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, but also triggered what has become known as the ‘Arab Spring’. What Slavoj Žižek (2012: 78) describes as “the sublime beauty of uprisings doomed to fail” brought to global attention the rage of North African youth in the face of socio-economic and political injustice. Whilst the region’s spring of unrest was doomed to fail without powerful revolutionary parties to channel the anger and demands of the dispossessed in revolt, young people from Cairo to Casablanca have manifested the will to alter the historical direction of their countries. As Foucault wrote about the Iranian revolution, “People do revolt; that is a fact. And that is how the subjectivity (not of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history” (2000: 452). Looking at the unfolding events in 2011, Nasser Abourahme and May Jayyusi observed:
The revolts—regardless of what may come—have through their very occurrence intervened in what is today the most prominent form of struggle: the struggle for and against subjectivity. It is clear to us that they have—at times quite stunningly—not only ‘unplugged’ subjectivity from sovereign apparatuses but opened the possibility for genuinely new subjectivity. (2011: 626)

In retrospect, this appears quite natural in a region where young people are demographically predominant. However, a comparative glance at the recent uprisings reveals not only similarities but also contrasts between the North African countries. The Moroccan and Algerian regimes have survived all the seasons of mass protest so far whereas other countries in the region have seen tyrants toppled under street pressure (Tunisia and Egypt) and armed insurgency (Libya). Explanations for this diversity in the fortunes of North Africa’s upheavals are to be found in each country’s recent history and peculiar dynamics of government. Algeria is a republic living under the shadow of a recent civil war and the army’s political hegemony. Covering housing and basic commodities, its vast oil-funded subsidy system has provided a macroeconomic stability that has relatively sheltered Algerians from the drastic structural adjustment policies endured by their Moroccan and Tunisian neighbours since the 1980s (Achy 2013). To the extreme west lies the Kingdom of Morocco, an old autocracy often perceived in the West as an example of democratic transition despite rampant poverty and the repression of any serious opposition to the Makhzen (monarchical regime). In 2011, Morocco and Algeria swiftly introduced partial constitutional and welfare reforms to waylay the simmering unrest and wider unease about political corruption and social injustice.
Perhaps this much is already common knowledge following extensive media coverage of North Africa. However, certain dominant interpretations of the events have precluded more profound analysis. In general, the Western media have covered the region through a neo-Orientalist lens, which overrates the role of social networks at the expense of local human agency. We need to understand the uprisings “through wider conjunctures driven, in the main, by material production and social conditions [which] have already been there, simmering, for decades and, without them, social media would have been redundant” (Sabry 2013: 23). The mainstream narratives propagated by the mass media have been both simplistic and influential. For example, the coverage was dominated by an insidious narrative trope whereby the events were unforeseen. In reality, to the observer of social change and cultural production in North Africa over the last few decades, the 2011 uprisings were anything but. This is not to advocate a mimetic approach that sees a direct commensurability between text and context, whereby the former simply reflects the latter. It is rather a question of eschewing ahistorical interpretations by perceiving historical events and cultural production through a critical lens that takes into account the concrete circumstances and agencies that have produced them. For a host of complex reasons, some of which this dissertation will unpack through the close analysis of over two dozen films, cinema and youth cultures had been replete with the imagery and signs of the looming upheavals. From Egypt to Morocco, filmmakers have projected the growing wrath and simmering revolt of youth-dominated societies coming under increasing pressure from economic globalisation and the concomitant consolidation of political tyranny and radical Islam by market forces (Mitchell 2002: 297). The attentive viewer will have glimpsed in these films the indigenous voice of disaffected youth and ordinary people. North African filmmakers and youth have painted original portraits of their societies on the big screen as well as through youth subcultures, which I will explore in Chapters 4 and 5.
In the face of the mass media’s uncritical coverage of North Africa, academic research can provide more sophisticated accounts of the so-called “Arab Spring”. Such a critical project needs to begin by seeing the events in their wider socio-historical context, particularly from the perspective of their foremost agents: postcolonial youth. Two sociologists of the region have recently drawn an in-depth portrait of this generation and its subversive habitus:

As a result of a combination of the shifting moral politics at home, the relentless process of neoliberal globalisation, the geopolitics of neo-imperialism, the rise of a civilisational discourse in which “Islam” is positioned in opposition to the “West,” and unprecedented levels of school and university graduates combined with crises of unemployment, youth cultures are developing in novel ways with consequences of historical significance. (Bayat and Herrera 2010: 3)

In the early 1980s, North African countries began to implement the International Monetary Fund’s structural adjustment programmes (Cohen and Jaïdi 2006: 37). What was initially perceived as a short-term strategy to tackle recession-induced public deficit and soaring international debt transpired to be a decades-long process of privatisations, austerity, high unemployment and low human development indices. In the region’s non-oil-producing countries, the consequences have been dramatic in scale and impact. In Morocco, as Chapter 1 will lay out through a study of the evolution of Casablanca over the last three decades, rapid neoliberalisation engendered deep social and political transformations. Market reforms have consolidated the Makhzen’s hold on power. Social inequalities have soared, public education and healthcare deteriorated and affects of loss and uncertainty characterised the Moroccan people’s everyday life and structures of feeling under globalisation (Cohen 2004a, 2004b). However, people are never passive victims of power. Economic globalisation has triggered
multiple mass protests against poverty and political repression in cities, particularly in Casablanca. The protests were put down by the regime using a combination of brutal repression and partial state and subsidy reforms. The same containment strategy was redeployed to great effect when street protests similar to the Tunisian and Egyptian scenarios erupted in Moroccan cities in 2011.

This dissertation sets out to examine the cinematic articulations of postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco since the advent of globalisation. The country’s largest city and economic capital, Casablanca, is a complex urban landscape where globalisation ushered in a new cinema that has engaged with the consequences of structural adjustment through primarily realist modes of representation. The metropolis has attracted both the largest quantity of cinematic productions and a disproportionate share of quality films since the 1990s. A critical account of neoliberal Casablanca on the big screen has wider implications for an understanding of the changing landscapes of postcolonial subjectivity in contemporary Morocco. This metropolis of more than 4 million inhabitants has encapsulated key elements of Moroccan postcolonial modernity, social change and cultural transformations. Moroccan national cinema in its early decades was driven by a thematic grid centred on patriarchy, pastoral imagery, and a cerebral aesthetic of national allegorism. A new, urban, popular, and brazen cinema was born in the early 1990s and has ever since engaged with a rapidly changing society. Its has zoomed in on the everyday concerns and aspirations of ordinary people in sprawling urban centres. In consequence, this cinema has cultivated a broad audience base, particularly among urban youth. The tectonic shift in national cinema was triggered by Abdelkader Lagtaâ’s widely popular *A Love Affair in Casablanca* (1991). A tale of youth’s pursuit of sexual, social and political emancipation, the film reconciled Moroccan audiences with national cinema through a realist and critical reconstruction of everyday life in a globalising society. With Lagtaâ’s film a popular cinema with a strong and often youthful
following was born and urban Morocco became its stage. Its fame has rested on popular films, which have anchored national cinema in the everyday of a society in transition. By virtue of a sizeable population and its iconic image as the embodiment of modern Morocco, Casablanca has attracted the attention of most Moroccan filmmakers, young and veteran, diasporic and Morocco-based. Hakim Noury, the Derkaoui brothers, Saâd Chraïbi, Nabil Ayouch, Mohamed Asli, Faouzi Bensaïdi, Ahmed Boulane, Nouredine Lakhmari, the Noury Brothers, Mohamed Achaour, Hicham Lasri are only a few of the directors who have filmed Casablanca since the 1990s. A cursory glance at their works reveals a consistent preoccupation with young people’s social and identitarian problems under economic and cultural globalisation. By zooming in on the everyday life of this predominant age group, filmmakers have both cultivated a broad audience base and championed a new politics of postcolonial cinema as a mass art.

Moroccan filmmakers have resorted to realist representations of globalisation from below. As Chapters 2 and 3 will establish, the transformation of Morocco since the 1980s has been accompanied by the rise of a new urban cinema focused on youth and ordinary people in everyday Casablanca. The protagonists are often young people in search of emancipated subjectivities and historical agency in an increasingly interconnected world. This cinema owes its popularity not only to the aforementioned defining focus on everyday life as a counter-archive to discourses of power, but also to a critical projection of postcolonial subjectivities and the everyday’s potential for historical change. Everyday life on screen is not projected merely as a space of mundanities, rituals and uncritical everydayness, but also as an “inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished” realm of historical possibility (Blanchot 1993: 239). Moroccan urban films mine the everyday’s spaces of resistance to established regimes of truth and power. Everyday life is, in Ben Highmore, “inherently resistant […] framed by bodies that are at variance to the machines they operate” (2002: 148).
Postcolonial subjectivity or the “becomings” of the postcolonial subject, to use a key Deleuzo-Guattarian concept which informs this dissertation’s conceptual framework, take shape in the mundane spaces of everyday life on screen. To make critical sense of this cinematic investment in the everyday, it is necessary to combine a socio-historical approach with close film analysis. The first methodological component aims at grounding the cinematic representations of Casablanca and Moroccan postcolonial subjectivity in their concrete circumstances of production, taking into account both social history and each film’s context of production and reception. Many films analysed in this dissertation gave rise to controversies upon their release and were all made in specific conditions, which hold clues to our critical understanding of them as visual texts. The research methodology’s second component consists of reading the films closely to unveil their cognitive mapping of a city and nation in a globalising world. As I will elaborate in the following chapters, what Fredric Jameson (1990: 349) terms “cognitive maps” or the mental images of “the social and global totality” of the world are central to Moroccan cinema’s representation of reality. Cinema’s cognitive mapping of Casablanca and Morocco can be critically appreciated only if one grasps the historical background against which this mapping occurs.

For an example of how the New Urban Cinema (NUC), a phenomenon that Chapter 2 will both contextualise and conceptualise further, has been cognitively mapping a postcolonial society under globalisation, let us look at Lagtaâ’s groundbreaking Love Affair. The protagonist Slawa is an 18-year old girl in search of emancipation in Casablanca in the late 20th century. Heartbroken after her decision to end their love affair, the middle-aged Jalil arranges a meeting of reconciliation in the last sequence of the film. He disarmingly confesses, in words which ironically echo the Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s last speech in colloquial Tunisian rather his customary Modern Standard Arabic on 14 January 2011: “Ana fehmtkom” (‘I understand you’). Salwa laughs him off before deserting
the scene. This fateful encounter takes place in a downtown park, a strategic site prefiguring public space in the neoliberal city as the battlefield of generational conflict and youth’s ultimate revolt in 21st-century North Africa. Salwa rebels against the tyranny of the Father as would millions of her region’s young people in 2011. Shocked upon discovering his father’s relationship with Salwa, which had prevented him from having a relationship with her, Jalil’s son Najib runs home and seizes a knife in fury. He symbolically kills his absent father in the bedroom before taking his own life in the bathroom. Looking at this dramatic ending from the vantage point of the youth-led 2011 uprisings and their aftermath reveals Lagtaâ and NUC’s perceptive cognitive maps of North African society’s fraught social and political landscapes under globalisation. Like Najib in Casablanca two decades earlier, stifling oppression pushed Bouazizi to extreme action (taking one’s life) in Tunisia, where Lagtaâ’s film was released to wide acclaim in 1992. The final credits of Love Affair appear against a freeze shot of Najib in his bloodbath. Salwa blames his suicide on Jalil. The audience can hear them fighting off-frame with Salwa, knife in hand, threatening to kill the Father. The film closes on this suspenseful moment with Najib’s frozen frame still filling the screen. As I will elaborate by means of a close reading of various films in Chapter 3, 2011 had somehow already taken place and occupied centre stage in NUC from its melodramatic beginnings to the recent forays into experimental aesthetics.

When the mass uprisings of 2011 erupted, NUC did not miss the rendezvous with history. Hicham Lasri’s feature film They Are the Dogs (2013) opens in the main square of Casablanca, where a large crowd of young protesters are shouting slogans against corruption and calling for the fall of the regime. A TV crew is also out in the streets hunting for an interesting news story. A frail middle-aged man stands out in the crowd. He looks not only lost but also out of place in 21st-century Casablanca. As we soon learn, he has just been released from jail after thirty years. He was imprisoned during the Bread Riots which
engulfed Casablanca in June 1981, when people took to the streets after the government decided to lift subsidies on basic commodities (see Chapter 1). Hundreds were killed and thousands jailed, dumped in nondescript burial grounds or simply ‘disappeared’ by the regime. Our freshly released Majhoul or 404,¹ who remembers his inmate number but not his own name, was arbitrarily arrested after he went out to buy stabilisers for his kid’s bike and flowers for his wife. Upon his release in 2011, he gradually discovers how much the world and Casablanca have changed. Hungry for a sensational story, the TV crew accompany him around the city in search of his family. At one moment, 404 visits his own grave in the cemetery, where he was buried after the authorities informed his family of his death during the Bread Riots. Most of his friends have died and the surviving few have metamorphosed from ardent socialists in the last century to obedient mouthpieces for the neoliberal regime in the twenty-first. 404 ultimately finds his wife and children, but they refuse to accept him back. For them he is dead and should have never returned. Upon leaving the house, he runs into his grandson, who has just been released from a police station, where he was detained and tortured for taking part in the 2011 protests. The ending suggests that 404’s detention was not in vain because the flames of resistance are kept alight by generations of disaffected youth.

Filmed mostly through the handheld camera of the TV crew with extreme closeups and shaky frames, the journey in urban space is intensive, intimate and full of violent suspense. The cinéma vérité footage captures the everyday affects of uncertainty and arbitrary violence which characterised the 2011 protests in Morocco and North Africa. Real radio and TV coverage of the revolts forms the soundtrack for 404’s search for his bearings. The rapid movements of the guerilla camera render the urgency of the historical moment. Casablanca emerges as a space of stark socioeconomic disparities and rampant psychological violence,

¹ In computer language, 404 designates ‘not found’ (Majhoul means both ‘not found’ and ‘unknown’ in Arabic).
which erupts or threatens to do so at any moment. Playing the role of what Jameson terms a “social detective” (1995: 36), the camera runs (often literally) into the ordinary man on the streets. 404, who lived on the margins of history for 30 years, suddenly finds himself at the centre of History repeating itself. Thirty years have gone by, but the roots of oppression and its victims are still the same. The world has changed and Casablanca has experienced three decades of physical and social transformation. In the course of two days, 404 rises back from the ashes to put these transformations to the test. After laying bare the violence and resilient structures of oppression in the city, the ghost of history goes back whence it came. The film ends here, but history continues its course. By bracketing the story of an ordinary Casablanca unknown subject between two pivotal moments in recent Moroccan history (1981-2011), Lasri’s low-budget film perfectly illustrates NUC’s chronicles of a changing society. This film, like around two dozens analysed in this dissertation, provides a realist critique of the present and a repertoire of ordinary subjects’ small acts of everyday resistance. In this sense, NUC is one of contemporary Morocco’s compelling postcolonial archives and, in decades to come, will provide a resource for social historians and perhaps even sow the seeds of historical change at the hand of future generations.

Lagtaâ and Lasri’s films underscore the timeliness of a critical study of cinema, youth and the city in Morocco today. This dissertation provides an interdisciplinary perspective on these issues through the representation of Casablanca in Moroccan cinema since the 1990s. A key NUC theme is the struggle for control over urban space. As Henri Lefebvre (1996, 2004, 2009) and other social theorists have argued, the city is the battleground of society’s power relations. Different groups are embroiled in a constant struggle for spatial and social control. In neoliberal Casablanca, as Chapter 1 illustrates, the cityscape is ostensibly under the control of an urbanism that panders to the interests of the well-off classes and banishes the poor and disproportionately young majority to the margins. However, this account of urban space
would be remiss if it were to leave out the practices of everyday resistance deployed by ordinary people. Michel de Certeau distinguishes between the strategies of power and the tactics of resistance. Unconscious and repetitive, everyday life in the city is a battleground for the “clever tricks of the ‘weak’ within the order established by the ‘strong,’” an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter’s tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic and warlike discoveries” (de Certeau 1984: 40). This dissertation expands on this critical framework to explore the strategies and tactics at play in Casablanca as a postcolonial city in the globalisation era. Subversion is as omnipresent and multipolar a force as domination on the NUC screen. The city transpires to be a complex “calculus of time, space, memory, and semiotic codes” (Mignolo 1995: 243).

Despite the dearth of scholarship on Moroccan cinema in general, and its urban component in particular, this dissertation aims not only to examine a broad corpus of films set in Casablanca, but also to be original in its exploration of postcolonial subjectivity on screen. It aims to contribute to a materialist critique of postcolonial cinema in the globalisation era. Drawing on postcolonial theory and poststructuralist philosophy, the dissertation weaves its own critical framework by scrutinising films for clues to their critical interpretation. Whilst I engage with relevant scholarship in postcolonial, urban, globalisation and cinema studies, my film reading is grounded in the critical strategies found latent in NUC’s representation of everyday life and its production of Moroccan subjectivity. The same methodology informs the original surveys of a century of Casablanca’s metropolitan modernity (Chapter 1) and the rise and development of NUC (Chapter 2).

Casablanca is often the main character in the films examined in this dissertation. This defining feature makes NUC an heir to Third Cinema. According to Teshome Gabriel, “if Third Cinemas are said to have a central protagonist, it is the ‘context’ of the film: the characters only provide punctuation within it” (1989: 60). Casablanca on screen is a complex
array of histories, spaces and discourses produced over a century of economic, social and cultural modernisation. A critical appreciation of the films is thus impossible without adequate understanding of Casablanca’s emergence and development as a modern metropolis. As a relatively recent Moroccan city established a little over a hundred years ago, Casablanca is a modern city par excellence. Its long 20th century was made of spectacular social transformations and experiments in colonial modernism, post-colonial history, neoliberalisation and its tumultuous social history since the 1980s. Chapter 1 accounts for this palimpsest through a materialist reconstruction of the evolution of the city’s social and built environments, an understanding of which is necessary for a critical account of the films’ mapping of neoliberal Casablanca. For the sake of analytic clarity, this history is divided into four distinctive moments. The chapter opens with a deconstruction of some dominant cinematic and historical representations of the city. It then traces the making of modern Casablanca through the colonial invasion of 1907; the world-leading experiments in panoramic modernism; late colonial adventures in architecture to counter the rise of Moroccan nationalism; the city’s uncertain yet socially rich first decades after Moroccan Independence, which witnessed the rise of King Hassan’s authoritarianism and the first postcolonial uprising in the streets of Casablanca in 1965; finally, the chapter dwells at greater length on the current neoliberal moment to delineate its impact on the city’s built environment and social fabric. Drawing on history, human geography, urban and postcolonial film studies, the chapter establishes a multidisciplinary and historically grounded map of Casablanca against which NUC films are closely analysed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a critical examination of the rise and evolution of NUC since the 1990s. For a critical account of this cinema and its production of postcolonial subjectivity, it is necessary to deconstruct journalistic constructions before providing an in-depth account of the historical, social, cultural and industrial factors that engendered NUC and have granted it
both enduring critical traction and broad audience appeal. Produced by a country undergoing structural adjustments, this cinema was born as a cultural response to them. As I will discuss, NUC has also been aided by an improved funding scheme for national cinema. Chapter 2 also foregrounds the internal heterogeneity of NUC by distinguishing three heuristic strands within its aesthetic body. A few films will be used to illustrate the rich diversity and coherent politics of representation across NUC’s three strands. Finally, the chapter addresses the challenges and promises of the digital revolution to this cinema’s survival and audience trends. I conclude that notwithstanding the doomsday talk of veteran film critics and distributors about the end of Moroccan cinema with the decline of cinema-going, NUC boasts a youthful audience, who consume its films online, in theatres, on TV or as (pirated) DVDs. This is undoubtedly a healthy sign of the renaissance of Moroccan cinema at a time when movie theatres are closing and other modes of viewership have eroded traditional modes of film consumption. It is also an indication of how NUC has been at the heart of social change in Morocco.

Chapter 3 explores the social atlas of Casablanca which runs through the films of NUC’s two-pronged first stand. It argues that this ethnographically dense atlas of neoliberalism is an elaborate experiment in the city’s cognitive mapping on screen. Beginning with a close reading of four films by NUC’s godfather, Abdelkader Lagtaâ, the chapter aims to demonstrate how the young female and male protagonists of his films act as Jamesonian social detectives. Their movements and actions unveil otherwise hidden concrete and subjective maps, which structure everyday social life in urban space. In exploring this atlas, the chapter also examines the films’ rich affective textures and their representation of youth, gender, shantytowns and other components of the social and cinematic maps of Casablanca. The chapter’s next section dwells on the cine-sociological vision of Mustapha Derkaoui through a close reading of the widely popular film Casablanca by Night (2003).
The case study illustrates the role of melodrama within NUC’s realist aesthetics in the representation of neoliberal space. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the self-avowedly popular directors of NUC’s first strand. Five films by Hakim Noury, Hassan Benjelloun and Mohamed Asli are prized open to explore what happens to the city’s onscreen social atlas in unreservedly mass-market films. A close examination of the latter’s cognitive mapping and remapping of urban and national space reveals their perceptive and sophisticated representations of postcolonial space.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the rise of violence as an aesthetic idiom in NUC to articulate social segregation and spatial divisions in Casablanca. The violence of the social condition under neoliberalism makes violence a ubiquitous force in everyday life on screen and, by extension, in the cinematic production of postcolonial subjectivity. Spatial fragmentation, crime, disaffected youth, extreme individualism and socio-economic vulnerability are just a few of the sources of the existential anxiety that erupts into real violence on the streets and in the domestic spaces of onscreen Casablanca. The chapter places this omnipresent brutality within the political economy of the neoliberal metropolis whilst drawing distinctions between various ways of portraying violence across the three strands and various trends of NUC. For example, domestic space on the NUC screen is revealed to visualise a wide range of conflicts and structures of feeling which may not be immediately visible in the public realm. Looking at a variety of films set in different spatio-temporal sites of Casablanca reveals a great diversity of social life showcased by domestic space. The neoliberal condition has made home an uninhabitable zone for some to such an extent that they try to escape it by any means possible. In contrast, for others domestic space is a haven from the violent and inhospitable outdoors. However, as a film like Marock, set in the affluent suburbs of the city, unveils even the heavenly interiors of the privileged few are not immune to the violence beyond their gated communities. From the smokescreen serenity of affluent suburbs through the anxiety-
ridden domesticity of the middle classes to the poverty-stricken habitats of poor residents, domestic space on the NUC screen holds up a mirror to the transformation of a Moroccan metropolis and, by extension, an entire society and its modes of producing individual and collective subjectivities. The chapter also examines the life of Casablanca’s street children through Nabil Ayouch’s landmark film *Ali Zaoua* (2000). I draw on Michel Foucault’s idea of *heterotopias* and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concepts of *fabulation* and *deteritorialisation* to unveil the rich contours of what I call *juvenile postcolonialism*. The chapter closes with a study of Casablanca's youth’s quest for postcolonial agency through two films on Nayda, the subcultural movement which thrived in Casablanca following the death of King Hassan in 1999 and the suicide bombings of 16 May 2003.

Chapter 5 examines new developments in the representation of Casablanca since the mid-2000s. Instead of the plain social realism of NUC’s first strand and the hybrid accentedness of its second strand, postmodern experimental aesthetics take centre stage in the films of third-strand NUC, a representative corpus of which is analysed in this chapter. I focus on how *stylistic experimentation* deeply affects the representations of Casablanca and cinema’s articulation of social space and postcolonial subjectivity under and beyond globalisation. Like all chapters in this dissertation, Chapter 5 opens with a conceptual introduction which illuminates the origins and reception of the body of films under study. I then move to a close reading of Mohamed Achaour’s *A Film* (2011), which reflects on the (im)possibility of filming Casablanca through the experience of a young director searching in vain for a story to make his first screen fiction. This film unveils what I call, borrowing from Akbar Abbas (1997), the “floating identity” of Casablanca in the new century. The next section explores the postmodern aesthetics of Faouzi Bensaïdi’s *What a Wonderful World* (2006) to demonstrate how *affects* and *slow cinema* have emerged as a new poetics and radical departure in the representation of Casablanca. Minimalist mise-en-scène and affect
will be shown to be instrumental in the formation of postcolonial subjectivities in ways that have implications for the representation of urban space and Moroccan national identity. The next section in Chapter 5 examines the intersections of the network film and the aesthetics of violence in NUC through an analysis of Heaven’s Doors (2006), the debut feature film of Swel and Imad Noury. I show how this seemingly disjointed film unveils the radical potential of affects in resistance to the local and global structures of hegemony. Finally, the chapter reads Hicham Lasri’s The End (2010), a black and white film set in Casablanca around the death of Hassan II in 1999, which revealed traumatic fissures in a whole generation’s place in the world. My contention is that the film deploys a trash aesthetic to engage with Casablanca as a landscape of translocal ruins through the eyes of a lost generation of postcolonial youth. “The crisis consists,” writes Antonio Gramsci, “precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (1971: 276). The End subtly illustrates the crisis of Morocco at the turn of the millennium.

In the conclusion, I will seek to synthesise the findings of this dissertation, which examines the variegated yet complementary ways in which neoliberal Casablanca has been represented in NUC from the early 1990s to 2011. It will also reflect on the implications of the interpellations of history and aesthetics on the NUC screen against the background of a country in transition. I will explain how recent historical developments in Morocco and North Africa have sharpened my approach to the representations of Casablanca in Moroccan urban cinema and their articulation of postcolonial subjectivity. Finally, the conclusion develops a number of questions and areas for further research on Moroccan and Maghrebi cinema’s situated contribution to a postcolonial critique of globalisation that might build on the research findings of this doctoral project.
CHAPTER 1

Casablanca Modern: Colonial Pasts and Postcolonial Predicaments

Casablanca is the stuff of legend for millions around the world. The word often conjures up Casablanca (1942), the cult film produced by Warner Brothers and directed by Michael Curtiz. The movie stars Humphrey Bogart as Rick Blaine, a cynical American expatriate running the wartime city’s Café Américain, and Ingrid Bergman as Ilsa Lund, his Norwegian ex-lover en route to exile in the United States with her husband after the fall of Paris under Nazi occupation. The drama of the star-crossed lovers unfolds in French-occupied Casablanca. The film opens on a revolving globe which quickly dissolves into an extended aerial camera movement trailing escape routes drawn in arrows on both contour and flat maps. Superimposed are scenes of destitute refugees fleeing Europe and converging upon one point on the tip of northwestern Africa, “a site of anxious transience, of uncertainty and closure” (Conley 2007: 97). With the next establishing shot the camera cuts down from a mosque minaret overlooking the skyline of a Moorish medina (old walled city) into a crowded marketplace. The newsreel-style voiceover discloses that this is Casablanca, where “the fortunate ones, through money, or influence, or luck, might obtain exit visas and scurry to Lisbon, and from Lisbon to the New World. However, the others wait in Casablanca—and wait—and wait—and wait.” In contrast, Casablanca did not have to wait long for its own success: it was an instant hit with American audiences partly because its theatrical release in January 1943 coincided with the Casablanca Conference, 14-24 January. The U.S. Army had landed in Casablanca on 8 November 1942 as part of the Allies’ Operation Torch against the Nazi occupation of Europe.
By virtue of its timely geopolitical discourse, *Casablanca* was destined to become “a major text of ‘the American century’, one that might be said to enact it” (Edwards 2003: 75). Entirely shot on set in California and Utah (Dwyer 2004: 123), *Casablanca* has enjoyed a phenomenal circulation in the American Century and beyond. Besides its global popular appeal since 1942, the movie has also enjoyed broad attention in academic scholarship. In his cinephilic memoir, *Casablanca* (2009), Marc Augé recollects his experiences as a teenager in wartime Paris. The French release of the movie in 1947 had a profound impact on him and his compatriots because it soothed their national trauma. The film’s complex relationship with Casablanca is tellingly left out of Augé’s postmodernist memoir. Intertwined as it has always been with the cultural residues of international relations, *Casablanca* has often eclipsed the Moroccan city and its colonial history. However, the tale of unequal rivalry between the reel classic and its real namesake has not always been a one-way street. As both the city and film entered the new century, globalisation has added more layers to their intertwined histories. In an attempt both to cash on the fantasies and frustrations of international tourists who flock to Casablanca in search of *Casablanca*, one of the city’s upmarket hotels, the Hyatt Regency, opened Bar Casablanca in the mid-1980s, a true simulation of Rick’s Café Américain. The piano bar “recreates the ambiance of the film and is decorated with film stills and poster reproductions from *Casablanca* and staffed by Moroccans wearing Bogartesque trench coats and fedoras and 1940s French colonial uniforms. A piano player plays the obvious song on request” (Edwards 2003: 78). Hyatt, an icon of global capital, has perpetuated the myth of Casablanca. The city is challenged to live up to its Hollywood image and thereby continue their “the beautiful friendship” and its reproduction in the age of late capitalism. The city seems condemned to identify with a celluloid namesake in the global imagination. For a 21st-century metropolis competing to
attract more tourists and investment capital, there are considerable financial rewards in the commodification processes and the spectacle of globalisation.

Half a century after *Casablanca*, the Moroccan filmmaker Abdelkader Lagtaâ made *A Love Affair in Casablanca* (1991). Revolving around an illicit love affair, like its Hollywood predecessor, the film retrieves the real modern Moroccan city from the reel imaginary of the American Century. Unlike the romance between Rick and Ilsa, the love affair between Salwa and Najib is a genuinely complex affair. It dips into the everyday life of a metropolis shaped by colonialism and decades of post-colonial dictatorship followed by an intensive process of neoliberalisation. In Lagtaâ’s pathbreaking NUC film, gone is the Orientalist imagery of Hollywood’s Morocco. In its place sits an uncompromising image of a society ill at ease with itself. It is this nervous postcolonial condition that Lagtaâ as a committed filmmaker wants to screen for Moroccan and interested audiences. However, the dominant representations of Morocco in global visual culture have to be dealt with, too. In a pivotal scene, Najib takes Salwa out to Rick’s Café Américain in Hyatt Regency. After noticing her stares at *Casablanca*’s poster on the walls, he asks if she knows the film. She answers in the negative. The uncanny answer places Rick and Bogart outside her real time as a Moroccan subject in contemporary Casablanca. Salwa inscribes her subjectivity in the postcolonial temporality of her city beyond Hollywood and the cult of *Casablanca*. This thesis, like Lagtaâ’s film, aims to engage with Casablanca beyond *Casablanca* to retrieve the complex history overshadowed by magical *reelism*. What follows is a critical study of Casablanca Modern, or the entanglements of the city with modernity since 1907, when it was shelled by the French colonial army and turned overnight into a mecca for European settlers and migrants from inland Morocco, and its multilayered evolution through colonial and post-colonial times into today’s neoliberal metropolis.
The recorded existence of human settlement in Casablanca dates back to prehistoric times. Anfa was an Amazigh town in Tamsna, the region around modern-day Casablanca (Elmandjra 1985: 215). It began to be referred to in European travel narratives from the late 19th century as Casablanca, Spanish for the local toponym Dar el-Beida (‘White House’). Notwithstanding its role as a trading port during the Phoenician occupation in the 7th century BC, which was followed by Roman domination from the first century AD, the two major features of Casablanca’s recorded history are discontinuity and ephemerality. For instance, there is a dearth of knowledge about social life in the town when it served as the capital of the heterodox Amazigh kingdom of Barghawata from 744 to 1058. In fact, Casablanca is generally mentioned in historical chronicles only in passing (Pennell 2003: 29-30; Cattedra 2003: 3). On the few occasions it draws the attention of ancient and contemporary historians of Morocco, it is often in reference to the cycle of conquests and demolitions it was subjected to by local and foreign powers. Ironically, the same bleak fate was lying in store for Casablanca in the annals of Moroccan postcolonial historiography. In stark contrast to the imperial cities inland and other coastal towns of the country, a relatively small number of publications have been devoted to pre-20th-century Casablanca. Most scholarship on the city is still produced by sociologists, urban geographers and planners. It is as if, for historians, Casablanca suffers from an historical deficit that makes it unworthy of scholarly attention. It barely existed before the colonial period and even its long 20th century from small village to Morocco’s largest metropolis does not give it enough ‘pastness’ when weighed against the country’s imperial cities. No wonder that Casablanca is commonly labeled a ville sans histoire (‘city without history’).

The idea of Casablanca’s perennial ahistoricity has not been the preserve of Moroccan postcolonial historiography. It was a centrepiece in the colonial arsenal cemented by the French Protectorate and its urbanists in Morocco during the first half of the 20th century.
Casablanca’s alleged history deficit was behind the colonial establishment’s modernist vision for the Atlantic city as a *tabula rasa* on which to erect monuments of Western modernity. Despite tensions between the colonial power’s tourism strategy and a security-motivated policy of preserving local architecture, particularly the medinas, the native built environment was by and large represented as an architectural tradition condemned to disappearance or museification. Nowhere else was this colonial modernism more fully realisable than in Casablanca due to its history deficit as opposed to the thick and even excess of history in the imperial cities. As this chapter will reveal, the trope of Casablanca’s ahistoricity has taken deep roots in the minds of Moroccan post-colonial architects and laymen. The city is commonly imagined as the *locus classicus* of fresh beginnings and ample opportunities—a city where one can always start from scratch. As Moroccan films since the 1990s show, this Moroccan Dream rests on the belief that Casablanca is a fluid metropolis conducive to the formation of new subjectivities (see also Chapter 5).

Although the thrust of this chapter is not historical *per se*, it will examine modern Casablanca from the beginning of the colonial period, with a specific focus on its intensive neoliberalisation over the course of the last three decades. I will map out the plurality of planning and architectural discourses, uneven geographies, socioeconomic paradigms and cultural landscapes that has fashioned both the built environment and everyday life in the city since the early 20th century. Taking into account Moroccan cinema’s representations of Casablanca’s colonial and postcolonial time-space in recent decades, my approach is methodologically organised around four major moments which roughly span the evolution of modern Casablanca. Each of these moments was marked by a landmark transformation in the history of the city; for example, the first two moments or distinct epochs which altered the face of Casablanca in the colonial era were shaped by the ambitious planning projects of two French architectural *auteurs*: Henri Prost (1874-1959) and Michel Ecochard (1905-1985).
Much as I could have settled for a colonial-postcolonial dyadic frame for conceiving the city’s modern history, this chapter opts for a more nuanced periodisation within that overall framework of intertwining histories and spatial practices in order to do justice to the heterogeneity of the socioeconomic transformations and global dynamics that have informed the making of a postcolonial metropolis. This chapter thus accounts for modern Casablanca through these four moments: the colonial-modernist city was set in motion by the French occupation of the coastal town in 1907 and receded circa World War II; the late colonial Casablanca was ushered in by a new orientation of urban development to accommodate the realities of late colonialism and industrial capitalism in the post-war period; the city of emergency cut through the first three decades following Moroccan independence in 1956; finally, the neoliberal metropolis designates a new kind of urban politics and culture brought about by market reforms over the past few decades. Although continuity and overlap are undeniable elements in a city’s life-cycle, the four temporally and spatially mappable moments outlined above have made modern Casablanca as we know it. The neoliberal metropolis will be treated extensively due to its accumulative nature vis-à-vis the previous three moments. However, the three previous moments of Casablanca modern are also treated at adequate length to foreground their substantial role in the production of everyday postcolonial subjectivities in Moroccan cinema since the 1990s. The city on screen is a living archive of epistemes and practices that concretely define the contours and limits of postcolonial subjectivity in neoliberal times. I will be revisiting particular details of each moment when we come to film analysis proper in subsequent chapters.

The Colonial Modernist City

Although Morocco managed to prevent imperial occupation after the fall of Algiers in 1830 and the sultanate’s military defeats against France (Battle of Isly 1844) and Spain (Battle of
Tetuan 1860), its sovereignty had diminished dramatically by the turn of the 20th century. On 30 March 1912, Sultan Abdelhafid signed the Treaty of Fes and handed over to France most of his executive prerogatives and the last vestiges of his authority. In line with the Acts of Algeciras (1906), the Franco-Spanish Convention of 27 November 1912 partitioned the country into a French protectorate in central and western Morocco, and two Spanish zones of control in the Rif region on the Mediterranean and in the southern Sahara. The Convention of Paris signed on 18 December 1923 declared Tangier an International Zone run by Western diplomatic delegations. At the turn of the 20th century, Casablanca was a small fishing village with a tiny seaport. Flanked by the fertile plains of Chaouia, Morocco’s breadbasket for centuries, the economic fortunes of the Atlantic town made it a magnet for both colonial contenders and European settlers from the mid-19th century onwards. Besides the growing harbour activity, the evolving demographics of Casablanca after 1860 foreshadowed its destiny as a commercial hub. With a population of 4000 in the 1860s, Casablanca “had grown to nine thousand by the late 1880s, the small beginnings of Morocco’s greatest port” (Pennell 2003: 121). In 1900, the fishing village was rapidly becoming a boomtown due to the influx of settlers and an unbridled growth in land speculation (Brown 2007: 115). Although the population had rocketed to 20,000 by then, Casablanca was still a medium-sized town relative to inland Fes with its 100,000 inhabitants (Burke 1976: 4). However, the city was growing dramatically: its European population, for instance, shot up from 1,000 in 1900 to around 20,000 in 1912. The town’s ethnic landscape had also experienced dramatic change: in 1914, there were 31,000 settlers (including 15,000 French, 6,000 Spaniards, and 7,000 Italians), 30,000 Muslims and 9,000 Jews (Brown 2007: 115).

The 1900s were marked by a severe economic depression due to a combination of the Makhzen’s corruption, natural disasters, and the growth of armed resistance led by Amazigh confederations and influential zawaya (‘religious brotherhoods’) against colonial
encroachment. Between 1905 and 1907, harvests failed due to locust invasions and year-long droughts. The spectre of famine threatened people and livestock everywhere; poor peasants flocked to coastal towns like Casablanca in search of jobs to feed their families. The living conditions in the cities degenerated considerably. France and other imperial powers seized the opportunity to force exorbitant loans on the Moroccan government. The situation in Casablanca had become tense in the wake of mass rural migration and increasing colonial intervention. The economic and political stakes of the French presence in the port city were higher than those for any other European power. Under the command of General Hubert Lyautey, the French army occupied Oujda in 1907, a major town in the northeastern region abutting Algeria. The victory emboldened France to take other frontier towns countrywide. In Casablanca, engineers provoked protests when they began to extend the port railway through a graveyard. Reports of attacks on the workers by infuriated crowds stoked unrest in the town. The French army retaliated by bombarding Casablanca from a warship and the troops landed to take control of the town in June 1907 (Cattedra 2001: 50). The Morocco correspondent of the British newspaper *The Times* later wrote: “I saw it a very few days after the bombardment, and the scene was indescribable a confusion of dead people and horses, while the contents of almost every house seemed to have been hurled into the streets and destroyed” (Harris 1921: 117). The occupation of Casablanca confirmed the French determination to colonise Morocco. On 3 March 1910, Sultan Abdelhafid negotiated a new loan agreement with the French government in return for more control of the Oujda region, Casablanca and other occupied parts of the country. On 30 March 1912, Morocco finally lost its independence to become a protectorate of France and Spain.

Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854-1934) was named the first Resident-General of the protectorate. The character of Lyautey as a military man and royalist aristocrat “in search of a nation worthy of his virtues” greatly impacted on the character of French Morocco
Following an illustrious military career in Madagascar, Indochina and Algeria, Lyautey viewed his appointment in Morocco at the age of fifty-seven as an opportunity to give concrete form to his vision of the art of colonial government. He abhorred “the mediocre, envious petit bourgeois from whose ranks come the majority of those who govern us today” (Benoist-Méchin in Rabinow 1995: 107). Although this vision made him more enemies than friends amongst his petit bourgeois superiors in Paris, Lyautey strove to fashion the new Protectorate on his own terms until he was deposed in 1925 after the joint French and Spanish failure to quell the Rif Republic (1921-1926) proclaimed by Mohamed Abdelkrim Khattabi. At the time of his departure, Lyautey had only one regret: “I will not build more cities” (qtd. in Cattedra 2001: 32). During his thirteen years at the head of the protectorate, Lyautey earned the title of bâtisseur de villes (‘city builder’). “A construction site is worth a battalion” is one of his famous sayings. Urbanism was Lyautey’s battleground both in settling accounts with his parochial petit bourgeois foes and in realising his vision of colonial government not only as a technology of control but also as an act of technical modernity.

In 1913, Lyautey appointed Henri Prost as the chief urbanist of the protectorate. Unlike the military engineers trained at the Ecole Polytechnique or the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées who found themselves tasked with planning cities in the colonies, Prost was a civilian graduate of the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He was heir to a school of architecture which stressed “individual buildings and a grand, axial-symmetrical approach to design” (Rabinow 1995: 211). In 1914, Prost was given a jubilant welcome by the Resident General at the port of Casablanca. The warm welcome did not deter Prost from noticing the undisciplined growth of the town: “At first glance, it was unbelievable chaos. Nothing kept foreigners from building wherever they wanted. [...] It was impossible to grasp the actual

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2 “Je ne bâtirai plus de villes” (qtd. in Cattedra 2001: 32).
density of buildings; impossible to decipher the path of any street” (Prost qtd. in Wright 1991: 100). Prost’s mission was to draw up urban and regional master plans and supervise the construction of villes nouvelles (European districts) in the extra muros areas of Moroccan medinas. Lyautey insisted that each city’s ville nouvelle take “form on the vast open spaces, following a plan which achieves the epitome of modern conditions, with broad boulevards, water and electrical supplies, squares and gardens, buses and tramways, and also foreseeing future extensions” (qtd. in Wright 1991: 88). Prost was also tasked with the preservation of the native built environment, that is, medinas and their Moorish architecture. This policy of “modernist collage” (Clifford 1988: 13) was at the core of Lyautey’s philosophy of Belle Hiérarchie, which aimed “to preserve what he saw as typically Moroccan principles of social hierarchy and to harmonise these principles with modern knowledge” (Ossman 1994: 6).

Prost produced a Plan Directeur (Master Plan) for each city that not only sketched out its architectural style, streets, squares, parks, and buildings, but also drew plans forecasting its expansion. The ideal city is one with a “true sense of the future” (Prost qtd. in Wright 1991: 143).

In the Lyautey-Prost project, Casablanca was the jewel in the crown. A synergy of the myth of its historical deficit and the exponential growth of its Moroccan and European populations made it an ideal laboratory for colonial-modernist architecture and urban planning essays. Faithful to the tradition of Musée-Social urbanism with its dual emphasis on zoning and monumental public buildings, Prost’s master plan for Casablanca rested on a broad avenue axis that led from the recently enlarged port to a public square in the heart of the city (called Place de France; now Place des Nations Unies). The avenue was named Boulevard du IVe Zouave (now Boulevard Mohammed El Hansali). Taking into account the advent of cars in the 1910s, Prost’s fan-shaped network of spacious ring and access roads made Casablanca a global reference in urban planning during the next few decades. A grid of
wide intersecting boulevards gave it vital arteries and sealed its fate as a modern city. One of two railway stations was built close to the port on the main IVe Zouave avenue, which ran for some two and a half miles. In parallel to the spacious Place de France, which housed the city’s commercial activities, another public square named Place Lyautey (today’s Place Mohammed V or, in local usage, Pigeons Square) was designed to house all administrative activity on the principal avenue farther downtown.

Hygiene was central to Prost’s master plan. In addition to the abundance of spacious avenues and public parks, the city covered an area of 1000ha with a prospective density of 150 inhabitants per hectare; the planned Casablanca could comfortably house 150,000 people. In contrast to Rabat, which was designed as the administrative capital of the country (a role it has kept in post-colonial Morocco), Casablanca was destined for heavy industrialisation and pollution was an element Prost took into consideration. Two industrial zones were planned on rocky ground in the northern and eastern fringes of the city at a short distance from the port; the population was thus spared pollution given the strong winds from the Atlantic Ocean. This zoning of the industrial activity had the extra advantage of preserving prime land for residential areas to the west and southwestern parts of the city. Marrying the modernist ethos of the Musée Social school of urban planning with Lyautey’s preoccupation with the preservation of Moroccan architecture and social hierarchies, the medina and Mellah (‘Jewish quarter’) of Casablanca were left largely intact in both the master plan and its implementation (Fig. 1). The elegant Beaux-Arts design of the three-storey houses and fine stucco-decorated office buildings lining the boulevards of downtown Casablanca borrowed heavily from native architectural patrimony, which Lyautey praised for its “simplicity and sobriety of style” (Rabinow 1995: 312). Embodying what Rabinow calls “techno-cosmopolitanism” to describe the protectorate’s urban politics under Lyautey (1995: 277), Casablanca’s state buildings in the style Néo-marocain (Neo-Moorish style) were
designed as international references in Art Deco and Beaux-Arts architecture; as we will see through the analysis of Mustapha Derkaoui’s *Casablanca by Night* (2003) in Chapter 3, examples of this hybrid style include the Sacred Heart Cathedral by Paul Tournon, the Court of Justice by Joseph Marrast, and City Hall by Marius Boyer.

![Figure 1. Aerial view of Prost’s Casablanca in the 1920s with the Old Medina (left) and the Ville Nouvelle (right)](image)

Casablanca’s architecture and urban design school enjoyed wide acclaim in 1920s Paris. In a summa of Casablanca’s modernism, Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb (2002) argue that Art Deco was the city’s major contribution to architectural modernism and urban design. Visiting Morocco in 1931, Le Corbusier praised Prost’s achievements, particularly the *villes nouvelles*. In his characteristically overweening manner, he declared that Prost had contributed to fulfilling “the destiny of the West, to act, to compose, to create modern life”
Exalted by the metropolitan reverberations of his legacy in modern urbanism, Lyautey went as far as suggesting that his and Prost’s genius had been “one of the precursors of Le Corbusier”; he even laid down his general theory for urban planning in France: “Conserve the traditional fabric [medina] of Paris, but outside of Paris be as daring as possible” (qtd. in Wright 1991: 88, 137). However, Casablanca had another gift in store for metropolitan France: the word *bidonville* (‘tin city’) entered the French language in the 1920s to denote the makeshift slums that mushroomed in the city whilst its vanguard modernism was providing “a foil to architecture and urbanism in France” (Wright 1991: 135). Land speculation and population growth fuelled by migration from inland Morocco and Europe had outgrown the planning forecasts of Prost and Lyautey by the 1920s. Working-class Casablancans lived in insalubrious housing all over the city (Rabinow 1995: 308). At the time of his departure in 1923, Prost was resigned to the fact that Casablanca “will always bear the mark of its chaotic origins” (qtd. in Wright 1991: 100).

Although Prost’s master plan continued to guide urban planning until Michel Ecochard entered the stage in the late 1940s, the post-*bidonville* city was marked by the waning of interest in that foundational vision among urban planners. The Protectorate’s new clique of architects—notably, Antoine Marchisio, Adrien Laforgue and Jules Borély—was influenced by Le Corbusier’s school of Universal Modernism. Represented by the Algiers-based journal *Chantiers nord-africains* and concretised by Le Corbusier’s *Plan Obus* for Algiers in 1933, this school of architectural modernism derided Casablanca as an “anachronistic city” and slammed Prost’s attachment to Moroccan tradition and a “fallacious utopia of [the] garden city” (qtd. in Wright 1991: 138). The proponents of Corbusianism in Morocco argued that the modern architect should eschew any inspiration from local traditions, much less adapt his designs to them, for only his oeuvre’s modernism could bring the natives “into modern society” (Wright 1991: 138). One of the unintended outcomes of Le Corbusier-influenced
The Late Colonial City

Despite the achievements of Lyautey and Prost’s planning policy and spatial intervention, its vision was flawed from the outset because it rested on the myth of Casablanca’s lack of history. The city’s history was quick to avenge itself upon the mythmakers: bidonvilles started to sprout in the open areas designed for recreational purposes; speculation-driven development put accommodation costs beyond the reach of the native working class, which was confined by Prost’s master plan to living in the medina and suffered from unhygienic housing there and in other cramped areas. Even the Habous quarter (Fig. 2), a neo-traditional medina of whitewashed buildings and elegant arches designed by Albert Laprade and built between 1920 and 1940 to relieve the overcrowded old medina from a population density of 800 to 1200 inhabitants per hectare (when the figure was only 30 to 50 in the European districts), was a triumph of technical modernity, but it failed to meet the housing needs of urbanism in Morocco was that the native population felt increasingly alienated from designs not of its own making. Anti-colonial sentiments and activity began to flourish in Casablanca’s working-class quarters and soon found expression and support among middle-class nationalists and took the form of armed resistance after WWII (Adam 1972: 31). The postwar protectorate administration found itself caught in the insurmountable contradictions of a late colonial city. When colonial Casablanca’s last urban planner, Michel Ecochard, tried to revive the dream of a modernist city for all in the 1950s, it was already too late. However, his signature contribution to the city’s planning is worth a brief discussion. As with Prost’s colonial modernist city, Ecochard’s alternative vision continues to influence urban planning in present-day Casablanca and understanding of the representation of urban space in Moroccan cinema since 1990s is impossible without a critical account of this colonial chapter of its palimpsestic modernity.
Casablanca’s poor (Mazieres 1985: 24). These were only some of the consequences of the aforementioned epistemological myth behind the colonial-modernist city.

Figure 2. A street in the Habous (new medina) in the 1930s

In 1946, Ecochard was greeted by a surfeit rather than a deficit of history. Casablanca witnessed a population growth of 325 per cent between 1936 and 1953 alone (Benzakour cited in House 2012: 80). As colonial Morocco’s largest industrial base and home to one third of its urban population by the late 1940s, modern capitalism and its attendant social relations had changed Casablanca immeasurably. The lure of beginnings which animated Lyautey and Prost’s master plan was long gone and the colonial project’s modernity was increasingly questioned by Moroccans and doubted by the colons (European settlers). Urban planning in
the Prostian sense was anything but possible when Ecochard, another graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, was commissioned by General Governor Eirik Labonne to draw up new master plans to stamp out the bidonvilles which housed 19 per cent of Casablanca’s 650,000 inhabitants in 1950 (Rotalier 2002: 210). But how does one design (in) a late colonial city? This was the question Ecochard had to grapple with throughout his tenure. He was convinced that whilst he could not afford to neglect this question in his plans, urgent action was needed to improve housing conditions for the poor. Unlike the Chantiers nord-africains group that advocated Corbusian modernism, Ecochard selectively adapted the principles of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) or the Modern Movement (1928-1960), which he officially represented in Morocco.

In drafting his Schémas Directeurs, Ecochard was effectively designing a postcolonial city for a Third World country on the horizon. At the core of his philosophy was an uncompromising humanism, evident in his preoccupation with a hygienic and rational city as outlined in the Functional City approach agreed at CIAM4 or the Fourth Athens Conference (Mumford 1992: 392). Despite financial problems and the resistance that his social housing projects encountered both from within the Protectorate administration and among Casablanca’s bourgeoisie, Ecochard was keen on delivering the best results at the lowest cost. In contrast to Prost’s utopianism, Ecochard’s writings and urban planning from below demonstrated an awareness of the social and historical responsibility of the urban planner. Already Morocco’s largest city and industrial base in the late 1940s, Casablanca called for special planning that would address its particular history. Ecochard invented the Minimal Residential Unit of two eight-by-eight metre rooms, a W.C., and a patio (Fig. 3). Under this compact and endlessly reproducible scheme, 350 inhabitants could live in just one hectare. Designed to house 9,000 people, each neighbourhood comprised five blocks with a capacity of 1,800 apiece. Local amenities included a school, medical centre, gardens, playgrounds and
a market. The Minimal Residential Unit became the focal point of what Edouard called “habitat pour le plus grand nombre” (‘mass housing’). The *Trame Ecochard* (Ecochard’s Grid) was implemented to replace the *bidonvilles* in the districts of Sidi Othman, El Hank and Carrières Centrales in the vicinity of Casablanca’s industrial zone. Although they provided *habitat adapté* (suitable housing) for thousands of working-class people, their numbers were never great enough to house the swelling shantytown population of Morocco’s economic powerhouse.

*Figure 3. An example of Ecochard’s model houses and their bidonville locations (above) in the late 1950s*
Ecochard’s Grid revolutionised social housing (almost 200 8×8 units could be built every day) and the blocks constructed are still inhabited in Hay Hassani, Hay Mohammadi (formerly Les Carrières Centrales), and Sidi Othman. They are hardly recognisable today due to countless changes effected by the residents to adapt modernist architecture to their actually existing lifestyles in a postcolonial metropolis. Concrete examples of these adaptations include stories added on top of the single-floor structures, patios sealed with concrete to provide more room for the often large households, and balcony spaces converted into kitchens. These postcolonial appropriations are not failures of the Ecochard Grid but rather testimony to its generativity. Much to the dismay of the protectorate administration, Ecochard’s housing projects, particularly in the Carrières Centrales district, had become home to a sizeable and unionised working class. They became hotbeds of anti-colonial resistance, which took a definitive turn after the repression of street protests against the assassination of the Tunisian union leader Farhat Hached in December 1952 (Rotalier 2002: 207).

The National City of Emergency

Independence from France and Spain in March and April 1956, respectively, opened a new chapter in Morocco’s history. The colonial legacy was a delicate affair for many reasons. To begin with, the infant nation-state was heir to myriad challenges, many of which are still in existence today. Whereas the French zone was relatively more developed than its Spanish counterpart, the entire country was made up of unequally developed regions. From its inception, colonial domination inside the French zone instituted a divide-and-rule policy based on a distinction between what Lyautey dubbed Maroc utile (‘useful Morocco’) or bled el Makhzen (‘land of order’) to denote the fertile plateaus and economically productive parts contained by the Fes-Rabat-Casablanca triangle, on the one hand, and Maroc inutile (‘useless
Morocco’) or bled es-siba (‘land of dissidence’) comprising the rest of Morocco, on the other. This territorial apartheid hindered the infant state’s capacity to unify a structurally divided nation. Writing in the mid-1980s, Mahdi Elmandjra contends that “the découpage constituted a major rupture. It explains the rapid growth of Casablanca, but it also explains a dualism in the economy of the whole country which has not been eradicated even after thirty years of independence” (1985: 215-16). This holds true today.

Other challenges were represented by spectacular rates of poverty and illiteracy. About the latter the figures speak for themselves: 89 per cent of all Moroccans and 98 per cent of women could neither read nor write (Pennell 2003: 163). This is how an ordinary man in Tangier recalls the day of independence:

I went out. Everybody in the city was happy, everywhere in the streets. They were going to get their freedom. One man was saying: The Nazarenes are leaving! I’m going to have a big house on the Boulevard, and it will be all mine. Mine! Another was saying: I’m going to be a commissaire! And they were all telling each other they were going to be rich, and no one would ever have to ask for alms in the street again. They were talking. But not one of them knew how to read or write. (Charhadi 1982: 120)

In 1956, 70 per cent of the country’s ten million population, mostly illiterate and poor, lived in rural areas. In urban centres, the chasm was swelling between the poor majority and a nascent bourgeoisie in control of factories and large farms in some of Morocco’s prime land. This urban bourgeoisie was well placed to benefit from the redistribution of economic assets in the possession of the colons. The assets were passed over to even fewer hands under nationalisation schemes in the following decades (Vermeren 2010: 14-16). In addition to the
class divide, other challenges facing independent Morocco included centrifugal political manoeuvres and neo-patrimonial elite reproduction amongst the landed gentry, business magnates and the Royal Armed Forces (RAF). This period was also marked by the repression of subaltern insurrections in the desert frontier Tafilalet region (1957), Ifni (1958) and the Rif (1958-59). The rural-based and Amazigh-dominated Army of Liberation had refused to lay down arms and acknowledge the hegemony of the urban Arab nationalist Istiqlal Party and the RAF under the command of the crown prince Hassan II, the man who would be king between 1961 and 1999.

In post-1956 Morocco, Casablanca remained the largest city and its development was marked by the State’s evolution from a makeshift kingdom at independence to an authoritarian monarchy in the following decades. Upon the death of King Mohammed V in 1961, his son Hassan II ascended to the throne and set out to undermine the Left, his main rival for political power. Economic and social development were not a priority for King Hassan. Despite a wave of reformist policies in the last decade of his rule, when the real and imaginary threats to his throne had disappeared with the end of the Cold War and three decades of brutal repression, the kingdom that Hassan II bequeathed to Mohammed VI in July 1999 was a deeply underdeveloped country with myriad socioeconomic problems and a bitter historical residue.

Casablanca encapsulates the promises and predicaments of Morocco’s postcolonial condition. I have examined the making of colonial Casablanca in two major moments when discursive formations and material conditions combined in the dramatic rise and fall of two overarching periods of urban planning and social change. To convey the heterogeneity of post-colonial Casablanca, my analysis in the remainder of this chapter lies on two paradigmatic moments in the city’s development: the moment of the *city of emergency* sutures together the plethora of historical events and cultural dynamics in Casablanca from
1956 to the restive years and the regime’s heavy-handed repression of the street uprisings against poverty and an unpopular monarch in the crisis-strewn and revolt-prone 1980s; the neoliberal metropolis, the fourth and current moment in the city’s one hundred years of modernisation, denotes the new urbanism which intensive neoliberalisation has brought about in Casablanca since the 1980s. Like other newly independent countries in the mid-20th century, Morocco adopted a programme of national development based on import-substitution and the modernisation of industries, agriculture and services (Clément 1995: 1003). However, the post-1956 governments were plagued by the dilemma of an economy on the downturn after mass flights of both capital and educated elites to Europe. Morocco faced an agricultural sector in disarray, severe unemployment, lack of economic coordination, and insufficient revenues from phosphate exports (Pennell 2003: 163). To overcome these problems, successive governments resorted to French economic advisers for strategic planning. The Biannual Plan (1958-1959) and the Quinquennial Plan (1960-1964) aimed at restructuring agriculture and creating jobs. However, both plans were doomed owing to cash shortages in the government’s coffers, on the one hand, and stiff opposition from the royal establishment and a conservative bourgeoisie wary of the potential emergence of organised working-class politics, on the other (Vermeren 2010: 28-29). In the countryside, what James Sater terms “agriculture through irrigation without land reform” placed a premium on cash instead of food crops through dam construction and further expropriation of collectively owned land. This World Bank-backed, export-oriented policy spawned even more concentration of land in the hands of fewer owners (2010: 91).

The failure of the strategic plans left Morocco in difficult socioeconmic and political circumstances. Droves of impoverished peasants in the traditionally dissident regions of Tafilalt in the drought-ridden southeast, the Rif mountains in the north and the Sous valley in the southwest crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in search of employment in post-war Europe’s
mining, construction and car industries. However, the majority of rural migrants did not venture beyond Moroccan cities, where they “settled in the bidonvilles that surrounded them. Between 1960 and 1971, the population of Casablanca grew from 960,500 to 1.5 million, making it the third biggest city in Africa” (Pennell 2003: 168). Post-colonial Morocco’s first urban uprising took place in Casablanca and brought the nation-state to a standstill from 1965 to 1970. After a decade of mass recruitment of school graduates to fill the vacancies opened in the public sector by the departure of one-third of French officials and two-thirds of Moroccan Jews, the Ministry of Education decided to slow down the process of recruiting teachers due to insufficient funds (Vermeren 2010: 44). The number of recruits had reached 250,000 by 1965 and they constituted a desirable social group in cities and towns. Employment in the public service was perceived as a golden route to upward social mobility among large segments of a massively poor, rural and illiterate nation. When news made the rounds in March 1965 that the government was planning to reduce the number of students allowed to pass into the second cycle of high school, thousands of workers, students, unemployed youth and bidonvilles residents took to the streets of Casablanca to protest the scheme. What began as a peaceful demonstration soon turned into an all-out revolt against the regime; police stations, military barracks and banks were set ablaze by angry crowds. On 23 March, the insurrection had spread to other cities and Hassan II ordered General Mohamed Oufkir, the same person who put down the city’s 1952 insurrection, to suppress the protests. The crackdown killed hundreds of civilians in Casablanca. The regime blamed the events on trade unions. On 29 October 1965, Mehdi Ben Barka, the Moroccan socialist leader and Secretary of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, was assassinated in Paris by Hassan II’s secret services (Vermeren 2010: 43). Less than three months after the carnage in Casablanca, the king prorogued the parliament and declared a state of emergency, a manoeuvre that allowed him to rule by decree until 1970.
1965 is the year emergency formally substituted for development. It was in this charged climate that Casablanca nonchalantly bade farewell to the first decade of its post-colonial history and stepped into the next. With no significant acts of planning or architectural innovation undertaken, Casablanca in the 1960s and 1970s embodied what Jai Sen (2001) calls an “unintended city,” a form of urbanisation common in Third World cities even before the market reforms of the 1980s. From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, Casablanca, plagued by social inequality, a steady influx of rural immigrants and high levels of illiteracy and poverty, grew exponentially and its bidonvilles multiplied. The political stalemate and increasingly dictatorial rule of Hassan II gave birth to vibrant forms of resistance on the literary scene and in popular culture. Abdellatif Laâbi, Mohamed Khaïr-Eddine, Abraham Serfaty, Abdelkébir Khatibi and other Moroccan poets and writers created and contributed to the iconic literary magazine Souffles/Anfas to give voice to ordinary Moroccans through “linguistic guerrillas” and promote cultural and political resistance. In 1972, the magazine was banned and Laâbi and Abraham Serfaty arrested, tortured and jailed for “crimes of opinion” (Sefrioui 2012). Others went into exile. In Casablanca’s working-class districts, vibrant forms of popular culture such as music, sports and theatre evinced the frustrations and aspirations of ordinary people. The Moroccan equivalent of the 1960s counterculture worldwide was largely embodied by Casablanca’s popular voices. A landmark of the period’s cultural geography is the folk-rock band, Nass El Ghiwane, whose members hailed from Hay Mohammadi, a working-class district, home to migrants from all around Morocco. El Ghiwane sang about the everyday life of poor people and kept alive the spirit of resistance behind the street rebellion of 1965 in the minds and hearts of their massive audience. Their concerts and records tapped into the semiotic-affective potential of ‘people power’ or the radical potential of the postcolonial subjects’ untold suffering and hope for a better future. Theirs is a protest music melodically and lyrically tapping into the affective undercurrents of
revolt in a time of poverty and oppression in a sprawling metropolis (Fig. 4). “At the heart of their simple yet politically charged lyrics,” Tarik Sabry argues, “lie questions of class, cultural stratification and resistance” (2010: 43). Drawing on local and global influences, they embodied the role of popular culture in the making of a postcolonial modernity from below.

While Nass El Ghiwane and other bands were articulating popular resistance in the 1970s, the Moroccan economy was muddling through the last decade of developmentalist experiments, which failed to deliver economic and social progress. A Moroccanisation programme was launched in 1973. The decree mandated that “Moroccans hold majority ownership in private sector companies” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006: 127). However, this spree of economic nationalism benefited the business and landowning elites, under the stewardship of His Majesty, instead
of the middle class it was meant to bolster. In sum, this policy “had the effect of increasing income and corresponding lifestyle disparities among Moroccans” (Sater 2010: 10).

The lack of popular legitimacy, a broken polity, widespread corruption and the economic recession, which plagued the country throughout the first two decades of independence, were factors strong enough to wipe out Hassan II’s monarchy. However, the high prices of phosphate in the 1970s kept his regime solvent. Morocco became the world’s leading exporter of phosphate rock ore and an annual growth rate of 7.3 per cent was registered between 1973 and 1977 (Vermeren 2010: 66). Nevertheless, external debt and a rentier model of state capitalism prevented real economic development from taking off during this bonanza. The phosphate revenue allowed the regime to buy the support of military and political elites through patron-client networks. However, when the prices of phosphates nosedived in the international markets in the late 1970s, the regime found itself teetering on an economic and political cliff-edge. The domestic economy was impaired by the shortage of foreign hard currency. Jobs were lost and unemployment rocketed overnight. The crisis was compounded by the cost of Africa’s longest running conflict pitting the Moroccan army against the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, a pro-independence group which had taken arms in 1976 against Morocco’s annexation of the Spanish-occupied Sahara (1884-1975). In 1980 and 1981, Casablanca witnessed mass protests led by young bidonville residents and workers enraged by the rising cost of living and soaring unemployment, which affected more than 37 per cent of the workforce. The most violent of these street protests occurred in June 1981 against the government’s decision to lift subsidies on basic goods such as bread, butter, cooking oil and sugar. In Morocco as elsewhere around the Global South, austerity “violated the social contract between the states and the masses, triggering anger and discontent” (Bayat 2010: 69). A quarter of Casablanca’s 3.2 million inhabitants in 1981 lived in bidonvilles and were the most affected by such policy changes. They led June’s Moudaharat al-Koumira
(‘Bread Riots’). What followed was a remake of the 1965 repression, albeit on a greater scale. The regime violently suppressed the street uprising and thousands died or were ‘disappeared’ into Hassan II’s dungeons or, to quote him, “secret gardens” (cited in Perrault 1991: 110).

The Bread Riots marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. The developmental state receded with the onset of the neoliberal state in the early 1980s. A teetering economy, high unemployment and poverty, which affected 40 per cent of Moroccans, and urban riots forced the ailing regime to accept the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1983. The international organisation decreed the reduction of the budget deficit and direct investments in export industries such as crops and textiles (Clément 1995: 1004). The neoliberal project that began in 1983 gradually recast the role of the postcolonial state from the engine of national development to the guardian of market interests. Signs of this paradigm shift were borne out by the immediate consequences of sadomonetarist decisions taken in 1983: the budget deficit came down, but inflation and unemployment increased over time.

The Neoliberal Metropolis

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. — Guy Debord

In spite of frequent protests in the city throughout the 1980s, Casablanca was adapting to the temporal and spatial logics of neoliberal capital. The city’s fourth major moment of urban modernity in a century had arrived. As the metropolis was roiling through the turbulent 1980s, King Hassan II announced his intention to build a temple to his namesake on Casablanca’s Atlantic seafront:
I wish Casablanca to be endowed with a large, fine building of which it can be proud until the end of times. [...] I want to build this mosque on the water, because God’s throne is on the water. Therefore, the faithful who go there to pray, to praise the creator on firm soil, can contemplate God’s sky and ocean. (qtd. in Tozy 1990: 78)

Hassan II was convinced throughout his reign that autocratic rule depended on broad acceptance amongst his ra’aya (subjects) of his dual authority as a religious and political leader or Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the Faithful), a pre-colonial title he revived in the country’s first constitution in 1962. However, the king also knew that Casablanca was a city where the idea of his person’s sanctity carried little weight. The insurrection of 1965 and its sequel in 1981 only one year after his mega-mosque speech bespoke a seditious attitude to autocracy. He was thus resolved to instrumentalise religion to cushion the populous city against the eastern winds blowing from insurgent Tehran, which had toppled his compeer Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979.

The world’s third-largest mosque was strategically planned on the site of a colonial swimming pool (built in 1934, the biggest in Africa and the longest in the world until then) and the surrounding bidonville whose residents were evicted from the area without compensation, making the mosque project a case of urbanisation by displacement. Its US$800m budget was raised in large part from mandatory contributions by the king’s subjects. Construction began in July 1986 and the mosque was completed in August 1993. Towering high in the sky like the mosque in the opening scene of Casablanca (1942), Hassan II’s high-tech temple—with a 689 ft, 60-storey minaret sending laser beams to Mecca—has loomed over Casablanca skyline ever since. However, Hassan’s Haussmanian intervention in a city on the threshold of neoliberalisation is shot through with telling contradictions. One
would be mistaken in thinking that the project’s sole purpose was a straightforward Islamisation of a profane urban space. The mosque has had more uses than a visual Mecca fetish or an attempt to endow modernity with Islamic characteristics (Fig. 5). Every act was symbolically charged from the beginning: the timely speech, the fund-raising campaign intended both to unify the people behind an unpopular monarch and demonstrate how he was in command of the faithful and unfaithful alike, the choice of the site and the displacement of the *bidonville* population, and the manna of jobs created to build and later maintain the mosque. Designed by the French architect Michel Pinceau, the chief urban planner of Casablanca in the 1980s, Hassan II Mosque was also an intervention in the spirit of global capitalism. It consecrated the role of the king not only as the Commander of the Faithful but also as the country’s biggest owner and investor of capital, which is a secular force. A destination for more tourists than worshippers, his mosque has become a source of economic revenue for the city (Daoud 2005: 16). Its secular role was enhanced by the Commander of the Faithful’s decision to overthrow Lyautey’s decree preventing non-Muslim tourists from entering and taking pictures inside Muslim places of worship (Rabinow 1995: 287).
The construction and uses of Hassan II Mosque, an iconic sight in Moroccan urban cinema since the 1990s, are inscribed in the complex urbanism which has characterised neoliberal Casablanca. The city has continued to grow phenomenally and remains the largest urban centre in post-1983 Morocco by a wide margin, but it is no longer the Third World city of emergency examined in the previous section. Its material and human terrains have experienced a spectacular transformation in the last three decades to an extent which makes it both recognisable and analysable on the same plane as other metropolises of the Global South rather than alongside the so-called “Islamic cities” of North Africa and the Middle East. With a disproportionate concentration of Morocco’s urban population and economic activity, on the one hand, and an increasing regeneration of the built environment to accommodate neoliberal globalisation, on the other, Casablanca has evolved a postcolonial urbanism of
extremes. It is a city with increasing levels of social polarisation between affluent classes living in gated communities and precarious under-classes. A recent UN-Habitat report indicates that “Maputo and Casablanca, both with Gini coefficients of 0.52, feature the highest values in the world for consumption-based inequality” (2008: 74). In the middle between the two extremes of affluence and poverty in Casablanca is a middle class which has seen its fortunes and standards of living decline as a result of the waning of the welfare state (Sater 2010: 99). As in the rest of North Africa, neoliberalisation in Morocco has provoked important socioeconomic changes. Free-market economies have made consumer commodities vastly more accessible and have enriched the upper socioeconomic strata while also increasing income disparities and causing critical changes in labor markets. Informal and marginalized groups, such as the unemployed, casual workers, and street-subsistence laborers, have expanded. A large number of public sector workers and rural laborers, as well as educated, once well-to-do members of the middle class (government employees and college students), have been pushed into the ranks of the urban poor in labor and housing markets. (Bayat 2010: 67)

Despite disparities in the standards and areas of living, all the classes in the city have seen their social habitus restructured by market forces. For example, this excerpt from a Francophone novel by a middle-class writer from Casablanca today sums up the mixed feelings among her class: “Casablanca, my beloved and abhorred city, the immense and torn heart of Morocco, its only truly mirror city, which exhibits in the same body pustules and
grains of beauty, stinking misery and insolent luster, the bitterness of the past and fantasies of
the future” (Benchekroun 2004: 169).

As in most countries of the Global South, the national and urban agendas in Morocco
are shaped by history as well as by the dictates and recommendations of the trinity of the
World Bank, IMF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The IMF
reports often tout the country’s “textbook success” in reducing the budget deficit, devaluing
the currency and reforming the public sector by privatising productive sectors such as
transport, telecommunications and mining (Catusse 2009: 90). On the other side of the
spectrum are the reports of the World Bank, which whilst applauding financial reforms, often
sound the alarm about the country’s social indicators of development. In 2001, the World
Bank reported that

Morocco’s growth trend rate [has] continued to slacken, entailing a stagnation in
per capita incomes over the last decade, as well as increased poverty and urban
unemployment, in sharp contrast to the performance of most other middle-income
countries over the same period. (2001: 7)

Alongside their UNDP counterparts with their neo-classical discourse of human development
as freedom (à la Amartya Sen), the releases of IMF and World Bank reports are major events
in Morocco. The details of a confidential World Bank report on endemic corruption and tax
evasion in Morocco were leaked in 1995. It warned of an “economic heart attack” by
pinpointing the alarming socioeconomic indicators (Akesbi qtd. in Sater 2010: 104-5). In the
same year, the French newspaper Le Monde revealed the royal palace’s financial stakes in the

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3 “Casablanca, ma cité chérie et abhorée, le coeur immense et tiraillé du Maroc, sa seule vraie ville miroir,
exhibant dans un même corps pustules et grains de beauté, la misère puante et le lustre insolent, les rancœurs
du passé et les fantasmes de l’avenir” (Benchekroun 2004: 169).
illicit exports of cannabis, for which Morocco had become the leading global producer (Deneoux 1998: 109). King Hassan launched a notorious anti-graft drive and promised to introduce some structural changes to prevent a repeat of the uprisings in Casablanca of 1965 and 1981, Nador and Hoceima in 1984, and Fes in 1990. It was a doubly delicate situation for the ageing autocrat: first, his necropolitics in decimating opposition to his rule was no longer efficient due to the country’s changing demographics and the rise of human rights as a paradigm in international relations; second, he was preoccupied with guaranteeing a secure power transition to his heir. With help from the IMF, the EU and the US, he launched a programme of state decentralisation. The pliant media described this move as a quantum leap towards good governance. In politics, new reforms such as the establishment of a bicameral parliament “did not significantly alter the nature of Morocco’s political system, as Hassan and the monarchy remained the dominant force” (Zisenwine 2007: 137). In the economic sphere, labour laws were liberalised and generous incentives for foreign investors (e.g., tax breaks and the MidParc Casablanca free zone) were introduced under the aegis of the centre-left coalition government (1997-2002). The socioeconomic agenda of every Moroccan government ever since has been within the remit of what Neil Brenner and Nick Theodore call “an actually existing neoliberalism,” which rests on “the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (2002: 350).

Under this neoliberal modus operandi of good governance and free markets, which culminated in a disadvantageous Free Trade Agreement with the US in 2006 and an Advanced Status accord with the EU in 2008, Casablanca has led the country’s integration into the global economy. Under Mohammed VI’s executive monarchy, the city is run by a Wali (‘governor’) appointed by the king from his entourage of technocrats, on the one hand, and elected municipal councils and interest groups working under the watchful eye of the
Ministry of Interior’s National Agency for Urban Management (SONADAC) set up in 1994 to enshrine the security dimension in urban politics and planning, on the other (Berry-Chikhaoui 2007: 150). Although policy measures had been taken since the 1990s to transform its economy from an industrial to a services-based one to attract international investment, it was the new Communal Charter of 2002 that outlined the legal framework for the city’s neoliberal ecology. The charter was “more part of a broader course of reorganisation of the administrative structures in Morocco from above, than it [was] a response to the grievances of [...] local democracy” (Catusse et al. 2007: 10-11). It consecrated the tripartite model of good governance or what, a royal letter from January 2002 calls, the “decentralised management of investment” (qtd. in Catusse et al. 2007: 14): the king-appointed governor, the elected councils and the interest groups would be working together, with SONADAC having the last word in major decisions under what Magid Choukhaili denotes as “securitarian urbanism” (2005: 124). These governing bodies issued a master plan for Casablanca in 2008 with a new policy articulated around two directives: first, more planning services are to pass to private firms or joint public-private partnerships; second, the aménagement will prioritise Grands Chantiers (Big Projects). In keeping with the 2002 charter, the new master plan consecrated a set of corporatist discourses and practices which had already been in full operation under Casablanca’s actually existing neoliberalism.

The city entered the 21st century with a corporatist agenda. A first glimpse at the massive landscape changes taking place in Casablanca today would suggest that it is undergoing a resurgence of the ambitious visions and frantic land speculation which made it a boom city a century ago. The cityscape has been undergoing substantial transformation in recent years as some Grands Chantiers have been completed. Flagship examples of these ‘monuments of progress’ include the Casablanca-Tangier TGV (high-speed rail line), Casablanca Finance City, the Casa Park business district, Casablanca Marina, Casa Tramway,
and the Morocco Mall (Fig. 6). These ambitious infrastructures are often marketed to the general public using catchphrases such as ‘biggest’ or ‘largest’ in (North) Africa.

SONADAC, local banks, and high-profile companies from the Arabian Gulf and Europe are the big financial players in the city’s race to become a regional financial and services hub for northern, western and central Africa. Some of these developments betray a trend towards a Dubaisation of Casablanca. Driven by a ‘fortification aesthetic’ embodied by “such post-public places as festival marketplaces, citadel office complexes, enclosed shopping malls, and gated residential communities” (Murray 2004: 1), neoliberal urbanism has left its mark on the social fabric of Casablanca. It is increasingly becoming a city
splintered by the same capital forces driving its *Grands Chantiers*. Its condition is characteristic of the Global South where

In aspiring to achieve ‘world-class’ status, ‘city boosters’ foster the kinds of business-friendly, urban regeneration strategies that curry favour with large-scale global corporations by creating cocooned sites of luxury entertainment, shopping and leisure, while simultaneously leaving poor and working-class urban residents to fend for themselves in competing for access to affordable housing, to dwindling public space and to privatised (‘pay-as-you-go’) municipal services. (Murray 2004: 4-5)

In 2012, according to statistics from the Ministry for Housing, Planning and Urbanism, Casablanca boasted 500 satellite slums inhabited by 555,000 people (*TelQuel* 2012). On the evening of 16 May 2003, as Nabyl Ayouch’s thriller *God’s Horses* (2012) relates, a group of 12 radicalised young people blew themselves up in different parts of Casablanca killing 33 people. The authorities and allied media were quick to label the strikes as “Morocco’s 9/11” in a shrewd move tapping into the geographies of global empathy following the 11 September 2001 events. The “War on Terror,” which began with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, was at its zenith. The Moroccan regime, which had been participating in this imperial war as a secret torture outpost for Guantanamo Bay detainees, took advantage of the immediate state of shock following the Casablanca bombings to reinforce a liberticidal press code. The new counter-terrorism law “has given the government an almost unlimited legal margin to limit the human rights and basic civil liberties of any citizen” (Kausch 2009: 144). In addition, the murderous attacks led to a “swing of the pendulum back toward the modus operandi of the past—arbitrary arrests, abuse of human rights, and torture” (Zisenwine 2007: 142).
However, an alternative interpretation of 16 May 2003 has emerged: it could not have been a coincidence that all the suicide bombers were all desperate youth from Sidi Moumen, the largest of Casablanca’s sinister bidonvilles, and that all the targets were real or imaginary icons of unequally distributed wealth in the city—the five-star Hotel Farah, the Casa de España club, and a Jewish community centre. Subsequent blasts by radicalised young people linked to Casablanca’s poverty-stricken slums recurred in the city in February and April 2007, Madrid in March 2004, and Marrakesh in April 2011.

In the same year as the Casablanca bombings, UN-Habitat released a landmark report blaming the structural adjustment policies for poverty in the cities of the Global South, where most of the planet’s one billion slum residents live: “The primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality, and weakened urban elites in their efforts to use cities as engines of growth” (2003: 3). The report concludes that the “main cause of increases in poverty and inequality during the 1980s and 90s was the retreat of the state” (43). The 345-page report’s recommendations urge the governments of the concerned countries to take action toward the eradication of slums. In May 2005, King Mohamed VI owned up to the reality that, based on “objective data [...] large segments of Morocco’s population and entire areas of the country live in conditions [...] of poverty and marginalisation incompatible with a dignified and decent life” (qtd. in Martín 2006: 1). The monarch launched his projet de règne (reign project): the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), a multimillion-dollar programme aimed at alleviating poverty in urban and rural areas through the provision of basic infrastructures, literacy campaigns, and income-generating activities. Despite the state being the largest sponsor (80 per cent) and coordinator of INDH, private banks and microcredit promoters have been playing a significant role in its planning and countrywide implementation (Cattusse 2009: 205).
In Casablanca, where two decades of market reforms had been writ large by the social malaise behind the 16 May attacks, the royal initiative was initially hailed as an attempt to countervail globalisation with real socioeconomic development. A critical area of INDH investment is the *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* (Cities Without Slums) programme sponsored by the World Bank. Its aim is to stem the development of shantytowns in Casablanca and other cities. However, the sheer size of the housing needs of Casablanca’s slum residents has exceeded by far the INDH provision and budget. The programme has failed to benefit the intended number of 348,400 households in a city where over 10 per cent of the city’s 4 million inhabitants live in teeming slums (Martín 2006: 6). Another setback is the financial aspect of the project: most slum residents live off low-paid and occasional jobs in the informal sector and can hardly afford mortgages even with financial incentives. The poor living in shantytowns (e.g., Carrières Thomas, Douar Sqwilla, Carrières Centrales, Sidi Moumen) have not proved to be the bankable assets envisioned and desired by the techno-political engineers of *Villes Sans Bidonvilles*. Despite its progressive lexicon, INDH is an example of what Arturo Escobar calls *neo-developmentalist* or those “forms of development understanding and practice that do not question the fundamental premises of the development discourse” (2010: 20). The INDH’s core shortcoming lies in its incapacity to tackle the root causes of social exclusion in urban space, namely poverty and unemployment.

Teresa Caldeira contends that the ascent of “fortified enclaves” in the Global South’s cities is a sign of social disintegration:

In the last few decades, the proliferation of fortified enclaves has created a new model of spatial segregation and transformed the quality of public life in many cities around the world. Fortified enclaves are privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work. The fear of violence is one
As revealed by Casablanca’s aforementioned chasm between an official planning discourse with its superlative urbanism of a trompe-l’oeil Dubai, on the one hand, and an undercapitalised social housing sector unable to lift the squalor of shantytowns, on the other, the city today is in thrall to what Stephen Graham describes as “the spectre of the splintering metropolis” (2001: 365-68). Its development and social fabric are driven by different speeds and the endless fragmentation of its urban and social space. The extent of spatial fragmentation in Casablanca and the state of its social polarisation have undermined the idea of the polis as a space of civic values and citizenship. The proliferation of rich enclaves fortified by fences and security apparatuses or what Martin Murray calls “siege architecture” (2004: 11), on the one hand, and the indigence of slum planets within one city, on the other, are the concrete markers of the social cleavages, violence and existential insecurity which have become the hallmarks of Casablanca’s new urban ecology. This city is becoming, to quote David Harvey, “a patchwork quilt of islands of relative affluence struggling to secure themselves in a sea of spreading decay” (2000: 152). In contrast to the opulence of exclusive suburbs or “rich ghettos” (Chenna 2005: 98) like Anfa, Ain Diab, Longchamp, Polo, Hippodrome, Crêtes, Oasis and Californie, the Casablanca of the lower classes is “a dumping ground for a surplus population working in unskilled, unprotected and low-wage informal service industries and trade,” to quote UN-HABITAT’s description of poor urban communities in the Global South (2003: 46). As Katarzyna Pieprzak observes:
One need only look at the extensive shantytowns that are scattered throughout Casablanca to see how the city fabric has failed many of its inhabitants and how urban planning builds upon and renders concrete the unequal development that has accompanied Morocco’s modernisation process. In homage to its namesake, one of the newest Casablanca neighbourhoods, Hay Californie, is resplendent with large gated villas, watered gardens and manicured lawns. This utopist image of ‘Western’ industrialised society contrasts starkly with the proliferation of neighbouring shantytowns, tented communities or empty lots with small trash piles that seem to be persistently burning. For the ‘citizens’ in these communities, there is often no running water and sparse electricity. As the city builds up and outwards, these are the people left behind. (2007: 188)

The economic development of the city in the new century has deepened the social contradictions and concrete consequences of globalisation in urban space and everyday life. The tide of spatial segregation and social divisions is on the rise in Casablanca. “The population, which has increased tenfold since independence, is riven by these disparities and contradictions, and traversed by a considerable tension between the modernism and will to succeed of some, and the underdevelopment and poverty of others” (Daoud 2005: 25). Little wonder violence has come to prevail in social interaction among its five million inhabitants, as I will discuss through the close analysis of two dozen films in this dissertation.

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4 “La population, multipliée par dix depuis l’indépendance, est déchirée par ses disparités et ses contradictions, travaillée par une incroyable tension entre le modernisme et la volonté de réussite des uns, le sous-développement et la pauvreté des autres” (Daoud 2005: 25).
Conclusion

Despite the sombre present of the city, it is worth bearing in mind Casablanca’s history of evolution under different stages of capitalism from the colonial invasion of 1907 through the popular revolts of 1965 and 1981 to neoliberal globalisation. Casablanca is Morocco’s modern face with its contradictions and promises. The evolution of the city in the colonial period reflected the shifting ideologies of imperial government and the economic fortunes of the city. In the beginning, Casablanca was constructed in colonial discourse as one without history and therefore susceptible to becoming the showcase for the civilising mission of French colonialism. Resident-General Lyautey and his architectural associates, namely Henri Prost, designed and began building a city in line with architectural styles and modernist ideas sometimes way ahead of metropolitan France. However, the colonial oppression of native and European economic migrants soon disrupted the beautiful city built for the affluent settlers. Bidonvilles appeared in the city as early as the 1920s. The housing needs of Casablanca’s growing proletariat were largely neglected by the authorities and their official architects. The latter were concerned with deepening the theories and practices of architectural modernism on the world stage and focused on designing outstanding public buildings in the 1930s. The Second World War and the rise of Moroccan nationalism led the colonial power to invest in social housing. Michel Ecochard became the chief urbanist in Morocco and improvised plans to provide housing for the masses and secure social peace in Casablanca’s poor quarters. The anti-colonial insurrection of 1952 and the following years raised the bar. France had to leave Morocco to Moroccans in 1956.

In the post-colonial period, Casablanca continued to be the hub of the Moroccan economy and an attractive city for national migration. The failure of the strategic plans (1958-1959 and 1960-1964) and the political strife that accompanied King Hassan II’s early dictatorship years engendered mass upheavals in Casablanca. The uprising of 23 March 1965
was led by the dispossessed among a large population where poverty, illiteracy and socio-economic exploitation were rife. The regime responded with a brutality reminiscent of the colonial carnage of 1952 in Casablanca’s shantytowns. However, the repression led to the rise of protest culture and underground political activity over the next decades. In 1981, the city rose up again against price rises and a long catalogue of grievances following the government’s decision to lift subsidies on basic foodstuffs. The bloody repression was typical of the Lead Years (1956-1999). In 1983, the regime embarked on neoliberal market reforms through the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programme, which sealed the fate of the Moroccan economy and opened up society to the full winds of globalisation. Postcolonial identity has been stretched and forced to evolve under the new directions and fluctuations of Moroccan society. In a country where cinema has long been considered a public discourse practiced by committed intellectuals, filmmakers turned to the social consequences of neoliberalisation and, in so doing, created a symbiosis between cinema and society. The cinematic revolution was ushered in by a popular yet politically resonant brand of films from the 1990s onwards, as we will see in the next chapter.

Casablanca greeted the new millennium with an agenda for more neoliberalisation whilst cultural production benefited from the waning of the Makhzen with the death of King Hassan II in 1999. His son, King Mohammed VI, led the second neoliberal revolution in the city through a policy of Grands Chantiers after the suicide bombings on 16 May 2003. The deadly strikes by 11 young shantytown residents awakened the regime to the need for economic development to guarantee social peace. Aided by the rise of phosphate prices in the international markets and the economic fortunes of Europe, Morocco’s first trade partner, Mohammed VI launched a wide-ranging programme of social housing programmes and big infrastructural projects in Casablanca. However, the Villes Sans Bidonvilles programme has been hindered by structural problems, particularly its cost and insufficient capacity. The
Grands Chantiers themselves are being built to serve the consumption needs of the upper classes of the society, leaving behind the majority of the city’s precariat, working and lower middle classes at the mercy of globalisation. In response, Moroccan cinema slightly changed course around the mid-2000s to reflect the social transformations of Casablanca in the new millennium, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 5. However, despite the rise of the divided city and increasing divisions under globalisation, Casablanca remains a space of hope. The rise of a new urban cinema and strident voices of popular resistance in the arts, youth subcultures, grassroots organisations and waves of mass demonstrations in recent years are evidence that the longue durée of ‘Casablanca’ as an insurgent city and contested terrain lives on. The emergent alternative urban cultures have challenged neoliberal urbanism and power from below and demonstrated that the postcolonial metropolis is not a fait accompli but rather an unfinished project of what we can call, after James Holston (2008), “insurgent citizenship” writ large. No other other art form or mass medium has captured the neoliberal times of Casablanca better than the New Urban Cinema that emerged in the early 1990s and continues to enthrall audiences and influence public opinion in Morocco today.
CHAPTER 2

Casablanca Unbound: The New Urban Cinema

A tale of everyday life in a neoliberal metropolis, Abdelkader Lagtaâ’s A Love Affair in Casablanca (1991) has at first glance nothing extraordinary to earn the pride of place it has been accorded in the annals of Moroccan cinema. Upon its public release in April 1992, however, Lagtaâ’s debut feature performed a feat no other national film had managed heretofore. It drew more than 400,000 viewers to cinema theatres in a few weeks and outperformed Hollywood and Bollywood productions at the box office. Lagtaâ’s Love Affair owes its popular appeal to the fact that, in contrast to the mainstream of national cinema heretofore, it “more closely touched the sensibilities of the ‘new’ Moroccan filmgoers,” as Sandra Gayle Carter puts it (2009: 18). Looking at this film twenty years later, it is safe to say that not only did it reconcile audiences with a national cinema dependent on public funds, but also pioneered a novel politics of filmmaking in the country. The transformation was ushered in by such favourable factors as the relative waning of King Hassan II’s authoritarian rule (1961-1999), the social consequences of neoliberalisation, the country’s changing demographics, and the enhanced availability of public funding and screen time (in movie theatres and on national television) in the 1990s. What the national press immediately billed as the “New Moroccan Cinema” announced its arrival not only with a torrid amour in the sprawling urbanscape of contemporary Casablanca but also through a long overdue rapprochement between national cinema and its domestic audience.

This chapter aims to provide an original account of the emergence of what I call the New Urban Cinema (NUC) to differentiate it from the so-called New Moroccan Cinema
(with capital letters), a blanket term both insubstantial and exclusionary that it does not stand the test of critical scrutiny. NUC will be analysed against the backdrop of the socio-economic and political climates of Morocco in general and Casablanca in particular in the late 20th century. It then foregrounds the internal heterogeneity of NUC by distinguishing three strands within its aesthetic tapestry. The chapter also explores the distinctive features of this new movement of urban cinema on its own merits by drawing on a few representative films, which I will be reconsidering alongside others for closer study in the next chapters, which are devoted to three overarching sites of NUC’s multiple yet consistent constructions of postcolonial subjectivity: urban space, youth, violence and agency. The chapter concludes with an examination of the crucial role of youth in the aesthetics and reception of this urban cinema.

**The New Urban Cinema: Take One**

To begin understanding the Casablanca-set NUC films under scrutiny in this dissertation, one has to problematise journalistic claims about Moroccan cinema in the 1990s. Due to the dearth of scholarly literature on this cinema, newspaper reviews often hold sway in what people think and say about it. In the pioneering studies of Roy Armes and Sandra Carter, there is no adequate account of the cinematic renewal ushered in by the breakthrough of Lagtaa’s *Love Affair*. Armes’ *Postcolonial Images: Studies in North African Cinema* (2005) surveys film production from the 1960s to 2002 with a comparative glance at the cinemas of Algeria and Tunisia. Carter’s book *What Moroccan Cinema? A Historical and Critical Study, 1956-2006* (2009), is the first full academic study of Moroccan cinema. She mentions structural transformations in the Moroccan film scene in the early-to-mid-1990s. However, she merely reconstructs in passing what has become an ecumenical belief among the local film commentariat: released to wide acclaim in 1992, *Love Affair* breathed new life into
Moroccan cinema (2009: 18). What is missing from this all too straightforward account is the nuance that would put cinematic production in perspective without trapping itself in the proclivity of journalists and festival promoters to create a sea of confusion by announcing the advent of a new wave every few years. Unlike the body of journalistic commentary, Carter eschews the syntagm New Moroccan Cinema even if she stops short of discussing the aesthetics proper to the cinematic changes in the 1990s that engendered NUC, which, I argue, is a more accurate description of the transformation and its aftermaths. Kevin Dwyer has proposed an anthropologist’s view of this transformation by ascribing it to the dynamics of cultural globalisation. “Home-grown films are increasingly popular in Morocco,” he writes, “reflecting the changing tastes of film audiences and their growing desire to see themselves and their own society represented on the large screen, rather than yet another representation of life in the West” (2002: 351). Whilst this broad assertion is true, it too does not address the complex urban, social and filmic dynamics which engendered NUC and the transformation of Moroccan cinema in its aftermath. What is needed today is a critical account of NUC from the perspective of its historical conjuncture, particular modes of production, distribution and exhibition, and politics of representation.

Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a thorough history of Moroccan cinema, it is well placed to illuminate the issues germane to the advent of a new movement of urban cinema in the 1990s. Notwithstanding its status as the quintessence of NUC, urban is the critical category that has eluded the purview of journalistic and academic commentators alike. For a research project aimed at mapping out the onscreen constructions of postcolonial subjectivity with regard to the evolution of everyday life and urban culture in Casablanca and Morocco under neoliberalism, redressing this critical void cuts to the heart of my endeavour. It is my contention that around the early 1990s, a popular movement of urban cinema revitalised the Moroccan film scene, which had until then been dominated by
production and aesthetic paradigms that failed to establish an indigenous tradition of cinema veritably popular with its postcolonial public. In contradistinction, NUC has been characterised from its inception by what Mohammed Abderrahman Tazi, one of the proponents of this new movement, describes as a “politics of proximity” between the filmmakers and their national audience (Dwyer 2004: 153, 274). On a deeper level, this politics of proximity denotes NUC films’ social diagnostics of neoliberal Morocco through a focus on everyday life and ordinary people’s ‘raw’ and minor struggles. This cinematic attention to urban everyday life’s residue of alienation and contradictions, on the one hand, and its potential for the subversion of power regimes, on the other, makes NUC a political cinema in step with a changing society.

Before exploring the aesthetic cartography of NUC, this chapter will first put it in the historical context of its rise and development over the last two decades. The demographic and social consequences of market reforms on everyday life in Moroccan society in general and cities in particular, the political economy of the cinematic sector and the transnational routes of filmmakers and funding sources are the three crucial elements that we need to probe for an informed account of the production of postcolonial subjectivity in NUC. The previous chapter has provided an aperçu of Casablancas’s evolution as a modern metropolis from colonial modernism to neoliberalism in order to set the stage for a nuanced understanding of NUC’s constructions of postcolonial subjectivity against the city’s longue durée. Keeping in mind this long century of urban modernity, this chapter can now proceed to account for the remaining two overlapping factors behind the advent of NUC and its onscreen production of postcolonial subjectivity. It begins with a short social history of Moroccan cinema and then proceeds to explore the role of the transnational networks of filmmakers, thematics, styles, and audience reception behind popular urban films since the 1990s.
Moroccan Cinema: A Very Brief History

The advent of cinema in Morocco dates back to 1896 when the Lumière Brothers dispatched their agents to the country to capture native scenes and ‘exotic’ types on celluloid for the entertainment of audiences in metropolitan France. A montage of those scenes and types, Louis Lumière’s film *Le Chevrier Marocain* (*The Moroccan Goatherd*) was released in 1897. In the same year, the first film screening took place in the royal court in Fes (Veyre 1905: 136). The French occupation of Casablanca ten years later was filmed by the Lumière brothers’ cameraman, Félix Mesguich, and released as *Reportage des événements de Casablanca* (*Report on the Events in Casablanca*, 1907). In 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate with the Rif and the Sahara regions falling under Spanish control. “Under Lyautey’s auspices,” writes Henry Slavin, “a Franco-Moroccan film industry arose and thrived, producing travelogues, ethnological docudramas, and narrative fiction” (1998: 128).

The Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) was set up by the French authorities and housed under the Ministry of the Interior in 1944. Its mission was to organise the film trade and promote colonial propaganda to counter the rise of Moroccan nationalism. CCM was also tasked with consolidating the burgeoning sector of international film production and distribution. Cinema-going flourished in the colonial era, particularly in large cities. J.P. Pichon’s *Mektoub* (1918), Jacques Sévérac’s *Sirocco* (1930) and *Razzia* (1931), Jean Benoît-Lévy and Marie Epstein’s *Itto* (1934) and Jacques Becker’s *Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs* (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, 1954) are some of the French colonial films made in and about Morocco to wide acclaim (Slavin 1998: 126). Hollywood discovered colonial Morocco and has made it a favourite shooting location ever since. *Morocco* (1930), *Casablanca* (1942), *A Night in Casablanca* (1946), *Outpost in Morocco* (1949) are popular examples of the American film industry’s colonial Morocco framed through an Orientalist lens. Other
international films have anchored Morocco as a cultural geography in the global cinematic imagination.\(^5\)

French colonial cinema was rural and stereotypical in the main. In parallel with the Moroccan novel, an indigenous cinema began to emerge in the 1940s and early 1950s at the hands of figures like Brahim Sayah (1925-2011), Ahmed Mesnaoui (1926-1996) and Mohamed Ousfour (1927-2005). The latter made short amateur films and showed them to neighbourhood audiences in a garage in Derb Ghallaf, Casablanca, where he worked as a daytime mechanic. In contrast to the pastoral imagery of colonial images, the films of the Casablanca-born Ousfour such as the feature-length *The Damned Son* (1958) focused on urban themes with popular techniques and motifs drawn from Egyptian and international commercial cinema. Morocco regained its independence in 1956. With new cinema legislation introduced a year later, CCM began to produce documentary films about current affairs, health, education, agriculture and related nation-building projects. It also financed their screening in film clubs and used cinema buses to reach the remotest corners of the country (Carter 2009: 62-64). In 1957, CCM produced *Brahim or the Donut Necklace*, a feature film by the French director Jean Flechet with an exclusively Moroccan cast. The centre concurrently sponsored the training of technicians and directors in the film schools of Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc. Postcolonial feature cinema formally took off in the late 1960s with two CCM productions: Mohamed Tazi Ben Abdelouahed and Ahmed Mesnaoui’s *Life is Struggle* (1968) and Latif Lahlou’s *Spring Sun* (1969). Both releases garnered critical acclaim. Less acclaimed then as now is Abdelaziz Ramdani and Larbi

Bennani’s CCM-produced *When the Dates Ripen* (1968), a feature film about generational conflict in southern Morocco after independence. Through a cooperative set up with his colleagues, Hamid Bennani made *Traces* (1970), widely regarded as the first postcolonial film in Morocco. The story of Messaoud’s troubled childhood under the stern gaze of his overbearing stepfather and his tragic delinquency as an adult, this cerebral work has enjoyed limited influence among the general public despite the critical consensus on its aesthetic merits as a national allegory and cinematic achievement. *Traces* set a benchmark for Moroccan cinema in 1970s when various films of a good quality were made on slender means. The lack of commercial distribution and the delay in producing adequate legislation by the CCM in a politically charged environment under Hassan II’s authoritarian rule shaped the quantity and quality of films produced after Bennani’s classic. Other remarkable filmmakers who were active in the 1970s include Souheil Ben Barka (*A Thousand and One Hands*, 1972 - Golden Stallion at FESPACO; *The Oil War Will Not Happen*, 1974; *Blood Wedding*, 1977), Ahmed Bouanani (*Mirage*, 1979), Moumen Smihi (*Cherqui, or the Violent Silence*, 1975), Nabyl Lahlou (*Al-Kanfoudi*, 1978), Ahmed El Maânouni (*O the Days!*, 1978), Mohamed Reggab (*Barnyard Ashes*, 1979; co-directed with Saad Chraibi and Mostapha Derkaoui), Jilali Ferhati (*A Breach in the Wall*, 1978), and Mustapha Derkaoui (*About Some Meaningless Events*, 1974). Whilst never openly identifying with the Third Cinema movement, these filmmakers navigated the darkest decade of the Years of Lead under Hassan II through cerebral aesthetics and allegorical modes of representation (or light comedy in the isolated case of Abdellah Mesbah).  

In 1980, CCM introduced the *Fonds de Soutien à la Production Cinématographique* (Support Funds for Film Production) to galvanise feature filmmaking. The funding scheme was immediately productive in quantitative terms as almost every film project presented to the institution’s selection committee received financial support. In consequence, a total of 58
films (of which 32 feature-length ones) were made in the 1980s against only 15 features in the previous decade. Twenty-one directors made their first features, yet the poor technical and intellectual quality of most films led many to question the wisdom of the state support system. The small grants and the almost automatic nature of the scheme sired films of meager quality with the emergence of *Chasseurs de fonds* (Fund Hunters) or bogus filmmakers who entered the scene to harvest the non-refundable subsidies and rebates. They quit filmmaking after the scheme was suspended in 1987. It is noteworthy that despite the reigning mediocrity in the 1980s, some directors managed to make remarkable films.  

Pier Paolo Pasolini’s sometime assistant Souheil Ben Barka was appointed CCM director in 1986. He set out to reform the subsidy system behind the hemorrhage of low-quality films. In 1988, CCM announced a new subsidy scheme, *Fonds d’Aide à la Production Cinématographique* (Aid Funds for Film Production), whereby only quality products from proven filmmakers would be supported by its tripled production budget after a rigorous selection process by the Fund Commission composed of diverse actors on the national film scene. The reforms also “required filmmakers to have professional cards in order to apply for funds, and to have a legal production company through which funds would be dispersed” (Carter 2009: 206). The new scheme also encouraged private-public sector cooperation and international co-productions. Although the reform was attacked for stalling the emergence of new filmmakers, the spree of mediocre productions ceased and the output stabilised at around

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4-5 features per year. As I argued earlier, the improvement of funding conditions was one of the catalysts behind the renaissance of Moroccan cinema in the early 1990s, a rebirth shouldered by NUC’s theamatics and creativity from *Love Affair* to the present. Although only forty-nine feature films were produced in that decade, quality had improved and, equally important, national cinema won the support and money of domestic cinemagoers. In consequence, Moroccan releases have regularly topped the box office ever since despite the persistent problems of distribution and the gargantuan challenge of competing with global behemoths like Hollywood and Bollywood, which inundate the film market with several copies of each movie that cost several times less than national films. The 1988 Aid Funds scheme is still in operation today with minor revisions introduced in 2003 and 2012 when the subsidy fund was significantly increased to support the making of more films, renovate or build cinema theatres, and promote film culture in the media and school curricula. In its present form, the CCM’s funding programme consists of the *avance sur recettes* (advance on receipts) grants for pre-production projects submitted by national producers, tax breaks, quality allowances for completed films which had benefited from pre-production support, and financial assistance in the scriptwriting stage of films being prepared for submission to the funding commission. Feature, short and animation films are all considered for financial support by the Fund Commission provided they are presented by Moroccan producers. Films in Darija, Tamazight, Modern Standard or Classical Arabic and international languages are given equal consideration in the Fund Commission’s quarterly meetings.

Moroccan cinema today is at an all-time high in terms of annual production (around twenty features and several dozen shorts as of 2013), artistic quality, innovative practices, competitiveness at the national box office and increasing visibility on on the *mappa mundi* of world cinema and international markets. Morocco also boasts relatively healthy levels of financial investment in the film sector at large by promoting international co-production, film
festivals and cooperation with other African countries. If there is an element behind the status quo that can cited as more crucial than all the others, it should be state funding. This support is akin to the French system where cinema is considered a *cultural exception* in need of protection from cultural globalisation. As in most countries outside the United States, Moroccan state intervention in film production rests on

the notion that culture is an integral part of development and that as the ultimate guarantor of a nation’s cultural unity and identity the state has a legitimate responsibility to protect society’s cultural memory and heritage, to defend its cultural values, to stimulate cultural production, and to ensure that culture is not defined exclusively by market criteria. (Johnson 1993: 105)

In an ever globalising world, the Moroccan subsidy system for cinema has enjoyed widespread support in the public sphere, especially following the Marrakech Agreement on 1 January 1995, which established the World Trade Organisation to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Dwyer 2007: 277–86). Without state support and the expanding margins for freedom of expression, cinema would probably not be what is in the country today. More crucially still, NUC, the cinematic movement which has archived and engaged the transformation of Casablanca and Moroccan society under neoliberal globalisation, would not have existed, or at least not in its present form.

**The New Urban Cinema: Take Two**

Having briefly examined the historical and institutional environment of Moroccan cinema before NUC, I now turn to some of the latter’s distinctive characteristics as a film movement. Although this urban cinema is marked by a focus on social issues, its representational arsenal
is not a homogeneous whole. From the diversity of genres to the filmmakers’ distinctive styles, its realism does not constitute a cohesive film movement such as Italian Neorealism or Third Cinema. The new realism of NUC is intrinsically variegated and no attempts have been made by the filmmakers to give discursive or stylistic coherence to the movement. Despite this striking heterogeneity in the Moroccan film scene in the 1990s, the local press and festival promoters often referred to what emerged as the New Moroccan Cinema, a market label further popularised following the death of Hassan II and the ascent to the throne of his son, Mohamed VI, widely promoted as a liberal monarch keen on building a new Morocco from the ashes of the old. However, seen through a critical prism, the organic continuities between national cinema, barely twenty years old at the time, and the 1990s cinema, on the one hand, and the absence to date of any scholarly treatise on the so-called New Moroccan Cinema, on the other, are evidence of the insubstantial nature of this label. Whilst acknowledging the transformation of national cinema in Morocco over the last two decades, the filmmaker Narjiss Nejjar, for example, says this about what “The New Moroccan Cinema” means to her:

Nothing! Every film is part of a new cinema. A few years ago, young filmmakers who learned their craft abroad came back to Morocco with shorts. They were immediately labelled “the New Wave.” [...] The only thing we brought in common was rigour and technical ability. And then, perhaps, a little boldness, even a certain insolence, perceived as arrogance and a threat by veteran filmmakers. However, there are jewels in Moroccan cinema. It may be in the
order of things that in ten years, we will also begin to tremble at the arrival of new talent. (cited in Boukhari 2009; my translation)\textsuperscript{7}

Other established and new directors have similarly questioned the label’s critical purchase and contested its reductionism vis-à-vis the diversity of post-1990 Moroccan cinema. Whether used by festival organisers or taken up by the commentariat, the New Moroccan Cinema is a label out of kilter with Moroccan cinema’s modes of enunciation, not to mention its social history and production and reception contexts. In what follows, I foreground the aesthetics of the New Urban Cinema, the name I give to the so-called New Moroccan Cinema. Unlike the latter, the term NUC refers to a historically determined and aesthetically distinct movement of urban cinema that emerged twenty years ago and has gained in attraction and still draws growing attention and audiences to its portrayal of postcolonial subjects under globalisation. NUC is a heterogeneous phenomenon and does not claim to be a programmatic movement of cinema. It is the cinematic articulation of postcolonial subjectivity in the post-1983 Moroccan city, particularly Casablanca as the metropolis which has been the stage of most films and pervades NUC’s aesthetic geography and critical diagnosis of a changing society. This cinema is popular thanks to its artistic innovations and focus on the most urgent social issues in Moroccans’ everyday life today such as poverty, violence and social inequality. This politics of proximity acquires a distinctive edge in the case of Casablanca predicated on the city’s exemplification of flagrant levels of social inequality and ontological insecurity in an unevenly globalising Morocco. Casablanca has

\textsuperscript{7} “Rien du tout ! Chaque film fait partie d’un nouveau cinéma. Il y a quelques années, de jeunes cinéastes qui ont fait leurs classes à l’étranger sont venus au Maroc avec des courts-métrages, et on les a aussitôt qualifiés de “nouvelle vague”. [...] La seule chose que nous avons apportée en commun, c’est la rigueur, la technicité. Et puis, peut-être, une petite audace, voire une certaine insolence, perçue comme une arrogance, comme un danger pour les plus anciens. Or, il y a des bijoux dans le cinéma marocain. C’est peut-être dans l’ordre des choses, que d’ici dix ans, nous aussi commencerons à trembler avec l’arrivée de nouveaux talents” (cited in Boukhari 2009).
come to embody the murky nature of the postcolonial Moroccan subject’s urban experience on the NUC screen, as we shall see in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

NUC was born in response to neoliberal globalisation and its social and existential consequences in urban Morocco. The diversity of the filmmakers’ social and formative backgrounds is at the centre of this heterogeneous cinematic movement. Geographical location, generational differences, funding sources and training backgrounds have variably influenced the representational politics of individual filmmakers and their contributions to NUC and Moroccan cinema at large. Looking back at twenty years of NUC’s existence, we can distinguish three strands amongst its filmmakers. The first strand consists of Casablanca-or Morocco-based cineastes like Hakim Noury, Abdelkader Lagtaâ, Mustapha Derkaoui, Saâd Chraïbi, Hassan Benjelloun, Mohamed Asli, Abdelhaï Laraki, Farida Benlyazid, Ahmed Boulane, and Aziz Salmi. These first-strand NUC filmmakers deploy production methods and aesthetic codes in relative continuity with the history of Moroccan national cinema. Born in the 1940s and 1950s, this coterie of experienced filmmakers had been working in national and international cinema as filmmakers, assistant directors and producers. When the funding schemes improved in the 1980s and, better still, in the 1990s, they took advantage of the state’s willingness to support national cinema. However, despite the inevitable continuity in a director’s output, the veteran filmmakers working in the 1990s and into the 21st century discovered in urban everyday life the locus of neoliberal Morocco’s postcolonial subjectivity.

Despite formal continuity with their earlier works, their NUC films testify to how Moroccan cinema altered its politics of representation and came into its own by tuning in to the micro-histories of ordinary people struggling against the challenges of a fast-changing world. Everyday life in a neoliberal society has been the common ground between these veteran directors and the younger generation of filmmakers which emerged after the mid-1990s.

The fourth edition of the National Film Festival in June 1995, which marked the centenary of cinema, remains a watershed date in the recent history of Moroccan cinema. New filmmakers from the diaspora, mostly second-generation Moroccan immigrants from Europe, were invited to screen their short films at the festival in Tangier. The new cineastes met with older compatriots, discussions flourished about the state and future of Moroccan cinema, and the CCM promised to cast the net of its funding recipients wider to incorporate the new filmmakers. Their productions over the years have changed the face and nature of this cinema. Comprising the second strand of NUC, directors with diasporic connections include Nabil Ayouch, Narjiss Nejjar, Laila Marrakchi, Faouzi Bensaidi, Noureddine Lakhmari, and Ali Benkirane. These filmmakers have tended to inscribe their work within the aesthetic registers of transnational cinema, broadly defined (Higbee and Lim 2010: 12). These hyphenated directors were born in the 1960s and early 1970s and live between Europe, North America and Morocco. They learned their craft outside the patronage system of the Moroccan film sector. Whilst providing a glimpse into neoliberal Casablanca and Morocco through the eyes of their ordinary residents, the work of this group of cineastes encourages a global perspective on urban and national conditions. The attentive viewer can identify transnational echoes in these films so readily that they could be read as global cinematic

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works on Morocco today rather than exclusively endogenous articulations of local issues. This “cinema of transvergence” (Higbee 2007: 85) is rooted in the local whilst still speaking to the global in tandem with other filmmakers screening the social condition of the Global South as its societies evolve under globalisation. Casablanca on screen finds resonance in some Buenos Aires-set features of the New Argentine Cinema, for example, given the common history of dictatorship and intensive neoliberalisation that both cities and countries went through over the past half century; besides, the concurrent availability of state funding for cinema in both countries and the rise of a young generation of adept filmmakers in the 1990s have encouraged the rise of a steady flow of films (Aguilar 2011; Andermann 2012). While remaining rooted in the local narratives and social geographies of Casablanca, NUC as a cinema of globalisation belongs with film movements around the Global South today. Other global connections can be established between Moroccan cinema and the images of urban and social segregation among Europe’s immigrant communities. This last network of circulation is even more resonant given the close ties between many young Moroccan filmmakers and North African communities in Europe.

A third characteristic of the work of this group is attention to detail and the will to make the best use of film grammar, especially the cinematic image’s capacity to convey meaning without the sometimes excessive narrative dialogue prevalent in the films of their veteran peers. NUC’s second strand is also distinguishable by its success on the international festival scene. This visibility has secured the young filmmakers’ access to international distribution channels and additional or alternative funding sources. Lastly, the films in this category ally outstanding artistic quality to audience appeal. An interesting exception to this rule is represented by Faouzi Bensaidi, whose films are well-groomed pieces of world cinema. However, his success on the international film festival circuit has not been matched by broad audience interest in Morocco owing to the cinephilic postmodernism of his films.
Within my functional taxonomy of a three-stranded NUC, Bensaïdi bridges the gap between the second and third strands (a point to be substantiated through the analysis of his Casablanca-set WWW in Chapter 5). Bensaïdi’s difference from his peers in the second strand of NUC directors further puts paid to the label New Moroccan Cinema, which is often associated with diasporic directors in post-1990s cinema.

NUC’s third strand comprises a broadly younger generation of up-and-coming filmmakers with no definite aesthetic affiliations or transnational lineages bar those of artistic inspiration and individual persuasion. Born in the late 1970s and early 80s, Hicham Lasri (The Iron Bone, 2007; The Angels’ Terminal, 2009; The End, 2010; They Are the Dogs, 2013), Mohammed Achaour (A Film, 2011), and Swel and Imad Noury (Heaven’s Doors, 2006; The Man Who Sold the World, 2009) are the pioneers of this maverick and unapologetically subjective cinema of globalisation. They draw on MTV aesthetics and postmodern motifs to explore the subjectivity of Casablancans and Moroccans today. This third group of NUC shares the self-conscious filmmaking style of the second strand whilst taking film grammar to new heights at the risk of alienating domestic audiences beyond a small cinephiliac base. Their films show a propensity to experiment with new and unconventional aesthetics by incorporating music video and TV commercial advertising techniques, on the one hand, and the convergence symptomatic of sci-fi movies and new media, on the other. Lasri’s The End and the Noury brothers’ The Man Who Sold The World (original titles in English), for example, are the works of young filmmakers who strive to distinguish themselves from the work of the two other camps of NUC. In The End, we are confronted with a post-apocalyptic Casablanca, an urban desert and saturated digital landscape of visual and aural simulacra. With the streets deserted and the cityscape opaque, it is difficult to determine what exactly is happening and where despite the wealth of codes in urban and filmic space, enhanced by the visual and aural references from local and global
popular culture. Whilst this semi-silent black and white film is meticulously rooted in the socio-spatial fragmentation of the neoliberal metropolis and Morocco’s recent history, its dense narrative elements and cinematic techniques make *The End* markedly different from the bulk of NUC and its social-realist consensus. In addition to its self-conscious grammar, the cinema of this third strand of NUC is populated not by rounded characters but rather elusive flashes of subjectivity in becoming. The fragmented narratives and formalist aesthetics in Achaour, Lasri and the Nourys’ films have implications for NUC’s appeal to local as well as international audiences. This aesthetic, as we shall see in Chapter 5, impacts NUC’s representation of the present and its articulation of postcolonial subjectivity.

**The New Urban Cinema: Take Three**

The three strands of urban cinema sketched above are primary indicators of a diversity of approach and variety of experience within NUC. However, a realist focus on everyday life and ordinary people’s struggle with the realities and dreamscapes of a globalising city and world is the common thread that gives NUC its unique alchemy of considerable audience appeal, artistic quality and socio-political critique. Whether one is watching Hakim Noury’s melorealist films about the family dramas of the salaried class in Casablanca or his sons Imad and Swel’s formalist portrayals of existential angst among young people in the same metropolis, NUC’s poetics of the real in narrative and staging assails us with its breathless immediacy and visceral affectivity. To further hammer home this argument about the continuities and discontinuities between the three stands of filmmaking about Casablanca, let us briefly look at three films by three different directors and set in the metropolis at two different moments of its post-colonial history (see Chapter 1). Latif Lahlou’s *Spring Sun* was released in 1969 to critical acclaim without however attracting large audiences, due to distribution problems and the as yet nonexistent audience niche for national films. Set in the
national city of emergency that emerged in the wake of the 1965 urban uprisings, the film follows a young bureaucrat with fresh rural origins as he tries to find his way in a Casablanca that challenges his country values. The film is influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague and draws an arresting portrait of the protagonist as a young man unhappy in his skin—a Moroccan Omar Gatlato.\textsuperscript{10} His urban saga is fraught with difficulties and the film closes on a note of uncertainty, thus intimating the ambivalent march of the Moroccan nation towards postcolonial times (Fig. 7). The allegorical nature of the film denotes the failure of the post-colonial subject to live his modernity without compromising the traditional values of honesty and face-to-face human interaction characteristic of everyday life in the countryside. This focus on nostalgia for past plenitude and the collective destiny of the nation is just one mainstay of the cinema of the period. Another is the image of the city as a monstrous body that corrupts human character. Lastly, the film’s lack of popularity is not due to any esoteric obsessions on the part of the filmmaker. \textit{Spring Sun} was made with a large popular audience in mind in what was then a predominantly illiterate society. However, the director’s awareness of the absence of an audience niche for national cinema shaped his aesthetics and particularly the film’s construction of its implied audience. \textit{Spring Sun} weaves in the audience’s concerns about national destiny, modernity’s individualistic ethos and the disembedding impact of city life on their collective identity. The cynical attitude of the filmmaker and his implied audience make the nation the mise-en-scène of \textit{Spring Sun} and Moroccan cinema at large before the 1990s when NUC emerged as the cinema of a post-colonial society under globalisation.

\textsuperscript{10} Omar Gatlato is the protagonist of Merzak Allouache’s eponymous film (1976), which marked a landmark transition from national heroes to ordinary anti-heroes in Maghrebi cinema in the 1970.
The second film is Laila Marrakchi’s *Marock* (2006), a Franco-Moroccan production set in Casablanca in 1997. Rita, Youri and their upper-class classmates are in the last year of high school at the city’s prestigious Lycée Lyautey. The director revisits her own past as a high school student in Casablanca in the late 1990s. *Marock* captures not only Marrakchi’s days in her native Casablanca before migration to France after her *Baccalauréat*, but also the zeitgeist of a neoliberal metropolis and country approaching the end of the millennium. It does so through the story of Rita, who stands in for the filmmaker as the beautiful daughter of a Muslim bourgeois family, and Youri, a Jewish native of Casablanca. Largely non-observant of their religious affiliations except as seasonal rituals like Ramadan and Mimouna, both Muslims and Jews belong to the insular upper-class of Moroccan society and send their children to the same French schools and Anglo-American universities.\(^{11}\) Their affluent way of life and residential suburbs cut them off from the rest of the city’s residents, Mimouna is a traditional Moroccan Jewish celebration held the day after Passover.
whom they encounter only as workers in their factories or as house servants. Things get complicated in the film when Youri and Rita start a relationship and have to face the gaze of their social circles on their cross-faith bond. This personal story brings to life the tale of a Casablanca spatially and existentially divided along class lines with a concomitant growth of conservative and radical identity politics among its lower strata (El Ayadi, Rachik and Tozy 2007). Like other films of second-strand NUC, *Marock* was a succès de scandale: it was met by negative press at the National Film Festival in December 2005 and engendered intense political polemics pitting the conservatives against the liberal press. While the political reception of the film diverted the debate away from the real issues addressed by Marrakchi, it worked as free publicity for the film which was seen by a record number of spectators. However, putting aside the political debate and the film’s enunciatory deadlock to be explored in the next chapter, *Marock* touched a nerve about Moroccan society under globalisation through its autoethnography of upper-class Casablanca and the latter’s relationship with the rest of society and its values. A combination of factors makes this film a work of NUC’s second strand: neoliberal Casablanca as setting, box office notoriety in Morocco, worldwide distribution, and the aesthetic debt to a world cinema.

The last example in my discussion of NUC’s distinctive features and internal diversity is Hicham Lasri’s *The End* (2010), a millennial black and white film set in Casablanca circa 1999. Using a dazzling combination of fast camera movements and special effects characteristic of the MTV clip and commercial ads, Lasri’s feature film tells the tale of a city on the edge through the story of Mikhy, a disaffected youth caught between his loyalty to the ruthless police commissioner and his love for Rita, an enchanting beauty jealously guarded by her gangster brothers. Like the Noury brothers’ *Heaven’s Doors* (2006), which will also be discussed in Chapter 5, *The End* is a contingent experiment in realism to render urban subjectivities and invent new “cognitive maps” for post-neoliberal postcoloniality through a
cinematic reconstruction of everyday life in Casablanca. The film is also traversed by violent language and action to an extent unprecedented in Moroccan cinema. Equally, it is daring in its experiments with film form. This experimentalism in theme and style has significant implications for the film’s social vision, a question explored in Chapter 5 through Jameson’s theorisation of late modern subjectivities. The third strand of NUC challenges classical approaches to postcolonial national cinema because of its global provenance and incarnation of a world increasingly shaped by the transnational circulation of images, capital and ideologies. A byproduct of post-Fordist capitalism’s spatio-temporal configurations of class and culture from the 1970s onwards, postmodernism has ever since gone global beyond its Western birthplaces to a Global South transformed by structural adjustment policies. Vehemently attacked by local film critics not conversant with recent developments in global aesthetics and film production, Lasri and other directors of NUC’s third strand are filmmakers of their time. They mould the actually existing Moroccan city rather than erstwhile nationalist ideals as the *mise en scène* for their visually exquisite and globally comprehensible works. In addition, beneath the veteran filmmakers and critics’ misgivings about third-strand NUC is its sophisticated take on the present and future of postcolonial subjects. Without neglecting some of the problematic aspects of this experimental cinema, Chapter 5 will divulge its secrets through a postcolonial interpretation of Jameson’s proposition that late capitalism is characterised by the subject’s inability to construct cognitive maps capable of grasping the totality of social life beyond the logic of commodity culture (1984: 54). What my study of Lasri’s and other NUC films hopes to demonstrate is that this cinematic movement’s focus on the everyday of ordinary subjects in Casablanca contains elements of cognitive maps beyond the neoliberal present. The present of Morocco’s largest city is an assemblage of postcolonial subjectivities constantly under construction in the circulation of subjects, spaces and temporalities.
Young Audience

*The End* brings us full circle to the question of NUC’s audience demographics and trends. Having teased out the impact of state support for production and improving distribution channels, the coming of age of new filmmakers and the politics of realism underlying NUC in its three strands, the last component in the tapestry of factors behind this urban cinema’s popular appeal is its largely but not exclusively youthful audience. The nature of this audience is partly a reflection of a changing society where young people are numerically the dominant age group and partly evidence of the appeal of NUC’s social realism to youth in post-1983 Morocco. In their surveys of Moroccan cinema, neither Carter nor Armes dwells on this crucial factor. Coming a few years later and with a focus on NUC as the engine of Moroccan cinema’s renaissance, this dissertation is an opportunity to address this gap in the scholarship. As the academic literature and World Bank reports cited in Chapter 1 indicate, structural market reforms affected the class ecology of Moroccan society by further impoverishing the under classes, weakening the middle classes and empowering a small omnipotent elite (Sater 2010: 99). Up and down this class spectrum, it is the habitus of youth as society’s dominant age group which has been most affected by the economic reforms and the disembedding forces of cultural globalisation. From Lagtaâ’s *Love Affair* in 1991 to Nabil Ayouch’s *God’s Horses* (official selection at Cannes 2012), NUC is thematically and politically a cinema of and about youth in urban space in a country where well over half of the 33-million population live in cities today (12 per cent living in Casablanca alone). NUC’s youth connection rests on two elements: thematic appeal and aesthetic innovation. Regarding the former, a cinema of social issues like NUC could not have existed and thrived without the existence of legions of unemployed or underemployed and disaffected youth who find themselves caught between the hard place of a poor country and the rock of what Zygmunt
Bauman (2000) terms the “liquid modernity” of global capitalism. In stark contrast to pre-1990s cinema and its fixation on patriarchy and national allegories, NUC projects the present of a youthful society and arrests national time by focusing its lenses on the everyday life of ordinary people in sprawling urbanscapes. Taking advantage of the film medium’s capacity for entertainment and its time-lag vis-à-vis TV news and new media screens in their uncritical immediacy, this popular urban cinema offers its audience the opportunity to see anew and reflect on an everyday world in which they live but they hardly notice or take time to grasp and interrogate. Through this defamiliarisation of everyday life in the neoliberal present, the audience (and the cultural critic) are indirectly drawn to ponder the structures of feeling that bind together Moroccan subjects alongside the alienation and potential for change that traverse their quotidian realms. In this complex network of representation and reception, NUC comes to assume a primary position in the mediation of everyday life and young people’s habitus in urban and national contexts. In turn, the mediatory role makes this cinema a primary site for the study of the production of postcolonial subjects under globalisation.

A related aspect of the thematic component of NUC’s youth connection is its audacity in tackling taboo subjects in Moroccan society. Violence, corruption, class struggle, sexuality, and the Lead Years are some of the topics that the filmmakers have confronted head-on or used as the mise en scène for their celluloid tales of urban life in Casablanca. Lagtaâ, Saâd Chraibi, Boulane, Hakim Noury, Benjelloun, Lasri, Nejjar, the Noury brothers and others have made films in the last twenty years that delve deep into the social and political problems that continue to confront Moroccans in their long march down the fraught path of postcolonial nationhood. Noury’s Simple News Item, Lagtaâ’s The Casablancans, Chraibi’s Jawhara, Benjelloun’s Dark Room and Nejjar’s Dry Eyes (partially set in Casablanca) are among an increasing number of NUC films to have struck a chord with audiences and contributed to public debate about human rights, memory, citizenship and
culture in Morocco. Although Casablanca is only one out of many places that housed clandestine torture centres during the reign of Hassan II, NUC frames its stories of the metropolis against a background of national past and space haunted by the persistence of memory in the present. The Lead Years topos, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, has had other subtle uses for the filmmakers and NUC’s audience. Besides this topical subject, another overwhelming thematic is gender, in particular sexuality. Although this question has always been present in some form or another in the history of Moroccan cinema, the new urban films are unique in tackling the issue through a daring and sophisticated lens befitting a youthful society transformed by accelerated urbanisation, modern individualism, communication media, and a rising average marriage age. Partly a consequence of the major questions that confronted Moroccan society and filmmakers at the time and partly a reflection of the prevalent modes of cinematic production and expression, pre-1990s films are largely confined to the realities and sensibilities of pre-neoliberal Morocco. An urban, popular, and brazen cinema, NUC arrived with *Love Affair* in 1991 and has ever since engaged with the new realities and changing times and spaces of Moroccan society. NUC relies on the desire for new images of society amongst its youthful audience. However, especially in its second and third strands, this is not a cinema about youth but crucially one by young people themselves. Reflected on its screen are youth’s values and everyday life as they see and experience them. This is a critical feature of NUC even when the image of youth in some of its first-strand works seemingly remains imprisoned in the paternalist frames of the veteran filmmakers.

Regarding the second component of NUC’s youth connection, namely aesthetic innovation, it is noteworthy that here too Moroccan cinema changed face in the 1990s so much so that celluloid classics of the 1970s and 1980s look like a sunken, un lamented Atlantis. As was argued in the preceding pages, national cinema in its early decades was
driven by a thematic grid dominated by patriarchy, pastoral imagery and a cerebral aesthetic of national allegorism. Despite the sterling experiments of Ahmed Bouanani and Mustapha Derkaoui and the thespian forays of Nablul Lahlou, most veteran filmmakers were not keen on making formally self-conscious works. NUC, in contradistinction, has championed aesthetic innovation in all its three strands. The directors have benefitted from the emergence of a young and image-literate audience that has come of age in a country permeated by the influx of images from transnational cinema and other screen cultures. A successful NUC film today is one that allies a brazen approach to social issues and technical innovation. Morocco’s youthful film audiences do not seem to appreciate being patronised or taken for uninitiated spectators, as the success of certain films and the failure of others demonstrate. Although it has yet to be accepted by the mainstream theatre circuit, the formalism of third-strand NUC directors has notched up popularity among an expanding fringe of highly educated spectators who came of age during the digital revolution and consume as much cinema as other visual media every day. As Chapter 5 will reveal through a close and contextualized analysis of their films, the Moroccan-Spanish Noury brothers and the Casablanca-based Lasri and Achaour entertain closer ties with the young audience base than the two other strands of NUC. In addition, the technical innovation of NUC, especially in its second and third strands, is predicated on an awareness of the ongoing structural changes in film viewership wrought by the Internet. The appropriation of video and new media motifs in the films of Lasri, for example, can be said to be partly premised on the awareness that many of his young viewers will watch his films on the small and interactive screens of their devices rather than exclusively on the big screen. Beneath the new media and screen cross-fertilisation in his films lies a consciousness of an increasingly individualised society where younger members of the audience expect films to appeal to them through style as much as content. This also partly goes to explain the soaring popularity of NUC in spite of the decline
of cinema-going across the country, where neighborhood and small town theatres have all but disappeared (even if the growth of multiplexes since 2002 promises the continuity of cinema as a public ritual).\textsuperscript{12} In a country where it is feared the sun is already setting on cinema theatres, Lasri’s most significant contribution is in factoring in individualism and new viewership cultures into the form of his films with real implications for their constructions of postcolonial subjectivity (see Chapter 5).

No survey of NUC would be complete without mentioning its debt to Neorealism. In their attempts to underscore the everyday life of Moroccan subjects, NUC filmmakers have adapted key ingredients of Italian Neorealism to the Moroccan context. Theirs is a postcolonial neorealism for the neoliberal age. From Lagtaâ to the latest NUC comers, using first-time actors is one of the common features and conscious strategies of this cinema. It is a means of capturing the rawness in the everyday life of Moroccans in a fast-changing world, where digital media assume an increasing mediatory role between subjects and their social reality. A second intersection of NUC and the global traditions of neorealism is on-location shooting. This aesthetic strategy embeds subjects in their everyday space. Alongside the realist effect on the spectator, shooting fictions on location allows the audience to appreciate the city as more often than not the major character in the films.

\textbf{Conclusion}

NUC is neither a \textit{nouvelle vague} (new wave) nor a \textit{school} of cinema. It is instead a heterogeneous movement of urban cinema that emerged in response to the historical evolution of Moroccan society, particularly in urban space, following market reforms launched in 1983. Sparked by a combination of demographic, political, and economic factors,

\textsuperscript{12} The number of active cinemas has gone down from 251 to 160 in 2003 to around 50 today. Plans are now afoot to build new theatres with digital screens and bring old ones up to modern standards. However, cinema-going continues its downward slump from 45 million in 1980 to 9 million in 2003, for example.
NUC burst onto the national stage in the early 1990s. The advent of a new generation of directors after the mid-1990s further anchored the new urban cinema in its local and global conditions of production and reception. The growing rates of social inequality, youth disaffection, and the spectre of radical Islam have consolidated the social-realist aesthetic of NUC in its three major strands. To the observer of the aesthetics and dynamics driving the continuing appeal of this cinema, the youth-led uprisings in Morocco and North Africa since 2011 carry an uncanny air of *déjà vu*. For Moroccan filmmakers have been projecting a youthful and urbanised society increasingly emboldened to question social inequalities and political authority. NUC has screened how structural adjustment policies have weakened the social contract between state and nation. More than any other art form or mass medium, cinema has been at the forefront of social and political change in Morocco since the 1990s. With this politics of representation in mind, the next chapters provide an in-depth study of over twenty NUC films with a systematic focus on space, youth and violence. It is hoped that these key sites of analysis will give the reader a greater understanding of the production of postcolonial subjectivity on (and off) screen in Casablanca and Morocco more widely under globalisation.
CHAPTER 3

City of Extremes: A Cinematic Atlas of Neoliberal Casablanca

The representation of urban space reveals a latent consistency beneath NUC’s thematic and stylistic heterogeneity, which the previous chapter has discussed in contextual terms. Ever since its infancy in the 1990s, this cinema’s politics of representation has rested on a twofold cognitive mapping of urban space: a representation of Casablanca through a poetics of the real, on the one hand, and a cognitive mapping of postcolonial subjectivities in everyday life, on the other. Everyday life is projected through NUC’s realist frames of representation as the ultimate reservoir of “that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry in our heads in variously garbled forms” (Jameson 1990: 352). Dudley Andrew, following Jameson, contends that in their “inclusions and exclusions, in their scope and style, films project cognitive maps by which citizens understand both their bordered world and the world at large” (2006: 25). Jens Andermann foregrounds another aspect of the importance of “cognitive mapping” as a critical tool for the study of situated and everyday subjectivities on screen:

Films enact our belonging to place as well as contesting it: they offer us a different angle on the locations we inhabit, thus putting them in relation to their universal context. Cinema’s cognitive mapping of place and space can respond to a narcissistic longing for self-confirmation, yet it can also trigger a curiosity for the strange and unsuspected that is shown to inhabit the familiar and the everyday. (2012: xix)
The close study of NUC’s cognitive mapping of Casablanca in this chapter will complement Chapter 2’s account of audience appeal as the defining thrust of Moroccan urban cinema. I will reveal how NUC’s representation of neoliberal space taps into the mental maps of the Moroccan people and the *longue durée* of their collective subjectivity. Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping is thus at the centre of my argument that onscreen Casablanca is the stage of both the neoliberal social condition and the everyday production of Moroccan subjectivity. The cognitive maps of the city and ordinary people’s subjectivities within a postcolonial nation intersect on the NUC screen in very complex ways. I will unpack some of this complexity and its critical potential through a close study of the irreducible diversity and latent coherence of NUC’s representations of Casablanca.

In a country transformed by three decades of structural adjustment (Cohen and Jaidi 2006), Casablanca has come to assume a primordial role in the production, circulation and consumption of postcolonial subjectivities. This metropolitan condition is not unique to Morocco. Writing about the urban ecology of globalisation in the Global South, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai have made the case for “a framework of investigation that considers cities challenging, diverging from, and even replacing nations as the important space of citizenship” (1999: 3). Without sharing their loose conclusion about cities displacing nations, Holston and Appadurai’s argument finds echoes in my analysis of Casablanca on the NUC screen, where Moroccan citizenship and postcoloniality come into sharp focus. On-screen Casablanca is an apposite site for a study of Morocco’s postcolonial transformations under globalisation. Its concentration of millions of Moroccan citizens and the material and symbolic contradictions of life under contemporary capitalism make this heavily filmed metropolis the mirror of an entire nation. The national idea remains the *mise-en-scène* of the micro-histories and cartographies of Casablanca in NUC, even if in a different fashion from pre-1990s Moroccan cinema (as the previous chapter has discussed). In NUC, the spatial and
temporal fragmentation of Casablanca is mapped against the backdrop of a fragmented national space. A city of extreme social and spatial contrasts, Casablanca is an appropriate site for a cinema of extremes. Moroccan filmmakers and audiences implicitly reached this consensus in the wake of Lagtaâ’s landmark *Love Affair* (Dwyer 2004: 24). The NUC films bring together the extremes of a fragmented city in one frame not to reunite them but rather to map through their fragmentation the totality of social and subjective conditions under globalisation. We can thus begin to understand why NUC often not only provides deep insights into the complex urbanism of Casablanca today but also prefigures the future of a city and country transformed by global capital and its social relations. A study of postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco could not find a better screen and urban setting than NUC and Casablanca. The close and contextualised analysis of a carefully selected corpus of films in this dissertation aims to make it evident that, despite the diversity of NUC filmmakers’ styles, their projections of Casablanca cohere around a realist cognitive mapping of urban and national space. Whether structured by melodrama or drawn either to world-cinema aesthetics or to stylistic experimentation, the NUC film draws an archeology of the present through a multitude of spaces, their associated social habitations, and the whole’s participation in the production of postcolonial subjects.

NUC’s cognitive mapping of post-1983 Casablanca is essentially also that of Morocco under globalisation. For instance, before making *Ali Zaoua* about Casablanca’s street children in 2000, Nabil Ayouch had achieved fame with *Mektoub* (1997), which attracted 350,000 cinemagoers in Morocco and won multiple awards at international festivals. Subversively reclaiming the title of a French colonial film made in Morocco in 1918, *Mektoub* is a postcolonial portrait of contemporary Morocco through the story of a young couple, Dr. Tawfik Raoui and his partner, Sophia. The latter is kidnapped and ritualistically raped by senior cadres in the police force while attending a dentistry conference in Tangier with her
partner. The couple then go on a cross-country journey to forget the trauma but only to discover a society they had never fully known (Fig. 8). The rape incident opens their eyes on the reality of Morocco beyond their confined upper-class universe in Casablanca and the United States, where Taoufik spent many years. Sofia overcomes her personal wounds in the face of national trauma. She attains redemption and questions her class privilege in a massively poor country. Through this spatial and existential journey, Ayouch’s road movie paints a realist portrait of a society deeply transformed by structural adjustment policies and anachronistic structures of political power. Despite its occasionally saccharine melodrama, *Mektoub* is, as Denise Brahimi remarks, “a rich and complex film which can be taken as an example of the best of Moroccan cinema” (2009: 42).\(^\text{13}\) Set on the national plane and rich in allegorism, *Mektoub* launched the second strand of NUC as a popular cinema focused on the everyday life of ordinary people (as Chapter 4 will discuss).

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\(^{13}\) “*Mektoub* est une oeuvre riche et complexe qu’on peut considérer comme exemplaire de ce qu’il y a de meilleur dans le cinéma marocain” (2009: 42).
Structural adjustment in Casablanca ushered in NUC and its ongoing autopsy of Morocco from below. This subaltern realism projects the subjective conditions of globalisation through threefold tales of embittered individuals in a city evolving against national and global backdrops. To hammer home this crucial point, let us look at another NUC film. Lagtaâ’s *Face to Face* (2003) is set between Casablanca and the southeastern desert provinces of Ouarzazate and Tafilalt. The film opens with static long shots of nighttime street scenes in downtown Casablanca. After the opening sequence, a car drives into the frame and a man with a business case gets in. The car is driven to a seemingly deserted street. The driver receives an envelope from his acquaintance, who warns him that the information therein is classified and would send them both to jail in case of arrest. Two police officers are not far away in the frame. In keeping with Lagtaâ’s modernist vision (which will be discussed below), collective drama unfolds side by side with the personal drama of Casablanca subjects in pursuit of emancipation. At the centre of *Face to Face* is Kamal, a young civil engineer compulsorily transferred from the metropolis to Tafilalt in retribution for going off-piste with his corrupt superiors in Casablanca. His wife, Amal, a victim of rape and arbitrary detention, takes to the road in search of the eventually amnesiac father of her child. Early in the film, Kamal and Amal are an ambitious couple living in a modern neighbourhood in Casablanca. The typically large Moroccan family is absent. The two spouses and their only child go through the ups and downs, hopes and fears, pains and pleasures of being in a relationship. Kamal had given up the dream of migration to Canada to develop his country and build a family. Amal rewarded him by suspending her university studies when she became pregnant. With Leila now aged three, Amal wants to resume her studies. A post-colonial man torn between patriarchal and modernist values, Kamal opposes her will because, as he says, “I don’t want my child to be raised by a housemaid.”
Kamal spends the first night of the film in his study perusing the whistleblowing files and writing a report for his employer, the National Office for Dams. His report is damning of the office management’s decision to relocate a dam project to a different site under pressure from rich landowners. The director of the agency demotes Kamal to Tafilalt and the intelligence services are determined to ruin his life for questioning the status quo. As he makes his first trip to Tafilalet, Amal is kidnapped, raped and jailed by Hassan II’s secret services in Casablanca. During her incommunicado detention, Kamal comes to believe that she has deserted him for another man. Upon her release, she in turn believes that he has left for Canada without her. Amal quickly decides to take back control of her life: she completes her studies and starts a new life. Seven years later, she decides to go out in search of Kamal to obtain a divorce. To mark the spatial transition from Casablanca to the backcountry, the screen goes dark for a few seconds and then lights up with Amal in a 4WD car on the bumpy road to the south. The journey down-country is one of self-discovery. The scenic landscapes of the Atlas mountains and the desert beyond them are overwhelming. The country’s social space is dissected by Lagtaâ through an economy akin to that through which he screens neoliberal Casablanca. Amal picks up Hamid, Kamal’s brother, in Marrakech. A former school teacher until he was arrested and jailed for eight years in the 1970s, Hamid’s past ghosts are awakened by the southern journey twenty years later. Both characters are increasingly overpowered by what Amal calls: ‘Ce putain de pays que je ne comprends même pas!’\(^{14}\) They reach Ouarzazate and learn that Kamal is not only alive but also active in local civil society (Fig. 9).

\(^{14}\) “This damn country which I don’t even understand!”
The attentive viewer might be puzzled at this stage at how an educated and principled man could endorse a neoliberal civil society discourse often promoted by the World Bank in its politics of blaming the victims of structural adjustment (Bush 2007: 180-81). It transpires that Kamal has gone through more than a compulsory transfer to Tafilalt. He has suffered an orchestrated car accident and lost his memory. He was wrongly accused of belonging to the nascent Amazigh (Berber) Movement and being behind its watershed May Day protests in Errachidia, the provincial capital, in 1994. The regime’s subsequent wave of repression engendered a transnational campaign against North African regimes’ longstanding oppression of Amazigh people (Silverstein 2011: 73). King Hassan reckoned that behind the 1994 provincial insurrection lay a majoritarian volcano of historical resentment with the capacity to overthrow the regime. Like many ruling families in Morocco’s history since the 7th century, the current dynasty had originated in Tafilalet in 1631. A historic kingmaker, Tafilalt is also a kingslayer responsible for two attempted coups d’état out of three since 1956. Hassan II had
abandoned the arid south-east to poverty after independence whilst exploiting its abundance in natural resources. In a historic speech on 20 August 1994, he acknowledged the Amazigh identity of the country in a clear signal of the gradual demise of pan-Arabism as the ideological apparatus of post-colonial nationhood. He decreed gradual access to Tamazight (the Berber language) in the public media and education. Lagtaâ emplots the historical Tafilalet in an in-depth interrogation of neoliberal Morocco and its identitarian transformations long before 2011’s mass protests and the subsequent enshrinement of Morocco’s plural Amazigh, African, Arab and Jewish identities in a revised constitution. In Tafilalet, the amnesiac Kamal is very active in civil society. Amal, Hamid and Leila try to return him to history and his recent past in neoliberal Casablanca. Will they succeed? The film closes on Amal and Leila on a hill overlooking a palm grove. Leila is about to call Kamal in a last attempt to rescue him from amnesia when the final credits appear. This ending is realistically in keeping with Lagtaâ’s allegorical atlas of Casablanca and Morocco. Kamal is the ambitious middle-class subject unable to find a place in a neoliberal society nor take it forwards. The survivors from Hamid’s generation of socialists have lost faith in radical change. Both Hamid’s post-independence generation under Hassan II and Kamal’s neoliberal generation under Mohammed VI have failed to achieve democracy and social equality. Like Morocco in the early 21st century, Lagtaâ’s film leaves the characters and the audience face to face with uncertainty.

The journey outside Casablanca in Face to Face unveils the complex and charged atmosphere of life under a police state and the stark disparities between modern Morocco on the Atlantic coast and the wretched interior. The film’s broad setting provides a glimpse of life on the national plane, but urban space unveils the concrete consequences of market reforms and their social relations in Moroccan everyday life. The cinematic projection of neoliberalism is at its most poignant when depicting the social relations in Casablanca. Since
Lagtaâ’s *Love Affair* in 1991, NUC has projected the city as one of extremes and fragmented spaces. Looking at its constituent films, one would at first glance be at a loss to find a common vision of space in a wealth of cinematic styles and generational variations. However, as was indicated above, beneath the apparently incoherent string of spatial fragments lies a structuring cognitive map of Casablanca and postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco today. The atlas of fragments reveals NUC’s obsession with ethnographic detail to map the totality of social relations in neoliberal space. Everyday life assumes a paramount position in this map as the site not only of the impact of globalisation on society but also as the space of daily struggle and resistance. Splintered space breeds fragmented identities on the screen with significant consequences for NUC’s cognitive mapping of postcolonial subjectivity. NUC re-signifies the disjunctive cityscape through a realist poetics that provides cognitive maps of a splintering sociality. This chapter will outline a socio-spatial and cinematic atlas of Casablanca since the early 1990s. This task will be carried out with a primary focus on the films of the Lodz-educated Abdelkader Lagtaâ, Mustapha Derkaoui, in addition to Hakim Noury, Kamal Kamal and Mohamed Asli. This selection rests on the conscious attempts of their films to map the changing landscape of contemporary Casablanca in its complex totality. The city will thus be analysed as a tapestry of fragments and histories that cohere around a cognitive map of neoliberal urbanism and postcolonial subjectivity. This map crystallises on the NUC screen allowing the spectator to grasp the social and spatial totality of a changing city. Excavating this atlas of Casablanca will allow me to reconstruct a critical map for a nuanced analysis of the representation of space, violence and youth subjectivities in this dissertation. Divided into two major sections, this chapter will unveil the significance of the social and spatial transformations of Casablanca for over a century, as explored in Chapter 1, and reveal their critical contributions to the NUC film’s cognitive mapping of the metropolis.
1. From Lodz to Casablanca

Films mirror our reality. Let us look in the mirror. — Siegfried Kracauer

The old and new medinas, city centre, shantytowns and chic suburbs of Casablanca have subtly been mapped by NUC’s Lodz-educated social realists: Lagtaâ and the Derkaoui brothers. These filmmakers are original ethnographers of Casablanca, where they have lived most of their working lives and filmed it through an unmistakably insider’s gaze. Trained at the National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź, Poland, in the 1960s, Lagtaâ and the Derkaoui brothers are the Ken Loaches and Dardenne brothers of Moroccan cinema. Theirs is a political cinema par excellence. Lagtaâ has described himself as more influenced “by Polish cinema or, more generally, by the cinemas of Eastern Europe, than by Western cinema or, for that matter, by Egyptian cinema” (qtd. in Dwyer 2002: 122). The Lodz school’s philosophy is further spelt out by Lagtaâ elsewhere:

I have always sought to question reality, to interrogate the relationships among people, between people and power, between people and traditions. I have never adopted the so-called arch themes; even when I discuss certain problems such as repression, I treat them through the intrinsic development of my characters. (2004)

15 “J’ai toujours cherché à questionner la réalité, à interroger les relations entre les gens, entre les gens et le pouvoir, entre les gens et les traditions. Je n’ai jamais cherché à adopter des thèmes dits porteurs. Même quand je traite de certains problèmes, comme la répression par exemple, je les traite de biais, à travers le parcours de mes personnages” (2004).
The films of Lagtaâ and the Derkaouis (alongside Noury, Kamal, Asli and Benjelloun) depict Casablanca and, through it, Moroccan society from the 1990s onwards when the consequences of structural adjustment began to be felt and social relations transformed by market values. These filmmakers are to Morocco’s cinema what Driss Chraïbi, Mohamed Zafzaf and Mohamed Choukri are to its literature: contemporary griots of the postcolonial condition. They cast ordinary characters in Casablanca’s fabric of the real and within the wider context of socioeconomic and political changes. This complex intersection of the personal and the public is at the heart of the Lodz school’s cognitive mapping of reality.

In this school’s political cinema of everyday life, individuals are not so much national allegories as emblematic Casablancans and Moroccan subjects:

My characters are primarily individuals, not clans or families. They aspire to autonomy first and foremost. The individual in our society is governed by tradition and religion. [However,] society can develop only if the individual reaches the necessary autonomy to enable him to express himself freely at the social and political levels, but also in terms of his own personality. (Lagtaâ 2004)

The films of first-strand NUC problematise the preordained beliefs and structures of feeling in ordinary Casablancans and Moroccans’ everyday life. However, this project—which is also the project of NUC in its different styles and stripes—does not stop at the descriptive level of a cinematic portrayal of a changing society. It searches for the buds of resistance in everyday life. NUC is akin to Henri Lefebvre’s project to unravel “the complex skein of negative and positive forces embedded in the dense textures and rhythms of everyday life,

16 “Mes personnages sont d’abord des individus ce ne sont pas des clans ou des familles. Ils aspirent d’abord à une autonomie. L’individu dans notre société est régi par la tradition et par la religion. La société ne peut évoluer que si l’individu atteint l’autonomie nécessaire qui lui permette de s’exprimer librement, s’exprimer sur le plan social, politique mais aussi sur le plan de sa propre personnalité”(2004).
and with how these relate to wider totalities in a manner which provides us with tangible clues and signs *vis-à-vis* the possibility of alternative modes of being” (Gardner 2004: 245). This political cinema constitutes a radical philosophy of social scrutiny and postcolonial critique.

**1.1 Of Casablanca and Men**

To substantiate the preliminary observations above and begin to divulge both the spatial atlas and cognitive map of neoliberal Casablanca, let us now turn to Lagtaa’s trilogy: *Love Affair* (1991), *The Casablancans* (1999) and *Yasmine and Men* (2007). These films are characterised by an unpretentious style and a humanistic vision, two defining characteristics of first-strand NUC’s politics of representation. This politics is anchored in Lagtaa’s ethnographically accurate filming of Casablanca, which he sees as an ‘anarchic and unstructured megalopolis, a city of extremes, engaging and challenging, which has a history, nostalgia and memory’ (Lagtaa 2005: 22). His films often open with panoramic views of the metropolis, particularly its streets and spatial heterogeneity from traditional medinas to the modern cityscape. This journey in space is also a form of time travel because, as Chapter 1 has discussed, the built environment of modern Casablanca spans over a century of contingent histories and spatialised power relations. Centred on the camera as an omniscient observer, Lagtaa’s technically unpretentious openings are also theoretically sophisticated and vividly filmed scenes that evoke cinema’s imbrications with movement and the city:

The panoramic views, the shifts in viewing position, the traversal of diverse spatio-temporal dimensions and the movements of the spatial consumer have linked the city to travel to film. Cinema, born out of the theatre of urban motion, exhibits a

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17 “[Une] mégapole anarchique et désstructurée, une ville des extrêmes, attachante et stimulante, qui a une histoire, une nostalgie et une mémoire” (Lagtaa 2005: 22).
fascination for the very means that produced the modern, moving visual space.

(Bruno qtd. in Andermann 2011: 30)

In this sense, Casablanca is a quintessentially cinematic city, which has been associated with travel and mobility in national and global cinema since *Casablanca* (1942). Lagtaâ provides an insider’s postcolonial gaze on a city under transformation. This mapping is seemingly simple but actually rich in historical and cinematic layers of meaning. The opening sequence of *Love Affair* comprises a preliminary beach scene, which swiftly gives way to a longer sequence dominated by the *flâneur* camera. We travel with its gaze through the outdoor landscapes of modern Casablanca in its built and human diversity. This journey culminates in the arrival of Najib and his mistress, Salwa, in the Habous quarter (the new medina built in the 1930s). The Moorish architecture and a towering mosque minaret astride the main street signal the crossing into another world whose urbanism is more complex and allegorical than what we have seen hitherto. The new medina on screen stands for traditional values and the patriarchal authority enabled by the underlying division of space in the neighbourhood and the typical structure of the Moroccan traditional house. This spatial economy thrusts the viewer into the obscure universe of Salwa’s upbringing and habitus as an 18-year-old girl. Coming back from a night out with a middle-aged man in a beach bungalow, Salwa, we infer, is a rebel against her social environment. This pivotal element is further driven home by her resolutely modern look.

*Love Affair*’s opening is strategically filmed to foreground the everyday movement of characters in a terrain adorned with signs of Moroccan modernity in the present. This spatial atlas cognitively maps the social terrain of a neoliberal city. By the time we are introduced to the characters, we have already been prepared to take their actions and expressions as minor or major acts of producing postcolonial subjectivity in urban space. Through a sprightly
performance by the first-time actress Mouna Fettou, the angst-ridden Salwa crisscrosses Casablanca’s spatial and social worlds, unveiling the rich textures of everyday life in neoliberal space. *Love Affair* inscribes itself within what Nouri Bouzid terms “the New Realism,” which prevailed in North African cinema in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. To filmmakers across the Maghreb, 1967 brought home not only a sense of historical defeat but also, to borrow another Bouzidian term, an awareness of the “decadence” of their civilisation. “Admitting defeat,” Bouzid asserts, “the new realism proceeds to expose it and make the awareness of its causes and roots a point of departure” (1995: 249). Cinema was transformed overnight into “a vehicle for the spreading of awareness and a tool or forum for analysis and debate” (243). The filmmakers turned their cameras away from grand narratives to the projection of what the sociologist Asef Bayat (2010: 14) calls “social non-movements” or the collective action of dispersed subaltern actors, particularly the poor and disaffected youth. In Morocco, there emerged in the 1980s “a new concentration on the individual, sometimes on the defeat of inarticulate males, but more often on the suffering of young women, in a rigid Muslim culture” (Armes 2006: 90).

The doyen of NUC, Lagtaâ had absorbed the spirit of the New Realism and put it to use in filming his native Casablanca from the 1990s onwards. Given the city’s mythical status in the cinematic imagination worldwide, it was necessary to demystify it for broad audiences often by telling stories of ordinary people in everyday space. To this end, Lagtaâ has placed modernity and freedom at the heart of Casablanca on screen. In *Love Affair*, after a session of picture-taking (tellingly with Salwa behind the camera and Najib posing), the youth head to Rick’s Café Americain (see Chapter 1). Even if she has never seen the film, the love story of *Casablanca* (1942) as related by Najib touches her. They ponder the film posters on the wall. Salwa soberly asks why Ilsa eventually chose to leave with her husband instead of staying with Rick in Casablanca. Najib responds that the ending of *Casablanca* is in line with
Hollywood’s moral censorship regime. Salwa identifies with Ilsa, except that the Moroccan girl transpires to be more progressive in choosing adventure over conformity. Najib asks the pianist to play Sam’s “As Time Goes By.” This scene strikes back at Casablanca’s Orientalist topos with the city’s postcolonial ordinariness under globalisation, where the agency of subjects is, by its sheer existence, an act of resistance. Jalil appears from behind the posters of Rick and Ilsa. He has been spying on Salwa and Najib in a reflection not only of his jealousy but also of the tyranny of patriarchal authority on young people in urban space.

Salwa uses her sexuality strategically to empower herself in the face of an oppressive social order. This economy of desire cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of its spatial distribution in Casablanca and the attendant social atlas of postcolonial subjectivity. Salwa hails from the medina and cruises the modern city every day for learning, romance and freedom. She uses the chance to spend time outside of the medina to craft her own subjectivity. Whenever she is back at home in the medina, her father assumes his patriarchal authority over her. In contrast, she enjoys freedom and spends nights with Jalil and Najib in modern apartments downtown or in affluent suburbs. Salwa’s movements between the medina and the modern city can be grasped with reference to what Susan Ossman (2002) calls light versus heavy bodies in her comparative study of globalisation and beauty salons in Casablanca, Cairo and Paris. Characterised by anonymity and stasis, the “heavy body” is the habitus of the traditional or tradition-minded woman, whereas the “light body” translates the reality or aspirations of many Moroccan women to emancipate themselves from the tethers of tradition and espouse individual choices in fashion and the production of postcolonial female subjectivities (2002: 19-20). Urbanisation, class dynamics, education and increasing economic independence among women are some of the factors behind this quiet revolution in Casablanca. Salwa is a light body on account of her outwardly modern looks and habitus, yet she is still subject to family and traditional forces (Fig. 10).
Akin to Paul Klee’s angel of history, she inhabits a liminal space between the attractions of modernity and the weight of tradition (Benjamin 1968: 257).

Figure 10. Salwa disowning Jalil in Love Affair

*Love Affair*’s spatial maps unveil the social atlas of Casablanca and Morocco in the late 20th century. The nation is torn between the increasing power of the secular forces of modernity and the resilience of traditional values (Ossman 1994: 48). Lagtaâ admits that “the characters that preoccupy me are characters with projects. They may, at certain moments, be confronted with tradition and mores, [or] political power. But they essentially have a modern
Whilst remaining faithful to his devotion to strong characters with modernist worldviews, Lagtaâ anchors his films in history and delivers a critical ethnography of postcolonial society. He sees his role as that of “questioning society, questioning social practices, questioning how people behave and the kinds of relationships they have with each other” (Lagtaâ qtd. in Armes 2006: 96). Jalil is one of Love Affair’s “social detectives,” to use Jameson’s term for fictional characters that help us “to grasp or represent the social totality as whole” (1995: 36). He completes the film’s social atlas of the city woven around Salwa. Following Jalil’s movements in urban space, we learn about the decline of a certain middle class and the waning of secular values. He is a senior administrator and a trade union leader. The first time we see him in the workplace, he is walking in the corridor to his office. A clerk stops him and asks respectfully if it is true that “colonialism is coming back.” To an astounded Jalil the illiterate clerk explains that the rumour is making rounds. In reality, the public company is being privatised and ownership transferred to a Spanish firm. This anchors the film in the late 1980s during the first wave of privatisation of public companies under IMF directives. The clerk is speaking for large numbers of downtrodden Casablancans and Moroccans. Jalil has been working for the Office for twenty years. Now, he senses his postcolonial Fordist honour soiled by structural adjustment. Jalil’s character also reveals the rise of Islamist trade unionism and its dangerous liaisons with neoliberal capital in Casablanca. Sporting well-trimmed beards to signal their new political identities, Islamist staff members have created their own trade union. Jalil finds himself in the minority overnight; even his secretary disobeys him after she joins the Islamist union. The new union leader deems the construction of a staff mosque a victory worthier than fighting for salary increases for workers. After all, he says, “money is not essential for

happiness” because this life is transient and everyone should be working solely for Allah and the afterlife. The film thus suggests that Islamism and free-market fundamentalism are not mutually exclusive. In essence, this neoliberal piety and its social atlas underscore the emergence of Islamism as the cultural logic of Moroccan late capitalism.

Salwa is a young woman searching for a room of her own in society. She is thus emblematic of an entire generation. The concrete consequences of structural adjustment define the contours of her struggle. She encounters a distraught middle class and a horde of nouveaux riches with unlimited powers and wealth. She savours a measure of freedom but is ultimately exploited by apparently liberated and secular upper-class men, who have a resilient patriarchal habitus. Aged eighteen in the 1980s, Salwa belongs to the first generation of Moroccans to come of age under market reforms. Her identity is marked by globalisation whereas that of the previous two young generations of independence was moulded by the colonial experience and developmentalist paradigms of nation-building in the 1960 and 1970s. Within the analytical framework formulated in Chapter 1, Salwa’s subjectivity has as a backdrop the neoliberal metropolis rather than the national city of emergency (or Casablanca from 1956 to the early 1980s). Mirroring the accumulative history of Casablanca, Salwa’s subjectivity is an amalgam of Moroccan history and urban modernity. A critical study of this subjectivity on the NUC screen reveals present-day Morocco’s postcolonial identity transformations. In her journeys through the city, Salwa meets major and minor characters. Her movement is a telling trip through Casablanca’s social world and its everyday enactments. Salwa’s story is interlaced with telling street scenes of anonymous people. The street is a symbol of modernity and anonymity. Salwa acts not only as a spectatorial point of identification but also as a social detective. She navigates Casablanca’s spaces and, in doing so, the entire map of its subject positions. Her medina upbringing ties her to traditional Moroccan values. The interaction with downtown and suburban Casablanca and their subjects
is a dialogue with secular modernity and the contradictions of neoliberal subjectivity in postcolonial space-time. Her subjectivity emerges from these contradictions and the encounters she makes.

The second film in Lagtaâ’s Casablanca trilogy, *The Casablancans* (1999), unfolds in the Habous medina and city centre almost a decade after *Love Affair*. This combination of traditional and modern spaces provides a more recent atlas of social values in the city. The Habous is inhabited by working-class Casablancans and the *Ville Nouvelle* (city centre) by the middle classes, which maintain close family ties to the medina. The plotline weaves together three social groups and intertwined narratives: Mustapha Ziani, a downtown resident working as a bookseller in the medina, whose life is abruptly shaken when he mistakenly receives an invitation to stop by the *commissariat* (police station); Salwa, a female teacher living on her own in the medina, is in the process of applying for a passport to travel to France to participate in a conference on the repudiation of women in Islam; and, lastly, the schoolboy Kamal and his medina-dwelling parents are devastated by the child’s indoctrination by an Islamist teacher, Kabous (Fig. 11). Mapping these spatial and social worlds through a continuum of tragi-comic effects, the film provides a perceptive atlas of Casablanca. This socio-spatial map is enhanced by a semi-ethnographic camera, characters as social detectives and the atmospheric film-noir architecture of the Habous medina. *The Casablancans* is characterised by a verbal economy with scenes, faces and the soundtrack left to draw a picture of Casablanca under globalisation. Downtown Casablanca impresses the viewer as the natural habitat of secular citizens with ample access to the material and symbolic amenities of modern life. Mustapha is an educated man and frequently speaks French to index his social standing whilst remaining fluent in the local dialect to retain social acceptability. However, the arbitrary police invitation unveils the fragile world of the middle class and its subservience to the political and social climates of Morocco under Hassan II,
characterised by fear of the omnipresent police service. The invitation instills a surreal fear in Mustapha. He and his family imagine Kafkaesque scenarios about what would happen to them when he presents himself at the *commissariat*.

*Figure 11.* Kamal being punished by his fundamentalist teacher Kabous

Beyond the phantasmagorical topos of *Casablanca* (1942), the Moroccan medina is revealed by Lagtaâ as a complex society in the present tense. People work, gossip, drink, fight, party and struggle for survival. The environment is mundane also due to the ubiquitous policing of social and political life by the Makhzen. Everyone is under constant watch. Relying on a system of everyday surveillance inherited from the colonial era, state authority is represented in the medina (and every Moroccan city and village) by the all-knowing
employee of the Ministry of the Interior, the *Muqaddem*. This cunning spy reports on his constituency. In *The Casablancans*, he pulls strings and taps the neighbourhood prostitute and butcher to reveal or spread the latest intelligence. Omar Sayed, one of the legendary Nass El Ghiwane singers, plays the butcher and feeds the Muqaddem with tips. This casting of a familiar face of Casablancan and Moroccan life can be read as a declaration of demise of the 1970s culture of resistance and the triumph of social conformity in the neoliberal era. ‘Until proven otherwise,’ Lagtaâ observes, ‘everything is political. What interests me is how the citizen feels the weight of authority’ (1999).19 Salwa is a teacher and doctoral researcher who needs a passport to attend an international conference. This triggers a long and perverted process of surveillance by the Muqaddem.

Kamal is the medina’s Antoine Doinel. He is young and clever. Falling victim to radical Islam at school steals his innocence. Unable to convince his father to give up alcohol for Halal beer, he attempts to kill him with a kitchen knife. Through Kamal’s eyes, the film maps many social details and the domestic and public spaces of the children of his class. In an implicit homage to Francois Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959), *The Casablancans* panoramically closes with Kamal running from the medina through different districts of Casablanca before finally arriving at the beach in an attempt to drown himself. He is ultimately rescued by his friend Houda, accompanied by Mustapha and Salwa. Through these three stories, Lagtaâ paints a realist portrait of Casablanca in the late 20th century: spatial divisions, poverty, police repression, the decline of the middle class and its secular values and the rise of religious and other conservative ideologies, which backfired with the suicide bombings on 16 May 2003. *The Casablancans* thus renders Casablanca’s space and Moroccan society in the 1990s. Faithful to the philosophy of the Lodz school at Casablanca, the film questions the modernity of Moroccans against the background of the metropolis and

19 “Jusqu’à preuve du contraire, tout est politique. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est comment le citoyen ressent le poids de l'autorité”(1999).
its socio-political structures. For Lagtaâ, “Moroccan society is torn between an undeniable aspiration to modernity and an identitarian isolationism that often manifests itself through fundamentalism. It is this schizophrenia that I tried to question in *The Casablancans*” (Lagtaâ 2002). The main character in Lagtaâ’s film is Casablanca itself. The myriad human characters on screen are sub-characters within this living character.

Like *Face to Face*, Lagtaâ’s *The Closed Door* (1998) is a film set between Casablanca and the desiccated landscapes of southeastern Morocco. Both films stage the stories of Casablanca subjects who find themselves socially and psychologically afloat in the backcountry. Only minimally present on the screen, neoliberal Casablanca is *The Closed Door*’s structuring absence. Said is a young man who escapes the control of an abusive stepmother and sets out for the south. This *bled* runner (‘bled’ means ‘countryside’ in Darija) is the same young character from *Love Affair*. A photography student in the first film, Said is now a teacher in the desert province of Ouarzazate. He develops a deep relationship with a homosexual colleague. Said feels lonely and unable to live in a world incomprehensible to him because of his different upbringing in middle-class Casablanca. This is due to the social relations of globalisation having placed Casablanca and the countryside on different temporal planes.

*Yasmine and Men* (2007) is the fifth and latest feature film in Lagtaâ’s chronicles of Casablanca under globalisation. The plot revolves around Yasmine, a young woman in search of freedom and individual subjectivity in a patriarchal society. She lives with her husband in the city centre of the post-2003 metropolis, that is, the city after the suicide bombings. Physical and social space in *Yasmine and Men* is more fragmented than in his previous films and cannot be mapped as one continuum. The terrorist attacks seem to have blown apart the ontological centre of Casablancan subjectivity. Unlike Lagtaâ’s films set in the city centre under Hassan II, where fear is coupled with hope as the major forces in social life, his films
in the new millennium expose the hollowed heart of this life. Characters with modern projects seem defeated and hope for better times is gone.\textsuperscript{20} The Makhzen used the 2003 events to achieve national consensus behind its authoritarian rule in return for protection against the Islamist threat in the same way that Hassan II used the annexation of the southern Sahara in 1975 to buy social peace. It was in Casablanca that history repeated itself, except that this time it was not massive popular anti-regime protests but rather suicide bombings by impoverished Casablancans that have reinforced the regime’s hold on power. Thousands of Islamists and dissidents have been tortured, imprisoned or ‘disappeared’ since 2003 (Amar 2009). In this environment, Lagtaâ’s modernist subjects are shocked into silence or forced into exile. Despite its brutality, Hassan II’s regime remained fragile throughout the four decades of his rule (1961-1999). Under the current king, monarchy looks stronger than ever before. Mohamed VI holds the key levers of power and controls important portfolios in the government. A combination of rapid neoliberalisation and authoritarianism has made the mores of society become conservative under his reign.

Whereas public space in \textit{Love Affair} (1991) is visually dominated by secular forces and modern lifestyles, religious icons prevail in the new Casablanca of \textit{Yasmine and Men}. The latter opens with a street view of the looming minaret of Hassan II Mosque astride the main boulevard. In \textit{Love Affair}, the mosque scenes are confined to the Habous quarter to connote the predominance of traditional values in the medina. In the 2007 film, it is an entire city that has come under the control of the metaphysics of domination. In \textit{Love Affair}, most of the action takes place outside the medina with Salwa cruising through Casablanca’s modern spaces in search of emancipation. In \textit{Yasmine and Men}, in contrast, the characters retreat to the medina in search of anchorage in traditional values and societal norms, the sort that are depicted in detail by two recent films: Aziz Salmi’s \textit{Veiled Love} (2008) and Abdelhai

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{20} Lagtaâ has been living mostly in France in the new century.}
Laraki’s *Love in the Medina* (2011). The modern project of postcolonial subjectivity has retreated under the weight of neoliberal globalisation, which produced rampant conservatism and the terror attacks of 2003, thus giving the new regime a coveted opportunity to seal its hold on society and slide towards more autocracy. For instance, the Casablanca of *Yasmine and Men* is littered with billboards bearing portraits of the king in a sign of the politicisation of public space after 2003. In a pivotal scene, a portrait of Mohammed VI dominates the front of a building. A literal embodiment of what Mary Louise Pratt calls “the monarch-of-all-I-survey” (1992: 201), the king overlooks the street connecting the medina to the city centre. This atlas of Casablanca sums up the social and political atlas of an entire country. Yasmine is Casablanca. She has had an accident in which she lost her memory; she emerges traumatised and unable to reconnect with her past. Yasmine met Rachid in a demonstration commemorating the second anniversary of the suicide bombings. The film ends on an ambivalently hopeful note outside Casablancan space. Yasmine and Rachid strike a romantic note on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea up north. Yasmine has given away her passport and national ID. She ‘burns’ her identity to start a new life from scratch. Casablanca needs new beginnings. This utopian ending may bear some hope in the future.

### 1.2 So Dark is the Night

Mustapha Derkaoui’s *Casablanca by Night* (2003) is another landmark film of NUC in general, and the Lodz school in Casablanca in particular. Like Lagtaâ’s trilogy, Derkaoui’s films draw a deceivingly simple atlas of spatial and social relations in post-1983 Casablanca. To appreciate how NUC represents Casablanca through a strategy of cognitive mapping, it is imperative to read closely the opening credits of this watershed film (albeit a critically unsung work). *Casablanca by Night* was met by a remarkable audience appreciation upon its release in 2003. It topped the national box office, outperforming Hollywood productions by a
wide margin; for example, the second box office success that year was *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* with an attendance figure of 92,632 against *Casablanca by Night*’s 340,347 (Gallaoui 2005: 155). A greater number of viewers must have seen it on the many occasions it has aired on national television and scores more on the Internet, where it has been viewed over the last decade. Like Lagtaâ’s *Love Affair*, Ayouch’s *Ali Zaoua*, Mohamed Asli’s *In Casablanca, Angels Don’t Fly* (2003) and Lakhmari’s *Casanegra* (2008), which stormed the box office, *Casablanca by Night* has enjoyed the privilege of being associated with Casablanca and defining its image in the national imagination. Moreover, the film exemplifies NUC’s privileging of nocturnal Casablanca to analyse the constituents of neoliberal urbanism and its everyday subjectivities through a realist lens.

The film chronicles one night in Casablanca. Derkaoui packs in a lot of subtlety under the wings of the night. His film is a de facto riposte to *Casablanca* (1942) and the Marx brothers’ *A Night in Casablanca* (1946): it opens with an establishing shot with the camera descending from the minaret into the medina as in *Casablanca*, except that this is a medina littered with signs of technical modernity (police vans, cars, phone boxes, and so on). Also woven into the opening sequence is the iconic Hyatt Regency Hotel overlooking the medina, where as we know a bar replicates *Casablanca*’s Café Americain for late modern tourists. Yet another subtle postcolonial cinematic gesture in Derkaoui’s torpid opening manifests itself in the colonial-era main square filmed through a wide horizontal panning shot rather than an aerial monarch-of-all-I-survey point of view. Thus implicitly shot from the ordinary citizen’s point of view, the square is filmed in a single take so as to look part and parcel of a modern city. This opening scene thus puts everyday Casablanca centre stage and prepares the viewer to see ordinary people as the film and the city’s protagonists.

This cinematic atlas is consolidated by the next scene in the opening sequence. The viewer is taken inside the swarming alleys of the medina, where instead of artificially dark-
skinned people in Orientalist attire, we encounter ordinary people, mostly youth in modern
dress. Significantly, in stark contrast to the commonplace camels, mules and donkeys of
Hollywood’s Orient, a red taxi is making its way through the alley. By this stage, the opening
sequence has undone Hollywood’s Casablanca for international viewers. For the domestic
audience, Derkaoui has concomitantly defamiliarised everyday Casablanca so that they can
see it anew through the eyes of its invisible ordinary subjects. This is central to Casablanca
by Night’s cognitive mapping. As I pointed out in reference to Love Affair, defamiliarising
urban space to elicit audience interest and discourage preconceived perceptions is a defining
feature of NUC. Even after the opening sequence is over, Derkaoui still has a few axes to
grind. The young Keltoum Ayach wants to become a belly dancer. She is the lead character
of the film and we are introduced to her after the opening spatial atlas. The introduction to
Keltoum begins with her getting a tape of dance music and putting in the cassette player. This
is radically at variance with the customary introduction of an ‘Oriental’ body sensually
dancing for the pleasure of (male) spectators. Keltoum is an aspiring singer named after Oum
Kalthoum. The former is the daughter of a self-prostituting divorced mother in a poor
neighborhood. Derkaoui’s introduction is reinforced by a semi-diegetic element: the film’s
poster showing Keltoum in belly dancing dress leaning against Casablanca’s iconic Clock
Tower, a colonial monument still showing time in Casablanca today. This is a play on Rick’s
famous question in Casablanca (1942): “If it’s December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it
in New York?” Over half a century later, Derkaoui reclaims Casablanca’s time from
Hollywood’s atemporal Orientalism for the city’s ordinary people. US-led structural
adjustment policies since the 1980s have reset the world clocks leading to the explosion of
precarity and social dissent around the world (Appadurai 2006: 27). Casablanca by Night’s
unpretentious opening thus manages to decolonise the filmic gaze before delving into its
subject matter: the story of an underage belly dancer in a divided city. This feat is achieved
with an economy of style and a clinically accurate ethnography of Casablanca. With a melodramatic yet sublime spatial atlas of Casablanca, the film’s affective charge defies the power of language to put human suffering into words.

The opening sequence glosses the zeitgeist of Casablanca and postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco today. In keeping with the Lodz school’s conception of the spatial atlas as a cognitive map of post-colonial society’s ordinary subjectivities, Casablanca is filmed as an urban sensorium, an emporium of signs. It is a city littered with billboards, McDonalds, Whirlpool, Hassan II Mosque, Hyundai, gas stations, the seaport, office towers, and other sacred and profane commodities. The streets are teeming with cars and hordes of anonymous people. People and commodities indifferently intermingle in Casablanca’s time-space. Having decolonised the gaze and defamiliarized the city, the film tells an ordinary story. Hicham, Keltoum’s young brother, has a weak heart and the surgical operation entails a sum of money beyond the poor family’s means. He is admitted into the operation theatre of a public hospital. In neoliberal Morocco, healthcare is free of charge in theory but is not really in practice because “patients must furnish everything from suture thread for their operations to bottles of blood for transfusions” (Gozlan 2011: 102). Keltoum goes into the Casablancan night to prostitute herself to raise money necessary for saving Hicham’s life (Fig. 12). From that moment on, the film crosscuts between her exploration of the nocturnal underbelly of the city and the heart operation. Shot almost in real time in a local hospital, the surgery epitomises the camera’s own delicate dissection of the heart of Casablanca. The intercut sequences of Hicham and the city’s matched fates give the film a powerful affective appeal. Its economical and almost minimal style provides a full and searing portrait of the city through ordinary objects and small details within a coherent narrative that juxtaposes two structuring plots and their intersecting lines: unscrupulous hospital staff, corrupt police, and a monstrous city with its nights full of blood, desire and fire. The drama of the heart operation
is lessened by the banal conversation of the surgeons and the harrowing soundtrack which heightens the ordinariness of the city and people’s everyday lives. The two plots equally occupy the narrative and visual space of the film. This juxtaposition of two narratives delivers a visceral journey through nocturnal Casablanca as the unconscious of the daytime city of capital’s rationality and socio-spatial exclusion. Instead of a mere melodrama of extreme emotion, *Casablanca by Night* is rather a critical portrait of the city.

![Figure 12. Kethoum singing in a Casablanca cabaret](image)

In the last sequence of the film, Keltoum is offered as a virgin to The Baron, an old aristocrat living in a walled mansion in the suburbs. She escapes rape with a bundle of
banknotes, but the middleman De Baddog (a cabaret owner) manages to hound her. He rapes Keltoum in a towering housing development. Attacked by the caretaker’s dog, he meets death by falling from a high floor. This melodramatic climax whereby the villain gets his due does not undermine the film’s social critique for two reasons. To begin with, *Casablanca by Night* is constructed as an urban fable from beginning to end, hence the abundance of folkloric imagery, themes and motifs. Moreover, setting the climax in the nondescript construction site as a space of marginality and surreal violence is pregnant with meanings, some of which will be unveiled through an analysis of heterotopias in the next chapter. Meanwhile, through cross-cut scenes we learn that Hicham’s heart operation has been successful. In a final irony, the hospital refuses to accept payment for Hicham’s operation. The rape victim is told that the public institution has taken everything in charge. Keltoum still donates the money to the hospital because “someone else may be in need of a heart operation,” she says. The potential patient may be another poor Casablancan or the city itself. This is another motif of melodramatic allegorism deployed by Derkaoui to guarantee a broad audience to *Casablanca by Night*.

This brings us full circle to the structuring absence of the father in *Casablanca by Night*. As the next chapter will discuss in greater detail, the trope of the absent Father, which is central to NUC’s representation of Casablanca, stands for the retreat of the postcolonial State under globalisation and the fragile social contract with its subjects. In *Casablanca by Night*, Keltoum transpires not to be the orphan we thought at the beginning of the film. Her biological father makes an appearance in a few scenes towards the end. In the final scene, Keltoum leaves the hospital after her brief check on her brother’s health. She walks past her father on the stairs. He appears disarmed when they recognise each other, but she keeps walking down the stairwell. He beckons her. Keltoum halts her steps for a moment and looks up at him in a reverse shot, but down the stairs she goes. The film ends here leaving the
viewer wondering if Keltoum’s rejection of the father in this symbolic location means her
descent into the ether or rather the more likely option of going back to the streets to fight her
own way through the world.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, Derkaoui made experimental films which were not often
commercially distributed or watched beyond film clubs (Carter 2009: 158-64). The Love
Affairs of Haj Mokhtar Soldi (2000) marked a turnaround in his career by adopting the first-
strand NUC politics of simple plot lines and a dose of melodrama to reach a mass audience.
Casablanca by Night (2003) confirmed this turn by submerging the NUC audience in the
dark world of modern Casablanca at night. The film is deceptively simple because, like Love
Affair and The Casablancans, it is a thoughtful and subtle popular work. The depth of its
narrative and technical construction is woven around a social-atlas-cum-cognitive-map of
Casablanca. Narratively, for example, the banal conversation of medics in the operating
theatre reveals not only their indifference to the plight of the poor child undergoing an
operation but also the blasé attitude of city life, as theorised by Georg Simmel: “There is
perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé
outlook” (2010: 105). The surgeons’ conversation is also technical and significantly in
French, a colonial legacy and the idiom of science and class distinction in Morocco. In
contrast, Darija or the urban dialect is used for and by ordinary and pious subjects in the film.
This linguistic atlas foregrounds the multilayered cognitive maps and polyphony of
postcolonial subjectivity in Casablanca.

Other narrative details unveil more textures of the social atlas above. The second cab
driver in the film is young and disoriented like Casablanca’s youth on screen (see also
Chapters 4 and 5). He accompanies Keltoum on her nocturnal journey and his character
reveals the fluidity and instability of the postcolonial subject in neoliberal space. Like most
characters in Casablanca by Night, Jibril speaks a language which is ordinary and poetic at
the same time: every sentence rhymes with the affective condition of his subjectivity. In this language, he tells Keltoum with disarming candour about his dog Mars which he killed when it tried to kill him. However, he insists that dogs are better than humans because the latter are cheats, thus revealing his bemusement and loss in metropolitan space. In the same poetic register, the film’s closing Rai song by Keltoum is a dramatic coda of the human condition in the neoliberal city; the night is portrayed as evil and a continuation of daytime chasms between the dominant and the dominated. The night is thus revealed as the unconscious atlas of the city, wherein the Real assaults reality, to put it in Lacanian terms (1988: 66). This imagery of the unconscious is scaffolded by a pensive soundtrack, red cabs and dreamy subplots and surreal figures.

This narrative atlas is supported by the formal constituents of the film. It relies on panning shots and nighttime scenes of the streets of Casablanca. Iconic, for example, are the shots of the red cab cruising through the swarming streets of the city at night. Set in a postcolonial neoliberal city, Casablanca by Night unfolds against the political economy of the century of urban modernity explored in Chapter 1. Downtown Art Deco buildings are in the background to foreground the colonial roots of the present and question the utopias of modernity. For example, the City Hall and the adjacent Palais de Justice (court)—modern technologies of control par excellence (Choukhaili 2005: 122)—are glimpsed on the way to the cabaret and consequent rape of a 14-year-old girl. The Hassan II Mosque is also glimpsed in the opening sequence and also later when the profane plotline is in full swing, to the effect that the divine is indifferent to the daily struggles of earthly subjects in neoliberal space.

Casablanca by Night is a story told, sometimes quite literally, in asphalt, concrete and blood. The spatial fragments of the city’s streets, medina, downtown, exclusive suburbs, and abandoned buildings are brought together in a rich mosaic of power/strategies and counter-power/tactics (De Certeau 1984: 40). With Keltoum as a guide, the viewers travel with the
camera through Casablanca at night and witness these practices of space in action. The characters navigate a city divided between arenas owned by different power holders. For example, the medina is invaded by netherworld Casablancans at night to hold the Demons Market, where stolen objects and human organs go on sale. The gated mansions of the rich shield orgies of sex and exploitation from public view. Keltoum crosses the entire city from her medinan base to The Baron’s villa through the night clubs where the poor sell their flesh to rich customers through middlemen. The police are corrupt and patrol the city for the benefit of wealthy agents like the Saudi sheikh and the cabaret owners. This socio-spatial atlas of night-time Casablanca unveils the hidden logics of neoliberal power whilst mining everyday life for latent signs of subaltern resistance.

The narrative and formal components of *Casablanca by Night* combine in constructing a cognitive map of the metropolis through a social realist atlas. A key component of this mapping is the surreal subversion of social values. This surrealism is realistic in effect. In a society where honour sits atop the value pyramid, rape and sexual exploitation are used by Derkaoui as the engines of his social critique. Bellydancing is the profession that Keltoum aspires to pursue in order to lift herself out of poverty in the medina. Tutoring her is Aunt Yezza, a nightclub belly dancer by profession, caught in the vicious spiral of elemental struggle. Nevertheless, this figure of resistance uses her body to survive and help others against precarity. She is a symbol of the humanism and solidarity of ordinary people versus the materialism of the powerful represented by The Baron. Selling one’s body to help others is a visceral critique of capitalist exploitation. The critique is consolidated by incidents of surreal and sordid humour in a film that balances farce with tragedy. Examples include the droll acts of theft; a tramp jumping over the cab; the anonymous sub-Saharan migrant who almost gets run over by a cab, only to dust himself and walk away in fear of police arrest and deportation; the cab running into a garbage truck, which the Saudi sheikh then hires to chase
the fleeing belly dancer in another cab; the truck catching up with the taxi and Yezza agreeing to dance in the street upon the sheikh’s promise of 1000 dirhams or a palace in Paradise; the party continuing in the police station into the early hours of the morning after the late partygoers are arrested; the drunken sheikh on his prayer mat entertaining everybody in the commissariat including the policemen with his humour and stately Arabic, a contrast to the mundane dialect of poor Casablancans; and, finally, the party lingering on in the medina after the release of everyone following the intervention of Ba Lahcen, a former police commissioner cum dealer in the nighttime market of stolen goods. The slow and subliminal accretion of these seemingly insignificant realist scenes constructs a social atlas of marginality in Casablanca, on the one hand, and foregrounds the arbitrary necropolitics of globalisation, on the other.

Even if Derkaoui’s Joycean sense of irony sometimes approximates pure surrealism, it only heightens the realism and richness of everyday life in the city, which is thus not condemned to the prosaic. Surrealism is an extension of the film’s realism because it reveals the murky underside of Casablanca and its nocturnal world. The film’s hyper-realism shades into the surreal at moments of great distress for the characters. The name of the young taxi driver is Jibril Boujenah (literally, ‘Winged Gabriel’). In a moment of despair after being beaten up in the cabaret, he tells Keltoum that the difference between him and the mythical angel of the Islamic tradition is that the latter had a winged horse to ride whereas he has only a jalopy in a foul and wicked earthly city. The morale is that the neoliberal order is too murky for the values of decency and religiosity. In an interview, Derkaoui refers to Casablanca by Night as “a fable that takes on the traits of the everyday” (2003).21 This view is supported by the nightly Souk of Demons, for example, as a fabulous embodiment of the city’s necropolitical order of capital accumulation whereby humans become mere commodities.

21 “[…]Une fable qui prend les traits de du quotidien” (2003).
The film’s surrealism renders precarious situations without the horror associated with them in the social imagination; the extraordinary is rendered in the language of the ordinary to prevent moral judgements, which would fail to grasp the kernel of Casablanca’s political economy.

The city is ordinary. Similarly to most NUC films, everyday Casablanca is the major character in *Casablanca by Night*. The film chronicles its various spaces: streets, cabarets, construction sites, mosques, medinas, and so on. Its realist documentary scrutiny of the city is analogous to and indeed crosscuts with the minute surgery on Hicham’s heart. This cognitive atlas of the city is at its most visible in fourteen-year Keltoum’s nocturnal street journeys. She is presented as a social detective, an engaged ethnographer of the city’s heart of darkness. For instance, after Jibril’s arrest for accidental robbery, Keltoum meets Zir Ben Atiya, a teenager coming out for air after a dispute between his mother and stepfather. He gives Keltoum a ride on his motorcycle through downtown Casablanca. This invites the spectator to feel the cityscape of old and haunting colonial buildings such as City Hall on wide boulevards as drawn and built by Prost and Lyautey almost a century earlier. The most dramatic cognitive remapping of space takes place in the penultimate sequence of the film when Keltoum stops to wash rape blood from her skirt in a public fountain with the overbearing Palais de Justice in the background. The time is early morning and justice has been done—the justice of dark Casablanca. The equation of darkness with neoliberalism is made poignant by the setting. The fountain is located in Casablanca’s administrative square built in the colonial era. Derkaoui’s postcolonial remapping of Casablanca is not only physical, but primarily cognitive: contra the utopian vision behind colonial urbanism, we are made to see the city through the eyes of its outcasts and struggling ordinary subjects in the 21st century—like Keltoum, whose point of view guides our journey through Casablanca by night.
The city is human. Instead of painting an abstract machine, Derkaoui portrays a living city, partly through the organic metaphor of the palpitating hearts of Hicham and Casablanca. Even if the film merely shows incipient signs of solidarity in the face of duress, its social atlas foregrounds deep popular resistance through the unpredictability of the political unconscious of the masses. It seems that at this early stage of Casablanca’s neoliberal moment, elementary struggle takes precedence over the imperative of solidarity among the lower classes. However, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, “specters of the common appear throughout capitalist society, even if in veiled and mystified forms” (2009: 153). There are many subtexts of common solidarity in *Casablanca by Night*. Asef Bayat has coined the term “non-movements” to describe “collective actions of noncollective actors” (2009: 4) in reference to the embedded expressions and acts of dissent in everyday social life. Take, for example, the solidarity of the cab driver with Keltoum by starting a brawl in the cabaret when he learns that the owner will take all banknotes dedicated to the apprentice bellydancer by customers worse for wear. He refuses to let his 100 dirhams be diverted from his original intention of making a contribution to Hicham’s heart operation expenses. In the film’s melodramatic allegoricality, Hicham is Keltoum’s brother and the alter ego of an ailing city. Other customers join in the spontaneous insurrection against the cabaret owner. Jibril sets the locale on fire in an ultimate gesture of class solidarity.

In keeping with first-strand NUC’s construction of a cognitive map of the city through its social atlas, characters in *Casablanca by Night* are meticulously profiled as social types relying on a cast of unknowns in the Neorealist tradition seasoned with melodramatic motifs. They range from the monumentally privileged feudal-like lords through transvestites and tramps to Arabian sheikhs. The characters as social types are mapped onto urban space with ethnographic precision. The cognitive elements of cinematic mapping are rooted in the *longue durée* of Casablanca Modern unpacked in Chapter 1. Another pillar of *Casablanca by
Night’s cognitive mapping is affect. Akin to the cinematography, the soundtrack prioritises affectivity and narrative simplicity as means of exerting influence on a broad audience. Derkaoui constructs a geography of emotions through popular music and other nondiegetic soundscapes. Different musical registers are ethnographically associated with particular sites and affective states. The melodious call to prayer is heard in the film’s opening sequence as we pass Hassan II Mosque; in retrospect, this scene is incorporated within the opening sequence in a way that it goes beyond the simple function of establishing the film’s location, for it implicitly places the film’s secular plot and events beyond moral judgement. This scene is followed by ones of traffic noise as we inch closer to the main square, the scene of Derkaoui’s aforementioned riposte to Hollywood. As we enter inside the old medina, popular music takes over the soundtrack in addition to the accented Darija of working-class Casablanca. The soundtrack changes both diegetically and non-diegetically as we travel throughout the city in the company of Keltoum. The filmmaker proffers an aural map of the city which, in parallel with the film’s spatial atlas, taps into the cognitive maps of postcolonial subjects’ everyday life. This affectively charged chronicle of the city’s soundscape will work especially for spectators familiar with Moroccan and Maghrebi music. The film reconstructs an aural map of the city from Nass El Ghiwane’s music through Rai to youth musical subcultures in the 21st century.

The aural and the affective are intertwined in the representation of Casablanca. Human experience largely lies beyond the capacity of language to capture accurately in words. Verbal language is a rather limited arena of human communication. Film is richer by virtue of its incorporation of images and other non-linguistic semantics. However, human experience is vaster than all these languages can convey. It remains a large reservoir of experience untapped on screen. The best we can hope for is to watch a film that intentionally or unintentionally allows glimpses into that little-known area of experience: affect. In
Casablanca by Night, Keltoum’s agony and that of postcolonial subjects in neoliberal space is beyond representation. The intensity of the young girl’s experience is affective and escapes direct expression. Derkaoui opens up her experience and, in so doing, that of sombre Casablanca by multiplying cinematic codes (e.g., language, sound, editing) and references (e.g., Neorealism, Bollywood, melodrama, oral literature). This, as we have seen above, allows for a survey of globalisation in its human and spatiotemporal habitations. In this sense, the film is political without putting forward a programme of action against social injustice. Instead, it zooms in on one night in the everyday life of a city to lay bare the suffering, sexploitation and other shortcomings of a globalising society. The film here goes global while addressing a minute local space, as if to say that the local is already global but we need to understand the local and question globalisation from below through its concrete fissures and contradictions. These key concerns are conveyed by the affective power of the entire film without inducing pathos through a facile deployment of melodrama. In consequence, Casablanca by Night is emotional without being sentimental in its drawing of a visceral portrait of Casablanca at the turn of the millennium.

The purpose behind this analysis of Casablanca by Night is to foreground the social atlas of a neoliberal city and its cognitive mapping on screen. Before moving to explore an earlier film by Derkaoui, The Love Affairs of Haj Mokhtar Soldi (2000), a word about Casablanca by Night’s sequel is in order. Following the popular success of the earlier film, Derkaoui released Casablanca Daylight a year later. The audience and film critics found it deeply disappointing. From a critical perspective, the hurried and cheaply made sequel is a light comedy devoid of the subtlety and innovation of its prequel. It opens with Keltoum washing rape blood from her robe in the fountain. In the background are City Hall and the Palais de Justice; these monuments set the location whilst a subsequent radio report about the invasion of Iraq in 2003 anchors it in time. In contrast to Casablanca by Night’s explosive
start, the dearth of street scenes and ordinary life in the opening of *Daylight* undermines any genuine critique. In narrative terms, the film carries on where the first one left off but without the considered photography and cinematography of the former. *Daylight* works like a series of unnecessary footnotes to the prequel: for example, we learn more about the Demons Market; Keltoum’s father and aunt proselytise about family values; and then there are Sardi’s bone-dry sitcom staples, probably meant to paper over the cracks, as he goes to ludic extremes in pursuit of big posteriors in colourful djellabas without enriching the film’s plot or dramatic construction. There is hardly any character development in Derkaoui’s directionless sequel. The film is a scrapbook of banal and loosely edited anecdotes (Fig. 13). Daylight Casablanca is thus uncaptured and cognitively and socially unmapped. His surreal nighttime characters and plot lines founder in sunlight and flat television filmmaking. Badly structured dialogue, unconvincing performances, mediocre filming and unthoughtful editing take the place of the deep melodrama of *Casablanca by Night*. From *Casablanca Daylight*, problematic as it is, we take the reference to the musical underground in Casablanca and the rise of Internet culture and creeping fundamentalism in urban space, all subjects due for extensive analysis in following chapters.
Leaving behind his notorious reputation as an experimental filmmaker from the 1970s to the 1990s, Derkaoui has risen to become one of the most popular filmmakers in Morocco. His films in the 2000s utilise melodramatic motifs and comedy to enrapture large audiences. His humorous drama *The Love Affairs of Haj Mokhtar Soldi* (2000) was another high-grossing NUC film. The lead actor is Bachir Skiredj, already well known to Moroccan filmgoers through Mohammed A. Tazi’s *Looking for My Wife’s Husband* (1993). In Derkaoui’s film, the Moroccan-American Skiredj plays the role of Haj Mokhtar Soldi, a wealthy man in Casablanca. The film opens with him on the phone in a chauffeured limousine. Between Haj’s instructions to the manager of his election campaign in the Old Medina constituency and his stop to pee from a bridge, we travel through the street landscape of Casablanca at night. As in *Casablanca by Night* three years later, the opening sequence is a series of charged scenes that demythologise Casablanca for the international eye and defamiliarise it for the home audience. The camera travels at street level through many
historic places from colonial buildings and broad avenues through big squares to icons of global capital. Derkaoui’s auto-ethnographic opening sets the action in everyday Casablanca in the present tense. This social atlas aims to construct a cognitive map of a city and country on the cusp of the new millennium. Haj Soldi owns factories, a shopping centre and other assets in Casablanca. He is a renowned zahwani (bon vivant) who abuses his power by engaging in corruption and sexual orgies. This plot line is inspired by the aforementioned Tabitgate and Hassan II’s 1996 Campagne d’Assainissement (Cleanup Campaign) in Casablanca’s business world to curb illicit trading and convince international lenders to support more neoliberalisation. As Chapter 1 explains, the 1990s marked the end of an era in Morocco and the beginning of another, especially defined by the death of the tyrannical King Hassan (as we shall explore in depth with Lasri’s film The End in Chapter 5) and the ascendance to the throne of what was then a less threatening figure in the person of his son, Mohamed VI. Society was agitating and the new monarch made amendments to prolong his dynasty’s rule peacefully in the face of popular discontent (Cohen and Jaidi 2006: 142).

In this film, Derkaoui deploys a Jamesonian social detective in the person of Lahbib, a police commissioner. He closely surveys the actions of Haj beyond the call of duty because members of his family are either working for, or being sexually abused (often both) by Haj, a character loosely inspired by Haj Mustapha Tabite (Fig. 14). Lahbib has just returned home after seven years spent studying overseas and joined the metropolitan police force as a divisional commissioner. He was born to a sex worker and brought up in the medina. The first thing he does in his new office suite is hang up the standard-issue portrait of King Mohamed VI over a large map of Casablanca. This act of allegiance is an uncanny acknowledgment that the city has spun out of control and needs to be reclaimed for the new ruler, much as his royal father reclaimed it through the construction of Hassan II Mosque in the 1980s (see Chapter 2). The portrait associates Lahbib with the new reign, which
propagated the idea that democracy and social justice would soon be achieved without a revolution. Many in Morocco and abroad believed that “Mohammed VI, the gentle son of a tyrant, ruler of a valiant member of the third world, [was] guiding his country confidently toward a lifestyle approaching that of southern Europe” (Gozlan 2011: 101). The young and uncommunicative man took the throne in July 1999 was immediately branded by international PR agencies and inhouse intellectuals as “The King of the Poor” and a reform-minded monarch bent on ending human rights abuses and implementing social reforms. In his chief publicist’s words, the king is “a modern man who aspires always to further the cause of democracy… authentic and true, profoundly good to the core, obsessed by the eradication of poverty, free society, and liberty” (Ayouch qtd. in Gozlan 2011: 106). Lahbib thus represents the so-called “New Morocco.” This sets him on a collision course with the forces of continuity represented by Haj Mokhtar Soldi, who in turn has a gigantic portrait of Hassan II at the entrance of his shopping centre. The film dramatises a national conflict on the urban map of Casablanca.
The film’s social atlas works as a cognitive map of political and social values and postcolonial subjectivities. Everyday life in the metropolis is the playground for this allegorically concentrated portrait of the national condition. Cleaving to NUC’s guiding principles, depth and simplicity of presentation, an unpretentious urban comedy thus portrays a national drama. Lahbib is investigating Haj Mokhtar Soldi, which as we learn from the police commissioner, is a pseudonym. Haj’s real name is Belaïd Bara and he has reestablished himself in Casablanca after twenty-five years spent in self-imposed exile to escape imprisonment for sex trafficking. This is a nod to the shady past and present involvement of the capital owners of Casablanca in the underworld economy. The idea of twenty-five years of exile is used by Derkaoui to collapse the past and the present and suggest continuity between the eras of Hassan II and Mohammed VI without risking censorship. Taking into consideration NUC’s politics of proximity, this view on the blurry border between legal and underground economies translates a mentally garbed attitude toward, or cognitive map of, neoliberalism in Casablanca and Morocco more widely. If we furthermore bear in mind the origins of Haj Soldi’s character in Haj Mustapha Tabite, we realise that Derkaoui is hinting that nothing has changed at the top of society. Tabite or Soldi, Hassan II or Mohammed VI, the problem lies quintessentially in a regime that produces political and economic monsters.

Another noteworthy social detective is Lahbib’s cousin, Adil Bilal, a philosophy student who abandons his PhD project due to the lack of job prospects. The simple storyline unveils major issues in Casablanca’s social relations. Adil is the common graduate-with-no-future type and thus represents the largest group of unemployed young people in Morocco:
This force appeared here long before showing its face next door in Tunisia, unleashing demonstrations that led to the fall of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January [2011]. In Morocco, only 13 per cent of all youths find their way to a university, compared to 31 per cent in Algeria and 34 per cent in Tunisia. The results, however, are little different—after graduation, no jobs. (Gozlan 2011: 107)

The unemployed university graduates’ hunger strikes, self-immolations and daily street protests, often brutally repressed by the police, have been a common sight in Morocco since 1991. Adil is a self-appointed Robin Hood in neoliberal Casablanca, stealing to help the poor and striving to lift his mother out of prostitution. His petty crimes and mobility around the city reveal more than do the movements of Commissioner Lahbib. Adil, Farida, Asma, Aziz and most characters hail from the precariat populating the medina. They are exploited by Haj Mokhtar Soldi, who has renounced his medina origins. Haj lives in a seafront Moorish palace on the outskirts of the city. He is a sterile and corrupt politician whose fortunes have survived the post-colonial period into the globalisation era. It transpires that Adil, Lahbib and many of the young medina characters are his children from a shady past. Derkaoui gives the film a melodramatic close. Haj is lured to and then shot dead in a country house in Ben Ahmed in the backcountry of Casablanca, from which the family hails. The ending suggests that things have to start from scratch despite the inevitably violent transition from the present to a postcolonial future that this entails. The equally melo-allegorical ending need not induce pathos even for mass domestic audiences due to the obvious clash between old and new forces in Morocco at the turn of the millennium.
Casablanca is the protagonist of *Love Affairs*. The city emerges as a modern system of capitalist relations regulated by power networks ranging from the most local (family problems) to the obviously global (airlines, commerce). For example, there is a landscape shot of Casablanca’s skyline at night dominated by Hassan II Mosque; whilst the film thus invokes the opening of *Casablanca* (1942), it immediately deconstructs that Orientalist image by not associating the mosque with any imagined Orient. Instead, the temple is incorporated within the film and conflicts among modern subjects in a modern city. Besides, the shot is probably taken from the Twin Towers in the city centre. Derkaoui mires his characters up to their necks in Casablanca’s modernity and everyday life. The sea, which is an open space in NUC, is shown only once and even then for no more than a few seconds at sunset, when Lahbib goes there in a moment of distress. *Love Affairs* is replete with wide shots and long takes designed to capture the minutiae and banality of everyday life in the city. After a brief introduction to the characters early in the film, a shot of City Hall and Palais de Justice with the iconic clock tower is inserted to put the film in context and invite reflections on the colonial origins of the present. The latter is characterised by rampant oppression and corruption. The multiple shots of Hassan II Mosque are sometimes a nod to the rise of conservative values but more often to the indifference of the characters to morality in everyday life. The latter is driven by the pressure of survival and ruthless competition for limited resources. This spatial atlas unveils a certain cognitive map of postcolonial subjectivities and their everyday production by ordinary Casablancans. This factor inscribes NUC as a cinema of popular resistance, one that is close to the people, hence its foregrounding of the tactics of people versus the strategies of power in everyday life.

Similarly to its spatial atlas, the soundtrack of the film is modern and alternates between universal and local music. The Euro-Amazigh song “Zaama Zaama” by Takfarinas is heard at many intervals. It inscribes the film in the same temporality as Europe where the world music
hit temporarily topped the charts in France. Additional icons of the present on the screen are policewomen and a famous painting by Farid Belkahia highlighting the changing landscape of Moroccan identity with the increasing recognition of its Amazigh and African identities. Moreover, the blasé attitude and indifferent comportment of urban types which Simmel identifies with urban life are everywhere in evidence in Derkaoui’s Casablanca. Against the Enlightenment project’s condemnation of the prosaic world of the masses, Walter Benjamin claims that “myriad passions, affects and epiphanies are as much a part of the ‘systematic continuum’ of human experience as our capacity for rational thought” (Gardiner 2006: 18).

Derkaoui signifies everyday Casablanca primarily through an affective register. Like *Casablanca by Night*, *Love Affairs* is rife with moments of high intensity—or *pregnant moments*, to use a Barthesian term (1974: 36). It is especially the downtrodden characters who navigate the affective cartographies of the metropolis, where a continuum of anger and discontent lies under the surface of everyday life. This anger is cumulative and has burst into open violence and confrontation with the holders of power on the NUC screen and in 2011 throughout North Africa, where structural adjustment policies engendered a globalisation with similar structures of domination and affects of resistance (Bayat 2010: 69).

The Casablancan night is framed in *Love Affairs* as the daylight city’s unconscious. This is both a simple and perceptive strategy of representation, especially given the film’s rarefied ethnography of the city’s class dynamics in their everyday enactments. For example, the same *commissariat* (police station) is used both in this film and in *Casablanca by Night*. Choosing the same location connotes not only the continuity of injustice but also the same system of repression. On the NUC screen, the police station inevitably evokes the Years of Lead (1956-1999). Repression lives on even if social attitudes to authority have evolved under Mohamed VI’s monarchy and in the aftermath of the Justice and Reconciliation Commission set up between 2004 and 2006 to investigate the previous regime’s human rights
abuses (Slyomovics 2005). Lagtaâ, Derkaoui and other filmmakers incorporate police stations and an atmosphere of fear and repression in their films to highlight the continuity between the last two reigns. Casablanca by night on the NUC screen captures these cycles of continuity and change in Moroccan society.

II. POPULAR VISIONS

The last section of this chapter will look at a slightly different kind of NUC film made by Moroccan cinema’s veteran generation. They are filmmakers who deploy melodrama not only to entertain a broad audience but also to raise awareness about social and political issues. Emerging around the same time as Lagtaâ’s *Love Affair*, the NUC films of Hakim Noury, Saâd Chraibi, Hassan Benjelloun, Ahmed Boulane, Kamal Kamal, Farida Benlyazid, Mohamed Asli are more direct in address without being didactic. They belong together with Lagtaâ’s sceptical films and address issues of the day such as corruption, elections, underage domestic workers and migration. Their plots are close to the civil society discourse that has flourished in neoliberal Morocco (Mernissi 1997). Unlike Lagtaâ and Derkaoui’s films, the films analysed in the remainder of this chapter are traversed by a positive discourse which is commonly revealed by their happy endings and ideological simplicity. Take, for example, Hassan Benjelloun’s *The Judgement of a Woman* (2000). Touhfa lives in a shantytown and makes a living as a cabaret dancer. She is separated from her abusive husband and later on even quits her ‘indecent’ job in order to keep her daughter under Muslim law. She has a relationship with a French photographer, Jacques, who unsuccessfully tries to smuggle her out of the country. She kills her husband in self-defence whilst trying to regain her daughter after the patriarchal civil law fails her. In Morocco, despite the juridical advancement of women’s rights in the 2004 *Moudawana* (family code), women remain subordinate to men in courts as well as in society. Nadia, a Franco-Maghrebi lawyer, arrives in Casablanca to
defend Touhfa. She is assisted by a local interpreter, Malika, who works in an association providing shelter for single mothers and orphans. Malika hails from a middle-class background. With Taoufik, her journalist husband, she is in the process of applying for immigration to Canada. True to this type of cinema, the film ends with Touhfa’s triumph over the law of the father. Touhfa, portrayed as an Everywoman, is released from prison. The film also restores the agency of women in a subtler way through their modern ideas and looks, at one point with a *Casablanca* poster in the background. This near final scene takes place in Café Casablanca, named after the cult film, where a middle-aged man looks askance at this female invasion of public space and, in particular, that most macho of Moroccan spaces, the café. The film’s melodramatic unrealism is in keeping with Benjelloun and other NUC filmmakers’ positive discourse about social change and the imminence of a better tomorrow. Malika decides to stay in Morocco even if her immigration application has been approved by the Canadian embassy. Her last words conclude the film and sum up its civil society message: “Our country needs us today more than ever before.”

Alongside civil society and cinema’s parallel evolution in post-1983 Morocco, changes in the audiovisual field propelled this new cinema of popular attractions. In brief, CCM pushed for audience appeal to support cinema and justify public funding despite the unpopularity of this cinema overseas and the dismissive reviews of film critics at home. Besides, since the early 2000s the second public TV channel 2M has emerged as a key film co-producer. Lastly, there is the professional truth that most filmmakers make a living from their trade today and own companies that produce both national and international films, television series and commercials. Ever since Hakim Noury’s release of *Between the Devil and the Blue Sea* in 1990 and his rise as the most prolific Moroccan filmmaker of that decade, there has been a steady growth of films about Casablanca that can be situated between the cheap popularity of tele-films and the semantically weightier works of Lagtaâ and Derkaoui.
The remainder of this chapter explores a selection of this NUC substrand’s films with an emphasis on how they complete and popularise issues already highlighted in the social atlas of Casablanca intricately woven by Lagtaa and Derkaoui.

2.1. All You Need Is Love

Born in Casablanca in 1952, Hakim Noury made his first steps in Moroccan cinema as an assistant director to Souheil Ben Barka in the 1970s. Noury has been based in Casablanca, where he has also been working as a senior officer in the seaport customs. After a series of shorts and documentaries, he released his debut feature Saai al-Barid ('The Postman') in 1980, the same year that the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) launched the Aid Funds scheme. Despite the film’s address to a broad audience, the lack of commercial distribution networks for national cinema at the time meant that the Casablanca-set film was not released widely. Noury would not make another film until 1990, when Bayna al-Mitraq was Sindan ('Between the Devil and the Blue Sea') was released. In 1993, his A-Tofula al-Mughtasaba ('Stolen Childhood') was released to some acclaim. Three other Noury films from the 1990s are Sariq al-Ahlam ('Dreams Thief'), Abbirou fi Samt ('A Simple News Event,' 1997) and Massir Imraa ('A Woman’s Fate,' 1998). In 2000, Noury made Fiha al-Meleha wa al-Sukar w Ma Bghatsh Tmout ('She Is Diabetic, Hypertensive and Still Refuses to Die’), a popular comedy both in cinemas and on national television. Noury made Qissat Hub ('A Love Story') in 2002. Released in 2005, his sequel to the 2000 comedy enjoyed enormous success. Local film critics accused Noury of making “a box-office cinema” to the detriment of artistically accomplished films (Carter 2009: 259-60). Noury’s last film to date, Nihayat al-Alam ('The End of the World'), came out in 2011.

Noury occupies a special place in the short history of NUC. Even if his output tends to place great emphasis on commercial success, its critical potential is abundant when the films
are seen against the backdrop of Casablanca’s neoliberal transformations. Existing in continuity with the social atlas foregrounded above through the films of Lagtaâ and Derkaoui, Noury’s equally popular and deceptively unsophisticated films provide an opportunity to examine the ordinary experience of postcolonial subjects under globalisation. In stark contrast to the Noury brothers’ formalist aesthetics of realism (see Chapter 5), Hakim Noury’s is essentially a thematic realism. *A Woman’s Fate*, bearing all the Noury father’s trademarks, draws us into the social world of Casablanca through cumulative shots and narrative sequences which capture the minutiae of everyday life in a society in transition. His style is *melorealistic* because it relies on psychological realism without innovation in the form of the melodrama. Shouldered by plain style and unadorned reporting of social situations, this melorealism should be taken seriously because it captures the cognitive maps of urban space and subjectivity through an ethnographic attention to detail that bears witness to a changing city and society.

I begin this study of NUC’s most popular director with *A Woman’s Fate* (2002). The first shot is of a woman walking in kitten heels. She is rushing down in a corridor with the folders in her hands twice falling to the ground. When the next shot shows her walking out of a glossy highrise building, the viewer gets a glimpse of the identity of the modern-looking woman. The smart dress and shiny steel-and-glass building in the almost empty street stand out. She is a *light body* in urban space. As she is about to open the car, she notices a flat tire. A young passerby, whose attire and discourse betray a working-class background, sarcastically suggests that she call the fire brigade because a woman is incapable of fixing a flat tire on her own. A smartly dressed man walks up to her from his car. He offers to repair the tire. After the job is done, he introduces himself as Hamid and asks for her name, which she says is *Mademoiselle* Saida Rachidi (Ms Rachidi). Their conversation is a mixture of French and Darija, a linguistic diglossia characteristic of the professional class and educated
Moroccans. They arrange to meet again. The next scene shows Ms Rachdi in a meeting with her colleagues. As the company’s human resources manager, she champions the introduction of a seminar on HR management. Her aim is to increase the staff’s productivity. This simple plot line gets to the heart of neoliberalism’s logic of subjectivity defined by Michel Foucault as *entrepreneurial* (2008: 226). In Ms Rachidi’s view, the company employee is a *homo economicus* in need of continuous training, a process that can happen only through his or her will to improve their performance and thereby increase revenue margins for the corporation. Whether a lay citizen or an employee, the human subject is a project in itself by itself for the neoliberal machine to function and prosper. As Foucault writes, “Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” (2008: 226). Entrepreneurialism as an abstraction of the market is the model for social relations in neoliberal society.

The film’s narrative discourse is focussed on women’s rights rather than any conscious attempt to deconstruct neoliberal ideology. However, in *A Woman’s Fate* as a realist NUC film, the present of Casablanca and its social tapestry support my analysis within the framework of a postcolonial critique of globalisation’s economic reason. As Chapter 1 has discussed, globalisation through market reforms introduced and popularised neoliberal values in Morocco. They have become a major player in the production of postcolonial subjectivity. On a more global level, neoliberalism “has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey 2007: 3). What is interesting in Noury’s social drama is how the values of the neoliberal project are embodied by a woman whose story showcases the contradictions and embodied consequences of being a *homo economicus*. Grounded in market utopianism, the neoliberal subject is an impossible enterprise. After a few dates, marriage and a honeymoon in the idyllic resort town of Ifrane, Saida and Hamid’s happiness dissipates. The flawless nuclear family begins to crack under the weight of neoliberal
rationality’s subsumption of the formerly extra-economic private domain to the entrepreneurialism of *homo economicus*. Neoliberalism is “a political rationality that tries to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for ‘personal responsibility’ and ‘self-care’” (Lemke 2001: 203). Hamid punishes Saida for refusing him her inheritance money to realise his dream as an entrepreneur, that is, as the perfect neoliberal man. Hamid descends into alcoholism and is given to frequent bouts of boorish and bullying behaviour. He marshals a patriarchal arsenal against his wife, who is portrayed as an innocent model of modern womanhood. For example, Hamid invites his mother and sister to live in and effectively occupy his marital house in the suburbs. When Saida, to whom he denies the right to divorce consonant with Moroccan family law at the time, asks him to order them to leave, he wryly answers: “I’m not a cursed son to throw out my mother and sister.” Neoliberalism and patriarchy become one regime of repression that stalls progress and freedom in the name of both modernity and tradition.

Despite living under the weight of a patriarchy in league with the market values of profit and self-interest, Saida fails to make the link between her plight and that of other women (for example, a freshly divorced woman and her wailing mother in front of Casablanca’s court house). Class, it seems, is too high a wall for subordinated women to show mutual solidarity. Saida is shown in another managerial meeting, now stammering and unable to finish her presentation. Even then her discourse is still the same: the need for her company to reinforce profitability and competitiveness through human resources investment. Saida is both the culprit and victim of neoliberal violence. Her failure to make the link between her personal plight and the *homo economicus* lies behind her saga (as illustrated by Hamid’s desire to become an entrepreneur). Her fate is also that of her city and society transformed by globalisation. Her subjectivity, like her society’s, is caught between the
extreme individualism required of the model citizen and the social and class violence attendant upon it. Saida upholds neoliberalism at work and in her private life (at one point she says: “No one can help me. I have to rely on myself alone”—thus dismissing any notion of solidarity as collective resistance to oppression), and resists patriarchy in a futile exercise which only accelerates the spectacular demise of Casablanca’s neoliberal Antigone (Fig. 15). When the situation worsens, she surrenders to one of the tenets of any patriarchal system: superstition. She takes the advice of a colleague and goes to see a *fqih* in the medina. French gradually gives way to the less secular tongue, Darija, as Saida gives in to the pull of tradition and, spatially, wades into the world of the poor quarters of Casablanca. The black magic potion, which the *fqih* advises her to put in Hamid’s favourite drink (whiskey), comes to nought. From the ideal successful type of neoliberal society, Saida turns into a pathological case of the entrepreneurial self she ardently advocates throughout the film until her demise in its real contradictions.

*Figure 15. Saida: a lonely woman*
A Woman’s Fate’s deconstruction of the neoliberal subject model is the kernel of its cognitive mapping of Casablanca and Moroccan society. Neoliberal rationality has altered the socioeconomic and identitarian maps of postcolonial society since the 1980s. Without neglecting the intertwined diachronic forces of colonialism and neoliberalism, it is the latter which has become the major force against which postcolonial subjectivities are produced and consumed in Morocco today. Market reforms engendered NUC, which has in turn become its foremost reflection and creative interrogator alike. Taking her lead from Foucault’s Collège de France lectures (1973-1983), Wendy Brown writes:

Neo-liberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neo-liberalism carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player. (2003: n.p.)

The story of Saida, Casablanca and Morocco on the NUC screen illustrate how neoliberalism has become the predominant rationality behind Moroccan postcolonial subjectivity. Saida is a good example of the wilful neoliberal subject in post-1983 Morocco. A Woman’s Fate provides a perfect case of the constitution and inherent contradictions of this subjectivity.

A Love Story (2002) is Noury’s eighth feature film and continues his own brand of social realism lite. Its story is both simple and classically constructed. It contains the
conventional spices of a delightful film that makes a few points and draws a social atlas of Casablanca from an NUC perspective. Aziz is a middle-class professional. As in many NUC films, Younes Megri plays the role of the last civilised man in Casablanca: well-educated, forty-something, professionally successful, arty, single and principled. He meets Wafa, a beautiful twenty-something girl in a McDonald’s restaurant. This sets on course a questioning of mores and traditions in the light of civil society discourse. Casablanca is lightly screened to show its spatial and class diversity and the unhappiness of some versus the delight of a few. The sea is the measure of NUC films; the more intensive the affective experience of characters, the less we see the sea. If glimpsed at all, it is often to suggest either the impossible dream of escape or solitary contemplations of suicide (by Wafa, for example). The sea is a rare sight on the NUC screen. There are many concrete and aesthetic reasons for this eccentric situation in a city built on the Atlantic ocean. Prost, as we saw in Chapter 1, designed the city around the seaport. The latter is surrounded by a wall blocking all view of the sea from downtown Casablanca, the busiest part of the city and the setting for most NUC films. A second reason why the sea is almost absent from this cinema is at the heart of NUC’s aesthetic identity: a cinema of ordinary people struggling against regimes of economic and social oppression, hence the absence of the sea associated with freedom and an open spatiality. It is often the case that freedom and agony are encoded in the same sea view scenes. Take Lagtaâ’s Love Affair, for example: it opens by the sea away from the medina with whose arcades and sparsely lit scenes the bright initial waterfront scene is contrasted. After becoming good friends with the photography student, Salwa is seen swimming and posing for photos on the beach in an expression of liberty, which is tied to technology and exposure.

In A Love Story, Noury puts the characters on the beach early on in a long sequence and suggests that love is all they need to be blissfully happy. However, he soon mires them back
in Casablanca’s everyday life. Noury’s cognitive mapping of his native city chronicles the everyday reality of the upper, middle and working classes under globalisation. The film is a love story that marshals melodramatic motifs to denounce the tyranny of money over human relations. Aziz is the humane face of Casablanca versus the suburban barons that Wafa hangs out with to make money and feed her working-class family. The fatherless family lives in a downtown flat, a gift from Si Issam in return for Wafa’s charms and, previously, her mother’s. They moved in from the medina. Besides the liberal use of the sea, Noury dilutes another spatial metaphor of NUC: the hinterland. Aziz and Wafa take the road to the Atlas mountains. The Casablancans feast their eyes on the sights of an unknown country. They stop at restaurants and hotels and their gaze is no deeper than that of the casual tourist. What John Urry (2002: 3) calls “the tourist gaze” is the main prism through which the interior and south have been sold to Moroccans and international tourists alike. The Atlas mountains and the desert beyond are placed on another temporality, outside the present tense of urban Morocco. Unlike Lagtaâ’s characters, Noury’s float on the surface of things. However, they do not depart from the social realism of Lagtaâ and Derkaoui. Noury only dilutes it for a broader audience, on the one hand, and self-censors himself to avoid political or funding repercussions, on the other. Like Saida and Hamid in A Woman’s Fate, Wafa and Aziz course through the Atlas mountains stopping in places recognisable to the touristic eye. An iconic place is the ruins of the Roman city of Volubilis in the Middle Atlas. They go around the ancient arcades and artwork listening to the story of Wafa, Casablanca’s Scheherazade, and her endless nights with the neoliberal masters. Volubilis provides respite away from the madding crowds in the metropolis. She relates the rise of her highborn family, its fall due to the father’s pathological gambling and death, their return to the medina, the mother’s self-prostitution to feed her children, her meeting with the rich Si Issam, and Wafa’s ultimate servitude to his sexual desires. The film crosscuts between the Volubilis ruins and Wafa’s
tale in Casablanca. The narration in the quiet Atlas mountains illuminates the thick atlas of neoliberal Casablanca.

They return to Casablanca armed with Aziz’s promise to rescue the damsel in distress from bondage to Si Issam and his mighty friends. The film draws attention to the rising phenomenon of sex trade in Casablanca and Morocco. The phenomenon is ascribed to poverty among the working- and under-classes, from which the girls hail. As sociological studies of prostitution in the city demonstrate, the call girls often drop out of school or combine both university studies and prostitution to survive (Benito 2008). Whereas *Casablanca by Night* sheds light on international sex tourism, *Love Story* dissects its local causes and consequences. Noury’s politics is represented by Aziz’s humanism and a civil society sensibility which seeks to uproot capitalised sex trade. There is a social atlas underlying all this: Wafa represents the working-class Medina masses exploited by Si Issam’s upperclass; the vanishing middle-class subject, represented by the director’s point-of-view character Aziz, is helpless even if hopeful that things will eventually change for the better.

The problem with the civil society discourse is that it is premised on the feasibility of taming the screw of capitalism. This film and NUC at large are proof of the contrary. Learning of Wafa’s plan with Aziz, Si Issam swears to bulldoze what he calls “that ignoble civil servant.” Aziz is immediately transferred to Oujda, a northeastern city hundreds of miles away. Because she is found plotting to leave with him before the expiry of the twenty-hour ultimatum he is given to leave Casablanca, Wafa is kidnapped by Si Issam. When she finally escapes her palatial prison, the viewer panoramically glimpses the suburbs against the backdrop of the medina and its poor folks. Noury gives the film a melodramatic ending. After going to his flat and finding out that Aziz has left a few minutes before, Wafa goes to the beach to grieve and weigh her options. He does likewise. They meet and the film ends with a template of loss and hope by the sea. Noury indulges in pathos to achieve his dramatic
effects. This melodramatic closing is partly a confirmation of the drama of urban life and partly a concession to make the film culturally legible to a broad audience accustomed to commercial cinema. In both cases, the ending remains wide open for new developments in the lives of the characters and Casablanca.

2.2 Neoliberal Symphony

My arguments about Noury’s cinema above also apply to Saâd Chraïbi, Hassan Benjelloun, Ahmed Boulane, Mohamed Asli, and Kamal Kamal, to cite but four other industry auteurs of NUC’s first strand. Like the trailblazing Noury, these popular filmmakers were born in the mid-20th century—1948, 1950, 1956, 1957 and 1961, respectively. They have lived in Casablanca and made influential films in the new century about the social and political issues faced by the city’s residents in their everyday life. Take Kamal Kamal, who has made two feature films to date. Both works bear the defining aesthetic and industrial trademarks of NUC’s popular strand. The opening credits of *The Moroccan Symphony* (2005) kick in as though in a television film announcing the feature’s reliance or rather, as we will see shortly, risqué dependence on melodramatic codes. The opening scenes and soundtrack also betray a Bollywoodian influence in dramatic effect, aura and technique. Lastly, there is an initial echo of the films of Youssef Chahine, whose *Cairo Station* is an undertext for *Symphony* even if the latter lacks Chahine’s sure eye and craftsmanship. Kamal’s film, for which he is also the scriptwriter, editor, and music director, is neorealist in theme yet inconsistent in stylistic terms. By simplifying the codes of filmic presentation, Kamal is hoping to lure the broad audience base of television, for which he has worked extensively. *Symphony* reached the target audience whilst creating some idiosyncratic complications due to its representation of postcolonial subjectivities in neoliberal space. For example, the characters are schmoozers, made to talk a lot even where silence or visual stylistics could have been more effective. In
consequence, the film is mixed bag of strengths and weaknesses. This may be partly explained by Kamal’s hybrid artistic background as much as by his television career.

Although he trained in European film schools like most NUC directors, Kamal is the Oriental figurehead of Moroccan cinema given his inscription of cinematic style within the Middle Eastern, especially Egyptian, canon. Resorting to a marketing strategy introduced by Abdellah Mesbahi in the 1970s (see Chapter 2), Kamal shot his debut film Taif Nizar (Nizar’s Spectrum, 2002) in Modern Standard Arabic to attract audiences in Egypt and the Middle East. Not only did he fail in the risky venture, but he also condemned the Casablanca-set film to instant oblivion in Morocco and jeopardised its realist claims even if though addresses the same subject matter as the other popular films of NUC. However, the inherent social vision of Kamal’s films makes him a popular filmmaker of NUC’s first strand. Other elements which inscribe him within this stream is the unabashed deployment of melodrama and prioritisation of broad audience appeal (sometimes at the expense of film form as in the language choice of Nizar’s Spectrum or the glib incorporation of a princess at Symphony’s end, thus undermining the film’s cognitive atlas of neoliberal Casablanca). A combination of melodramatic codes and television address makes Symphony seem weightless at first glance. However, its setting in a junkyard and interrogation of globalisation through music and heterotopia, make it an important text of NUC. I shall limit my analysis here to the film’s social atlas of the metropolis and configuration of solidarity among the downtrodden of society. Casablanca comes across in Symphony as a ruthless city that excludes people unwilling or unable to accept their assigned roles in its social machine. With a professional musician (Younes Megri) in the lead role of Hamid, the film homes in on a group of male and female outcasts squatting in a railway junkyard next to the seaport. Hamid is a Moroccan ex-freedom fighter in Lebanon during the Israeli occupation of 1982 and Kafi a former music teacher in Casablanca; other squatters include Habiba (a prostitute), Hassan (a mute youth),
Moustafa (a thief), and a few other marginalised types. Hamid has a dream to lift the group out of poverty and self-denigration: to form a symphony orchestra and perform at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Kamal’s double training in filmmaking and classical music makes his film unique within NUC thanks to its aural richness. It amounts to a musical mapping of a neoliberal city’s spatial and temporal realities.

Hamid and his friends inhabit what Foucault calls heterotopia or an ‘other space’ that is both invisible in Casablanca whilst being an integral part of it because marginality and Otherness are the product of the power relations which regulate the wider society:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986: 24)

Taking one example of heterotopia, he continues: “The cemetery is certainly a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces. It is a space that is however connected with all the sites of the city, state or society or village” (Foucault 1986: 25). The junkyard in Symphony fits this Foucauldian definition of the cemetery as a heterotopic space. Music is the aural and affective bridge between mainstream Casablanca and its junkyard or social cemetery. The junkyard with gigantic but now abandoned machinery is an other space of precarity, dreams and deconstructions of neoliberal values. The abandoned Fordist machinery reflects the deindustrialisation of Casablanca and the transformation of the abandoned working classes
into an underclass vulnerable to radical conservative ideologies like Salafism and other apocalyptic visions of redemption. Kamal’s heterotopian vision is born out of the disintegration of community and the social contract in Casablanca and Morocco. However, the film is built on the premise that music can transcend marginality and social divisions. Not only can music be a subaltern arm against oppression but also an inclusive cross-class project of reinventing the nation: Kafi convinces Rebeka, one of his former upperclass Moroccan-Jewish students, to participate in the symphony orchestra instead of migrating to Canada. Music is here a social project to reinvent a city and Tamghrabit (Moroccan national identity) from the junkyard up rather than top down from the nearby “post-public places,” to use Martin J. Murray’s term (2004: 1), represented by office towers of real estate agents and other power holders in the city.

However, the pursuit of hope through music and Kamal’s overall social atlas of Casablanca are traversed by class struggle. For example, there is an acrimonious dispute over Rebeka’s habit of addressing the junkyarders in French, an upper-class idiom, to which they strike back by speaking only in Darija, the everyday street vernacular. The conflict also surfaces when the members of the symphony orchestra are unable to afford the market price of an accordion; the following exchange about the instrument sees the shabbily clad musicians judging robbery legitimate to procure one. Even if Kafi selflessly invests his small savings in buying tuxedos for the whole orchestra, the impoverished characters have joined the symphony orchestra simply because they see it as a chance to go to London and overstay their visas; indeed, they break ranks with the symphony project after a letter of rejection arrives from London. A further illustration of how Casablanca’s physical and symbolic atlas is imbued with class conflict occurs when the orchestra are invited by an army general to entertain his guests; the orchestra drive their otherworldly pickup from the junkyard to the upscale neighbourhood and play for the party. A melee breaks out when Hassan finds the
sight of well-fed women in light dresses irresistible. The orchestra are evicted from the neoliberal paradise and their chances of gaining sponsorship from the army’s social services charity evaporate. A working-class solidarity card gives two members of the symphony orchestra access to a genteel nightclub, where Habiba doubles as a dancer. They take her back to the junkyard at knifepoint to keep the customers away from her body. The film also illustrates the spatial division of social capital further when the adrenaline rush that the squatters experience in the nightclub evaporates as one of them is shown enjoying his drink and a live popular band singing an Oum Kalthoum classic in a working-class pub.

Despite the sometimes unsubtle melodramatism of the plot, the junkyard dwellers come across as ordinary people rather than heroes. Pretty Ahlam ends up in the junkyard because Hamid had inadvertently caused her mother to die of a heart attack. Like everyone else in the junkyard, Hamid is composing music for the symphony in a quest for redemption for his crime as well as the bloodshed he witnessed in Lebanon’s civil war (1975-1990), where he lost a hand as a Moroccan deserter-cum-freedom fighter. The Lebanese battleground in the film-within-a-film is not dissimilar to the junkyard in Casablanca: Is this a condemnation of freedom fighting or rather a condemnation of neoliberal precarity or a salute to the courage of Hamid still at war against injustice from one battleground to another even with a hand less? Whilst there are no definitive answers to these three questions, it seems that the first interpretation is buoyed up by Hamid’s own negative pacifism in condemning as futile all resistance to oppression.

Mr Stevens from the Royal Albert Hall visits the junkyard community; they perform in front of him, but the saxophonist’s dental affliction at a crucial moment crushes their Albertopolitan dream. However, Hamid convinces the orchestra members to continue the project because, as he says: “You are the symphony.” Music is the only voice they have in an alien city and menacing world. Hamid goes back to the music shop and asks the owner to
loan them an accordion for the public performance of the symphony. The film’s climactic moment begins when Hamid stabs the owner of the shop because he refuses to loan him the instrument. On his way back to the junkyard, he has a tragic motorbike accident but still manages to make it back on time. The makeshift openair stage is built to resemble the concert stage of Albert Hall in London. Everyone is tense and Hamid lies dying in the junkyard. A princess suddenly arrives in an extravagant parade of limousines escorted by sirening police motorbikes; a red carpet is rolled out for her and the royal guard give their salute. The princess is accompanied by dozens of dignitaries. Hamid lies dying backstage when the angel of death appears; in an example of extreme heterotopia, it dances to the rhythms of the symphony before taking his soul. The symphony orchestra performance is applauded and Hamid dies peacefully.

The patriotic naivety behind the introduction of the princess in Symphony’s climax is telling. Kamal’s narrative choice may be interpreted as compensation for the refusal of the Royal Albert Hall to hear the unwashed Casablancans’ symphony or, underneath the allegorical terms, to recognise the social consequences of market reforms imposed by the neocolonial West on the Global South since the 1970s. Let us recall how Hamid lectures the underclass musicians that they are the symphony after Albert Hall’s rejection. As the film’s title suggests, the symphony is allegorically a nationalist project and the only road out of neoliberal repression. However, Kamal’s patriotism inevitably plays into the aforementioned myth of the Moroccan monarchy’s commitment to the poor (see Chapter 1). Filmmakers do not the best political pundits make. The film’s nationalism, in Jameson’s terms, is an “imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (1981: 77). The counterproductive royalism makes Symphony an INDH film, one in line with the discourse of neo-developmentalist in Morocco in the new century. In neoliberal discourse, ordinary people are poor because they have brought it on themselves. To be good citizens, they should be working hard (even if jobs
are scarce and underpaid where available) and refrain from questioning or rising against social and political authority. Unlike Lagtaâ’s *Face to Face*, which also breaches civil society in Mohammed VI’s Morocco, *Symphony* endorses the hegemony of globalisation in the name of a universal love that transcends class and socioeconomic precarity. Despite the film’s broadly consistent subaltern point of view before the concert, its utopian ending suggests that change can come only from above. This imaginary resolution undermines the film’s postcolonial project because it fails to map out a credible route of meaningful emancipation.

Notwithstanding its weak ending, *Symphony* largely weaves a probing social atlas and cognitive map of Casablanca and a globalising world from below, that is, from the standpoint of downtrodden Casablancans. There is a latent narrative of class solidarity that inscribes itself in neoliberal space. Like the other NUC films analysed in this chapter, *Symphony* is populated by social detectives who proffer a social atlas of the city, a cognitive map of the everyday production of postcolonial subjectivities and a critique of globalisation from below. In addition, the junkyarders’ physical and imaginary journeys in Casablanca as social detectives reveal the profusion of parallel social worlds. The dream of performing in the Royal Albert Hall is an allegory of the desperation and stalled mobility of the social junkyards, which have proliferated in most countries of the Global South. The translocal dream is also a sublimation of precarious reality through art. This original social atlas is funnelled through the melodramatic register and television address, which made the film all the more influential in reaching large audiences in Morocco and beyond through festivals and digital distribution.

### 2.3 Rough Destinies

Mohamed Asli’s widely popular *In Casablanca, Angels Don’t Fly* (2004) chronicles in an eclectically neorealist style the dreams and disillusionment of three waiters in an inhospitable
The angels in question are Saïd, Othman and Ismaïl. They have come to Casablanca to flee poverty in the countryside. Said dreams of earning enough to feed his family in the Atlas mountains and afford the education of his children; Othman aspires to rejoin his horse, to which he sends bags of leftover bread and barley from Casablanca by coach; Ismail is fixated on an expensive pair of sports shoes in a highstreet shop window. Their dreams evaporate under the weight of reality. Reflecting his training and professional experience in Italy, Asli shoots Casablanca through a Neorealist lens that poetically captures the poetry of everyday life, in addition to the spatial and social segregation in the city. Long shots and first-time characters are utilised to convey the ordinariness of hardship to the viewers. He shoots the Atlas mountains and a poor Amazigh community through a Neorealist penchant for poetry and allegory reminiscent of Yilmaz Güney’s filming of Kurdish villages in Yol (1982). The affective power of Asli’s film shook audiences in Morocco and at international festivals (for example, in 2004 at Cannes and Carthage, where it won the Golden Tanit for best film). Like other NUC films about social issues, the film’s social atlas of Casablanca works as a cognitive map that captures the dreams and aspirations of ordinary people. These dreams and aspirations are the stock of postcolonial subjectivity in everyday life.

Asli’s second feature film, Rough Hands (2011), is also set in Casablanca and continues the first-strand NUC’s realist politics of the social atlas as a cognitive map of postcolonial subjectivities in urban space. Its noteworthy addition lies in bringing to light the transnational dimension of the crisis of Moroccan neoliberalism through the most predominant theme in national cinema over the last decade: migration to the North. If Derkaoui broaches sex tourism in Casablanca by Night and Noury tackles sexual servitude in A Love Story, Asli questions Morocco’s neocolonial subordination to Europe, which has further underdeveloped the country by mercantilising its agriculture and forcing entire populations into urban

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22 The film was seen by 300,000 viewers in the cinemas in the first two weeks alone (Daïf 2005: 190).
shantytowns or precarious labour in Spain’s EU-subsidised farms (Sater 2010: 134). Following in the footsteps of other NUC directors, and before them the Italian Neorealists, Asli questions the world order from the concrete landscape of power relations in everyday urban space (Fig. 16).

![Figure 16. Zakia and other poor women queuing for seasonal Schengen visas in Rough Hands](image)

_Zakia in Rough Hands_ is a schoolteacher in one of the city’s popular neighbourhoods. Living with her mother and unable to achieve a decent living standard with her meager income, she decides to join her fiancé in southern Spain, where he works as an agricultural labourer. She has to apply for a visa from the Spanish general consulate in Casablanca. Zakia finds herself queuing for the whole night with hundreds of women applying for temporary visas as seasonal workers. She is told that she cannot obtain one unless she has rough hands,
a sign of her lower-class standing and ability to perform manual labour. Even after she
roughens her hands by hennaing them with cement, she is unable to get the coveted visa
because her feet are found to be soft. This satire of imperialism and the irony of the film in
general are a clear critique of globalisation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how a set of films representative of NUC’s two-pronged first
strand have represented Casablanca since the early 1990s. What I have called the Lodz school
is represented by Lagtaâ and Derkaoui, who have filmed neoliberal space through a sombre
poetics of the real which relies on a social atlas and cognitive mapping of everyday
postcolonial subjectivities. Their maps are rooted in a social realism strewn with
melodramatic motifs to reach out to a wider audience yet without sacrificing the aesthetic
worth and intellectual weight of their films. The analysis of Casablanca’s social atlas
provides insights into the production of postcolonial Moroccan subjectivities in everyday life.
Lagtaâ and Derkaoui build on their ethnographically grounded knowledge of their native
city’s built and social environments to deliver in-depth portraits of Morocco’s largest city
and, by extension, an entire society in transition under contingent dynamics of globalisation
and political change. Lagtaâ’s films from the groundbreaking Love Affair (1991) to Yasmine
and Men (2007) have chronicled the transformations of a city and country over the last
decades. His training in communist Poland and aesthetic debt to the socialist cinemas of the
erstwhile Eastern Bloc have left their indelible imprint on Moroccan cinema and its
representations of Casablanca. Derkaoui trained at the same school and his forays into NUC
after three decades of experimental filmmaking have marked this cinema’s representation of
everyday Casablanca as the cognitive map of a whole nation. As we have seen, Casablanca
by Night and The Love Affairs of Haj Mokhtar Soldi have screened the nighttime city as the
unconscious mirror of its invisible daytime regimes of oppression and collective structures of feeling.

In their turn, first-strand NUC’s popular directors—like Noury, Benjelloun, Kamal and Asli—have not shied away from seeking mass audience appeal through overt melodramatic strategies of cinematic representation. The critical worth of their commercial films lies in their attachment to the everyday life of ordinary people and charting of the evolution of civil society in Morocco in general and Casablanca in particular. They provide insights into the cognitive maps of both ordinary people and semi-official sociopolitical discourse in an urban and national time-space being transformed by the forces of global capitalism. The most prolific of these filmmakers to date is Hakim Noury, who has probed the everyday concerns and contradictions of life among Casablanca’s middle and lower classes. His films map out a changing society where mores and family ties have undergone rapid transformation. Noury projects a civil-society point of view through his educated and principled good characters versus the wealthy evil guys. The simple plots and unpretentious technique of his films betray a critical portrait of the city and Moroccan society with a broad appeal to large audiences brought up on mass-market cinematic tastes. It is this audience niche that Benjelloun also targets through his accessibly constructed films, which tap into common human feelings to project the suffering of ordinary Casablanca’s, particular vulnerable women. Kamal and Asli are two other filmmakers in this category analysed in this chapter. The brief examination of their films is justified by a focus on their additions to the social atlas of Casablanca on the NUC screen already discussed through Lagtaâ and Derkaoui. Kamal deploys original music as a driving force in The Moroccan Symphony’s narrative construction with implications for its projection and production of postcolonial subjectivities. Finally, Asli, adapts Italian Neorealism to screen hitherto unfilmed or taboo topics such as Amazigh identity and the urban-rural divide in an unevenly developing country. His critical portrait of 21st-century
Casablanca, where everyday life and social relations are increasingly caught in the transnational networks of global circulation, foreground the subjective and affective formations of Moroccan identity. In the end, both trends within NUC’s first strand converge in painting a realist portrait of Casablanca through the social atlas and cognitive maps of everyday life under globalisation.
CHAPTER 4

Fear and Loathing in Casablanca: Youth, Marginality and Postcolonial Agency

The film directors comprising NUC’s second strand—in particular, Nabil Ayouch, Laila Marrakchi and Noureddine Lakhmari—are probably the most popular Moroccan filmmakers abroad. As Chapter 2 has discussed, their films have consistently attracted the attention of international festivals owing to the transnational aesthetic of their onscreen translations of Morocco. There is another pivotal factor behind this international visibility, which fell beyond the scope of Chapter 2. As this chapter will discuss, these directors are without exception drawn to filming children and young people on the margins of Moroccan society under globalisation. Their defining interest in Casablanca’s social margins stems partially from their diasporic backgrounds. These cineastes were born or raised overseas (often both) by Moroccan and mixed parents, and upon their return to Morocco or through frequent visits (as is often the case), they trained their cameras on taboo themes and previously unscreened arenas of life in the Moroccan city and countryside alike. A transnational discourse of humanism which marries the denunciation of human injustice to faith in better times runs through their films reflecting both the directors’ accented perceptions of Morocco as semi-diasporic filmmakers and audience expectations at home, at international festivals and among the postcolonial diaspora in the global North, where over 3 million Moroccans live. Rather than acting merely as a predominant thematic, marginality assumes metaphorical connotations in their screen fictions. Since this aesthetic cuts to the heart of NUC as a whole,

23 The term ‘accented’ is borrowed from Hamid Naficy’s seminal study Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking (2001). The filmmakers of NUC’s second strand are not strictly diasporic or exiled, but their films bear some marks of accented cinema. Laila Marrakchi’s Marock, for example, was made on a relatively big budget and does not neatly belong within the category of accented cinema that Naficy identifies with the work of exilic and diasporic filmmakers.
the present chapter is devoted to the representation of neoliberal Casablanca from the standpoint of its material and discursive margins, particularly its youth population. Filming the fringes of society is not merely an aesthetic strategy of deconstructing the master narratives of globalisation but also an articulation of the evolution, inherent contradictions and emergent spaces of hope for postcolonial subjectivity in everyday life.

Chapter 3 has explored how under market reforms the class divide in Casablanca has intensified and engendered the divided city as the spatial paradigm of actually existing globalisation. This chapter will probe further NUC’s production of postcolonial subjectivity through a key site of its meaning-making: marginality, its attendant forms of violence, and the emergent forms of popular resistance in Casablanca on screen. This critical task will be carried out through a focus on young people as the social group around which is woven this subaltern poetics. The previous chapter closely examined the representation of Moroccan youth in the films of veteran NUC directors. The conclusions reached therein provide a convenient platform from which to launch this chapter, for it is inconceivable to appreciate the nuanced heterogeneity of youth’s images on the NUC screen without comprehending certain dominant tropes in the representation of this foremost demographic group. Generational differences, the rapidly changing landscape of Casablanca under globalisation and their combined impact on the demographics of Morocco have produced a certain conception of youth in Moroccan society and cinema. This image varies in nuance and audience impact across NUC’s three strands with all their generational and stylistic variations. Take, for example, the film which engendered NUC as a popular and dynamic film movement. *A Love Affair in Casablanca* is a portrait of youth by a middle-aged filmmaker. Lagtaâ was forty-three years old when the film opened in cinemas across Morocco and thrilled audiences around the Maghreb (Derkaoui qtd. in Carter 2009: 196-97). Although the pioneer of NUC was by no means a *postcolonial auteur* in the avant-garde
traditions of the 1970s and 1980s, his projection of the social problems of a youthful society is that of a public intellectual keen to frame young people through an older generation’s lens. This should in no way lessen the value of Lagtaâ’s film and the dozens more made in its image about Casablanca and Moroccan youth under globalisation. However, because the director’s age and convictions shape the final product and its reception, it is instructive to distinguish between the representations of urban youth borne by the films of middle-aged directors like Lagtaâ, on the one hand, and the youth cinema born in the new century, on the other. Having examined youth’s representation in NUC’s first-strand films in Chapter 3, Chapters 4 and 5 will probe how they are portrayed across the remaining strands. This comparative methodology is essential for a critical appreciation of the nuanced diversity within this cinema’s realist modes of representing youth, on the one hand, and an account of their implications for postcolonial subjectivity production on screen, on the other.

Although NUC’s three strands converge in painting a realist portrait of Moroccan youth under globalisation, their portrayals vary and range from the broadly naturalistic to the most experimental. As Chapter 2 illustrates, different contexts of production (such as the filmmaker’s training, style and social background) and reception (both how each film implicitly constructs its own audience and how it has actually been received) leave their mark on youth’s on-screen representations. In a nutshell, young people in the first strand are framed through the gaze of their fathers’s generation, who often see them as a lost generation in need of existential parameters and reincorporation into mainstream society; in second-strand NUC, this image is thrown into question by filmmakers keen to represent youth as victims of social inequalities and late capitalism’s political economy of subjectivity; however, it is only in the third strand of NUC that youth attain auto-ethnographic representation and a greater measure of postcolonial agency through a variety of filmic strategies such as

24 Morocco’s population stood at 33 millions in 2013 with a median age of 27.3 years. 58 per cent of Moroccans lived in cities.
minimalist mise en scène and subcultural aesthetics (see Chapter 5). Whilst there is an obvious generational element behind the diverse images of youth across NUC, another crucial factor behind this heterogeneity within the same realist register of representation is, I argue, a symptom of the accumulative globalisation of Moroccan society, particularly its young majority, since the 1990s and the looming large of global capital’s social crisis.

This chapter will also explore the cinematic articulations of the spatial fragmentation of Casablanca. We will see how spatial splintering is projected as a multiplicity of city spaces of disidentification and social marginalisation. Youth are caught in a splintering city where the civic functions of public space have been eroded by rising social inequalities and their accumulative violence. The public space of Casablanca on the NUC screen projects the everyday struggles for survival of urban subjects under the evolving ecology of globalisation. To draw a comprehensive picture of this cinematic and urban world, I will analyse films set in affluent suburbs, shantytowns, downtown areas and other spaces which encapsulate the historical and spatial diversity of Casablanca. The physical fragmentation of the city is probed by the filmmakers through an aesthetics of violence, which translates both marginalised socialities and new potentialities for historical change. All four representative NUC films analysed in this chapter offer vivid tableaus of Casablancan youth’s everyday lives. I will start this film analysis with Laila Marrakchi’s Marock (2005). On first appearance, it is a film exclusively about privileged youth living in the cloistered world of Casablanca’s affluent suburbia. However, if we read it contrapuntally searching for “those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (Said 1993: 51), Marock turns out to be a much more complex film. It is haunted by the filmically excluded and socially invisible world of Casablanca’s subalterns, who ultimately take their revenge on Marrakchi’s postcolonial project from above.
1. Upper-class Youth and the Spectre of Radical Islam

Like the majority of her second-strand NUC confrères, Laila Marrakchi is a filmmaker shuttling between Morocco and Europe (France). Her films’ hybrid aesthetics and ideological stakes are accordingly shaped by the transnational circulation of ideas and film funding sources. Her debut feature film Marock was the most popular release in Morocco in 2006. It made front-page headlines for months following its screening in the National Film Festival in 2005. Based on an episode in the director’s life, Marock is a semi-autobiographical fiction of youth experience in Casablanca upper-class milieus in the late 1990s. Upon its general release, the French-produced film was panned by the conservative press, particularly the main Islamist party, yet it went on to become a succès de scandale attracting over 300,000 spectators in a few weeks and even fewer theatres. The political controversy inevitably diverted the debate away from the real issues foregrounded by Marrakchi. Between the conservative attacks and the relative silence of intellectuals on the Left, Marock touched a nerve about Morocco in the early 21st century. The film unveils not only the everyday life and existential insecurity of an upperclass isolated by wealth and its idioms in exclusive suburbs, but also the spectral resistance of the urban poor.

I propose here to retrieve the social history of Marock’s production and reception for a critical appreciation of its representation of youth, social class and urban space in a neoliberal environment. My contention is that the real contradictions and moral vacuum of social

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25 Seemingly insignificant, this admissions figure is actually a great feat in view of the dwindling number of cinema theatres and cinema-going culture in Morocco (with less than 60 theatres left today down from 247 in 1985; in 2005, audience admissions stood at a little under 5 million, down from 45 million in 1980). However, alternative viewing channels have emerged such as Youtube, where one upload of Marock has been viewed over a million times, and DVDs, pirated and sold for just MAD 5 (40p £), often even as the films are still running in the theatres.

26 I vividly recall watching the film at the now defunct Cinéma Rex in Fes one spring afternoon in 2006. When I came out of the cinema with three of my Cultural Studies MA programme classmates, I found myself unable to have a coherent critical view about Marock despite my misapprehensions about my friends’ quick dismissal of the film as an unnecessarily provocative and dishonestly self-Orientalising film. At the national level, I appreciated the controversy that the film sparked because it could not but help progressive intellectuals and activists to conquer more space for individual liberties in an increasingly conservative society still trying to come to terms with the Lead Years. However, I was also disturbed by the film’s deployment of clichés to represent a complex reality.
inequality create fissures in the film’s representational edifice, ultimately leading to its collapse. Integral to the film’s representational problems, partially diluted by Marrakchi’s command of the visual and aural conventions of the mainstream teen film, is the difficulty of speaking as a *postcolonial subject* from an upper-class position in neoliberal Morocco. In other words, *Marock*’s representational project collapses under the impossibility of speaking coherently from the position of Marrakchi’s class, which the film frames as essentially unethical. My contrapuntal analysis will thus focus on reading the film against its own grain. This will reveal both its covert strengths as a social text and the thwarted articulation of a postcolonial suburban subjectivity in its cognitive mapping of Casablanca. The absent Other, the urban poor, haunt *Marock* through the spectre of religious radicalism. The latter creates fissures in the film’s representation of privileged youth.

Between screening in the Un Certain Regard competition of the Cannes film festival in 2005 and a noteworthy performance in French cinemas in early 2006, *Marock* competed for the Grand Prix at the National Film Festival in Tangier in December 2005. Leading the camp of *Marock*’s detractors at the festival, the filmmaker Mohamed Asli lashed out at its lack of “a national sensibility,” the abundance of sexual scenes and its treatment of Islam (Boukhari 2005: 45). While his attack was dismissed by many present at Marrakchi’s press conference as gratuitous and dogmatic, the controversy was picked up by the national media. The film soon found itself at the centre of heated debates between Islamists campaigning for its ban and liberals championing free speech. The Islamists and pan-Arabists dominated the debates with their charge against *Marock* for allegedly spreading Zionism and tarnishing the reputation of Islam. The virulent attacks on the film exemplify the domestic culture wars vis-à-vis globalisation between moral critique (the Islamists) or uncritical celebration of the new (the liberals). Whilst the first camp was tapping into a reactionary reserve of identity politics that mobilises religion to censor difference, the second camp could not understand or fully
acknowledge uneven globalisation, which has propagated conservative ideologies in Morocco. The class question and divided urban spaces were haunting national consciousness on both sides of the polemic. An insider’s portrayal of upper-class youth in Casablanca, *Marock* was also scapegoated by an intellectual class unable to control global market forces and ideoscapes, which have eroded their social function as public intellectuals. This is not to suggest that the film’s *succès de scandale* was confined to the intellectual sphere of Moroccan politics and culture. It is rather the case that Marrakchi touched on an issue which could hardly leave educated Moroccans indifferent. This uneasy sensibility toward globalisation springs from a predominant feeling of guilt among an intellectual class increasingly aware of its inability to influence the transformations of Moroccan society. Market forces, not public intellectuals, are the major player in national life today. In the end, the considerable controversy turned out to be good publicity for *Marock*, which topped the box office in 2006 (Fig. 17).
Figure 17. Marock created a media uproar in Morocco

Marock is set in Casablanca in 1997. The title merges Maroc, the French name for Morocco, and Rock’n Roll. Borrowing the word “MaRock” from the local subcultural scene, Marrakchi explains that “I have chosen this title to account for the paradoxes of a youth culture that is divided between the traditions of an old Morocco and some aspirations more rock’n’roll” (qtd. in Boukhari 2006).27 “Marock” also reads as both “my Rock” and “My Rock’n Roll,” which can be taken to suggest the waning of collective forms and narratives of Tamghrabit (Moroccanness) and the hegemonic ascent of individual subjectivities under

27 “J’ai justement choisi le titre Marock […] pour rendre compte des paradoxes d’une jeunesse partagée entre la tradition du Maroc ancien et certaines aspirations plus rock’n’roll.”
“neoliberal governmentality” (Foucault 2008: 12). These new subjectivities are born out of the disintegration of the developmentalist model of the postcolonial State in the aftermath of globalisation. *Marock*’s plotline is woven around 17-year-old Rita, Youri and their friends as the last year of high school is drawing to a close at Lycée Lyautey, the high temple of Francophone elite education in Morocco.28 The high school students live and party in night clubs and suburban estates on the Atlantic coast, a world away from the millions of Casablanca youths who inhabit the crowded medinas and other low-income districts of Morocco’s largest city. Marrakchi has said in an interview that, even if it is not strictly autobiographical, *Marock* is based on her own experience as a high school student in Casablanca in the late 1990s.29 A *performatively Francophone* film, it chronicles not only Marrakchi’s last year at Lycée Lyautey, but also the zeitgeist of a neoliberal metropolis and country approaching a new millennium.30 It does so through the story of Rita, who stands in for the filmmaker as the daughter of a Muslim bourgeois family, and Youri, a Jewish native of Casablanca. Largely non-observant of their religious affiliations except perhaps Ramadan and Mimouna, *Marock*’s Muslims and Jews belong to the insular upper echelons of Moroccan society and send their children to the same French Mission schools and Anglo-American universities. Their lavish lifestyle in upmarket suburbs like Aïn Diab and Anfa, *Marock*’s main setting, cut them off from the rest of the city’s residents. Some way into the film, Youri and Rita start a relationship and begin to face the disapproving gaze of their social circles on this cross-faith romance. This love story brings to life the larger tale of a divided city. This process has been accompanied by the growth of conservative views and

28 Established in 1919, Lycée Lyautey is a French Mission institution named after Marshal Hubert Lyautey.
29 The film’s action is set in the beginning of summer 1997. Most of the film takes place during Ramadan. Without wishing to dwell on the motivations for this temporal factor, Ramadan of 1997 lasted from 10 January and 8 February. In 1993, Marrakchi’s actual baccalauréat year, Ramadan began on 23 February and ended on 24 March.
30 I have said ‘performatively Francophone’ because although the film is largely in French, most of the privileged youth speak French as a marker of class rather than as a native language. They speak perfect Darija (Moroccan Arabic) at key intervals, especially when addressing members of lower classes like their drivers and servants.
attitudes in the lower and middle strata of society (El Ayadi and Tozy 2007). The drama of Rita and Youri is analogously the story of Casablanca in a globalising Morocco.

*Marock*’s narrative dialogue, which is predominantly in French, reflects the class habitus of its young subjects. The other language in the film is Darija (Moroccan Arabic), spoken by the housemaids and other subjects from lower classes. Between French and Darija, a whole world of meaning inscribes itself into the film’s cognitive mapping of Casablanca. *Marock*’s Francophone gaze is thus tied to the distribution of speech and power along class lines. Marrakchi’s aim is to render realistically the languages used by Casablancans in their everyday life. The upper classes use French at home and send their offspring to the French Mission’s educational institutions and increasingly to American schools and English-only private universities abroad or ones built for the purpose in Morocco. In *Marock*, Rita and her friends use French with an overcorrect Parisian accent and a few English words to sound ‘cool’. The household servants and drivers use Darija and a Berber-accented version of Casablancan Arabic. There is a complex background behind this speech distribution. Judging from their surname (Belghiti) and the kind of industry from which they make a living (textiles and import/export), Rita’s family probably originates from Fes and established itself in Casablanca during the colonial period, when native commercial elites gradually joined the ranks of wealthy settlers (Adam 1972: 37). The Belghitis’ habitus reflects the wealth and refined tastes of established elites in Casablanca. Youri’s family are Moroccan upper-class Jews, another established economic elite. Youri’s parents are visually absent in the film. Youri hardly uses Darija. In Casablanca, most Jewish youth speak French as their native language with little command of Darija.31 In addition, Rita’s freelance maths teacher stands for a middle-class Casablanca both in retreat under globalisation and denigrated by higher

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31 This linguistic map dates back to the beginnings of the Jewish problem in 19th-century North Africa when the French empire (and Britain and Spain, to a lesser extent) granted citizenship to native Jews following a politics of divide and rule to weaken and later colonise Morocco (Kenbib 1994).
classes. For example, his heavy French accent and comportment are treated with barely concealed disdain by Rita and Youri. French and Moroccan teachers in Lycée Lyautey are equally middle-class and viewed condescendingly by their students. Lahcen the driver is a working-class Amazigh (Berber) probably hailing from the Anti-Atlas backlands, the source of mass migration to Casablanca in the 20th century (see Chapter 1). Comprehending this linguistic and social atlas is crucial for an appropriate understanding of a film whose realist stakes are high and have been emphasised by the director in press interviews (Marrakchi 2005, 2006).

*Marock*’s polemical reception was fixated on a moralist conception of individual liberties pitting conservative voices against their secular-leaning rivals. However, both camps missed the real problem with Marrakchi’s film: the ethics of representing privileged youth in neoliberal space. In his popular trilogy *La Saga des puissants de Casablanca* (1999-2004), Réda Lamrini depicts upper-class Casablanca between the 1990s and the 2000s. His social realist novels thrust the reader into a world of intrigue, money, corruption and crime. Lamrini resorts to detective fiction to probe a social milieu which is largely unknown to the other Casablanca. Myriam Catusse, in *Le Temps des entrepreneurs? Politique et transformations du capitalisme au Maroc* (2008), argues that Casablanca’s bourgeoisie—consisting of established national and international elites and a class of *nouveaux riches*—has been the main social class to benefit from economic liberalisation in recent decades. *Marock* gives visual credence to a world rarely screened before by Moroccan filmmakers. Unlike most of the latter, Marrakchi hails from this exclusive world and chose most of her characters from this class and its offspring among a privileged minority of the Maghrebi-French diaspora.

*Marock* is mostly set in the upmarket suburbs. Unlike other Moroccan films set in Casablanca since the 1990s, or indeed since the beginnings of Moroccan postcolonial cinema, absent from the screen is the world of millions of Casablancans inhabiting the old and new
medinas, working-class neighbourhoods, the downtown ville nouvelle, or the concentration camps of the poor in the bidonvilles. Marock meticulously draws a portrait of Marrakchi as a young girl in Casablanca during the late 1990s. It provides an insider’s portrayal of the jeunesse dorée (gilded youth) of her class. As she puts it in an interview, this is “a very personal film” and not a portrait of Casablanca (qtd. Kirshner 2005). Marock accordingly unfolds like a chamber piece of the city’s beau monde in its neoliberal habitat: the suburbs. While the film is undeniably an upper-class autoethnography, what if we read this exclusion of the other Casablanca against directorial intentions? A contrapuntal reading is called for because Marock’s action takes places in a real city against the backdrop of a millenial alchemy of social instability, political unpredictability and the rise of radical Islam among social groups traditionally associated with working-class politics. In the new Morocco of globalisation, young suicide bombers from the slums of Sidi Moumen blew up many symbols of wealth in Casablanca on 16 May 2003. The spectre of terrorism feeds on social segregation in Casablanca as much as it does on the globalisation of political Islam across the global North-South divide. Following a pattern of social splintering common to Third-World countries since the 1970s (Davis 2004: 9), structural adjustment policies have led to the rise of fortified urban communities inhabited by high society in Casablanca. The urban poor have increasingly been seen through the prism of an indigenised Orientalist discourse that frames them as an abject presence in urban space. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the slums has been used by the dominant classes as justification for stepping up the deployment of security discourses and technology in urban space. The abject fired back through religiously themed class terror in 2003 and 2007, that is, two years before and after Marock was made.

A few scenes into the film, Rita’s brother Mao returns from London at the end of the academic year. He returns a new man. Ironically for a character whose name conjures Mao Zedong, Mao has become an Islamist. His conversion to hardline Islam, we learn later, is not
merely a consequence of possible encounters with radicalised young people among Britain’s postcolonial communities. In reality, his fanatical turn is more poignantly an attempt to right the moral wrong of having run over a shantytown kid in Casablanca while drunk behind the wheel. His family bribed the police for him not to be sent to jail. Instead, Mao was sent to university in London. It is instructive to read this character’s psychological realism into the social history of terrorism in Casablanca, especially after the suicide bombings by shantytown youth two years before. The tragic events were still fresh in the minds of the Moroccan public as they watched Marock in 2006. Mao’s metamorphosis is a subtle depiction of how the spectre of terrorism travels from the city’s shantytowns into the heart of the exclusive affluent communities. Marrakchi frames the angst of upper-class youth as a consequence of community divisions along lines of faith. However, Mao’s transformation shows that existential insecurity and the lurking violence in everyday life essentially arise from class conflict. The rise of conservative identity politics such as Islamism is rooted in an entire society transformed by decades of market globalisation, which has created a large precarious underclass of urban youth.

The suburban pristineness in Marock is deceptive. As the tensions within Rita’s family, Mao’s embrace of hardline Islam after his crime, and Youri’s car crash reveal, the domestic world of this suburban class is permeated by the violence of the city at large. Domestic space in Marock is under pressure from the forces transforming the built environment and everyday life in Casablanca. In Marrakchi’s film, the glass cage represented by French and exclusive communities as class idioms give way under the escalating pressure of the social crisis of globalisation. In the same vein, one of the main fissures in the film’s representational project lies in the convincing portrait of Mao versus what Marrakchi hopes is an equally ample characterisation of her two main characters: Rita and Youri. Marock not only relates Rita’s last months at Lycée Lyautey but also adopts her viewpoint on reality. Played by the
filmmaker’s real-life cousin Morjana Alaoui, another inhabitant of the Casablanca-Paris nexus, Rita is the centre of Marrakchi’s film universe. She is portrayed as an innocent girl living in an ideal world of plenty. She takes her class privilege for granted and on the few occasions when she encounters lower-class Casablancans, like the housemaids or the police, she expects respect and submission.\footnote{Lalla Rita is how she is addressed by the maid, guards, the chauffeur and everyone else below her social status. Lalla is etymologically an Amazigh word meaning lady.} Mao’s return from London, however, strips naked Rita’s utopian universe by laying bare the dramatic underside of her existence in the metropolis. Even if the film does not show how her class makes its daily living and those subjected to its power, we get glimpses of the other Casablanca through minor details that speak volumes about the fragile position of the neoliberal masters. With a storyline primarily fixated on the diurnal and nocturnal rituals of Rita and her friends, Marock’s Others are its structuring absence. The bidonville is the invisible site of marginalisation and alterity. Marrakchi gears the spectatorial gaze towards a focus on young people’s innocence but less so on the brief flashes of class guilt that are inserted into the plotline to bolster its claims to social and historical verisimilitude.

Mao’s return from London and its dramatic impact on the course of events make Marock more than a mainstream youth film. Mao has killed a working-class boy, but his rich family oiled the judicial system as is the custom among an elite with unlimited material powers and little or no ethical responsibility, as Rita does not fail to remind Mao and her parents in a pivotal scene: “How much does the life of a shantytown kid cost?” she rhetorically asks. The concealed crime returns with a vengeance as the spectre of class guilt to possess Mao. This significantly occurs in London as one of the command centres of neoliberal globalisation (Sassen 1991: 139). Noteworthy too is how the revenant of the killed bidonville denizen of Casablanca catches up with Mao at the height of his prestige as one of the few Global South subjects entitled to concrete transnational mobility. The IMF’s SAP
policy was designed and has been administered from financial capitals like New York and London. Mao travels back to Morocco fourteen years later, not with a new package of market reforms, but with a transnational version of the religious radicalism which has mushroomed under the world’s uneven globalisation. In what is meant by Marrakchi as a matter of characterisation rather than a revealing reference to class conflict, Rita walks into Mao’s room scantily clad and finds him bowed down in prayer. Shocked by this unusual scene of piety, she shouts at him: “What’s happened to you? Have you become an idiot? Do you think you’re in Algeria?” If Rita is to be believed, our reluctant fundamentalist was praying in the wrong direction, an element which highlights his impulsive embrace of Islam. In any case, Mao neither responds to her provocations nor will he be able to change course throughout the film. The moral weight of his hidden class crime, he finds, is too overwhelming to suppress.

Among the dramatic consequences of Mao’s radical turn is his antisemitism. He pressurises his parents to end Rita’s relationship with Youri. His antisemitism destroys Rita’s dreamhouse and contributes to Youri’s tragic death in a car crash. Even if it is too late by then, Mao seems in the final scenes to have realised the extremism of his fanatical turn. However, he also realises that he cannot overcome the moral weight of his crime as long as the same class ecology remains in place. Even if Marrakchi does not develop his character further beyond Youri’s suicide and Rita’s natural departure for Paris, we can see how it is indeed Mao’s evolution in the film rather the cliché-ridden Jewish-Muslim relationship that gives Marock some critical edge. The film unwittingly bestows historical worldliness on Mao by foregrounding the concrete social origins of his behaviour and evolution as a character. In so doing, Marock gives the audience clues toward understanding Casablanca’s urban condition, the inevitable revenge of the silenced subaltern, religious fundamentalism and the rise of antisemitic attitudes in a country that was home to one of the world’s largest indigenous Jewish communities until the 1960s. In contrast, Rita and Youri’s centre-stage
relationship is awash with counterproductive clichés about a Muslim-Jewish clash of civilisations, on the one hand, and, on the other, over-relied on a melodramatic language which obfuscates social conflict. Consequently, Mao is the film’s unintended critical voice rather than the odd one out. His ethical limitation originates in the moral burden of an entire class—that of his family, Rita, Youri and Marrakchi.

Press reviewers have followed the film’s marketing package in focusing on Rita and Youri’s relationship as Marock’s driving narrative force. This directorial claim is unsubstantial because Mao is the film’s only truly rounded character and salvation from the formulaic relationship at its centre. Mao’s development gives Marock narrative coherence. In this light, we need to search for answers about the film’s ethics of representation around this character’s evolution. We have seen how even after he ruins Rita and Youri’s relationship, Mao is unable to relinquish the quest for a resolution to globalisation’s real contradictions. Marrakchi’slopsided approach catches up with him prematurely as the film ends when Rita leaves Casablanca. The film viewer is thus left none the wiser about whether Mao will do the right thing by transforming himself from a buddha of suburbia into the Mao of shantytowns. I described Mao earlier as a reluctant fundamentalist because although he is against the absolute power of his class position, he is neither willing to relinquish its material comfort nor able to take arms against a sea of injustices and, by opposing, perhaps end them. This ethical deadlock sums up the film’s problem: How can one speak ethically from a class position framed as radically unethical? If postcolonialism is the quest for a language of justice for the world in general, and for the formerly colonised and still imperially subdued Global South in particular, then Marrakchi’s film is not consistently postcolonial in a strictly

33 The Jewish-Muslim question is relevant to the Moroccan context, but Marock’s sensibility in this regard is rooted in post-Holocaust Europe and the diasporic context of the Arab-Jewish debates and imaginary conflicts between the children of Abraham in the banlieues of contemporary France today. This is the backdrop of the terrorist attacks and police slaughter of the French-Algerian youth Mohamed Merah in Toulouse in the paranoia of Sarkozy’s France in 2012. Marock had enjoyed a successful run in French cinemas in 2005.
critical sense. This is a consequence of the directorial decision to peg the film’s meaning-making to Rita and Youri’s relationship at the expense of the consequential forces (as represented by Mao’s haunted conscience) that finally sweep them over. In the film’s last scene, Rita leaves for France, the ex-colonial power which maintains a hegemonic presence in Morocco. In mainstream readings of the film, Rita leaves because as a young person she could not find freedom in Casablanca. An alternative reading based on some of the film’s unintended realism would be that she has left because globalisation has reduced the margins of postcolonial emancipation for an entire society by fostering greed at one extreme and radical Islam at the other.

In conclusion, let me repose the question which runs through Marock: Can the suburban speak? Marrakchi’s attempt at postcolonial speech is shot through with the paradoxical existence of her suburban subjects as well as their relationship with the subaltern and filmically excluded Casablanca. In Marock, Marrakchi tries to tell only the story of her last year in high school. However, the revenants of the spatially and socially excluded return to haunt the film’s space of enunciation. Speaking in the name of the suburban subject turns out to be impossible without the voice of the other Casablanca. One source of the existential violence haunting the film is the mass underclass on which the existence of Rita’s world depends; another is the inherent paradox of capital whereby money breeds its own matrix of social relations characterised by ontological angst and the return of history.

For the suburban to speak entails coming to terms with “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003: 158), which regulates the relations between the dominant and the dominated in modern society. In reality, communication is absent between the two classes in Marock. Only a violent silence or rather a temporarily silenced conflict lies in-between. Marrakchi’s attempt at giving a postcolonial voice to one class only falls short of the mark. Mao appears to go against this grain but in the last scenes of the film becomes subdued to and
at ease in his class positionality, ready to assume continuity between his father’s generation and his own by running the family business. Between the real suicide of Youri and the fundamentalism of Mao, Rita and her class are unable to sustain the moral vacuum at the centre of neoliberal subjectivity. Can the suburban speak? The answer is evidently no—at least, not in Marock. In contrast to Marrakchi’s project, Moroccan filmmakers have, since the 1990s, massively tapped into the materially and symbolically excluded subjects as its signifying outlets, with many films speaking truth to power from the margins of society. The next section looks at a paradigmatic film which has defined Moroccan cinema’s representation of a rapidly globalising and urbanising society. It depicts the world of the urban poor, which is blocked from view in Marock. Directed by a diasporic filmmaker who hails from the same social background as Marrakchi, Ali Zawa, in contrast, outlines a postcolonial critique of globalisation from below.

2. Sailing Heterotopias: Street Children in the City of God

NUC’s organic relationship with the socially marginalised sectors of Moroccan society under globalisation is best appreciated in critical terms as a way of seeing the world through their eyes. Whether they are street children, underage housemaids, disaffected youth, homeless people or prostitutes, the protagonists count among the people left behind or thrust further into precarity by the forces of globalisation. In an ingenious way, NUC films turn the table on mainstream society by placing marginalised experiences and unheard voices at the centre of public attention. This subalternist politics of re-presentation is particularly evident and poignant in the second and third strands of NUC because a substantial number of first-strand NUC films are populated by upper and middle-class characters rather than the struggling protagonists prevailing in its two other strands. Nabil Ayouch’s Ali Zawa, Prince of the Streets (2000) is the most popular film of the new century as well as the one which brought
Casablanca’s street children to national and global attention. This feted film inscribes itself within the social realism of NUC, but goes further by targeting the hitherto unreachable niches of international festivals and foreign market distribution. Ali Zawa “focuses on an aspect of Moroccan society not readily acknowledged: its story of street children was a new departure for Moroccan film” (Gugler 2011: 19). In what follows, I will explore the film’s attempt to speak truth to power from the point of view of the socially marginalised and their subaltern subjectivities. A close reading of Ali Zawa’s Neo-Neorealist aesthetics aims to highlight a series of important questions which face postcolonial cinema and public intellectuals today: Who speaks for the margins? Who defines the subaltern? Can the latter speak for themselves? What cinematic languages are capable of giving voice and space to the anonymous voices and unknown faces of this social category? Or, in a nutshell, what cinema for what margins?

Ali Zawa opens with the eponymous ‘prince of the streets’ being interviewed by an invisible TV crew. Surrounded by a crowd of shemkara (delinquent children), Ali relates with aplomb his recent dream as a sailor braving the perilous ocean, rowing to reach his coveted two-sun island. Foreshadowing the film’s fusion of realism with fantasy, the savvy storyteller has even found a beautiful woman at sea and takes her with him to his island of milk and honey. This pre-opening fantasy sequence provides a clue that the film is about more than a gritty portrayal of the drab reality of life on the streets of Casablanca. The audience gaze is geared from the beginning to perceive the filmed reality through the eyes of its ordinary heroes: street urchins (Fig. 18). The 15-year old Ali goes on to relate how he left the home of his single mother for life on the streets. The mother, he says, was contriving to trade his eyes for the money she needed to survive now that her age was increasingly preventing her from making ends meet as a prostitute in the bars of Casablanca. The film proper begins to unfold with wide shots of a construction site overlooking the white modern
city. The abandoned kids squat in such derelict sites and descend on the city to sell cigarettes by the unit, steal valuables, scrap for food in dumpsters, and buy glue to sniff in their urban hideouts. Their parallel community goes unacknowledged by the mainstream society of globalization embodied by high steel-and-glass buildings, busy roads and endless construction. In the building site of the opening scene, Ali confides in his friend Kwita that it will not be long now before he sails for his dream island. He has procured (a euphemism for stolen) a compass and a good samaritan (an old fisherman) has promised to take him to the island of two suns. The viewer next hears a slogan—Al-hayat! Mqawda! (Life is Shit!)—shouted in unison by an invisible crowd. The four kids are then pelted with projectiles and take shelter behind construction equipment. The members of the rival gang of street kids finally reveal themselves. Led by a deaf-mute called Dib, the eldest among them, the invading gang order the four runaways to rejoin the mother group. The order falls on deaf ears. Someone pokes fun at Ali by pointing out his lie to the TV crew earlier about his dead mother. Ali picks up a stone, but before he hurls it at the assailant, he is struck on the head by a projectile thrown by another kid. Ali drops dead and the invading gang members take flight. Ali’s three friends—Kwita, Omar, and Boubker—pull him onto a makeshift carrier to their hideout in a disused part of the seaport’s concrete pier. They decide to bury him like a prince in homage to his dream. Ali dreamed and died a prince (of the streets). In reality, as his three friends put it: “He led a shitty life, but he will not be given a shitty burial.”
Neorealism “relinquished its exclusive Italian nationality soon after World War II […] acquired many nationalities and became a citizen of the world” (Giovacchini and Sklar 2012: 11). What intrigued post-colonial filmmakers about this film style was “its mode of production, its ability to craft a national cinema without large studio investments” (ibid.). Global Neorealism today is evolving in conjunction with the forces driving the world cinema market and its festival circuit. Ayouch has prided himself on doing fieldwork for his films from *Mektoub* (1997) through *Ali Zawa* (2000) to *God’s Horses* (2012). *Ali Zawa*’s plotline is based on the director’s own ethnographic research on street children and on insights gained from talking to urban sociologists and civil society activists in Morocco (Ayouch 2005: 206). This claim is meant not only to enhance the authenticity of his realist aesthetics, but also to bridge the gap between his upper-class background and the poor subjects he often films. Real street kids are cast in *Ali Zawa*. Working together with Bayti, a civil society association
committed to protecting and educating street children, Ayouch handpicked his characters from the encountered real street urchins (Ayouch 2005: 206). Their language and faces in the film are *tableaux vivants* of those of hundreds of street kids populating Moroccan cities (even if they often go unnoticed through the sheer banality of their everyday presence). As in *Ali Zawa*, the homeless children display their objects for sale to car drivers waiting for the green lights to continue their journey unhampered in urban space. Ayouch’s cast of professional actors is confined to adult roles: the prostitute (played by Amal Ayouch), the fisherman (Mohamed Majd, a veteran Moroccan actor who would later star in Ismail Ferroukhi’s *Le Grand Voyage*, 2005) and Dib (Said Taghmaoui, the Moroccan-French actor already propelled to stardom by Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine*, 1995). This casting strategy is coupled with on-location shooting to make of *Ali Zawa* a second-strand NUC film uniquely popular in Morocco and overseas.

The street children as actors provide a convincing portrait of life on the streets through natural behaviour aided by compelling looks and the indelible scars on their haggard faces, bruised souls and worn bodies. Even if they mostly went back to street life after the film shoot, the homeless children’s life onscreen is not a passive existence. Their dreams, actions and fears are political acts in that they carry elements of resistance to the social and moral regimes of mainstream Casablanca. They are agents not only of the street but also of its onscreen representation. In a sign of their authorial agency in *Ali Zawa*, one of the unsubtitled Arabic gravestone inscriptions early in the film is that of the director: The Late Nabil Ayouch (b. 1969). To make sense of this juvenile agency on screen, Foucault’s concept of *heterotopias* is illuminating. In its simplest definition, a heterotopia is the juxtaposition in a single real space of “several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1986: 25). Forced onto the streets by poverty, alcoholism, and domestic violence, the homeless children squat—or rather occupy—abandoned spaces like disused factories,
abandoned construction sites, downtown colonial ruins, junkyards and the seaport pier. These spaces of abandonment exist in juxtaposition with spaces of wealth and social normativity in Casablanca. The children invest these derelict spaces with heterotopian qualities through their wild dreams fuelled by glue sniffing. For example, Ali unhesitatingly answers the journalist who asks him what he does in his daytime: “I keep an eye on the city.” Similarly, Dib’s army of street kids occupies an abandoned, half-finished building at the centre of a large vacant space, which divides Casablanca’s city centre from its working-class districts. This camp where Dib rules like a lion in a jungle is comparable to an Agamenian camp or “the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule” (Agamben 1998: 168-9). Instead of a mere state of exception, the camp is increasingly the ‘nomos’ or biopolitical paradigm of the modern in our societies (1998: 181). Faced with the camp as an everyday condition, the street children in Ali Zawa survive through the creation of heterotopias, dreaming up alternative worlds to the rough streets. Ali dies before he could travel to his imagined island and the others live in the dream of giving him the burial he deserves as a prince who desired to live on the island with the two suns. For the abandoned and glue-sniffing urchins, heterotopia is not a dream but rather a reality more real than the everyday brutality of hunger, violence and rape. One fundamental role of heterotopias is “to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation” (Foucault 1986: 27). Ali Zawa’s wily kids create their alternative world in compensation for the neoliberal value system, in which they are denied a proper place and their right to the city is denied.

Ali Zawa frames reality through the eponymous street child’s mythomaniac worldview, one where reality and fiction are hard to disentangle. The film strikes back at neoliberalism’s utopian visions with mythomaniac fictions, particularly the heterotopian
dream of escape as a means of resistance to and survival in the urban jungle. The motif of escape is a quest for agency to reshape the world according to the subaltern’s vision even in the absence of collective solidarity. However, the film is not about escaping Casablanca literally; it is rather about revealing its underside whereby the great unwashed are pushed to extreme dreams or even to death in the pursuit of an impossible escape. The sea in *Ali Zawa* is a metaphor for escape rather than a real conduit out of a violent existence. The Atlantic is a paradox: a signifier of escape but a de facto lethal ocean (the aspiring sailor Ali died before he had even boarded ship). The violence of the city pushes people to drown their sorrow, and sometimes themselves, in the ocean. Other heterotopian spaces in *Ali Zawa* are less physical but nevertheless expressions of everyday violence in Casablanca. Two instructive examples of these other heterotopias are Ali’s island and Kwita’s animated romance. The street kids project onto the ocean dreams which they know they will never fulfill in Casablanca. They dream of love and shelter away from homelessness and starvation. They squat on the seaport pier waiting for an opportunity to leave. This in-between space between the city and the ocean is a strategic habitat from which to question the city’s violence without projecting the kids as passive victims. They are rather agents in search of emancipation. Their heterotopian spaces of living and dreams foreground this liminal mode of subjectivity production. Ali’s heterotopia—the two-sunned island—provides the entire film’s narrative thread and symbolic space. According to Foucault, “the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications” (Foucault 1986: 26). The street kid is raped and then multiply exploited by Dib in a rite of passage to the street world. Ali’s scarred psyche, borne by a scarred and darkened face, pushed him to fantasise about escape from the harsh life of Casablanca’s *los olvidados* (the forgotten, to conjure Luis Bunuel’s paradigmatic film on Mexico City’s street children). Ali weaves his dream from the fragments of his
vanishing childhood and the iconography of popular culture in urban space (symbolised by the profusion of satellite dishes on the city’s skyline).

Kwita’s heterotopia complements Ali’s impossible dream. In Ali Zawa, glue-sniffing induces hallucinations in the street children and, in the process, provides the film’s second narrative and visual register: animation. In search of money for his dead friend’s burial, the shabbily dressed Kwita wanders into a private school downtown and expertly snatches a purse from the handbag of a smartly clad schoolgirl. He soon builds a strong affection for the girl merely from looking at her family picture, which he found in her wallet. Lacking a family to feed and raise him, Kwita begins to see the schoolgirl everywhere and dreams of becoming her boyfriend. He follows her to the school entrance, to which she is chauffeured everyday. His gaze animates every female figure on billboards or on wall drawings in Casablanca. This juvenile dream is a heterotopia in the sense of unveiling what Foucault terms juxtaposition as the ethos of our “epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (1986: 22).

The street child’s wild dream reveals the existence of close yet incompatible worlds and social realities in urban space. Kwita’s fetishising imagination embodies resistance against socio-spatial segregation and precarity. This resistance sits side by side with the overwhelming forces of precarity. Denied everything from bread to affection, Kwita imagines better habitats fuelled by this lack. After he announces that Ali shall be buried like a prince, Kwita shouts: “Yes, we will bury him! All the people will cry at his funeral. The whole city will cry.” Then looking at a fashion model on a billboard, he shouts: “You too!” In another key scene, Kwita sniffs his essential dose of glue and wanders in the vicinity of the school of his imaginary girlfriend. His gaze first surveys Casablanca’s Twin Towers as if to reclaim them for himself through the power of his heterotopian imagination. His gaze leisurely descends down the towers and takes in a billboard with a fashion model and a flower shop nearby. Surveying his girl talking to her companion, he imagines the dialogue as a
conversation between him and the girl instead. He interprets her gestures to fit his subaltern heterotopia. The wretched Kwita thus filters the speech of the upper-class girl and neoliberal buildings through his subversive imagination. He resists social and spatial precariousness by unveiling the juxtaposition of incompatible worlds and then weaving anti-hegemonic connections among them to suit his political fantasies about freedom and social equality. Casablanca’s social and urban space in *Ali Zawa* is hence rendered through the eyes of its victims.

These heterotopias are best understood as Deleuzian fabulations, whereby the street kids create stories and invent alternative worlds beyond their concrete conditions. The word matters more than the truth. “Fabulations,” Deleuze writes, “are forms of storytelling that are neither impersonal myth nor personal fiction” (1989: 222). Ronald Bogue argues that *fabulation* in Deleuzian aesthetics denotes the narrative process of “becoming-other, experimenting on the real, ‘legending,’ inventing a people to come, and deterritorialising language” (2010: 9). In *Ali Zawa*, fabulative narration affords the street urchins a say in the production of their subjectivities as postcolonial children abandoned in a globalising nation. When asked what he is doing, Omar—who is sniffing glue after being beaten up and raped by Dib’s gang—retorts that he is “mixing movies”. The pier is surrounded by apartments with satellite dishes on the roofs. Every night the three kids sleep on the pier listening in on the multilingual television channels being watched in the adjacent flats. Aided by glue and not constrained by the real presence of television sets, they give free reign to their fantasmatic imagination to fabulate through words new worlds in which they are heroes rather than victims (Fig. 19). In addition, after his death Ali is transformed into a legend. His surviving friends envision him as a successful sailor in heaven. He is both well fed (which they are not)
and so strong he can defeat even Aisha Qandisha.  

Ali the legend embodies the kernel of Deleuzian fabulation as “a form of ‘legending’, of creating larger-than-life giants, hallucinatory visions of future collectivities” (Bogue 2010: 19). Another instance is of Ali himself at the beginning of the film when he subverts the TV medium by telling lies to the crew. Fabulation, it transpires, is a question of creating what Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight” from the forces of material and symbolic oppression (2004: 226). This is also what Ali Zawa does as a whole through a two-pronged strategy of representation: exposing the concrete and affective precarity of street kids whilst allowing them to drive the narrative through spectacular stories. The latter force their own truth on the audience—a truth which subverts and lays bare the accepted wisdom of neoliberal society. This task is aided by the youngest of the three children’s questioning of everything with the curiosity of a bright, homeless kid. Boubker never accepts any statement without asking an endless series of Socratic questions to unveil the relativity of truth and half-lies on which the normative society is founded. His is one among many in Ali Zawa’s postcolonial polyphony of articulate voices of discursive subversion and everyday resistance through the power of fabulation or the creation of “legends in flagrante delicto” (Deleuze 1989: 150).

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34 In Moroccan mythology, Aisha Qandisha is the charming spinster who rises from her grave at night and walks the earth in search of male prey. She lures men with her charms before annihilating them.
The intertwined lines of heterotopia and fabulation coalesce in the street children’s unforced *performance* of their subjectivities as young Casablancans. Identity is never static but rather a continuous performance. In *Ali Zawa*, the children perform their everyday subjectivities in resistance to the control mechanisms of a society which has reduced them to the status of what Agamben terms *homo sacer* or “bare life” (1998: 159). Their lives or deaths matter to no one because they exist outside the political community. When they get noticed at all, it is often by police or private security guards chasing them away or Dib’s gang beating and raping them. However, they strike back with performative acts strewn in strategic sites of spectacular resistance throughout Casablanca’s space. In a concentrated scene, Omar animates a *halqa* (‘the storyteller’s circle’), the centrepiece of Moroccan street theatre (Amine 2001: 55). In his lecture on heterotopias, Foucault writes:
There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (1986: 24)

The concrete and symbolic setting of Omar’s _halqa_ concentrates elements of Moroccan social and physical space in a subversive heterotopia of performance. This pivotal scene in _Ali Zawa_ takes place in a vacant space akin to those reserved for weekday souks around Morocco. Omar’s _halqa_ is the street kid’s reappropriation of social and representational space right in the heart of Casablanca. His Rabelaisian performance is agency reclaimed and a poetic re-vision of urban space from the standpoint of its social outcasts.

Midway into the film the sympathetic fisherman Hamid surprises the three kids on the pier and enquires about the whereabouts of Ali, whom he had recruited as an apprentice. The fisherman quickly finds out that Ali is dead and his body lies rotting in a hole in the pier basement. He brings ice and pours it over the dead body. Hamid works with the three kids to build a coffin for Ali and give him a princely burial at sea. The old man and the sea are the kids’ remaining spaces of hope. Their contact creates an alliance of empathy between two outcast social categories. The destitute fisherman lives on his boat unable to make a decent living after big fishing companies bought the sea. Casablanca under globalisation has churned out both the fisherman and the kids as untouchables or what Mary Douglas calls “matter out of place” (1966: 41). Their last resort are extreme heterotopias after banishment from society and freedom. Whether it is living in its liminal space (the old fisherman) or dreaming of
leaving on one (the homeless children), the boat in Ali Zaoua can be interpreted in Foucauldian terms as “a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea” (1986: 27). Like most NUC films, Ali Zawa is a film of absent fathers even if the fisherman almost becomes the surrogate father of the the late Ali and his gang of three. Hamid is hardly a member of Casablanian society and his relationship with the homeless children is shot through with empathy and class solidarity. This empathy is in short supply in neoliberal society. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty posit that this affective solidarity is central to achieving social justice (1997: xlii). At the end of Ali Zawa, this empathy or affective class solidarity finds a handful supporters in Ali’s mother and Dib’s gang of street kids. The rest of society goes about its everyday life unaware of or oblivious to capital’s concomitant production of homines sacri.

Globalisation in the city works following a Foucauldian biopolitics which not only marginalises large swathes of the population, but also reduces certain groups to homo sacer or “bare life” (Agamben 1998: 7). In Roman society, homo sacer was any individual who might be killed without the killer being condemned for homicide, for the homo sacer existed outside the juridical-political community. This form of “life exposed to death” persists in modern times (Agamben 1998: 88). Homo sacer has become the central protagonist of contemporary politics. Ali Zawa’s street children are a lucid example of this condition. Ali dies at the beginning of the film, but no one cares or gets punished. The postcolonial State as the protector of individual life under the social contract is in decline under market rule. The fate of the homo sacer is to die or live in death, which is a worse prospect. As Mahmoud Darwish puts it so well: “The life which cannot be defined / except by death is not a life” (2003). Ali’s three friends’ dream of giving him a princely burial is only a dystopia of the extreme precarity under which this social category lives. As Agamben argues, the life of the
hominès sacri is equal to their death. In Casablanca under globalisation, the homines sacri are legion. Whether Ali is alive or dead, the Law does not care because it has already excluded him from the judicial community. Homeless children have been banished from the polis by being banned from the logos, which guarantees access to life, society and legal rights (Agamben 1998: 88). Bare life, Agamben writes following Hannah Arendt and Foucault, is “the bestialisation of man” (1998: 3). This biopolitical process reduces man to what a Hobbesian state of nature, which for Agamben denotes the dissolutio civitatis (‘dissolved political city’) (1998: 106). As if to make sure that the bestialisation of human life (street children) is not lost on the audience, Ayouch multiplies animal metaphors in the film. Having narrowly escaped slaughter by Omar, who was taking revenge for having just been raped by Dib (‘dib’ means wolf in Moroccan Arabic), Kwita lies down bleeding on steps in the medina. A stray puppy approaches him spoiling for a warm place to lie down, but Kwita throws it away down the steps many times. The puppy keeps coming back for the same treatment until the street urchin desists from trying to mark a line between him and the animal. He realises that both are equal and rhetorically asks: “Why do you keep coming back?”

Ali Zawa closes on aerial shots of the Atlantic ocean and Casablanca. The camera zooms out of a two-sunned island painting in the pier’s cave-like basement where the children hide from the hard life on the streets. As it turns out, Ali Zawa is entirely structured around their collective fabulation of Ali’s story through paintings of islands and happy children on the cavern walls. The film is heterotopian by virtue of investing the social margins with hope and a critical imagination at odds with the precarious conditions of urban space. Ali Zawa projects Casablanca through its disadvantaged children’s fables in the face of bare life. Instead of showing passive victims of society, the film frames postcolonial kids as historical agents endowed with an infinite and subversive imagination. In a stinging critique
of the film, Josef Gugler posits that it “brought the misery of street children to public attention, but Nabil Ayouch refrained from social, let alone political, critique” (2010: 14). This reading is premised on the assumption that the director’s endearing tale of homeless children essentially vindicates the social and political factors behind this unhuman condition. However, my reading of the film in this chapter, which has taken the children’s dreams seriously and read them along the lines of the Foucauldian heterotopia and Deleuzian fabulation, goes against the grain of Gugler’s conclusion. The latter is lacking in critical appreciation of juvenile subversion of societal control and, through it, the complex intersections of neoliberal globalisation and social capital in contemporary Casablanca. Ali’s dream to escape the city to the two-sunned island, his friends’ endeavour to give him a princely burial and the final act of solidarity among the socially marginalised embody the film’s critique of political and socioeconomic globalisation through the eyes of its victims. In Ali Zawa, Casablanca and Morocco are projected through the subversive, subjective eyes of children. This is what I call juvenile postcolonialism. Unlike most NUC films and Postcolonial Theory, which represent adult perceptions of the world, this film refuses to frame children through their elders’ perspective. This child-centred critique of the social consequences of Empire’s global expansion provides a relief from the common tropes and angles in the cinemas of the Global South over the last few decades.

In their Capitalism and Schizophrenia project, which is indebted to Ibn Khaldun’s theory of history, Deleuze and Guattari coin the terms deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. The former denotes the dissociation of identity and other human practices from their native territory (like land or the means of production) whereas the latter designates the reestablishment of identity and order and their reincorporation into the social body (1994: 86-87). These two processes are the engines of subjectivity production under capital’s power relations in modern societies. In the Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding, which inspires this
dissertation’s analysis of the production of Moroccan identity on the postcolonial screen since
the 1990s, deterritorialisation produces novel currents of subjectivity, which are often
heterogeneous and have to be viewed both against history and from multiple angles as they
bear the marks of the fragmented identities produced through what Anthony Giddens calls
disembedding. Under globalization “the very tissue of spatial experience alters, conjoining
proximity and distance in ways that have few close parallels in prior ages” (Giddens 1990:
142). In contrast, reterritorialisation is often a negative force referring to capital’s constant
recapture and adaptation of the new and forces of resistance. Deterritorialisation always
already contains the seeds of its reterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 114).

These Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts can further illuminate the workings of juvenile
postcolonialism in Ali Zawa. The street kids lead a harsh life on the streets, yet they manage
to craft their subjectivities through a deterritorialisation of normative identities and societal
control. In the context of globalisation, the increasing translocalisation of urban spaces
through mediascapes creates spaces where ordinary subjects can imagine alternative escape
routes from the shackles of their everyday life. The kids dream of better worlds and fabulate
about a society where they have a proper place to live and grow. The aforementioned scene in
which Kwita fabulates a dialogue between himself and the rich schoolgirl is an example of
how mediatised images (in this case, the billboards and their translational iconography) allow
him to envisage new, albeit unrealisable, futures. The catch is that the kids subvert the
domination of the mainstream society by deterritorialising signs and symbols from their
normal habitats and usage. In the seaport scene, where the kids sleep at night to the sounds of
multiple global television channels, they adapt the translocal media culture to create new
fables in which they are the agents of their destiny. In the end, this active agency in the
production of their subjectivities as street kids amounts to a critique of Moroccan society
through juvenile eyes. The social ills and cultural transformation of the society are reinterpreted for us by the subversively deterritorialising imagination of Ali and his friends.

In their theory of space in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), which articulates “the most radical alternative to the conventional image of subjectivity as coherent, enduring, and individualised” (Rose 1998: 170), Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two kinds of space: *striated* and *smooth*. By the first term they mean “nomad space” or “the space in which the war machine develops”; in contrast, smooth space designates “sedentary space” or “the space instituted by the State apparatus” (2004: 420). The two spaces, it is important to note, “in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 474). In *Ali Zawa*, the street children not only navigate the neoliberal city’s webs of striated and smooth spaces but, as I have argued, invent their own smooth spaces. This is particularly evident at the level of everyday acts of resistance whether through physical movement or the heterotopian imagination fuelled by glue and their precarious existence. The production of smooth spaces through these survival tactics amounts to the production of postcolonial subjectivities beyond social hegemony and existential exclusion.

By virtue of its creative alchemy of the fantastical and the quotidian, the absurd and the mundane, *Ali Zawa* has screened the plight of Casablanca’s homeless children through their own subversive eyes. The film combines the presentation of the ‘real’ (or ‘immediate’ reality, thus making film realism a denunciation of social injustice) with a heterotopian imagination which permits a broad view of that reality. As we have seen, gritty realism and animation are interwoven in the film’s visual and narrative spaces. In so doing, the film provides a detached, reflexive approach to neoliberal society that allows space for new critical departures in a postcolonial critique of the present. Thanks to its originality and popular
appeal, Ali Zawa paved the way for more Moroccan films to question the social consequences of globalisation in Casablanca through the eyes of its victims. In the next section, we will see how these films build on the strengths of Ayouch’s film even as they tackle older generations of marginalised youth and strive to foreground their quest for postcolonial agency in a rapidly changing society.

3. From Casablanca to Casanegra: The Street Life of Disaffected Youth

*When history is made in the streets, the streets tend to move onto the screen.* — Siegfried Kracauer

Near the beginning of Noureddine Lakhmari’s *Casanegra* (2008), Adil comes under pressure from his friend Karim to account for his overwhelming desire to leave Casablanca by any means possible to emigrate to an elsewhere which he fancies will provide opportunities for decent living and prosperity. Adil responds with a series of the everyday life experiences which make his life unbearable in the city:

No more policemen on my tail, no more nobs who run red lights because they drive fancy cars, no more drunks in the neighbourhood, no more female beggars on the pavements who use kids who aren’t even their own to beg, no more bushy-bearded fundamentalists keen on forcing everyone into Paradise, no more perverted Saudis and Kuwaitis who soil this country, no more of my stepfather’s mug which I have to see every morning, no more Casanegra. *[Pause]* All that remains is Malmö with me in a little house with a chimney where I can watch the snow falling outside.
Whether this semi-soliloquy strikes one as evidence of an escapist attitude to reality or, on a deeper level, as testimony of a national identity crisis, the affective forces of anomie and fury that animate it speak volumes about the restless condition of youth in a postcolonial society under globalisation. Relying on his affective pulsations, Adil provides us with an assortment of interconnected yet nonrepresentational everyday experiences as a subjective *totality* (Lefebvre 2008: 97). Adil and Karim are two young Moroccans struggling to make ends meet in Casablanca in the 2000s (Fig. 20). They are caught in the vicious web of economic need, social injustice and affective alienation. Far from being Hollywood’s Casablanca or an open-air museum of Art Deco architecture from the colonial era, the city is nowadays home to over four million inhabitants and encapsulates many of the stark contradictions and bleak predicaments of globalisation in the Global South (Cohen 2004b: 32–34). Casablanca, or rather ‘Casanegra’ as it has come to be renamed by its large underclass and disenfranchised middle class, has turned into a socially and spatially divided city as a result of uneven globalisation and escalating levels of violence, spatial segregation and social exclusion.
Through an affective poetics of social realism which frames Casablanca’s streets as the prime stage of the everyday production of postcolonial subjectivity, Lakhmari’s film reclaims what Henri Lefebvre calls “the right to the city” (1996: 109) of its subaltern subjects. The film, as I wish to argue shortly, gives voice to their articulations of dispossession and resistance, despair and hope, joy and sorrow, to partake in the construction of new forms of postcolonial subjectivity. Casanegra’s portrayal of neoliberal Casablanca as an urban jungle, with disaffected youth on the margins, lends itself to a critical reading of the intersections of everyday life and the mass affects of revolt and, taken together, their implications for postcolonial subjectivity. My analysis in what follows will probe the construction of this subjectivity through the affective agency of rage and revolt that have characterised the cinematic representation of youth and urban space in Moroccan cinema since the 1990s.
**Casanegra** is the Moroccan-Norwegian filmmaker’s second feature film and the first in a trilogy about the city of Casablanca. Despite the current crisis of cinemas in Morocco, whereby theatres in active service have dwindled from 360 in 1956 to around 50 today, Lakhmari’s film was seen on the big screen by 500,000 Moroccans of all ages and social strata within weeks of its first theatrical run (Lorrain 2009: 119). As Le Monde’s correspondent reported, “Young, old, rich, poor, and women veiled or in jeans, all flocked to the cinemas” (Beaugé 2009). A token of its popularity, Casanegra was prey to piracy and made available as a bootleg DVD only days after it went on general release (Boukhari 2009). One of the most popular films in Morocco since Mohammed A. Tazi’s comedy *Looking for My Wife’s Husband* (1993), which drew a record number of one million spectators to the cinemas and five million TV viewers (Dwyer 2004: 2). Lakhmari’s film was Morocco’s official entry for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category in 2010. This is noteworthy since Casanegra was a succès de scandale after it was panned by the local conservative press for its alleged moral depravity (Beaugé 2009). In response to the Islamists’ ire, Ahmed Benchemsi penned an editorial in the weekly magazine TelQuel: “The project which Casanegra proposes is not that of an amoral society, but rather that of one which accepts its share of amorality”; he went on to make a case for cinematic realism as the “shock therapy” needed “for Moroccans to wake up and shake off the rigid certainties in which official propaganda has tried to lock them up for half a century” (2009: 4).

Drawing on film noir and global independent cinema, Casanegra is “the image of Morocco today: complex and troubled” (Lakhmari 2007). It relates three days in the life of Karim and Adil, two Casablancans in their twenties. Jobless and disaffected, they spend their days loafing and meandering through the streets. In spite of their resourcefulness in making ends meet against the odds, these young people are overwhelmed by the hardships of

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35 “Jeunes, vieux, riches, pauvres, femmes voilées ou en jean, affluent en masse” (Beaugé 2009).
everyday life, on the one hand, and the dream of better living conditions elsewhere, on the other. Their dark tale unfolds against the backdrop of a divided city evolving at different speeds dictated by class inequality and a globalisation which benefits only those with the material and intellectual attributes to meet its challenges. As foregrounded in the plot, Casablancan urbanism is defined by the spectres of violence and rampant social injustice. Although conscious of the objective obstacles between their present reality and the dream of a better life, Adil and Karim are not discouraged from hustling their way out of the claustrophobic and grotty metropolis. At the beginning of Casanegra, the two friends have opposing views on the way out of poverty and risky survival tactics through petty crime. Living with his mother and psychotic stepfather, Adil is adamant that the only way out of street drifting is a visa to a postcard Sweden where he will marry a blonde and enjoy sitting at home looking at the snow falling outside, as he puts it in the aforecited moment of extreme despair. Throughout the film, Karim, who has taken care of his family’s needs since his father became disabled, is always smartly dressed in a dark suit, white shirt and black tie. He scoffs at Adil’s dream of migration to the North and believes that a future can be made in Casablanca, provided one is determined to sweat for it. The irony is that, to eke out his meager income, Karim keeps a battalion of teenagers selling cigarettes by the unit in the streets.

Adil and Karim have to face the realities of daily sustenance, broken families and the nervous conditions of “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000: 24). In the course of the film, they live by their wits, only to reach the conclusion that survival tactics alone are not enough to get them out of the real world of hardship and social injustice, which push youth into extremes of religious radicalism or one-way trips to the wasteland of drug addiction. Karim and Adil resolve to make one last attempt to earn enough money to buy their way out of Casanegra. They accept a perilous deal from a louche mobster, Zrire. They go on a mission
to drug a racehorse on the night before the race. The scam goes awry when the horse escapes from the stall at the last minute and the police arrive to chase the young men through Casablanca’s downtown streets in the dead of the night. In the course of the chase, Zrirekk has a serious car accident and Adil and Karim are left to their own devices to cope with the police on their tail. The next scene shows the boys still being dogged by policemen, as in the opening sequence of the film. The ending suggests that for Adil and Karim there is no exit from the mean streets of Casablanca and their vortex of everyday violence. Before the final credits appear, the youth are back on the streets. Karim is still lording over his cigarettes-by-the-unit empire manned by teenagers adept at ducking and diving to avoid police patrols. Meanwhile, Adil has changed his mind about migration to Sweden: it is now Norway instead which haunts his daydreams. The systematic dreamer has acquired a postcard of a Norwegian city to replace his well-worn fetish of Malmö.

In Casanegra, everyday life on screen is the stage of postcolonial youth’s existential angst and horizons of hope. The film pays tribute to both the director’s self-avowed amour vache (tough love) for his city and the common people’s resourcefulness in surviving under difficult circumstances (Lakhmari in Idrissi 2008). As its title suggests, the main character of Lakhmari’s film is the dark city itself. Casanegra opens on a sequence with the credits impressed on deserted downtown streets at night. This aural tribute to film noir and the deployment of high-contrast shadowed cinematography are non-diegetically amplified by melancholy jazz music. This opening sequence sets the mood for the viewer’s imminent journey to Casablanca’s nocturnal underside. The credit sequence’s nostalgic aura puts the spectator in an affective state only to be shocked back into the city’s sordid reality by the next sequence of the police chasing Adil and Karim. The viewer’s affective response is further maintained in a state of flux by this second sequence’s three freeze-frame shots of the chased youth (à la François Truffaut in The 400 Blows). The last freeze-frame fades out to a black
screen, which lasts for a few seconds before a message in white letters appears: “Three Days Earlier…” As the writing fades out, the black frame dissolves and the audience is thrust into daylight Casablanca from the perspective of its underbelly, Casanegra. This other Casablanca is violent, seedy, vicious and fascinating. It is loved and hated by marginalised youth in equal proportions (as is unambiguously indicated by the rap song played over the film’s final credits). The film was shot on location and mostly at night to bring out the force of the mundane existence of the hordes of disaffected youth, drunkards, prostitutes, drug addicts, and other disadvantaged types who inhabit their city only at night to eschew the gaze of those in control of the city in broad daylight. The occupation of the city by these subaltern subjects can be seen as their manner of exercising the Lefebvrian right to the city as a claim for “a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (1996: 158). This war of position waged by the marginal characters of Casanegra has become more urgent in the wake of the strains placed on social mobility by globalisation. The exercise of the right to the city can bring poor and rich Casablancans into violent confrontation; we witness this firsthand when Karim engages in a fight with a wealthy transvestite drug dealer in the mansion of the latter. The class encounter erupts into linguistic and visual aggression when the rich person uses a camcorder to videotape Adil and Karim, thus both objectifying and keeping them at bay. Conscious of their lack of fluency in French, he uses the class idiom to exclude them from his privileged universe. This rekindles in Karim a bitter awareness of the class divide and its symbolic violence in Casablanca. The dispute flares into a fight with Karim striking back with the only means available to him: physical violence. He headbutts the French-speaking antagonist leaving him unconscious. In addition, Karim’s hope of redemption through a relationship with Nabila, an antique dealer and single mother, lasts for only one day and a night. In a city rupturing along class lines, a poor youth like him is not entitled to a long-term relationship.
with a member of an economic elite “alienated from its fellow citizens in terms of lifestyle, education, language and professional future” (Sater 2010: 10).

Most of the film’s action unfolds in downtown Casablanca, a space adorned with white Art Deco buildings, to visually emphasise both a modernist utopia and its disjunctures in post-colonial Casablanca. While Casanegra is thematically about the brutality and violence of youth’s everyday life in a neoliberal metropolis, the camera is pointed skyward at pivotal intervals in unflinching and expressionistic long takes, enhanced by deep-focus photography and slow film stock, to allow viewers to take in the melancholy beauty of this architectural landscape (Fig. 21). After many decades of uneven development, the affluent residents of Casablanca moved out into exclusive suburbs and left disenfranchised middle classes to inhabit this colony of architecturally beautiful yet often decaying buildings. The ordinary space of downtown Casablanca is contrasted in Casanegra with suburban estates to depict the division of this metropolis into two cities: the Casanegra of the poor and the Casablanca of the affluent few. However, Casanegra goes beyond a tale of two cities to explore their social worlds in a way that does not overload the film’s narrative structure. The mise en scène aligns the viewer with the everyday world of Casablanca’s underclass. For example, the Lime Night nightclub frequented by affluent Casablancans is devoid of the ambiance of the poor folk’s cabaret; the deluxe nightclub’s sounds are no match for the poetic realism of local popular music and the psychedelically earthy liveliness of the customers at the Où Tout Va Bien cabaret owned by Zrire and run by his mistress Rawiya.
The social and spatial divisions are also rendered in *Casanegra* through colourful contrasts. With other colours drained throughout this noirish film, black and white are the dominant shades worn by Casablanca. White buildings evoke the Casablanca of yore while black denotes the sombre visions and grey existence of disadvantaged youth in the present. Blackness also projects nocturnal Casablanca and its mean and garbage-strewn streets occupied by whores, pimps, drunkards, homosexuals, homeless children and other social outcasts excluded from the regimented world of the daylight city. Beyond the built environment and urban types, Casanegra is a dark double of the white city which impregnates every frame of this monochrome film with a darkly shaded ennui. This visual *mise en abîme* is enhanced by the dramatic jazz score playing in the background. Defying the capacity of language alone to transmit the existential canvas of Casanegra, Lakhmari’s urban saga
unfolds in intensive and multilayered folds of spatial and temporal contrasts, on the one hand, and the altered mental states of the characters, on the other. The viewers are granted access to the subjective states of Adil, Karim, Zrireak and others through an affectively charged play of black and white. This colourful expressionism enhances the film’s realist effects and its portrait of disaffected youth. The city dominates the film as a metropolis that blends the human and the spatial in a colourful, aural and affective rhythmicality that renders Casablanca’s neoliberal urbanism and the place of young people in its social order.

_Casanegra_’s street-smart anti-heroes are the emblems of a young generation of Moroccans living in a present so difficult it leaves them with little hope that the future will be any different. Born in the 1980s and the early 1990s, they have grown up under the state of austerity. Little has been done to equip them with adequate educational and material assets to face the demands of actually existing globalisation. They are a generation of disaffected youth in a society where real opportunities for social mobility are scarce. Although various Moroccan films have tackled the problems and dreams of this age group in a society with a considerable young population, _Casanegra_ stands out for its deep portrayal of urban youth’s structures of feeling under the yoke of neoliberal globalisation. Karim and Adil are two ordinary young men in a generation torn between the harsh realities of their birthplace on the southern borders of the affluent global North, on the one hand, and the spectacular illusions of virtual modernity, on the other. In a surreal dream sequence, a stoned Adil walks side by side with his Swedish bride in the streets of Casablanca. His Kusturicaesque marriage is a pregnant moment of the film’s social vision. This episode of fanciful surrealism is essentially grim realism with a darkly humorous effect. Adil and Karim’s gift for survival tactics in a social and spatial environment of limited means is what makes of them the symbol of an entire generation. Lakhmari’s humanist film stages the everyday life of urban youth in its raw
texture and quotidian brutality. The grievances and desires of disaffected youth are a central part of Moroccan society.

*Casanegra* and the wave of films that have garnered wide audience attention since the 1990s have attempted to change Moroccan society through a politically motivated aesthetic realism. Lakhmari belongs to the *Briseurs de Tabous* (Taboo Breakers), a movement of Moroccan artists intent on changing society by questioning its collective unconscious convictions about religion and sexuality. Their aim is to force it to see itself through the prism of repressed desires and subaltern narratives (Boukhari 2009: 46). Their vision consists of a creative destruction of a society torn between yearning for secular modernity and longing for tradition. *Casanegra* addresses this sensitive area of postcolonial subjectivity through what I call affective realism. Affective violence escapes representation and unsettles the audience in their comfort zones as spectators. It draws them in vicariously to live the same experiences of violence as the characters they are watching on the screen. This affective violence breaks the fourth wall. It has different manifestations and significance in the production of postcoloniality in a neoliberal environment. Before proceeding to explore affective realism in *Casanegra*, an account of the difference between emotions, feelings and affects is in order. Affects, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are our preconscious and as yet unqualified blocs of intensity, while emotions are social codifications or reterritorialisations of these intensive masses of energy which immanently inhabit our bodies and the world. As for feelings, they are the personal and biographical materializations of affect (1987: 240). Affect is the essence of all art. As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

> It should be said of all art that, in relation to the percepts or visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects. They not only
create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound. (1994: 175)

NUC films partake of the affective transformativity of art and its potential for the articulation of alternative *becomings* of the human subject. What this chapter has discussed as youth revolt on screen is an organisation of the mass affects of social malaise and the will to revolt, which have been gathering force in Morocco under globalisation. In this sense, Adil and Karim’s raging anger is a collective affect rather than a personal feeling or a fully actualised social emotion. As Deleuze and Guattari further argue, “affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel” (1987: 240). As we will see shortly, affect is the ultimate locus of postcolonial subjectivity in *Casanegra*.

This film’s affective realism projects urban youth’s everyday life and will to revolt on three levels: physical, linguistic and haptic. Most roles in *Casanegra*, including Adil and Karim, are played by non-professional actors. The rationale behind this neorealist casting is “to rediscover Casablanca through unknown faces” (Lakhmari in Mrabet 2008–09). The film relies on the ability of the anonymous body to articulate the impersonal and non-linguistic undercurrents of human relationships. Violence in its visceral realism is the primary and most visible manifestation of the transmission of the affects of anxiety and rage together with the scarce moments of joy which punctuate what is otherwise a dark tale of Casablanca from below. The spectator is led to reflect on the human body in its radical connectivity to other bodies and the spatio-temporal underpinnings of urban life. “In affect,” Brian Massumi writes, “we are never alone. That’s because affects [. . .] are basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations” (2002: 214). In *Casanegra*, affects are the connective tissue enabling the characters’ bodies to affect and be affected by one another as well as affecting
and being affected by the intensive textures of urban space. Affect melds together the human body and the city. *Casanegra* foregrounds Casanegra’s physical violence as an affective process and encounter between actor and spectator. Its affective violence is a realist expression of the condition of a divided city in an uneven world, yet it articulates this condition through the creative power of affects. For example, the sudden outbursts of physical violence offer a sombre portrayal of a violent city through affects which undermine stereotypes about the peaceful Moroccan society.

Similar to physical violence, the linguistic violence of NUC films has increased with the deepening of the neoliberalisation of Casablanca’s everyday life. Almost every sentence in the film’s dialogue contains a swear word. The poetic vulgarity of street language is not banal. More than any other Moroccan film prior to its release, *Casanegra* beat all the records in terms of violent language in its two-hour duration. The film is mostly set in the streets and barely a minute goes by without a character launching an expletive-laden rant at himself or at others. Almost everyone is loud, foul-mouthed and aggressive behaviour can burst at any moment. Is this wanton violence? *Casanegra*’s uncensored vulgarity consolidates its realist representation of everyday violence in Casablanca. Whilst the majority of his actors were born and bred in Casablanca or had lived there for a long time, Lakhmari insisted on reacquainting them with its underground zones, nighttime rituals and street language (Boukhari 2009: 46). This participant observation culminated in the frank talk of the film which led to it being denied entry into competition at the Marrakech International Film Festival in 2008. However, it was not so much the film’s unrefined street language that deterred the organisers of the royal festival from selecting it for competition, but rather the political connotations of linguistic violence in the film. Whether it is the visceral flashback of Karim pummeling a park attendant with his fists, Adil’s violent delights, Zrirekk’s verbal and physical eruptions or the actions of people who appear on the screen for just a few seconds,
Casanegra’s intensive violence is politically resonant with the socioeconomic realities of Morocco today.

The haptic dimension of Casanegra’s affective realism encapsulates the power of human bodies to affect and be affected. The affection-image “works directly on the affective nervous system that has its sensors everywhere in the flesh” (Pisters 2003: 70). In this Spinozist perspective, human bodies are not closed systems. They are rather multiplicities which thrive on the capacity to affect and be affected by other multiplicities. A body is “a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity within a web of other multiplicities” (Gatens qtd. in Probyn 2005: 141). Casanegra’s haptic articulation of the brutality of everyday life for the city’s marginalised youth is geared toward exercising an affective impact on the viewer. The audience are subjected to the affective flows of raw violence in the life of Karim, Adil and others. The film experience becomes what Deleuze and Guattari call the “body without organs” (2004: 9) or one continuum of affectivity whereby the spectator is plunged into the lived experience of Casablanca’s disaffected youth. Such moments of high intensity—or “pregnant moments” (Barthes 1974: 36)—erase the frontier between the characters and the viewers of the film when Casanegra relies less on language and more on images to exercise their affectivity on the viewer. Casanegra’s investment in cinematic affect to engage the audience in the everyday drama of Casablancean youth evidences an aesthetic of immediate and realist expression beyond language-based approaches to reality in cinematic and cultural expression. In this film, to expand geographically Steven Shaviro’s Deleuzian line of thought, “perception becomes a kind of physical affliction, an intensification and disarticulation of bodily sensation rather than a process either of naïve (ideological or imaginary) belief or of detached, attentive consideration” (Shaviro 1993: 52). One of the myriad manifestations of this affective realism revolves around Haitham the Turtle, a mute youth who as his name suggests has only one companion to share his moments of sorrow and joy: a turtle. The
minimal deployment of dialogue in the scenes involving them make their moments of speechless yet profound communion intense experiences of haptic connectedness between actor and spectator. The latter is symbiotically canvassed to be affected by and live the real experience of a poor and abandoned youth. This pregnant moment of affectivity is an exemplary case of the Brechtian social gestus, whereby the whole social situation of neoliberal Casablanca and its geographies of abandonment can be affectively glimpsed in one stroke.

These three levels of affective realism imbue Casanegra with an affective power which has attracted large crowds, most notably young people, to identify with its disadvantaged anti-heroes. As Noureddine Sail puts it, “Casanegra is a lucid and uncompromising gaze at a world full of violence” (qtd. in Boukhari 2009: 42). Through its realist portrayal of the other side of Casablanca and the extraordinary exploits of its resentful yet resourceful protagonists, Casanegra has screened the psychology of a city and a generation of young people torn between, on the one hand, a mixed affection for their city and rage against the post-colonial state which has failed them, and, on the other, impossible dreams for an elsewhere made attractive by global mass media yet remains beyond their reach. Youth’s on-screen affects of anger and the will to revolt project the off-screen dreams of dignity, freedom, social justice, the three slogans of Morocco’s youth-led social protests in 2011. The disjunctive articulations of Moroccan youth’s postcolonial subjectivity on (and off) screen take shape in the fluid space between the everyday hardships of lived globalisation and the spectacular illusions of late capitalism.

4. Nayda Cinema: Moroccan Youth and Global Subcultures

Having explored NUC’s representations of upper and under-class youth in distress in this chapter’s first three sections, the following section will explore young Casablancans’ quest
for postcolonial agency on screen. A focus on the agency of this age group can illuminate the real implications of youth’s condition under societal and global structures of domination. Casablanca, as we will see, has been the stage of Morocco’s foremost subcultural youth movement in recent history. Some NUC filmmakers have committed the spirit of this socio-cultural movement onto the screen whilst others—Achaour, the Noury brothers and Lasri—came of cinematic age under its influence, as the next chapter explores in great detail. This has implications for their representation of youth in search of postcolonial agency. This section will thus explore youth’s agency in urban space as postcolonial subjects through a close analysis of two films dealing with the alternative and independent cultural scene in Casablanca at the turn of the century. One a documentary (Casanayda!, 2007) and the other a feature film (The Satanic Angels, 2007), both works unveil young people’s struggle for emancipatory subjectivities in Moroccan society in the decade leading up to the mass protests of 2011. Focusing on each film’s articulation of the postcolonial subjectivity of young people through a realist lens, I will situate youth’s quest for agency within the historical evolution of Casablanca as a neoliberal city. I argue that the films foreground the agency of youth through a focus on their alternative constructions of postcolonial subjectivity in a cultural scene that marries local and global influences in the street, on stage and on the screen. The quest for agency through alternative performance cultures on screen is not only a matter of reclaiming urban space for an age group, but also the quest for justice of an entire society under globalisation.

As Chapter 1 discusses, Casablanca entered the 21st century with a youthful population, enormous socio-economic challenges and a deep uncertainty about how the future would pan out. Released in 2007, Farida Benlyazid and Abderrahim Mettour’s Casanayda! and Ahmed Boulane’s The Satanic Angels deal with the Nayda movement or the renaissance of youth cultures in Morocco at the turn of this century. Often compared to the Movida in post-
Francoist Spain, when young people stormed the stage in cities and broke long-standing taboos about sex, nation and religion, postcolonial youth’s cultural revolution in Casablanca and further afield in Morocco bears more than a superficial resemblance to that of their peers north of Gibraltar. *Nayda* (literally, ‘It's moving!’) is the expression of Moroccan youth’s struggle for cultural change and social justice from below. The seeds of the street demonstrations led by the 20 February Movement in 2011 are to be found in this age group’s cultural evolution over the last decades. Similarly to *Movida*, studies of *Nayda* cannot avoid accounting for urban change in a youth-dominated society in transition. In what follows, I will give a brief critical account of youth cultures in Casablanca before embarking on a close analysis of the aforementioned films as cultural works within the precise contexts of their historical and social production and reception.

Whilst young people always played an important role in Morocco’s urban life, youth subcultures have taken on new forms and meaning over the last decade. If the famous folk-rock band *Nass El Ghiwane* sang ordinary Casablancans’ fears and hopes through *lamâani* (‘allusions’) rooted in the popular culture of Casablanca in the 1960s and 1970s, *Nayda* voices youth aspirations and anxieties in neoliberal Morocco. From underground performances in the 1980s, *Nayda* has evolved to become one of the country’s most visible articulations of globalisation today. Metalheads and other subcultural artists and activists were among the first groups “to plug into the globalised cultural networks that emerged in the 1980s” (LeVine 2008: 7). The *Nayda* movement burst onto the public scene in 2003. Two landmark events in Casablanca that year profoundly marked youth cultures and Morocco’s recent history. As Boulane’s film relates, fourteen hard rockers were arrested on 13 February 2003 and subsequently jailed on Satanist charges. This incident led to the mobilisation of civil society to defend freedom of expression from the surge of political Islam. The youth
were released in April 2003. A few weeks later, twelve Islamist suicide bombers blew up different civilian targets in Casablanca killing 33 people.

Nayda is the alternative voice of postcolonial youth who have come of age under globalisation. It is the subcultural expression of their anxieties and articulations of dissent and hope. In the street protests staged in Moroccan cities for months in 2011, Nayda activists chanted slogans and composed songs to express their generation’s anger against the status quo. Mouad Belghouat (alias El Haqed or 7a9ed, ‘The Rancorous One’) is a young rapper from one of Casablanca’s poorest districts, Hay El Wifak (commonly known as Oukacha after the city’s infamous prison). In 2011, El Haqed was a factory worker by day, rapper by night and street protest leader on weekends. His virulent songs against social injustice and the king’s monopoly of executive, legislative and judicial powers vexed the regime. El Haqed was arrested on 9 September 2011. Protests multiplied leading to his release on 12 January 2012. He was arrested anew and sentenced to one year in jail in March 2012. Mouad is an example of Nayda youth who embraced the cause of social and political reforms in the country in 2011, themes which had dominated Morocco’s alternative urban cultures since the 1980s. His arrests, imprisonment and releases are evidence of the convergence between youth’s protest movement and Nayda. They also indicate the long road youth have to travel in the struggle for democracy and social justice in Morocco. In Morocco and around the world today, young people “blog, sing, protest, agitate, join formal and informal organizations, and find myriad other ways to claim their rights and assert their will for justice, livelihoods, and lifestyles” (Bayat and Herrera 2010: 11). Casanayda! and The Satanic Angels are two compelling examples of how NUC foregrounds youth’s quest for agency against neoliberal globalisation, authoritarian rule and exclusive discourses and practices of the nation.
4.1 Documenting Casablanca on the Move

Directed by Farida Benlyazid and Abderrahim Mettour, *Casanayda!* documents the birth and growth of youth subcultures in Casablanca. It gives voice to young artists, journalists and civil society activists who either took part in or witnessed up close the tumultuous birth of Nayda. The film frames this urban phenomenon within a global movement of youth cultures. For Benlyazid, “everywhere young people give voice to their local realities in the face of globalisation” (2007). In Morocco, this movement has flourished around Le Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens (alias L’Boulevard), Africa’s biggest festival of alternative music (Garçon 2007). Even if it was made in 2007 and L’Boulevard has evolved ever since, *Casanayda!* still covers an important period of Moroccan (youth’s) history. The documentary opens with fast-paced shots of traffic and pedestrians in the streets of downtown and coastal Casablanca. Subsequent shots show spiky-haired, goth-clad young people (including girls in hijabs and Ray Ban sunglasses) all dancing to rock and hip-hop tunes at a festival. Fast shots reveal graffiti-painted walls, youth in black clothing, tattoos, piercings, and crowds converging on a stadium. There is no voiceover in *Casanayda!* but it is evident early on that this is the L’Boulevard festival held every summer in Casablanca since 1999, which coincided with the death of King Hassan II. With his death, L’Boulevard co-founder Momo Merhari notes, “a wind of freedom blew over the country and urban youth allowed their creativity to flourish” (qtd. in Slimani 2009). Whether hailing from middle-class backgrounds or working-class neighbourhoods and shantytowns (as they mostly do), Casablanican youth are not afraid of putting into words and rhymes their everyday life in a changing society. Starting as underground rock and amateur hip-hop in the 1980s and 1990s, Nayda has revolutionised the Moroccan public sphere since 1999. From politics to fashion, recording studios to street protests, young people have questioned the taboos of a profoundly conservative society and repressive state system. Their music and street arts have held a mirror up to a society
undergoing rapid socioeconomic transformations and contradictory moves to modernity, a
process threatened by widespread poverty and the extremist ideologies that mushroom in its
nests.

The pre-credit sequence of Casanayda! unfolds to the rhythm of a rap song by the
Bizz2risk band: “Casa! Casa is my city, I feel at home here, You are like New York now:/
Very crowded and so dangerous.” The rappers go on to list the elements which make their
city both attractive and repulsive, but love for Casa wins out in the end. A linguistic means of
reclaiming the city, ‘Casa’ is youth’s common name for Casablanca. With the song still
playing in the background, clips and photographs from the city’s recent political and cultural
history flash on the screen. These images unveil acts of youth’s agency in urban space. One
clip in particular takes us back to 2003: hundreds are protesting in front of the city’s court
holding banners saying ‘I Vote, I Sing’ or ‘Free Our Youth!’ to demand the release of the
fourteen arrested rockers. When the opening credits appear, the viewer has already been
taken on a one-minute journey through Casablanca with young people acting as the agents of
this space. Their graffiti, goth or hip-hop clothing, music, long hair, sign language and break
dancing are all markers of a space reclaimed by youth through such subcultural weapons of
resistance. In Casanayda! youth reclaim their subjectivity and re-conquer the city through
Nayda’s verbal and visual tactics. Other activities centred around L’Boulevard in the
documentary and aimed at empowering youth include filmmaking workshops, experimental
documentary, photography, citizen journalism, alternative fashion, L’Kounache magazine,
and the birth of independent radio stations since 2006 (e.g., Hit Radio, Casa FM) to promote
and spread Nayda culture. Casanayda! reveals the key role of L’Boulevard and culture in
young people’s aspirations for control over urban space and socio-political agency in
Casablanca and Morocco at large, as Bigg Al Khasser’s closing rap song reveals (as I will
discuss further below).
Nayda youth use Morocco’s two national languages, Darija and Tamazight, long repressed by the state in favour of Standard Arabic and French. Everyone in Casanayda! thinks that realist messages about everyday life in Morocco can be communicated only in the everyday languages of young people. Casablanca’s most popular rapper, Don Bigg, puts it succinctly: “I use young people’s everyday language to speak the truth and say out loud what everyone else thinks in undertones” (qtd. in Caubet 2006).

A phenomenon traversing music, literature and cinema, Nayda empowers Moroccan youth through language and asserts their right to spatial justice in Casablanca and postcolonial agency in an interconnected world. As Casanayda! shows, language is only one aspect of the L’Boulevard generation’s quiet revolution. This subcultural renaissance raises questions about a society and culture in flux. As one of the documentary’s co-directors asserts: “There is a broad consensus today that Moroccanness incorporates all the constituents of this identity—Amazigh, African, Arab—whereas in the past there was only one answer: Arab and Muslim” (Benlyazid qtd. in Garçon 2007).

Through interviews with journalists, metalheads and emblematic rappers like Don Bigg and Casa Crew, Casanayda! paints a portrait of a generation’s quest for agency beyond the grand narratives of national identity. Although Benlyazid and Mettour evoke the threats to Nayda’s progressive agenda from widespread commercialisation and commodification, it is evident from the documentary and the reality of Casablanca a few years later that youth subcultures have radically impacted on urban and political culture. The film closes on Don Bigg thunderously rapping on stage in front of thousands of L’Boulevard youth in a rugby stadium: “O Moroccans, lift your heads!/ Be afraid no more!/ Enough fearing the police!/ Enough fearing the authorities!/ Enough fearing the rich!” Appropriately called Al Khouf

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36 This establishes a strategic continuity between Nayda’s politics of language and two influential Moroccan writers, Mohamed Shukri (1935-2003) in Tangier and Mohamed Zafzaf (1942-2001) in Casablanca, who drew on people’s vernacular modernity to speak truth to power at a time when even the word ‘people’ was taboo.
(Fear), the song was inspired by Saâd Chraïbi’s *Jawhara, the Jail Girl* (2004), a sombre film about the Years of Lead. This instance of Moroccan cinema’s contribution to Nayda illustrates how filmmakers have embraced the questions and problems of postcolonial youth in a society trying to come to terms with their place in the world (Fig. 22).

*Figure 22. Youth and the quest of agency through global subculture*

*Casanayda!* mostly consists of stage performances. The commentaries of the artists and observers of the alternative cultural scene are tightly edited to support a narrative that weds the rise and growth of Nayda to the birth and expansion of L’Boulevard in Casablanca. Through the lyrics of the rock, fusion and rap songs on the festival stage, on the one hand, and the learned commentary of various artists and observers, on the other, *Casanayda!* remaps Casablanca through the eyes of Nayda youth. Time and space, social class and gender, are implicitly negotiated and redrawn through the subversive art and realist verve of
Nayda’s artists. Mooted is the class divide in Casablanca which L’Boulevard bridges for a few days every year through its carnivalesque atmosphere. Like most of the hard rockers incriminated in the *affaire satanique* of 2003, upper-class Casablancans are essential players in the Nayda scene. Their Moroccanness is broached in the documentary and defended against the grain of the populist view that the rich are less patriotic than the rest. *Casanayda!* is making a reference here to the public controversy around Marrakchi’s *Marock* (2005).  

The social and political acceptance of youth’s new musical cultures like rock, fusion and hip hop in Morocco has been neither easy nor fully achieved. In addition to having to adapt a transnational youth culture to convey Moroccan realities, there is the issue of (self-)censorship under a repressive moral regime. As many musicians and the L’Boulevard founders, Momo Merhari and Hicham Bahou, explain in *Casanayda!*, it has taken three decades for youth’s subcultures to be relatively accepted as a legitimate form of public expression. Moroccan cities, particularly Casablanca, have their own bands and groups representing young people’s collective voice. Rock music in its different forms has been almost exclusively the domain of middle and upper-class youth, who have easy access to its global circuits, musical training and can afford the costly instruments (Hamma 2006: 169). Hip-hop remains the favourite medium amongst young people in poor neighbourhoods. Given its propensity for the explicit expression of protest against poverty and discrimination, this originally African-American culture is readily appropriated by poor urban youth on the other side of the Atlantic. To convey this transatlantic connection, Benlyazid and Mettour interview the rap groups Casa Crew and Bigg Al Khasser, who hail from working-class neighbourhoods in Casablanca. They concur that rap is a protest music that allows them to reclaim urban space and demand social justice.

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37 As I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, the film was attacked by the conservative media for its alleged immorality and anti-Islamic propaganda.
Casanayda! finally illustrates how L’Boulevard provides a few days of relative respite from the moral regime of Moroccan society. Young people are empowered by Nayda and its festival to question this and other values. As Hicham Bajjou, a young filmmaker and member of the Dayzine music group, explains elsewhere:

L’Boulevard cannot be reduced simply to a musical scene. In the beginning, it was a small platform for young musicians. Today, however, it has become the scene of Moroccan urban culture par excellence, the only one that brings us together in our quest for our global North African identity. Besides, it is not so much music alone that helps us in this. L’Boulevard is primarily a human adventure: a point of reference for hundreds of thousands of youth. (qtd. in Maréchaud and Bensalmia 2006)

Through a focus on the visual and verbal dynamics of Nayda, Casanayda! substantiates Bajjou’s view. The right to the city is thus the kernel of both Nayda and Casanayda! The film documents youth’s struggle for agency through the subculture as an assemblage of everyday subjectivities in Casablanca’s myriad spatialities from shantytowns to affluent suburbs.

4.2 Rocking the Medina

We play heavy metal because our lives are heavy metal. — Reda Zine

On 13 February 2003, the official news agency reported the arrest of a dozen ‘abadat shaytan (worshippers of Satan) in Casablanca. It soon transpired that the so-called Satanists were nine
metalheads and five fans of their music bands Reborn, Killer Zone, Nekros and Infected Brain. It was the first time in contemporary Morocco that anyone had stood trial for Satanism. The mystery that surrounded the cause célèbre, which made headlines around the world, did not fail to remind many people of the country’s Years of Lead (1961-1999) when Hassan II’s police regime could arrest, torture or kill anyone suspected of progressive convictions. The Satanist affair was only slightly different because, as the prosecutor’s charges in Boulane’s film reveal, Islam, instead of the State, was now seen as the victim of a conspiracy spearheaded by the arrested rockers. The local public sphere became polarised overnight between an antagonistic Islamist press emboldened by a significant victory in the 2002 parliamentary elections, and secular-leaning activists who condemned the arrests as a witch-hunt aimed at pleasing Islamist groups. On 6 March, a court in Casablanca condemned the fourteen “worshippers of Satan,” aged 20 to 35, for inciting “moral degradation, debauchery and acts against the Islamic religion” (qtd. in Garçon 2003). During the heavily mediatised trial, they were asked damning questions like, “Why do you slaughter cats and drink their blood?” One of the incriminated youth, Nabyl Guennouni, recalls: “The entire case against us was built on CDs, T-shirts, posters ripped from our bedroom walls and generic ‘satanic’ pictures pulled from the internet” (qtd. in Langendonck 2010). The jail sentences ranged from three months to one year (Fig. 23). Backed by human rights organisations and L’Boulevard activists, hundreds of youth and civil society actors staged protests in Casablanca and organised a rock concert in front of the parliament in Rabat. The fourteen young people were acquitted on appeal in April 2003.
The affaire satanique betrays the Moroccan regime’s unease toward a young generation seeking to express its postcolonial agency through translocal subcultures:

Governments in the MENA are naturally wary of the political potential of such hybrid “cultural” spaces and projects. They understand as well as the region’s metalheads and hip-hoppers how the presence of heavy metal, other supposedly Western forms of hard pop music, and alternative cultures more broadly threaten the established order, and through it their political power. That’s why most governments attempt to censor, and when that fails, either to co-opt or more violently repress these scenes. (LeVine 2008: 5)
A similar case involving satanic rock musicians occurred in Egypt in 1997 and the Moroccan government was urged by some Arab Gulf media to crack down on Casablanca’s alternative scene in 2003 (LeVine 2008: 31). However, the trial and the public outcry that ensued had the opposite effect: the subcultural scene and L’Boulevard shot to prominence, particularly after the suicide bombings on 16 May 2003, which unveiled the eminent danger of religious fundamentalism among Moroccan youth. As one of the L’Boulevard founders puts it: “The publicity around the Satanic music trial catapulted us from obscure concert halls for 200 people to football stadiums” (Merhari qtd. in Langendonck 2010). In a concrete example of youth solidarity in reclaiming the city as a space of justice, the released musicians and their nationwide fans organised the successful Metal Against Terroism concert at L’Boulevard, which was recreated for Boulane’s film three years later. Although it was only in 2006 that the term became widely used to refer to the renaissance of alternative youth cultures in and beyond Casablanca, Nayda as a phenomenon was actually born at the height of the Satanist trial, terrorist attacks and their aftermath in 2003 (Caubet 2009). It dawned on the regime that Nayda was an antidote to extremist ideologies in a youthful society. Since its beginnings in the late 1990s and public appearance in 2003, youth subcultures have been a relatively successful vanguard defence against the rise of religious fundamentalism and other forms of reactionary identity politics. This element alone inscribes The Satanic Angels within the Nayda movement.

A topical screen adaptation of the affaire satanique three years later, The Satanic Angels is about a generation keen on expressing itself in a manner which does not sit well with the “narrow worldview” of the conservative establishment (Boulane qtd. in Bourakkadi 2006). The film pieces together the true story from many sources with a focus on the parents and civil society’s mobilisation to free Guennouni, Bouch, Zine and their friends. A sign of
the Makhzen’s ambiguity toward youth’s freedom, shooting permissions were rescinded for scenes in the Oukacha Prison, where the hard rockers were detained in 2003 (Chabâa 2006). The courtroom had to be recreated in a Casablanca church after the authorities revoked Boulane’s permit to shoot in the real court (one of the main settings of Martin Scorcese’s Kundun, 1997). Another ban affected the appearance of 500 soldiers in the film (Najib 2006). These eleventh-hour acts of censorship led to significant financial losses for a film made on a modest budget (Boulane qtd. in Boukhari 2007). However, the Moroccan-Irish director persisted and managed to complete this second feature, a sequel to his popular film about Morocco’s hippie youth and politics in the 1970s, Ali, Rabiaa and Others (2001). Boulane asserts the thematic continuity of his films when he says that The Satanic Angels is also about the complex question of a generation of Moroccan youth “torn between a desire for individual liberties and the constraints of a conservative society” (Ben Gomra 2009).

The Satanic Angels opens with a heavy metal concert in front of a festival audience at a stadium. The scenes in this sequence are probably drawn from Boulane’s shooting of an actual L’Boulevard audience in 2006 (Maréchaud and Bensalmia 2006). We are next introduced to a group of metalheads and their meeting in Café l’Egyptien. They have visitors from overseas: an American girl and her European friend. The rockers throw a welcome party and go for a ride in the city and come back to their rehearsal venue in a basement garage converted into a dormitory for the night. Police raid the den early the next day and round up everyone. The foreign girls are immediately released and escorted to the airport to avoid a backlash from international media. The succession of events after the arrests follows a strict chronological line spanning the police interrogation of the metalheads, families shocked but determined to prove the innocence of their offspring, journalists and civil society activists rallying behind the parents’ cause and against the Islamist threat to freedom of expression, a

38 “Mon film parle d’une frange de jeunes tiraillés entre une soif de liberté individuelle et les contraintes d’une société conservatrice” (Ben Gomra 2009).
confused judiciary struggling to prove the hurriedly arrested youth guilty, street demonstrations, and finally the metalheads’ concert at L’Boulevard after their release. The film closes to the sound of bombs exploding and an onscreen message that eleven terrorists had attacked many targets in Casablanca on 16 May 2003.

Throughout the film Boulane deploys an aesthetic underpinned by fast-paced camera movements to bring out the drama of each situation in the narrative. A literal example of this speedy televisuality is the quick yet cogent invocation of the invasion of Iraq as the Satanist affair was unfolding in Morocco. Despite a relatively thin characterisation of the metalheads due to the film’s civil society focus, *The Satanic Angels* is a forceful portrayal of historical events with real consequences. Reminiscent of Jim Sheridan’s *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and Paul Greengrass’s *Bloody Sunday* (2002), Boulane’s film was the biggest box office success in Morocco in 2007 (outselling Hollywood’s *Harry Potter* and *300* by wide margins) and has won prizes at international festivals. The film’s political message is that there is a need to rally behind progressive causes in Morocco to prevent fundamentalism from taking hold of a youthful society increasingly torn apart by a neoliberal economy of precarity and the disembedding flows of global modernity.

Like *Casanadya!, The Satanic Angels* tackles youth subculture as a battle for the soul of Casablanca and Morocco. Its realism stages the Lefebvrian *right to the city* through two tactics of resistance. First, it establishes parallels between the Years of Lead and the persecution of Nayda youth in 2003. To drive this point home in the viewer’s mind, urban space on screen is dominated by a police station, the Oukacha prison, and the courtroom. This effect is further amplified by an atmosphere of confinement, restriction and a pervasive feeling of being in danger even in domestic territory. For instance, the youth are arrested in their basement flat and a journalist is attacked in his neighbourhood. Unlike the international and national films which often capitalise on Casablanca’s architectural attractions and open
spaces on the Atlantic coast, Boulane’s introduces us to a cluster of enclosed spaces, often shot in close-up or at mid-range at night, in order to suggest the vanishing freedom and normal life under the threat of ideological conservatism and police repression. The link with the Years of Lead is also driven home by direct references to that period by the arrested young people’s parents, two of whom were tortured and jailed under King Hassan’s dictatorship. It is therefore understandable why the authorities rescinded their licence for Boulane’s crew to shoot in the actual court and Oukacha prison where the fourteen metalheads were tried and jailed in 2003.

This sombre portrait of the city reflects youth’s affective crisis and search for agency in a city and country which have seemingly emerged from the darkness of the Years of Lead, yet without guarantees that they are a thing of the past. Whether invoked directly through film dialogue or suggested through visual effects, Casablanca has become a traumatic space for its youth, who find parallels between their habitus today and that of their oppressed parents in the 1970s (the subject of Boulane’s first film). So deep-seated is the sense of malaise that a relatively privileged rocker boards the plane to France at the film’s end. This departure is constructed by The Satanic Angels not so much as an acknowledgement of defeat, but rather as some youth’s demonstration of their revolt against a city and a society ravaged by uneven globalisation and left prey to reactionary ideologies and authoritarian rule. Similarly to NUC films more widely, the rocker’s departure is by no means a physical retreat but instead a temporary tactic of youth resistance.

An intertwined tactic of reclaiming the city in The Satanic Angels manifests in the young people’s desire to sing, dress, live and be Moroccans on their own terms. Even after a traumatic trial and an even more painful stint in the infamous Oukacha Prison, the hard rockers neither renounce Nayda nor seek redemption in the disciplinary morality behind their trial. The hard rock concert that closes the film encapsulates the agency of metalheads and
young Casablancans—they sing about the right to be free in their city and beyond. During the course of the film, there are other sub-plots and tactics of reclaiming the agency of youth and social justice for all. Civil society’s mobilisation through street protests in Casablanca and Rabat, for example, embody youth’s call for people in the neoliberal metropolis and Moroccan society at large to give free reign to dissent against political oppression, reactionary nationalism, and global injustice. Looking at this film in the aftermath of 2011 uprisings in North Africa, it is safe to say that NUC has foreshadowed urban youth’s overriding agency in the ongoing struggle for postcolonial emancipation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, second-strand NUC has projected the everyday life of disaffected youth and other marginalised social categories in Casablanca under globalization. If Marrakchi’s film is initially intended to depict the privileged life of upper-class youth, the spectre of the urban poor haunts the film and disrupts directorial intentions. Marock in my contrapuntal reading turns out to be a portrait of both sides of a divided city. In Ali Zawa, Ayouch scrutinises the subaltern world of street children who populate the streets of Casablanca. Its combination of gritty realism and fantasmatic animation unveils the harsh everyday life of neoliberal society’s homeless kids whilst retaining a space for the expression of their dreams and historical agency. A few years later, Lakhmari took his camera to the streets to depict the hard life of underprivileged youth in Casanegra, the concrete metaphor for Moroccan society under strain. The intensity and viscerality of the violence in Casanegra (2008) is unprecedented on the NUC screen. Through a close analysis of what I have called the film’s affective realism, the violence transpires to be an articulation of the accumulative globalisation of the Moroccan city and society’s material and symbolic fields. Casanegra elides drab verisimilitude through a creative deployment of human affects as original and
effective means of affecting the audience and drawing attention to north African youth’s problems, which engendered the popular uprisings of 2011.

As I hope to have shown through the analysis of two Nayda films against the background of a postcolonial metropolis and country in transition, Moroccan youth’s on-screen agency has also prefigured the off-screen issues and mass protests of Morocco and North Africa since 2011. We have seen how the short history of Casablanca’s subcultural scene Nayda has staged youth’s collective agency and right to the city as part of an ongoing struggle in post-colonial space today. The filmmakers have focused their lenses on an age group which not only dominates the country’s demographics, but also represents its promises and predicaments in an era of globalisation. In Casanayda! and The Satanic Angels, Casablanca is aurally and visually re-appropriated by the L’Boulevard youth despite, or rather thanks to, the resistance of the regime and conservative sectors of society to their hybrid weapons of expressing their Moroccan subjectivity. In the end, the two films are topical portraits of the condition of Moroccan youth in a post-colonial metropolis and their dreams for a future beyond oppression and poverty. The cinematic articulation of the emergent forms of postcolonial agency in Morocco is a timely reminder about the real forces which are shaping a society and a region with a considerably young population and potential for historical change.
CHAPTER 5
Adrift in Casablanca: Mapping Advanced Neoliberalism

The social atlas of Casablanca explored in Chapter 3 was prevalent in NUC from the early 1990s through the mid-2000s, when the veteran filmmakers gradually fell silent. Besides Lagtaâ and Derkaouï, who have not made feature films since the former’s *Yasmine and Men* (2007), directors like Hakim Noury and Hassan Benjelloun have continued to make films but at increasingly longer intervals and often set out with Casablanca. I want to argue here that the waning of NUC’s first strand is not due to its ageing directors but rather to a structural transformation in the relationship between cinema and the city. Advanced neoliberalism in its various social and economic manifestations (as discussed in Chapter 1) has bred new patterns in Casablanca’s cinematic representation as well as in its reception by the audience, which this chapter will explore at ample length. We have seen how Lagtaâ and Derkaouï socially and cognitively mapped Casablanca from the 1990s through the early 2000s. The second and third strands of NUC took over at the turn of the century with new and apparently dissimilar maps of Casablanca. Ayouch’s *Ali Zaoua* (2000), a box-office hit in Morocco and winner of over forty prizes at international film festivals, marked a significant shift in the cinematic representation of the metropolis. This second-strand director and his confreres have filmed Casablanca’s social margins through an aesthetic language centred on screening marginality, which I examined in the previous chapter. Over the last few years, the young filmmakers of NUC’s third strand have put forward their own novel and rich portraits of Casablanca. Their representation of the neoliberal city is, at first glance, radically at variance with the social atlas of the Lodz and world cinema currents within NUC. However, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, beneath the apparent variations in style and implied audiences, there lies a deep
continuity of cinematic realism. In essence, there exists a latent consistency in the realist representations of Casablanca across NUC’s three strands in spite of stylistic diversity and new rapports with the audience. Having explored the first and second strands’ deployment of social realism and melodrama in previous chapters, I shall now dwell on the generically indeterminate films of NUC’s third strand alongside those of Faouzi Bensaïdi, who occupies an in-between place between the second and third strands of this cinema for reasons sketched out in Chapter 2 but which will be probed further in this chapter.

Third-strand NUC’s politics of representation shares a realist aesthetic with the other strands. However, it begs to differ in going beyond the first strand’s mining of the subversive potential of melodrama and the second’s structural debt to world cinema and the international festival circuit’s dynamics. The third-strand filmmakers are not only younger than most of the other NUC directors, but also combine stylistic experiments with a focus on how Casablanca is coming under the full force of globalisation like other metropolises worldwide and the violence of capital is increasingly prevalent in its everyday life. Bensaïdi and NUC’s third-strand filmmakers (Mohammed Achaour, Hicham Lasri, Imad and Swel Noury) are keen on experimenting with film form in what I argue is an attempt to articulate Casablanca as a city of advanced neoliberalism since the mid-2000s. The talent of these formalists blast off the screen as does their willingness to take risks by mobilising innovative narrative forms and techniques. Bensaïdi, the Noury brothers, Lasri and Achaour provide a critique of globalisation through an aesthetic of the surface. This aesthetic does not pale in depth or significance in the face of the social realism of Lagtaâ or Derkaoui (see Chapter 3). In fact, as we shall see, it renders visible otherwise hidden dimensions of the postcolonial condition under late capitalism. At variance with the plain social realism of the first strand, this new aesthetic is shaped by stylistic experimentation and the impossibility of being certain in a world permeated by digital media, global flows and identitarian flux.
I. “My Film Will Not Be Televised”

Born in Casablanca in 1972 to a family from the Anti-Atlas mountains, Mohamed Achaour is today a Casablanca-based filmmaker with a prolific record of artistic productions. His artistic career began with the creation of the short-lived Amazigh music bands Afous and Abarraz in 1999 and 2001, respectively. Filmmaking came much later. This professional trajectory puts him in league with other third-strand NUC directors, who came to cinema both through unlikely routes and in the shadow of the Nayda subcultural movement in Casablanca at the turn of the century (as we saw in the previous chapter). After a series of acclaimed short and TV movies, Achaour released his debut feature film in 2011. This relative belatedness in making a fiction film for the big screen is precisely what *A Film* is about. It is the story of an aspiring film director in Casablanca, who is unable to settle on a script for his first screen fiction. Played by Achaour himself, the protagonist is a tormented young artist. He spends sleepless nights and long days chain-smoking or drinking with an actor friend in a pub, or routinely having disputes with his partner (played by Fatym Layachi, Achaour’s real-life partner at the time), another idle actress waiting to play in the director’s first film. Set almost entirely between a middle-class flat in the city centre and the pub, *A Film* blurs the fine line between reality and fiction even if it ultimately inscribes itself in Morocco and Casablanca today.

*A Film*: the indefinite title poses the definite question of what film a young postcolonial director today can and should make in a society economically subordinated to global capital and socially fractured by class inequalities, authoritarian rule and conservative reinventions of tradition. Can he make his film without risking social and political censorship or, more perilously, self-censorship? *A Film* voices the ontological questions at the heart of NUC, a cinema apparently unsophisticated in its take on reality but which is rather complex in its
representation of postcolonial subjects in urban space. In the wake of the Lodz school’s waning in the mid-2000s, Achaour asks what films Moroccan directors can create today. Should they make facile fictions that cater to the tastes of a general public accustomed to Hollywood, Bollywood and television’s modes of consumption? Or must they produce esoteric films for a few hundred cinephiles attending Moroccan and overseas festivals? The ultimate question comes up: What is the point of making films anyway? In a film unfolding through the voice-over of the filmmaker more than through dialogue, he confesses:

I spend my time walking, watching, and ready to take notes. I don’t want to make just anything. [...] Yes, I spend my time looking around and haven’t found anything yet. It’s as if stories avoid me. Or maybe it’s me that is not in the right place at the right time. I seem to always miss it. [Long pause] Even the people have nothing to tell. All are looking for ways to earn their livelihood... That I understand!

This director’s block thus becomes a question about collective forms of expression in specific historical circumstances. Achaour as both filmmaker and protagonist is a turn-of-the-century postcolonial subject contemplating the ways in which Moroccan subjectivities are or are not produced on screen and to what ends.

A Film ends up being two films in one: one made through filming the impossibility of making a film, so to speak. Achaour revisits Orientalist representations of Casablanca in international cinema and questions the formulaic images of the city in Moroccan films. The protagonist lives in the city centre like most of the fragile middle classes of contemporary Casablanca. On the one hand, his socioeconomic and existential vulnerability makes him weary of esoteric films made for international film festivals beyond national audience interest
or cultivation and, on the other, commercial cinema tailored for a mass audience with no consideration for artistic quality and the social role of the filmmaker. Both his partner and the couple’s complicit actor friend admonish the protagonist for asking too many philosophical questions whilst doing nothing by way of making a film. He is urged to do like everyone else: “Learn to compromise!” he is told (Fig. 24). However, he stands his ground and the rest of the film is made of his trips around Casablanca or sketches acted by the trio to parody national and international films like *Casablanca* (1942), in addition to revealing the vanities of stardom and television’s hegemony. *A Film* closes on the would-be director still undecided about what film to make but certain that his filmed reflections are a film in themselves.

![Figure 24. The reluctant filmmaker and his wife in A Film](image)

After winning the Original Script and Best Male Actor prizes at Morocco’s national film festival in 2011, *A Film* was released in a limited number of theatres. It immediately
attracted controversy for what some saw as its uncensored moral audacity (TelQuel 2011: 46-47). However, the major controversy in the film’s national reception occurred when Mégarama, a big cineplex chain, pulled the film from its Casablanca theatres due to an alleged lack of audience interest. Other cinemas, which often screen films after Mégarama has gauged their audience interest levels, were inevitably discouraged from showing the film. Achaour and the national film community decried censorship (Achaour 2011: 40). A Film was also caught in a no man’s land between controversy at home and the lack of interest from international festivals, which are often interested only in a standardised (North) African cinema. As I stated earlier, these problematic issues about the audience for Moroccan films are at the heart of third-strand NUC’s production of postcolonial subjectivity and its circulation. Achaour and his colleagues integrate them into the texts of their films. A Film questions the Moroccan film cycle from production to distribution, not least in preempting spectatorial reactions and the controversy at Mégarama. In an interview given when A Film was being initially if erratically distributed, Achaour reiterated the film’s embedded prediction of audience reactions: “This film will certainly not be shown on Moroccan television” (2011).

The Moroccan films that get televised, either literally or metaphorically, are often ones which refrain from questioning established artistic and political verities. A Film unsettles both through stylistic experimentation and thematic audacity, two defining features of NUC’s third strand. This is important to bear in mind in order to understand the film’s representation of neoliberal space. If Mustapha Derkaoui questioned received ideas about filmmaking from the 1970s to the 1990s, Achaour reposes the question in a new environment: How should films be made, if at all, in Morocco today? The question is asked from a specific historical space: 21st-century Casablanca. A Film is set in a fractured urban, national and transnational space. Casablanca on screen is a sensorium of signs and affects from local and

39 “Ce film ne passera certainement pas à la télévision marocaine” (Achaour 2011).
global provenances. The cityscape is not homogeneous, which renders the task of the filmmaker even more difficult. Achaour responds with sundry thoughts on how and how not to shoot Casablanca and, through it, Morocco. The city’s representation on screen is ultimately just as experimental as fragmented, which calls upon the viewer to invest a considerable effort to sew together the pieces projected on the screen with no descriptive or prescriptive order. Of all NUC’s strands, *A Film* shows how the third one is the most demanding of an active spectator with adequate knowledge of diverse cinematic and artistic traditions.

Despite its stylistic innovation and self-conscious difference from mainstream patterns of filmmaking and audience expectations in Morocco, *A Film* continues the project of cognitively mapping neoliberal Casablanca commenced by Lagtaâ and others in the 1990s (as we saw in Chapter 3). However, Achaour projects Casablanca with less confidence of tone and relishes in exposing the advanced neoliberalisation and the digital revolution in urban space through minimal frames and micro-stories. In line with the Nayda movement’s championing of society’s creative margins and its aesthetic of recycling global culture (see Chapter 4), Achaour’s film projects a realist atlas of a city in transition through the I/eye of a young artist who assumes his Moroccan subjectivity as a late postcolonial modernity. The point of view of *A Film* is not immediately that of an entire society, but rather one of a forlorn subject adrift in a globalising city. Casablanca is too vast and unknown a world to be contained within one protagonistic voice on behalf of the collective subjectivity, as is customary in the films of Lagtaâ, for example. This supports my argument that the accumulative globalisation of the city over the last two decades has been translated by NUC through a transition from collective to individual points of view and subjectivities. *A Film* gives this transformation extreme visibility by having the filmmaker as the protagonist of his own film. This novel form of subjectivity production is coupled with the dearth of wide
mapping shots of urban space such as wide boulevards, the Hassan II Mosque and the other iconic scenes and sights strewn through the films of Lagtaâ, Derkaoui and others. In *A Film*, shots of the cityscape are kept to a minimum because the story is quintessentially about a cloistered individual whose tale, or rather the quest for one, apparently concerns and makes sense only to himself. *A Film* is the attempt of an indefinite individual to tell his own tale amidst a sea of other stories. The tale of Casablanca cannot be represented in one collective narrative nor even in seamless individual narratives. The multiplicity and fragmentation of postcolonial subjectivity under globalisation is such that novel ways of filming the city are called for. A socially and existentially fragmented metropolis entails an innovative cinema of fragments, not one that imposes form on shapeless fluidity.

The retreat of Casablanca as a palpable and definable visual space in *A Film* and third-strand NUC in general is not synonymous with the disappearance of the city from the screen. Casablanca is still the prevalent character in the films but under a new economy of signification. It is the affective charge of urban life as experienced by individuals that has become prevalent in this cinema in recent years. The city has become the fluid matter that pervades every scene and character. This invisible city is everywhere. In *A Film*, Casablanca is not only the object but crucially the omnipresent subject of its own representation. The protagonist-filmmaker is only a chain in this fluid process of urban auto-ethnography. Instead of public spaces and the scenes of everyday life, Casablanca becomes a structure of representation that defines the contours of its onscreen articulations. It defies the filmmaker-protagonist to capture it on film. He is haunted by the spectres of its cinematic and colonial past, social and spatial fragmentation in the present and the uncertain horizons of the city’s future. It transpires that it is impossible to distance oneself from the city to film it since the city lives in the filmmaker as much as he does in its physical space. If it is ever possible at all,
a genuine representation of Casablanca would be, properly speaking, a matter of the city filming itself.

*A Film* is a good introduction to the crisis of representing Casablanca in the new century. As I advanced at the beginning of this chapter, the city’s evolution under a specific regime of globalisation in recent years holds the clues for understanding these novel articulations of Casablanca on the NUC screen. In his study of cultural production in Hong Kong in the years leading up to its 1997 handover to China, Akbar Abbas coins the phrase “politics of disappearance” to describe the city’s fluid images in cinema and the visual arts (1997: 4–6). Disappearance designates the process of dislocation or the transformation of the local into the translocal as a result of the handover’s historical exigencies. Hongkongness on screen is thus not a stable subjectivity but rather a “floating identity” (1997: 4). NUC’s third strand demonstrates how something of this postcolonial postmodernity is at stake in Casablanca’s resistance to representation. Akin to Hong Kong circa 1997, Casablanca is going through a rapid transition to an extent that its identity is in flux. The city no longer offers itself up to be finely mapped out by filmmakers with the clarity and confidence of NUC’s first strand in the 1990s and the early 2000s. In reality, as I argued in the analysis of *Yasmine and Men* (2007) in Chapter 3, Lagtaâ has already hinted at the disoriented and disorienting Casablanca of the new century. If for him this unmappability has ensued as a consequence of the suicide bombings in 2003 and the resurgence of state terror against the secular project of modern subjectivity, Achaour provides more clues to the disappearance of Casablanca and its once solid representations on the screen. For the angst-riddled director *of/in A Film*, the identity of Casablanca and Casablancans, Morocco and Moroccans, is dislocated due to unhinged media globalisation and rapid social change. It would therefore be pretentious to put a coherent form on this “liquid modernity,” which Zygmunt Bauman associates with the globalisation of postmodern identities (2000: 133). Postmodernism or “the cultural logic of
late capitalism,” as Fredric Jameson (1984) famously termed it, rode the waves of market reforms in the 1980s to Morocco and other societies of the Global South. In consequence, Moroccan postcolonial subjectivity today is a multiplicity of becomings crisscrossed by molecular currents of identity from umpteen glocal provenances. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, this subjectivity is one of becoming rather than being (1987: 239). Achaour is in the end posing these questions: How does one film an identity-in-becoming? What film syntax and semantics are adequate for the task? He gives tentative answers throughout the film through sketches of various film genres and styles but only to reveal their inadequacy in the face of the contingencies of a collective subjectivity in becoming. He is ultimately reduced to silence by the city’s identity of disappearance, a constant process of becoming-other or becoming-imperceptible, as is the nature of identities under late capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 274).

Disappearance is not synonymous with unworldliness, for A Film's affective and visual spaces are shot through with Casablanca’s reality. Social exclusion, conservative mores and existential uncertainty are the backdrop of Achaour’s film. Despite a reduced cast, which is confined to the aforementioned trio, the entire city and Moroccan society are condensed in the imagination of a filmmaker struggling to articulate his own subjectivity. For example, he evokes his Amazigh roots and, in so doing, the decades of repression of Morocco’s autochthonous identity in the post-colonial period. Achaour has screened Casablanca after the mid-2000s. The resurgence of human rights violations after 2003 and neoliberalism's social crisis have bred a new current of NUC characterised by formal innovation and an increasingly violent realism. If the other strands of NUC take film form as self-evident, the third-strand directors like Achaour have taken to stylistic experimentation, generic hybridity and collage to articulate the subjectivity of a changing society. A Film’s characters are modern subjects in a late modern metropolis permeated by multiple forms of collective subjectivity. The
protagonist has to negotiate his place in this everyday network of power relations to make a first film that conveys something of his multilayered Moroccanness and dwelling in Casablanca. If, as we have seen, what kind of film to make is the first question for Achaour, *A Film* inscribes this ambiguity in the film’s form by multiplying messages and codes without ultimately settling for any style in particular or, indeed, managing to make a film at all.

II. What a Wonderful City

Halfway through Faouzi Bensaïdi’s Casablanca-set film *What a Wonderful World* (2006), Hicham, a truck driver who doubles as a savvy hacker, stumbles on the online database through which Kamal, a contract killer and the film’s anti-hero, receives his assignments. The twenty-year-old Hicham leaps up in fear in front of the computer station in the *Club Internet l’Univers* cybercafé. After recovering from his initial panic, he prints off the profile of Kamal’s next victim. In the next scene, the stone-faced professional hitman is simultaneously performing the same action unaware that an alien has hacked into his lucrative database of death. A few scenes later, Hicham vows to take revenge on the crime lord who cheated him of his small fortune in an ill-fated attempt to smuggle him to the European eldorado. He slots his foe’s profile into Kamal’s online hitlist, a fatal scheme which not only intensifies the film’s affective and real violence but also eventually terminates both the human trafficker and hitman’s lives. Chance encounters in the virtual world thus have dramatic consequences in real life. In Bensaïdi’s Casablanca, everyday contact between the inhabitants has become unimaginable without the economy of flows enabled by what Arjun Appadurai calls globalisation’s *technoscapes* or “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (1996: 34). My film study in what follows dwells on the complex implications of this virtualisation of social space
for the production of subjectivity in the interstices of global technoscapes. This critical task will be carried out through a close reading of the cognitive maps of everyday affect and the aesthetics of violence in WWW and, taken together, their implications for the emergent forms of postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco under globalisation.

WWW is Bensaïdi’s second feature film. He scripted it while funds were being raised for the production of his debut feature A Thousand Months (2003), which won a prize in the Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival. In the wake of this international recognition, Bensaïdi received a pre-production grant from the CCM to make WWW. Unlike his first fiction, which is set in a village in the Middle Atlas mountains, this was to be his first film about urban Morocco. The second outstanding element in WWW is its generic experimentation. The film grew out of “a desire to deal with film genre and Morocco today—a desire to make an urban film” (Bensaïdi 2008). WWW is a complex film on Casablanca replete with cinematic references. The city, as we will see, is filtered through a postcolonial adaptation of various genres of world cinema. Despite its stylistic indulgences and an heterogeneous mix of the fantastic and the mundane, WWW’s nonlinear plotline is based on a tight script. Kamal, the serial killer for hire at the centre of the film, is a melancholy character and passive observer of the world around him. The few times we see Kamal in action are when he journeys to Casablanca’s high society or to Rabat’s Technopark to execute marked targets in return for money. His killings are carried out in cold blood, an effect enhanced by the film’s deadpan humour. The insomniac Kamal likes to spend occasional nights with Souad. She lives on the other side of town. Kamal reaches her at a cellphone owned by Kenza, a policewoman who doubles as a phone-call seller. Kenza gets to know Kamal through his melancholy calls to Souad over Casablanca’s nocturnal airwaves (Fig. 25). Meanwhile, Hicham, who shares a bleak shack with his disabled father, dreams of migrating

40 “Cela partait d’une envie d’approcher le genre dans le cinéma, parler du Maroc d’aujourd’hui, une envie de faire un film urbain” (Bensaïdi 2008).
to Europe to flee poverty in Casablanca. He is an amateur hacker and trains his cyber skills on forging a work permit or meeting a Western woman willing to marry him out of poverty. After multiple failed attempts at illicit migration, he sells his vehicle to pay for a clandestine boat trip to Europe with other African *harraga* (migration candidates). Hicham is cheated out of his money and, as mentioned earlier, decides to take revenge on the human smuggler by slotting his profile into Kamal's online hitlist. When Kamal shoots the target, the policewoman comes into physical contact with him for the first time. Kamal and Kenza fail to recognise each other. As soon as they meet at the end of the film, they are both shot dead by the underworld gang coming to avenge their assassinated leader. Hicham likewise dies a graphic death at sea in yet another attempt at migration to the North.

*Figure 25.* City of ashes: Kenza answering Kamal’s one of phone calls with Casablanca’s skyline in the background.
As I argued in Chapter 1, market reforms have opened up Moroccan society to global capital’s economy of flows and its deterritorialising effects on individual and collective identities. “Since the advent of market reforms in 1983,” Shana Cohen notes, “Morocco has experienced often dramatic change in demographic trends, social institutions, political movements and parties, social inequality, and economic growth” (2004a: 32-33). The same sociologist concludes elsewhere that the “complexity and heterogeneity characterising social relations have made conflict between different types of authorities an inherent feature of social interaction and everyday experience” (2004b: 11). As the analysis of seventeen NUC films thus far in this dissertation has shown, neoliberalism’s implications for social change are given expression on screen through the multiplicity of global and local agencies in the everyday production of postcolonial subjectivity in a city inextricably bound up with the dynamics of global modernity’s “space of flows” and its supersession of the local “space of places” (Castells 1989: 146). Tarik Sabry has explored the consumption of globalisation by Moroccan youth through their access to transnational media technoscapes. He reveals how the abundance of new spaces of social imagination has produced new subjectivities characterised by disjuncture. He suggests that young Moroccans’ desire “to be different in the world [...] is helped by the existence and the encountering of an ‘alternative’ cultural temporality, a ‘disembedding mechanism’, inherent to television and its phantasmagorical ‘worldliness’” (2010: 114; original emphasis). Global television is one among various technoscapes of globalisation. Communication technologies like the Internet and mobile telephony have also permeated the everyday life of Moroccan society, particularly its large youth population (Kriem 2009: 618-21). Hicham in WWW is the prototype of the under-class youth in Casablanca torn between the illusory attractions of the Western eldorado disseminated by global technoscapes, on the one hand, and his physical confinement on an impoverished
continent by the same globalisation’s neocolonial mechanisms, on the other. This paradoxical unevenness of global capitalism creates a deadly dreamscape, whereby youth are disembedded from their local reality whilst being condemned to tragic attempts at an impossible departure. At the end of the film, the boat on which Hicham and sub-Saharan migrants leave Casablanca is crushed by a titanic cruise ship in the Mediterranean.

WWW’s postcolonial critique is borne by its stylistic experiment. Bensaïdi’s film lies at the crossroads of many genres—particularly film noir, the serial-killer thriller and romantic comedy. The film’s generic hybridity registers the spatial and temporal fragmentation of Casablanca. In what is a defining feature of third-strand NUC, WWW’s cognitive mapping of the city is embedded in its form. This experimental aesthetics is appropriate for a polyphonic portrait of Casablanca. Advanced neoliberalism has created a dislocation between the city and its subjects to such an extent that drawing a portrait of the totality of urban experience has become all but possible since the mid-2000s. In consequence, the new subjectivist cinema of globalisation which emerged with the third strand of NUC has been keen to signify through small fragments of lived urban experience. If Achaour questions the possibility and utility of making films in Morocco today, Bensaïdi resorts to critical cinephilia and generic hybridity to make his intervention. Both directors experiment with film style either through blurring the line between fiction and reality (Achaour) or by multiplying cinematic codes to signify divergent micro-stories and partial identifications in one cityscape (Bensaïdi). The juxtaposition of the effects of boredom, suspense and irruption in WWW, for example, is achieved through a combination of film noir (boredom and suspense), the thriller (sensation and the eruption of the real) and black comedy (the absurd).

Bensaïdi eclectically deploys such common generic conventions without fully assimilating them into WWW’s narrative and visual core. Rather, he uses genre to create certain effects, particularly at the affective level. The director recreates the atmosphere of film
noir classics through WWW’s self-reflexivity and nostalgia in a quest for narrative models specific to the Moroccan context. The thriller genre is in turn selectively adapted sometimes to create bleak humour and at other times to enhance the affectivity of some scenes. In addition to generic intertextuality, the slow pacing of the narrative and lack of a linear plotline are Bensaïdi’s postcolonial answer to Hollywood. What Thomas Elsaesser says about Wim Wenders’ similar endeavour rings true for Bensaïdi: “Only a cinema of temps mort (dead time), of observation, could respond to the hectic business of a certain Hollywood cinema of car chases and smash-ups” (1998: 142). WWW subscribes to the realism characteristic of NUC’s postcolonial critique, often trained on socially peripheral subjects. Going beyond what Jameson (1984: 65) describes as pastiche or the “blank parody” of the ahistorical and affectless “nostalgia film” in the postmodern West, Bensaïdi’s postcolonial slow-motion film serves the political aesthetic of NUC. This aesthetic, as we have seen thus far in this dissertation, consists not only of a cognitive mapping of Casablanca that unveils the violence and complexity inherent to everyday life under globalisation, but also of the polymorphic resistance of ordinary people to its control. In his study of the Neo-Noir film, Richard Dyer argues that it mobilises “the structure of feeling it perceives to have been caught by classic noir” and foregrounds “the historicity of our feelings” (2007: 120). WWW as a neo-noir film mobilises the affects which traverse the everyday life of human subjects in a concrete social environment. In narrative terms, for example, Hicham is a shantytown youth enamoured with the dream of a better life in the Global North. His tragedy grounds the film’s experimental and slow style in a social reality captured through Bensaïdi’s observational lens and affective realism. The film combines the codes and high affectivity of classical cinema with the slow pacing, elliptical narratives and existential enquiries of NUC’s arthouse brigade. This hybridisation of genre effectively relates real stories through a contingent form. The structures of feeling which permeate the textures of the thriller and noir genres are
constantly pegged to the condition of Casablanca as a globalising city in an underdeveloped country. The story of clandestine migration to Europe, shantytowns and drug trafficking are captured through a sombre realism which lends historical credence to stylistic experimentation.

Borne by affective realism and generic hybridity, WWW’s representation of Casablanca is as poignant as the social realism of NUC’s first stand. The film frames the city beyond the déja vu through a realist lens rich in cinematic references. For example, the shantytown, where Kamal and Kenza are gunned down towards the end, is located next to a whitewashed block of new flats. This grounds the action in Casablanca around the 2000s when the government awakened to the radicalisation of young people in the bidonvilles (shantytowns), who were behind the suicide bombings on 16 May 2003. As Chapter 1 discusses, the World Bank and the Moroccan government launched the Villes Sans Bidonvilles programme to rehouse shantytown residents. The sharp contrast between the new white flats and a massive slum colony on the screen translates the clash between hope and reality and the inherent violence of urban space under globalisation. To foreground the extent of this violence, WWW borrows the narrative and visual tropes of the spaghetti western and gangster genres, yet critically stops short of faithful assimilation. The death scene foregrounds the violence through generic intertextuality while creating sordid humour in its reflexive staging. In this interstitial space, Bensaïdi remaps the drama of the postcolonial city. WWW’s realism sometimes verges on the surreal to create comic effects and to surprise as well as show Casablanca beyond the hackneyed imagery of consumer culture and visual naturalism. Portraying the serious business of death and precariousness through the light touches of generic appropriation cuts to the heart of what I call Bensaïdi’s aesthetic of the surface. In lieu of the plain realism of NUC’s first and second strands, WWW portrays Casablanca as a fluid space. Its subjectivity can be read only in passing flashes on its surface and that of
adapted genres, advertising codes and new media aesthetics. In WWW, stylistic composition suggests the location of meaning more in the signifier than in the signified. The film multiplies screen writing and zooms in on icons and other visible signs rather than on the inner life of the city and the characters. An example of this postmodern re-presentation of the city as a surface is the electronic-style text near the beginning of the film: “Casablanca 04h12 a.m. / 24 C. Humid and polluted air. / Recorded 4, 000 000 inhabitants. / 1.200.000 are insomniacs. / 500.001 have made love to someone. / 3, Kamal included, have killed someone.” Another instance of the prominent role of texts on WWW’s screen is the silent cinema scene on the train. In a play on romantic scenes in early cinema, Kenza sends Kamal a shoe with the coffee trolleyman. The conversation between Kamal and the train clerk is presented on a title card. More examples of fantastic or semi-factual inscriptions are poems and other writing on freeze or shaky frames throughout WWW. The onscreen texts and inserted frames invite a reading of the film as writing on a page. The slow takes, lingering closeups and the dearth of narrative dialogue afford plenty of time for the viewers to read rather than merely watch the city and its human characters.

Besides the politics of genre, a close analysis of the complex dynamics of everyday life in WWW is key to understanding the poetics of onscreen subjectivity and how globalisation has ushered in a *determinational postcoloniality* as the dominant mode of producing individual and collective subjectivities. Globalisation has brought about a deep sense of uncertainty in everyday life and its representations on the screen. The everyday in WWW is a repertoire of the disjunctions of the Moroccan subject in the early 21st century. This subjectivity reveals itself to the spectator in flashing moments from a complex process of everyday affects intensified by stylistic self-reflexivity. To adapt Lefebvre’s words, these moments are “flashes of perception into the range of historical possibilities that are embedded in the totality of being, but which cannot be disentangled from the activities of everyday life”
(qtd. in Gardiner 2004: 243). The subjectivity of the characters in WWW exists in the nondifferentiability of their everyday life. Its defining elements emerge only in flashes rather than linear or coherent narratives. Take Hicham for example: like Kamal, he is aloof and shuns defining his feelings. He passively travels through the affective continuum that is everyday life in Casablanca. His subjectivity is a floating identity. This is not the same as saying that it is unreal, for Hicham is rooted in the concrete living conditions of his class and nation in the 2000s. He is poor, under-class and barely survives in a metropolis where physical and symbolic violence have become dominant elements of social life. However, Bensaïdi does not reduce the humanity of his characters to their social conditions. Instead, he maps them onto a global space of translocal images and ideoscapes. In their struggle to escape definition and confinement, the characters wear and change identities by force of circumstance or at will. The policewoman doubles as a phone-call seller, the soldier’s wife as a prostitute and Hicham, a truck driver, as a hacker. These are the visible parts of an iceberg of floating subjectivities. Bensaïdi combines the concrete and the fantastic to allow the characters to seem real whilst looking unreal at the same time. The audience perceive their multiple subjectivities in flashes in this whirlpool of becomings. Instead of the disciplined body of Foucauldian understanding or the psychoanalytic passive body, for Deleuze and Guattari “the human subject is always a full body to come; it endures without ever existing as such. Being is Becoming. In other words, the subject endures through continually breaking down, but this is not a negative event” (Doel 1995: 230; original emphasis). Every character in WWW is becoming-other, trying to escape into difference, into other ways of being other than who they really are or who we perceive them to be at first glance. The fabric of this nomadic becoming is bound up with their everyday world, from professional identities (Kamal the gun for hire, Kenza the policewoman, Hicham the truck driver) to imagined future becomings, where their identities dissolve into imperceptible difference. Becoming-
minoritarian, as Deleuze and Guattari presume, is the ultimate stage of resistance where the subject evades definition and capture by Truth’s regimes of oppression (2004: 321). Becoming-minoritarian is the new logic of subjectivity production in NUC. This political economy of subjectivity is not an absence or desertion of the battlefield of subjectivity as such, but rather a strategy of becoming which occurs in resistance to hegemonic or majoritarian identities which always already try to define the subject and police its margins of freedom.

WWW is shot in a poetic style which produces a hyper-sensory realism through the film’s narrative and visual composition. Narratively, the NUC audience is presented with a refreshingly novel Casablanca on the screen. It is a deterritorialised city which can be experienced only at the micropolitical level of affects and flashes of perception between the screen and the viewing subject. Casablanca comes across as a city lived and livable only in its adriftness for both character and spectator. In visual terms, the film is traversed by eventless shots and temps morts serving to match the slow pace of the plotline and to foreground its affective underpinnings. Between long and atmospheric shots, the camera sticks like glue to its primary subjects. The lead actor’s thespian background is crucial to the performance of WWW’s realist vision. Bensaïdi's point-of-view character, Kamal, does not communicate through words. In reality, he hardly communicates at all. His body expresses the affective states that it goes through. This anti-hero comes across as an aloof chronicler of Casablanca from its everyday banalities to the affective textures of the city itself. Kamal is a postcolonial example of the ‘seer’ that Deleuze identifies with the time-image film: “the character has become a kind of viewer. [...] The situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides [...]. He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action” (2005: 3). The existential condition of neoliberal Casablanca comes full circle in the forlorn figure and expressionless face of Kamal. It also materialises
through the film’s black humour. As the aforementioned death scenes in the slum and at sea exemplify, WWW’s humour amounts to an existentialist portrait not only of the lead character but also crucially of Casablanca and Moroccan society. Combined with generic experimentation, WWW’s entertaining realism draws a detached portrait of a society in transition.

WWW’s Casablanca is cinematic before it is real in that it cites and dialogues with other iconic scenes and works of world cinema. The city is intimately portrayed with the camera caressing its physical and human spaces. The saturated colours are essential to this affective continuum between man and his habitat. The city’s web of inertia is deadly as the gathering violence in WWW shows. This violence is both rooted in and referenced back to social reality. Everyday Casablanca is the backdrop of the film’s events. Here profiled with ethnographic precision are shantytowns, prostitution, the underworld, sub-Saharan migration, Chinese-led globalisation and Casablanca’s informal economy. Not dissimilar to other NUC films analysed in previous chapters, the ethnographic camera and characters in WWW are Jamesonian social detectives. They unveil the social and spatial atlases of Casablanca. The characters hail from different backgrounds, live in various parts of the city (from downtown flats to the bidonvilles) and their movements in space register the everyday life and violence of neoliberal society. However, unlike the first and second strands of NUC, WWW is structured by a poetic register of realism which shuns clichéd images of the city, on the one hand, and evades imposing one truth on its human and built environments, on the other. This realism is subtle and smooth, punctuated by comic and evocatively cinephilic acts, making it easy for spectators to grasp the film regardless of their experience or knowledge of the filmed reality. Take, for example, the representation of social marginality in the form of the shantytown. Instead of the gritty realism that most NUC films often marshal in articulating the concrete consequences of social exclusion, WWW frames the shantytown as a space not
only of poverty and lack, but also primarily of people with sophisticated dreams, inexhaustible imagination and irreducible humanity. The deployment of a comic register reminiscent of Jacques Tati’s films in the depiction of shantytown residents like Hicham and the prostitute also works to this effect. A good example is the sequence involving Hicham and a maid in an affluent Franglish-speaking household. They are invested with unpredictable thoughts and an imagination which transcend their under-class status. In addition to being a cinephilic comedy that broadens the spectator’s gaze, WWW is also constructed around film noir’s codes and nostalgic aura in a way that draws in the spectator. The camera relishes the multiplicity of spaces and temporalities in the neoliberal city whilst unveiling its dark side and existential adriftness. The magic realism of some scenes, like the one involving the rain falling out of the blue, makes the film endlessly generative of meanings by widening the lens of the viewer’s perception of the filmed reality. There is always a slippage between reality and surreality in WWW. It is left to the audience to interpret what is happening on the screen according to their own spectatorial and life experiences.

As mentioned above, the film is structured by an aesthetic of slowness which captures space by arresting time through the slow-paced, ontological enquiry characteristic of experimental art films. The outcome is not only a prolonged moment of spectatorial perception but also a matter of allowing the viewer to read the frames at leisure, picking out elements which the camera is not framing in the centre stage. This effect is achieved through static shots, a focus on trivial objects in the frame and other techniques of elongating the film image’s duration. Time in WWW registers the prevalence of globalisation’s chronoscapes in the everyday social reality of Casablançans. Time and subjectivity are intertwined in Bensaïdi’s realist mapping of urban space. They are embodied by the characters, who are steeped in their social background and existential conditions. The local is already global owing to its translocal connectivity through technoscapes, chronoscapes, global commodities
and their subjective experiences of time. Casablanca in WWW is an empire of global signs. Take, for example, the Youki neon sign. It is lit at night atop the highrise in which Kamal lives in an attic flat. To stress the embeddedness of these icons of global modernity and postmodern temporality in local space, Bensaïdi depicts them through an affective realism, which serves to destabilise meaning and widen our horizons of reception. The Youki sign’s flashes go on and off following Kamal’s changing affective states. The affective texture of these commodity icons is fodder to his own as well as the city’s floating identity. The globalised icons are signs of a culture in disappearance, that is, one where the local has gone translocal and time seems out of joint. Only fluid identities can emerge from this disappearance or continuum of becomings.

This fluidity is tied into the material changes in urban space under globalisation, particularly the digital revolution. As I suggested in Chapter 2, a peculiar attention to the digital landscapes of the postcolonial is predominant in the films of NUC’s third strand. In WWW, Casablanca is an urban space permeated by the iconography of mass media and digital technologies. The film offers a cinematic map of Casablanca as a digital landscape and neoliberal spatiality with consequential implications for postcolonial subjectivity. This dimension of Casablanca’s modernity reveals a city living the global transformations of the world in the 21st century where colonialism is fast receding in memory and being replaced with new forms of capitalist domination. However, the digital also provides opportunities for Casablanca subjects to enact their own identities and leave postcolonial traces on the global map of globalisation. Hicham’s savvy acts of hacking, for example, are the work of a subject struggling to comprehend and navigate an increasingly complex world where signs and power are inextricably intertwined. In this vein, the long silences of the characters in WWW are also significant because they are charged with poignant visual and aural maps of Casablanca in an interconnected world. Kamal, for example, scans and travels in the city like an alien from
outer space. The translocal jazz soundtrack enforces this alien-nation in Casablanca. Kamal’s subjectivity resists being frozen in the local space. However, WWW anchors his and other characters’ subjectivities in the material and often negative consequences of globalisation for ordinary people. Souad, for example, prostitutes herself to survive while nourishing the hope that her soldier husband will return from the war front in the southern Sahara. The characters are rooted in the historical and social reality of their setting. This reality is filmed through a magical realism or rather an “absurdist lens”, to borrow Elia Suleiman’s definition of this style of slow-motion cinema (2003: 70). Bensaïdi’s own chronicle of disappearance questions Moroccan subjectivity through multiple, constantly shifting lenses that translate the fluctuations of this subjectivity in real space. Seen through WWW’s lenses, Casablanca is a nervous city like Hong Kong circa 1997 or Suleiman’s own Jerusalem under siege in Chronicle of a Disappearance (1996). The Moroccan city’s social terrain has been altered by market reforms and the global economy of flows. It is at boiling point and can no longer contain its violence. The violence erupts throughout the film, particularly through Kamal’s smoking gun and erotic fantasies. Violence also manifests through Hicham’s attempts to leave Casablanca, once using forged papers and later onboard a lifeboat which is ultimately sunk by a cruise ship. The latter stands for the major forces that crush the chances of physical mobility for poor subjects, the victims of uneven globalisation and its deterritorialisation of subjectivity. WWW is thus a political film, for Kamal’s melancholia is not merely an affective state but rather a tool of critical deconstruction. It unveils the absurdity of power relations and the violence inherent to their everyday modes of operation. In his essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” Sigmund Freud defines mourning as a reaction “to the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (1917: 243; my emphasis). The loss at the heart of WWW’s melancholic portrait of Casablanca is not the loss of a concrete object but rather one of a
special kind. “One can recognise that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not actually died, but has been lost as an object of love” (Freud 1916: 245). The lost object in WWW is both the holistic city of film noir and the postcolonial city of social justice.

Affect lies at the centre of WWW’s re-presentation of Casablanca. Building on Deleuze and Guattari’s argument that “affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic” (2004: 265), affect is taken here to mean an unqualified intensity versus emotions as qualified intensities permits an understanding of the affective cartographies of the everyday in WWW. Personal feelings and emotions are different from affects, which are pre-conscious, pre-reflective and anonymous intensities. Kamal’s body, for example, is traversed by strong affects of anger, pleasure, sadness, loneliness and anxiety. The audience is not encouraged to perceive or experience them as emotions due to Kamal’s sparse dialogue. However, crucial elements provide clues to his affective states throughout the film. Kamal’s affects erupt onto the screen owing to the jazz soundtrack, atmospheric shots and their projection of the city and its everyday life as unpredictable currents of affectivity that engulf the bodies of characters and spectators alike without the mediation of language. The everyday affects create a threefold continuum of “affective contamination,” to use Guattari’s concept (1995: 92), between the characters, Casablanca and the audience. Kamal is the central knot in the film’s affective web, but he remains a passive observer of the world around him. This hinders identification with him in a noir thriller where the plot is secondary to atmosphere and character. Kamal’s action is largely confined to his clinical killings for money. The only moments we seem to glimpse his emotions occur during his phone calls to another body in the same city, Kenza. However, even then he does not personalise his emotions; they remain rather collective affects that crisscross his body like those of the anonymous millions who inhabit Casablanca or other cities around the world. In Cinema 2: The Time-Image, Deleuze argues that the time–image emerged in Western cinema in the aftermath of World War II
because “the post-war period has greatly increased the situations [to] which we no longer know how to react, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe” (1989: xi). **WWW** is a postcolonial example of the time-image in that the characters are caught in a world to which they do not how to react. Two consecutive decades of radical market reforms altered not only social structures but also how the Moroccan subject relates to the world around her. In recent NUC films, characters are often adrift in urban space, unable to take control of their lives, let alone change the world around them. The Moroccan subject on screen is alienated from her surroundings. She is afloat in an overwhelming environment.

In **WWW**, affect registers everyday life’s movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation through *diagrams* inscribed on/in the body of the city, film genre and the characters. These diagrams constitute what I call Kamal’s *postcolonial noir-city*. A diagram is “a display of the relations between the forces which constitute power” (Deleuze 1988: 36). **WWW** is replete with diagrams of the powers that regulate everyday life in contemporary Casablanca. In his seminal essay on postmodernism, as we have seen in Chapter 3, Jameson proposes an aesthetic of cognitive mapping of reality as a critical strategy for understanding the current stage of global capitalism and its cultural reproduction (1984: 89). In both Jameson’s theory and its Deleuze-Guattarian rhizomatic model, “maps are not static representations, but tools for negotiating, and intervening in, social space” (Shaviro 2010: 7). **WWW**’s cognitive mapping project is inextricable from the affects it works through at visual and narrative levels. It mobilises the affectivity of the characters, Casablanca and film noir’s intensive poetics both to make statements and to affect the audience. It contaminates them by imparting the human condition in Casablanca onto them. In Guattarian terms, the film’s aesthetic works “not through representation, but through affective contamination” (1995: 92). Affect transcends a representational aesthetic into one of contamination whereby bodies affect one another in the film as well as the bodies of the audience. For example, Kamal’s
melancholia is contaminatory not only because it fatally contaminates other characters in the
film, but also because we are also affected by it as an audience.

WWW’s adaptation of film noir conjures the modern city’s dark liaisons with death and
seduction. Two adapted elements of film noir stand out: firstly, most of the scenes are shot at
night with an accompanying slow movement of the camera to enable the viewer to absorb the
nighttime city; secondly, the camera displays an almost perverse fascination with long takes
and aerial views of the streets of downtown Casablanca (once through Kamal’s computer
screen to emphasise the deadly attractions of the city). The film creates an affective
connection between Casablanca and the noir capitals of yore (1920s Berlin and Los Angeles
in the mid-20th century). In WWW, the bodies of the characters, especially Kamal, are
inseparable from the nighttime cityscape. They are entangled in a plane of affection. They act
as one body in the film’s long takes generating a realism of the senses. This politics of
embodiment in the postcolonial neo-noir can be construed according to Deleuze and
Guattari’s definition of the body as “the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of”
(2004: 260). WWW creates a continuum of fluid affectivity between the human and built
environments whereby the urban landscape is not reducible to an extension of the character’s
mindscape. WWW’s affective force reaches meridian heights with Kamal becoming-
imperceptible by dissolving his individual subjectivity within the affective matrix of other
bodies and urban space. WWW invokes the intertwined destinies of the psychic life of the city
and the human characters through a diagram of everyday affect that “does not function to
represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of
reality” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 157). This is germane to what I mean by noir-city as an
affective diagram of Casablanca through the noir genre which unveils the violence of capital
in everyday life and its invisible power relations. It is through the critical diagram of noir-city
that WWW also foregrounds and forecasts narratives of resistance to globalisation’s powers of
commodification of space and subjectivity. The affective maps which are fodder to this resistance “infuse the present with affective forces that resist commodification” (De Certeau 2000: 57).

The force of noir-city as a diagram in WWW is enhanced by its articulation of affection as a matter of the ambiguity and relationality of everyday life, two essential components of the noir genre. At the centre of the film’s affective diagramming is not a staged extraordinary eventfulness but rather the raw and unqualified rhythms of everyday life, whereby bodies affect and are affected. In this affective economy, the spectator experiences the everyday “in its very spontaneity and as it is lived—in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity” (Blanchot 1987: 13). Bensaïdi’s configuration of noir-city as a diagram of virtual and actual power relations provides an intensive experience where boundaries between the human and built environments of the city are blurred by everyday affect’s borderless connections. In so doing, WWW foregrounds the vital role which Jameson has argued cognitive mapping can play as “a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system” (1984: 92). In a world of fortified enclaves and limited mobility for the underprivileged subjects and classes of humanity, this politics of embodiment is the film’s contribution to a “poetics of relation,” to borrow Edouard Glissant's concept (1997). The noir-city diagrams social and global injustice in search of a genuinely postcolonial world.

Everyday life under neoliberalism is thus the playing field of subjectivity in WWW. It is shot through with affective violence. Scenes of direct violence are sparse, but the entire film is replete with an intensive and visceral brutality. The film is inherently violent yet hardly bloody. Like Francis Bacon, the director of WWW paints “the scream rather than the horror” (Deleuze 2003: 34). Affective violence probes the deep aspects of the postcolonial condition.
In so doing, the film invites new ways of mapping subjectivity in its violence away from the latter’s spectacle in the mainstream media. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good at al. ascribe the prominence of ‘subjectivity’ in recent cultural theory to

a new attention to hierarchy, violence, and subtle modes of internalized anxieties that link subjection and subjectivity, and an urgent sense of the importance of linking national and global economic and political processes to the most intimate forms of everyday experience. (2008: 2-3)

By tackling subjectivity through affective violence, WWW inscribes itself within the growing body of postcolonial art and thought at work on new cognitive maps of the world from the Global South. Bensaïdi’s film participates in this new movement of resistance to global domination. Set as it is in Casablanca, the film is also a contribution to the rise of strident voices of popular resistance in the arts, youth subcultures and local civil society against spatial injustice and social polarisation in the city-world. WWW’s aesthetics of violence through the noir-city unravels how the Moroccan subject has become deterritorialised both under and in resistance to the violence of globalisation.

At a time when the serious construction of grand narratives of resistance around identity, national or otherwise, has been undermined by a postmodern condition gone global, it is interesting to observe how works of art engage in weaving a micropolitics of multitude that invites us to embrace new modes of thought. WWW articulates a subversive affective politics of difference or becoming-minor, a strategy of becoming-imperceptible that permits the perception of new modes of freedom and resistance. In an essay on the mosaic film, Patricia Pisters writes:
Becoming-minoritarian is what Deleuze and Guattari call micropolitics, which is not related to any form of representation either of majorities or of minorities. Its aim is to resist, to resist power, resist the intolerable, resist fear and to shame, resist the injustices of the present. Contemporary mosaic films function precisely as such micropolitical acts of resistance, first and foremost by proposing for the spectator an intensive, affective encounter that can provide a slightly new perception of the world. (2011: 188)

The film weaves elements of everyday life in Casablanca around the affective potential of a deterritorialised subjectivity to offer us fresh perspectives on the postcolonial condition today through the becoming-minor of Casablanca and its subjects. Working through the noir-city diagram as a strategy of cognitive mapping, WWW not only uncovers the violence of everyday life under uneven globalisation, but also opens up new spaces for alternative becomings of the postcolonial subject, on the one hand, and new ways of seeing the world from an African metropolis, on the other. “Thinking politically means turning representation into diagrams, making visible the vectors of force as they oppose and crisscross each other, rewriting reality as a graph of power centers, movements, and velocities” (Jameson 2004: 406). Inscribing itself in this global movement of postcolonial critique, WWW is a political statement on the state of our world.

III. Casablanca-Madrid

Imad and Swel Noury (born in 1978 and 1983, respectively), sons of the NUC filmmaker Hakim Noury and his Spanish producer Maria del Pilar Cazorla, came to filmmaking from unlikely beginnings in music and the financial services. They eventually graduated from the Madrid Film School in the early 2000s and divide their time today between Casablanca and
Madrid, where they make a living by directing commercials or taking pictures of landfills, birds and fashion models. Taking advantage of increasing state support for cinema in Morocco, they made *Heaven’s Doors* in 2006. The feature film is a third-strand NUC production in both subject and treatment. It is woven around a minimalist aesthetic characterised by sparse dialogue and *mise-en-scène*. A film about absent fathers, *Heaven’s Doors* also kills the father in cinematic form without renouncing the defining realism of NUC. Despite its relative unpopularity among the general public in Morocco, the Noury brothers’ cinema has been slowly building its audience niche among youth and cinephilic filmgoers. Press and Internet reviews of their films demonstrate the existence of a growing appreciation for novel images of Morocco beyond the naturalistic consensus of mainstream cinema. Realist is not the adjective most film critics would associate with the maverick cinema of the Noury brothers. However, I want to argue in what follows that a critical study of *Heaven’s Doors* reveals how much it is woven around a realist vision of Casablanca and Moroccan society. Akin to their peers in third-strand NUC, the Noury brothers make films that go beyond the classical forms of Moroccan cinema by embracing global influences in screening local realities. The experimental style of their co-directed films further puts them in the same league not only as Bensaïdi, Lasri and Achaour, but also up and coming filmmakers from all around the Global South. They have in common the quest for a new film language to scrutinise their societies in the 21st century.

Despite its unconventional form as an episodic narrative, *Heaven’s Doors* story unfolds following a simple plot line which is not as disjointed as it seems at first sight. The opening credits promise an unusual experiment in Moroccan cinema by announcing a film in three chapters. *Heaven’s Doors* three-pronged plotline unfolds in three installments interlaced with intersecting stories, plot twists and common characters. Similarly to Achaour and Bensaïdi’s films already analysed in this chapter, this formal hybridity allows *Heaven’s Doors* to capture
the splintered urbanism of neoliberal Casablanca and the violence of everyday life without imposing artificial unity on heterogenous matter. Social experience under advanced neoliberalism requires innovative formalism to render its irreducible diversity. The triptych form of Heaven’s Doors sits well with the visceral violence, dislocated lives and the disaffected youth at the centre of the film, as I wish to argue below. In addition, as we will see, this elaborate experimentalism challenges the viewers to remain alert and engage with the onscreen experience on an affective level. This effect is helped by the intriguing complexity of the film’s narrative and visual puzzles as well as by having a violent tragedy (a shooting incident gone awry) as the event which ties the multiple plot lines together. Heaven’s Doors three narrative threads twist and blend around this tragedy and, in so doing, multiply viewing angles and points of spectatorial reception. The Nourys’ elaborate stylistics exemplify how, in third-strand NUC, the signifier contains its signified and takes precedence over it. In this new postcolonial cinema’s postmodern aesthetic of the surface, form is not the medium (as in NUC’s first and second strands) but the message itself. This is why it is important to follow the development of Heaven’s Doors plot through its stylistic choices from beginning to end. In what follows, I will relate the film’s narrative line and comment closely on the formal elements which contribute to its cognitive mapping of Casablanca. This will be followed by a critical account of the theme of absent fathers and, in conclusion, what both form and story tell us about Heaven’s Doors’ construction of youth subjectivities in urban space.

Heaven’s Doors opens inside a car with extreme closeups, a frantic tempo and drained colours. At first sight the combined effect paints Casablanca as a claustrophobic city. The visual intensity complements the narrative motifs of imprisonment from the outset. There are hardly any establishing or landscape shots and there is little space in the frame even for characters to breathe. Ney and his friends (Hamza and Tawfik) are sitting in a car. The tense
atmosphere is made claustrophobic by extreme closeups and shaky handheld shots. The film language is constructed so that the youth’s adrenaline rush is felt by the viewers who cannot help experiencing the claustrophobia and panic engulfing the characters. Ney gets out of the car and walks into a house. He pulls the trigger of his gun and knocks on the door. The shoutout ends with Ney shot dead next to his dying victim, his wounded wife and a horrified child (Fig. 26). A parable about a mother and her child appears on a dark frame.41 Heaven’s Doors then flashes back to chart the events that led to the shocking opening scene. Tension continues to build up in the flashback narration. It transpires after a few flashbacks that the first episode of the intricately plotted triptych is the story of Ney and his two buddies. They hail from the slums of Casablanca, perform heists and extract money from the underworld business community on behalf of Si Mansour, a drug lord residing in a suburban mansion. The illicit business deals are represented as common in Casablanca’s upper-crust world; for instance, whilst Si Mansour proselytises against transnational migration and the daily death by drowning of young people from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa desperate to cross to Europe, his most lucrative enterprise consists of smuggling boatloads of them to their death. To support his family, Ney accepts to be Si Mansour’s righthand man. While the mafioso businessman gets higher up in the world, Ney goes through a downward spiral despite the material gains for him and his needy family in the short term.

41 “The mother approached her son. Crying, she softly caressed his face. She did not know what to say or do. Then she whispered in his ear: ‘My son, you can see the light in many different ways. But you can only be blind in one way.’”
The visual poetry of minimalist frames is complemented by real poetry on the screen at the beginning and the end as well as in the transitions between the triptych’s parts. Dialogue is sparse but extreme closeups, visceral violence and an atmospheric soundtrack build up tension and create an affective rapport with the audience. Characters communicate the violence of everyday life in Casablanca to the viewer through affect, which transpires to be the film’s core language. Ney is a taciturn type like all the main characters in NUC’s third-strand films. From the beginning to the end, his habitus is mirrored more by his affective states of anger and frustration rather than by film dialogue. His poor kid’s upbringing in material and affective deprivation in a shantytown and an intensive awareness of social injustice in Casablanca enrage and predestine him to a tragic ending. Like all the protagonists in NUC, he is a social detective. His actions and breathless journeys in an increasingly disenfranchised urban space provide a social atlas of a socially and spatially divided
metropolis. The audience experience it through his character’s changing affective states. Casablanca is hence cognitively mapped through the affective habitus of Ney as a marginalised youth in a postcolonial city.

After a black title card bearing another poetic text about mothers and lost love, enter the second act of the film. The opening shots of this episode are in black and white. The first shot is of Lisa behind the wheel. The next flashback shot shows the American woman in tears on the phone with her mother in San Francisco trying to decide what to do after her brother-in-law, Faïcal Bernoussi, has been found dead. She has been approached as the next of kin to take in his 10-year old child, Salim, and his mother in. In the brisk crosscuts of her in the car and at home, we glimpse Salim, the child orphaned by Ney’s shootout, in the back of the car. A direct connection is thus established between the first and second episodes of Heaven’s Doors. Lisa is an arts teacher and lives in an upscale villa in the suburbs. Next in the same episode we see a man named Smail (framed as a father figure for Ney) frying an egg and drinking a beer in a prison cell. From his luxurious car suite Si Mansour rings the lawyer in charge of the child Salim to offer his services to Lisa, who has adopted the child and his mother. The latter is still in a coma after injuries suffered during Ney’s shootout. The next shot shows Ney’s two friends in the car apparently having forgotten him; they are suspiciously merry. As has by now become evident, Si Mansour has framed both Ney and his victim to get rid of both. This shot sequence is important because it lends contemporaneity to the the first and second episodes of the film; Ney’s friends and Smail, Salim and his comatose mother have all appeared in the previous episode. In network films like Heaven’s Doors, not only are plots and narratives entwined, but also, I would argue, geographically remote areas and histories are brought into contact by the political and cultural economy of globalisation. In addition to the aforementioned examples of youth’s dreams about transnational mobility and the American expatriate’s distressed phone calls to America, we
have the illustrative example of Smail, who has just been released from jail. He starts looking for a forged passport to escape to Thailand after executing the man who landed him in jail. He visits an underground hacker in his basement office. Both Smail and the tech-savvy youth are examples of geographically confined subjects willing to reclaim their right to global mobility through the digital loopholes of economic globalisation. The youth is using his knowledge of a lucrative area of the global technoscape (the Internet and crime fiction cinema) whilst Ismail is using the underground economy to achieve justice for himself through the possibility of escape permitted by the same technoscape.

After a black frame with a parable on solitude, the third episode breaks in and does away with the generally chronological narrative thus far. It opens with Smail just about to get out of prison. He is released into Casablanca after “5512 days spent behind bars,” as he tells a friend. On the taxi ride home, we see Casablanca in almost black and white through his eyes via POV shots of smart flat complexes, fast running cars, the city centre’s colonial buildings and the Old Medina, where he gets out. As is the way of this film, in the onscreen mapping of the city the scenes are blurred, or splashed with white flashes or framed through soft focus photography. This formalistic defamiliarisation of space creates a strong affective connection with onscreen space and history itself, on the one hand, and with the audience, on the other. This connection is further enhanced by nondiegetic classical and modern music. The Nourys’ minimalist style, like Lasri’s, is highly economical as it does not rely on narrative dialogue or linear plot development to signify every space in the film. Instead, a few wayward shots and a hybrid soundtrack create a plethora of connections which viewers are left to decode and resignify. Spectatorial resignification is a powerful strategy of cognitive mapping in this and other films of NUC’s third strand. In addition, the Nourys’ minimalist style amounts to producing a cinema of surfaces where nothing exists beyond the screen. No

42 “The silence of the night makes loneliness a heavy burden. He opened his eyes and saw the Fate he kept running from. At that moment he had only one thought: resistance against the irreversibility of lost time.”
utopias of redemption are projected and Casablanca is portrayed in its grey claustrophobia. The minimalist style is coupled with the less conventional cinematic aesthetics of the digital and MTV video to paint a disturbing picture of Casablanca and the world of its disaffected youth. The film’s unabashed experimentalism is still within the remit of realist aesthetics and does not fail to articulate the social map of the city. Take, for example, snapshots of the urban landscape: slums, cityscape, streets, gated villa, new blocks of flats and inserted bucolic shots of an idyllic farm and a small town cemetery. They offer quick glimpses of the urban space. The Noury brothers map the city together through these flashes instead of the clichéd images and mental maps of TV reportage and films. In this scenario, the spectator is called upon to invest a great cognitive effort in piecing together the projected fragments of Casablanca.

Upon his release, Smail retreats to a small seaside bungalow loaned to him by an inmate. In the spectator’s mind, this marginal location in the onscreen cityscape stands against the seaside Casablanca Marina development with its glass towers and capital monumentality. As if in a prescient mapping of the city’s future, the recently built marina stands in the low-market area where Smail in *Heaven’s Doors* once stood. Smail is melancholy as he contemplates the Atlantic Ocean. This is a decisive moment by the sea because, like all the NUC characters, he has to return to the centre of Casablanca to fight his way through the maze of everyday power structures. His next stop is the hospital where his mother is on her deathbed. This is followed by another pensive shot of Smail by the sea: a drunk tramp interrupts his contemplation. Looking at NUC films since the early 1990s, the viewer would be forgiven for thinking that Casablanca is an inland city turned in on itself with no view on open spaces like the sea (as we saw amply with *Ali Zaoua* in the previous chapter). In fact, Casablanca stretches for miles along the Atlantic coast. That the sea does not figure in NUC films is the measure of the confinement of their characters in everyday struggles for survival. On the few occasions where the sea makes an appearance in NUC, it is
always in connection with dreams of salvation and escape from the infernal spaces of
Casablanca. It transpires that the sea on screen is often there to show how no one can escape
Casablanca, except in Marock where rich high school students travel unhampered by air to
Western destinations to pursue their studies. The working class Casablancans and embittered
middle class denizens have only aspirations about an escape that never materialises on or off
screen. When they go against fate, only tragedy awaits them. For instance, we have seen how
Hicham and sub-Saharan migrants end up as dead bodies on a beach in WWW. Death is thus
closely associated with the sea on the NUC screen. In Heaven’s Doors, Ney and Maria (his
little sister) are standing by the sea; he asks her to care for their mother if something ever
happens to him. A few shots later, he dies in the shootout. Returning to Smail, who is
standing by the ocean and is about to bring death to Si Mansour, the sea here is a space of
solemn confessions. In Heaven’s Doors, Lisa is once seen sitting by the tragic Atlantic in her
distress. A female tramp strikes up a conversation with her saying that both must be lonely to
be coming to such a place to contemplate the rough water. In the scene’s background is the
Hassan II Mosque, half of which rises above the Atlantic Ocean so worshippers and tourists
can see water through the glass floor of the prayer hall just as they can see the sky through
the retractable roof of the basilical building (see Chapter 1). Yet another appearance of the
sea in Heaven’s Doors is of Smail, who also runs into a male tramp thus placing the sea front
as a marginal space for those society has pushed to the margins.

The next sequence is of Ney and his friends planning the assault on his enemy.
Narratively, this places episode one and three in the same time-frame, which leaves the
second episode as the last of the film, chronologically speaking. In yet another play on the
network narrative, Smail is visiting the house of Ney’s victim to procure a gun. Ney had
borrowed one himself from Si Mansour a few scenes earlier. We thus get to see the events of
the first episode from the third one’s angles and the torrid experiences of characters we had
not met before. When he leaves his friend’s house, Smail rubs shoulders with Ney in the corridor. As the former steps into the elevator, we hear a series of shots (from the first episode) ring out in the house. A shot of a rural field, which has already appeared on screen many times, is inserted again as a leitmotif contrasting rural peace with urban warfare. *Heaven’s Doors* is strewn with bucolic shots, a cemetery and other non-urban scenes and temporalities inserted between shots and especially at the peak of the characters’ moments of psychological distress (e.g., Lisa driving in the street or a lonely and crestfallen Smail by the ocean). The bucolic scene, a leitmotif in all three episodes, provides an affective unity in the film. These other spaces speak volumes about how porous neoliberal time-space is and how vulnerable it is to being haunted by alternative visions of society from elsewhere. If the countryside is a space of no return in Asli’s *In Casablanca, Angels Don’t Fly* (2004), in the Nourys’ film the binary between the country and the city is even more dramatic because the rural space is where punishment for urban crimes and violence occurs, as we will see shortly.

Smail is hellbent on revenge: he wants to kill the person who framed him fifteen years ago. His mother dies. He buries her properly and mourns. He is free to strike now. Twenty days later, we meet him sitting by the sea weighing up his choices. The male tramp joins him in his soul-bearing. As in most scenes, the Nourys start with closeups and restless movements with the establishing shots following a few moments later. This melancholic scene is largely silent and reliant on long takes, especially a two-shot of Smail and the beer-holding tramp on the seaside rocks with the Hassan II Mosque and the white modern city in the background. The next scene is of Smail in his borrowed house drinking. He is soon joined by a young prostitute, an unemployed university graduate with a degree in literature. He pays up front. The film’s third episode comes to a climax when Smail abducts Si Mansour in his car from a fitness club and drives him to a secluded woodland, the eerie non-place, which we have already seen in leitmotif shots strewn throughout the film. Before Si Mansour receives his
bullet, a string of quick shots of all the main characters file on the screen to round up the strands of the episodic narrative. Smail deserts the scene in the bullet-crippled Si Mansour’s BMW car. Smail is Bangkok bound. The film ends.

The minimalist realism of *Heaven’s Doors* is shouldered by sparse dialogue and *mise-en-scène*. Casablanca is framed as a hostile urban space which is prone to visceral violence. The Nourys resort to tight closeups and jerky movements to capture the violence of everyday life. In addition, the minimalist style creates uneasy feelings amongst the audience, drawing them to go under the skin of Ney, for example. They affectively experience the visceral violence of everyday Casablanca for this unprivileged youth. This effect is enhanced by the absence of excessive dialogue and the moralising tone of mainstream Moroccan films. The minimalist style of *Heaven’s Doors* is propped up by the technical medium, which becomes the message as in the other third-strand NUC films analysed in this chapter. The film is replete with erratic shots always filled with objects, soft-focus close-ups, and half the frame is often dark or obscured by some object. Objects are strewn in space sometimes with clear or only loose connections to the plot. These objects are often in their natural location but the Nourys’ free takes make us imbue them with value each according to his own interaction with the film, which works as an affective installment of urban violence. Different film stocks are utilised to control speed and quality. A variety of lenses are also utilised to create a tense atmosphere. Besides the splash of black and white, MTV-like flashes abound on the screen to provide a backdrop for the characters’ affective development. The film thus exhibits a conscious surface, which visually gives most scenes a painterly appearance. With its washed out colours and lens dexterity, *Heaven’s Doors* is like a visual installation of contemporary Casablanca. The violence of its everyday life is reflected by the intensive violence of *Heaven’s Doors* from rapid tempo and flashy lighting down to MTV montage’s visual and aural techniques.
Directed by two young filmmakers, *Heaven’s Doors* is about disaffected youth in neoliberal Casablanca. In striking dissimilarity to the portrayal of young people in NUC’s first and second strands as a social category prone to (un)civic engagement and revolt (e.g., *The Satanic Angels* and *Casanegra*), young Casablancans are self-defeated and violent in this cinema’s third strand. Since the mid-2000s, third-strand NUC’s image of youth has prevailed on screen thanks to the arresting portraits of Lasri and the Noury brothers, among others, and the contemporaneous Nayda movement. In their films, young people are not only disaffected and alienated from their socio-economic environment, but also crucially cloistered in an urban jungle with no way out. They are alone in their daily struggles. This element is highlighted by a defining feature of these films: the absent fathers. I want to argue here that this absence goes a long way towards explaining the intertwined conditions of disaffected youth and the city under advanced neoliberalism. This amounts to killing the father in order to explore and live in the city beyond paternal and national control. The father was the most important metaphor for the nation in Moroccan cinema until the 2000s. The absent father in NUC is a reference to the absence of the post-colonial nation-state in the new political economy of urban social life. Third-strand NUC’s post-national imagination provides a fresh cognitive map of neoliberal space. In *Heaven’s Doors*, the main father figure in the film is behind bars whilst the son, Ney, has to eke out a living to afford minimal conditions of survival for his young sister and an extremely protective mother in a shantytown. Ney has a tempestuous relationship with his blind mother. He firmly asks her to stop reminding him of how virtuous and clean his father was: “I have had enough of this dad talk. You and I know that he is not dead. Yes, he isn’t dead! He left us in this misery.” This strong declaration identifies the absent father with the decline of the state as a protector from market forces and identitarian alienation. In his ignorance of his father’s whereabouts and traumatic struggle to be seen as a man on his own right, Ney is resigned that the Father may as well “go to hell!”
On the construction site where he has his first job, Ney meets an old man working to feed his family. His low and irregular income forced three of his daughters into prostitution. Ney sees him as a surrogate father but only to see the skeletal man humiliated by the overseer. The old man dies alone one day on the construction site from overworking his frail body whilst digging a pit (literally his grave, as it turns out). This short-lived filial bond between Ney and the old man and its tragic end are important because they lay the blame for inhuman exploitation and family disintegration in Casablanca at the door of socioeconomic forces. Taking the example of Ney’s two father figures in the film, we can see how the absent fathers are not absent of their own free will. They are rather ‘disappeared’ by larger forces. Whatever their fates, they remain present-absent in urban space: the first father is in a prison in the same city and the second one is buried under the ground on which are erected the monuments of the neoliberal system like office blocks and palatial seafront mansions for the victors in the fierce struggle for material and symbolic possessions.

Let me expand this argument one step further. The ruthless dealer Si Mansour is the dominant father in a neoliberal society whereas the working-and under-class fathers have no place in the new social order. Si Mansour interestingly tells Ney that he too was abandoned by his own father. Si Mansour, being as he claims a self-made man and a successful type, the implication is that the neoliberal economy is founded by and on the necessity of terminating the father in order to make one’s way in the world. Legitimate fathers have been wiped out by socioeconomic change in a new society whose pace they could not keep up with. They disappeared (like political prisoners during the Years of Lead, an analogy suggested by Smail’s intellectual aura): some dead, more jailed and others just gone away. NUC’s castrated fathers from Casablanca by Night to Heaven’s Doors are incapable of being role models for their offspring. When he gets out of jail after 15 years, Smail calls Yasmine (his ex-wife) for a meeting by the sea. She has remarried, divorced and is now working for a
German company in Casablanca, an indicator of the city’s domination by multinationals. She chides Smail for being an irresponsible father although she knows that his only crime is the struggle to support his family. This reveals one of the unresolvable paradoxes of neoliberal ideology: while it creates precarity and cutthroat competition among people, it reinforces a moralising discourse that condemns ordinary people who fail “to make it” in its impossible economy. After giving up on wooing back his wife, Smail is seen walking in the street when the fancy sports car of two youngsters almost runs him over. One berates him for his perceived carelessness whilst the other sarcastically calls him “Father!”

In contrast to fathers, mothers are not absent from Heaven’s Doors. However, theirs is a special presence that equally tells us something about Moroccan society under advanced neoliberalism. The film’s title, Heaven’s Doors, is a reference to Prophet Muhammad’s saying: “Paradise is at the feet of mothers.” This means, as Ney’s mother tries to convince him when he begins his spiral down the underworld, that mothers are the centre of the world. In the Islamic tradition, children owe them respect if they are to be rewarded in the afterlife. In the real world, mothers stand for warmth and compassion, yet these emotions are in short supply in a new society dominated by elementary struggle for survival. The Arabic title of the film, Abwab al-Janna, is rendered in the Kufic script, which is widely used for the Quranic text. The film does not propagate a religious discourse but rather uses common references in the Islamic tradition to make a secular statement about social relations in Casablanca today. The entire film insinuates that neoliberalism has its own quran, which rewards or punishes people according to their faith and practice of its precepts. In the real world, the hell and paradise of religious mythology do not exist. For the poor people in Heaven’s Doors, hell means everyday life under the violence of socioeconomic deprivation and exploitation. The film title is meant to be taken ironically. Heaven is a chimera that ends badly, as Ney’s saga
to make a decent living in his own motherland illustrates. Heaven’s doors are the gates of hell.

The divisions of urban space along class lines can become ingrained within people’s subjectivity over time. They cannot leave where they were born and raised to live in another part of the city. Ney’s mother, for example, is adamant that she will never leave her house in the slums after Ney suggests they move to a better neighbourhood (supported by his money from working for Si Mansour). Neoliberal spatiality ends up by coding itself into the subjective identity of Casablancans. As she says: “Money, money... I don’t need your money! It is you that I need, and so does Maria.” This indictment of the sado-monetarism of neoliberal society mellowed in her tears over a bullet-injured son goes beyond any moralising logic, for both mother and son know that they are powerless. As Ney reminds her, his father left them. This creates a parallel between the biological father and the nation-state, which has gradually retreated from the protection of its subjects from market forces under the denationalisation of the economy and social policy. In Heaven’s Doors, the portraits and posters of the current king, who adopted the charged label the King of the Poor in the new century, are an ironic reference to the decline of the postcolonial state. Its remaining presence is embodied in the institutions of punishment such as the prison and the police force, which uphold the status quo. Si Mansour tells Ney that the Mother is important and that he is successful thanks to her blessing. He advises Ney to take care of his blind mother because she is everything. Ney also adores his own mother. Is the mother here related to the importance of love in a ruthless new social order? Or is she just the affect neoliberalism needs to function, a minimum of affection needed to keep people going? In a world of absent fathers, mothers are like nations left behind to raise future generations in difficult conditions.

There is an intertwined aspect to Heaven’s Doors’ representation of mothers, which is a shared structure of meaning in NUC cinema: the mother is the societal womb to which the
young Morocco cannot return because of the irresistible pull of global forces. Ney and his crisis of masculinity are representative of the young Moroccan subject in the early 21st century. Like Benjamin’s angel of history, “The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” (1968: 258). Even if his mother chides him for giving in to the power of money and the uncertain gang life of Casablanca, Ney knows that like a tragic hero he cannot escape his fate. His credo is: “Make it or die trying!” Ney is the perfect “subject under siege,” to borrow Ismail Xavier’s description of the favela characters in recent Brazilian urban films (2003: 30). After multiple attempts at making a ‘decent’ living on construction sites, he goes where the money is. He follows it up the social ladder to the illicit world of upperclass Casablanca.

Ney’s tale unfolds around a chain of violent sprees interlaced with scenes from his family and time spent with friends. Although the main plot line, his gradual involvement and absorption in his life as a gun for hire and the righthand man of the underworld lord, is fairly chronological and not difficult to follow, the other plot lines are narrative vehicles freely populated by scenes from the life of young people in Casablanca as well as snapshots of the built environment itself. The film weaves these major and minor narrative lines around Ney and his friends’ descent into hell through a life where violence begets not only some money but also more violence. Violence, I argue, is not only a motif in Heaven’s Doors but its very essence; it is the structure that crystallises meaning in the film and youth’s identity in neoliberal space by association. Take, for example, the shooting scene atop a highrise: the first shot of the cityscape and the next shot of the Old Medina and the Hassan II Mosque in the background are filmed with a gritty aura and blackbirds filling the frame. The accumulating violence erupts when Ney and his friends are provoked by a rival gang member, with whom they exchange briefcases but he still insists on getting his own back. A
bloody skirmish ensues and Ney is soon shot in the leg. Although there are many situations in the film where contact between strangers ends in violence, this one might at first sight seem to trivialise violence to the extent of making the film’s take on it look banal and cinematically clichéd. However, there is more to this scene and violence in *Heaven’s Doors* than meets the eye. Let us return to the spatial configuration of the scene. The meeting of the two local gang groups takes place atop a building in Casablanca, which we do not see in its entirety. In the background we can glimpse signs of the affluent suburbs of Casablanca, an indexation of the meeting place not only in the seafront residences and beach clubs of the esplanade but a transatlantic indexation of the local within the global circulation of gang and film cultures. The beach area of Casablanca looks like, and is often talked about, as Morocco’s Los Angeles. Many of the swimming pools and facilities there get their names directly from the movies and LA. The gangsters in the above shooting scene from *Heaven’s Doors* are dressed in baggy clothes, a carefully planted reference to real and aspiring Latino and other minority gangsters in LA.

*Heaven’s Doors* thus indexes violence in neoliberal globalisation’s ideoscapes and fragmentation of urban space worldwide. This representation of violence is a step further from the social and sensory realisms prevalent among the first and second strands of NUC. The lyrics of the accompanying rap song at the beginning of the above sequence evoke the picture of globalised structures of violence in cities ripped apart by socioeconomic forces. In a film rich in references to American independent cinema and that country’s urban subcultures, this may be a reference to the 1992 riots in LA. This connotation puts *Heaven’s Doors* on the same plane as international youth cinema focussed on violence in sprawling metropolises. In sum, violence in the film is not as banal as it looks at first sight even if its intertextuality may prove onerous to decode for the lay spectator. As I will argue in more depth through a close reading of Lasri’s *The End* in the next section, violence in third-strand
NUC is an indexation of social, economic and political changes. The Nourys’ crude realism is fitting of a city perceived to be ruthless and out of bounds by young people excluded from its productive sites.

IV. T as in Trash

Hicham Lasri’s *The End* (2010) is a millennial black-and-white film set in Casablanca circa 1999. Using a combination of fast editing and special effects characteristic of MTV, video games, and commercial ads, Lasri’s feature film tells the tale of a city on the edge through the story of M’Key or Mikhi, a disaffected youth caught between his loyalty to a ruthless police commissioner and his intoxicating love for Rita, a ‘dumb beauty’ mollycoddled and jealously watched by her gangster brothers. The film is traversed by violent language and action to an extent hitherto unprecedented in Moroccan cinema. This begs the question of whether this visceral violence is socially meaningful or mere pulp fiction. This question can be answered only after a thorough analysis of the film’s aesthetic construction. Taking third-strand NUC’s experimentalist drive to new extremes, *The End* is also daring in its stylistic experimentation, as we will see shortly. This drive to innovation in theme and form has significant implications for the film’s social vision and cognitive mapping of Casablanca, particularly when seen in the light of Jameson’s conceptualisation of late modern subjectivities (2004: 405). In this chapter’s last section, I will explore the representation of Casablanca’s neoliberal space in *The End* with a special focus on how its exquisite attention to form bears on the images of the city. Lasri’s debut feature is a claustrophobic tale about the looming demise of neoliberal Casablanca in the last years of King Hassan II’s absolute monarchy. I will also explore how *The End* is a contingent experiment in cinematic realism to render urban subjectivities and invent new cognitive maps for a post-neoliberal postcoloniality through a critical reconstruction of everyday life in Casablanca. I will ultimately bring the film to bear on
neoliberalism’s social crisis in 21st-century Morocco, two years after the popular uprisings across North Africa.

_The End’s_ opening sequence starts with upside-down shots of fast-running cars in an underground tunnel. The speedy MTV-like digital filming is rendered in black and white, which confounds the low visibility of the constituents of the frame. The sparse opening credits are written upside down on the screen as an indication of how the film’s form is as important as its thematic content. When the procession of cars emerges into the open, we learn that the time is night and the vehicles belong to the police force. They have come to burn seized cannabis in a tall tower. In the background we hear an idolising radio report in Modern Standard Arabic on one of Hassan II’s processions in an unnamed city in Morocco. The audience are invited to make the link between drugs, politics and the people. The young man we had glimpsed earlier tied to the roof of one of the vans comes down and climbs the white cylindrical tower. He looks desperate for something. He finally makes it to the roof of the tower when the policemen start throwing seized packs of cannabis resin into the furnace. The youth atop the tower is sitting on a toilet stand when the smoke gets into him through the chimney. When he gets down and walks back into a boulevard in Casablanca, it is morning and he looks psychedelic and unhip for his age. A few street types, a talkative prostitute and a tramp, engage him in conversation and propose a game of chess (he turns both down). Blood is streaming from a cut in the back of his head. We learn through a line on the screen that it is 1 July 1999. The young man works as a parking attendant, a delicate job in Morocco because it often comes with accepting the deal to become a police informer. He walks into a fake classic Rolls-Royce car and discovers a beautiful girl tied to the wheel by an iron chain. The security alarm of a shop goes off and four gangsters walk back towards the Rolls-Royce sedan. They are chased by a crowd and desert the scene on foot instead. They have robbed the high street properties from the tobacco shop to the bakery through the pharmacy. The
police arrive and cordon off the area. Their chief, Captain Daoud Raddad, enters the scene and the film rapidly unravels into a maelstrom of tension and paranoia. He arbitrarily orders the arrest of an old and skeletal baker for daring to say that the Makhzen must reimburse him for the robbery, especially now that the price of yeast has increased. Captain Daoud, as he is called by everyone, has the unmistakable aura of a Hassanain police type. Played by a Hollywood actor of Moroccan origins (Sam Kanater), the godlike Captain is impeccably clad and takes his time to read the scene of the heists. He summons the parking attendant, Mikhi, and slaps him for alleging that he knows nothing about who is behind the robbery. He is especially admonished for not being like his late father, a faithful underdog, police informer and soldier who participated in the carnage against ordinary people during the 1981 bread riots in Casablanca. Mikhi walks off with Rita, the girl he rescued from the Rolls-Royce, which belongs to her four gangster brothers. The two-part opening sequence thus tells us enough to follow the plot despite the unconventional filming style.

Young people living under dictatorship are not totally cut off from the wider world even if the way they experience it is shaped by the physical confinement and symbolic violence of their everyday life. Mikhi and Rita walk around the city window-shopping and recycling garbage to replicate icons of global commodity. With Rita still in chains, they are tracked down by her brothers when they are lost marvelling at ticking clocks in the windows of a high street qissaria (shopping arcade). The rest of the film revolves around the struggle between the System through its pitbull, Captain Daoud, and the social outcasts, Mikhi and the gang of four. Rita’s ‘brothers’ perform heists to survive as well as destroy the economic system, which has turned them into social outcasts. They are also engaged in an open war with Captain Daoud and the political establishment because their father was among the ‘disappeared’ thousands during the Years of Lead. Desperate to be with Rita forever, Mikhi sets up the police captain. Captain Daoud is kidnapped, beaten up and left to die in a car boot.
in the city’s garbage landfills. The film reaches a climax when a dying Daoud is rescued by unknowns from his metal grave. After recovering in hospital and learning of the death of his wife Naima, he turns on the gangsters and manages to finish them off with harrowing brutality. The extrajudicial executions are carried out in a manner which recalls Giorgio Agamben’s aforementioned theory of *homo sacer* or the non-sovereign subject living in “a state of exception,” a permanent state whereby the Law is suspended (2005: 40). Their life or death are equal because they are conceived as “bare life” (1998: 4). Morocco’s Years of Lead (1956-1999) were a state of exception under a regime obsessed with its own survival. In the eyes of King Hassan II, most Moroccans were not *bios* (citizens and sovereign subjects) but rather *zoe* (*homo sacer*) deprived of any rights and could be killed or disposed of in camps if necessary (Perreault 1991). Through the support of the capitalist West and his purging of the army during the Cold War, the Alawite sovereign endowed himself with “the power of decision over life” (Rancière 2004: 300). The secret jails all over the country were thus camps in the Agambian sense of spaces created “when the state of exception begins to become the rule” (1998: 168-69).

Mikhi and Rita survive Captain Daoud’s carnage. The news of King Hassan II’s death is broadcast on television and people start running in all directions. In a utopian moment which brings together the end of the political regime and the capitalist system, people do not just scatter hither and thither but also pillage commercial properties and run away with whatever commodities they can carry. Mikhi and Rita drive off in a convertible car stolen from a supermarket car park. The next scene is of them sitting on a bench at the end of a dark tunnel and facing the blinding light of the future (Fig. 27). Can they go forward? Is it possible to go anywhere from here? If there is a post-dictatorship future or life after Hassan II, can people adjust to it after four decades lived in fear and darkness? The poetic ending leaves the future open. What is certain is that the future, if there is one, will be uncertain and under the
full force of globalisation (as the proliferation of digital icons everywhere on walls, on roads and on screen suggests). The End is just the beginning.

The heist as well as most of the action in the opening sequence take place in downtown Casablanca. The black-and-white film makes the colonial buildings look more original with an aura of postcards and films set in Casablanca in the colonial period. However, The End’s events and violent outbursts betray the reality of extreme poverty and state repression under the reign of Hassan II. The background radio reports on royal affairs in both stately Arabic and French establish the temporal context of Casablanca in the film. The city’s modernity is chained to the archaic despotism of a monarch fond of processions and byzantine traditions such as hand-kissing (Mikhi kisses the hand of Captain Daoud in the first heist scene). The
urban space is affectively tense with the violence lurking under the seemingly quiet space of a city and a people which has accepted dictatorship and everyday surveillance as their fate. However, ordinary people deploy tactics of resistance to the Makhzen’s strategies of control. The quiet and estranged car parking attendant, Mikhi, alongside Rita and her gangster brothers are engaged in daily warfare for survival and the subversion of control. They occupy the city from the crumbling colonial buildings and what Robert Smithson (1996: 249) terms “non-sites” (vacant or half-developed lots) from the city centre down to Casablanca’s poor periphery, which houses the empty factory sites abandoned under the deindustrialisation of the structural adjustment programme in the 1980s. The outlaws are determined to ruin the system because their father was executed by Hassan II’s regime. Everyday tactics are not always conscious attempts at subversion, as Michel de Certeau reminds us (1984: 40). They are efficient arms of daily insurrection that ordinary people resort to in the battle for survival. Mikhi takes advantage of the police’s nightly ritual to burn seized cannabis to get his free dose of ecstasy. The neoliberal space of Casablanca is thus a battleground between those in control and those who contest that control. This everyday conflict constructs a cognitive map of the city under political and market dictatorship as a fraught and contested space of domination and resistance rather than one of full control from above.

NUC filmmakers increasingly source their plots and aesthetic choices in their own lives as youth or residents of Casablanca. The filmic point of view becomes deliberately subjective in the process, an unprecedented occurrence in NUC until the late 2000s. If Bensaïdi and Achaour play the lead roles in their films, thus blurring the line between reality and fiction at authorial and spectatorial levels, Lasri draws on his own experience as a Casablancan who came of age in this city and witnessed its transformation firsthand from historical changes to the renaissance of subcultures. In consequence, The End is a subjective film on more than one account. As its young director says in an interview, this is his own story as a twenty-
something in Casablanca in July 1999 (Lasri 2011). This date is as important in recent Moroccan history as is the resilient memory of the late potentate. During his reign and indeed still even today, filmmakers have avoided tackling one of the oldest monarchical systems in the world. The current Alawite dynasty, which claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad, has been in power since 1631. More than any other dynasty in Morocco’s history, the Alawites have always been adept at surviving the turmoils of history from the decline of the Moroccan empire through colonialism and post-colonial challenges to their power (from coup d’etats in the 1970s to mass social protests under globalisation). Whether one does or does not believe the official mythology around the king as the father of the nation, it is difficult to deny the strong presence of this institution in Moroccan everyday life. Public life countrywide is pervaded by the hegemony of a “banal nationalism,” to borrow Michael Billig’s concept (1995), constructed around the monarchy. Hassan II’s portrait still sits side by side with that of King Mohamed VI on the walls of shops, cafes, on billboards and in every public scene. An important scene in The End takes place in a Kafkaesque police station, an icon of Hassanian Morocco. The old and emaciated baker is being tortured. He sights a portrait of King Hassan in the room and immediately clings on to it shouting “Long Live the King!” many times to seek protection from the maniac police chief, who is both an agent of the system and an allegory of it, as we will see below. He is instead knocked to the ground with the portrait unscathed. “One shouldn’t mess with saints,” Captain Daoud tells the old man rolling in his blood.

The End, however, is not about King Hassan but rather about a month in the life of a young Casablancan who came of age under his rule and witnessed the tense atmosphere in Casablanca on the days leading up to his death. The film’s anti-hero, Mikhi, is one of the millions of Moroccans born and brought up under King Hassan II’s dictatorship (1961-1999). They grew up in total fear of the brutal police regime and an environment that vehemently
discouraged knowing the truth. People were afraid of civil strife, extrajudicial detention or ‘disappearance’. The enforced silence was as violent as the reigning terror itself.\(^{43}\) The year 1999 marked the end of both Hassanian dictatorship and the silence around what he called his “secret gardens” or detention camps (Perrault 1991). As the apocalyptic and ambivalent ending of The End reveals, the demise of a dictator does not resolve all the problems in people’s everyday life. It instead throws up a series of questions: How does one react to the sudden death of a deified tyrant? Is it ever possible to come to grips with the past? Where does one begin to narrate it and heal the wounds? And, last but not least, how can one welcome or embrace the future when he has not been brought up to expect it to arrive at all, particularly without Him as happened in July 1999? For anyone who has lived under dictatorship, these seemingly banal questions are quintessential even though they remain without answers. They are unanswerable because truth is subjective. A Justice and Reconciliation Commission was set up in 2004 to investigate the Years of Lead. It allowed hundreds of Moroccans to tell their stories or those of their tortured, assassinated or often just ‘disappeared’ relatives in public hearings. Their tales of horror, torture and abuse were broadcast on public television (Slyomovics 2005: 1-13). The final public report of the state-mandated commission was relatively damning of the regime’s human rights violations from 1956 to 1999, yet it stopped short of naming the perpetrators.

However, public memory is something and one’s experience of both terror and truth quite another. There is still a great desire that seems only to grow stronger over time for every Moroccan subject born under or affected by the dark decades of Hassan II’s rule to come to terms with their own truth. Cinema and literature have been at the forefront of quenching and

\(^{43}\) This bitter truth is the subject of Faouzi Bensaïdi’s landmark film A Thousand Months (2003), set in the Atlas mountains in 1982, the year I came into the world not far from two notorious desert prison camps (a truth I learned only twenty years later through the memoirs of camp survivors). We grew up in fear everywhere from cities to the remotest regions, where poverty and the lack of electricity and schooling made the silence a vast prison.
feeding this desire for subjective truth. Despite its allegorical references, *The End* is a film about one young Casablanca’s experience of a special moment in time. Mikhi suddenly found himself feeling like an orphan having to live without a king-monster he had come to accept as an essential element of his identity. When life left the idol thought to be eternal, Mikhi found himself all of a sudden face to face with a present synonymous with nothingness. He is astride the abyss between a past imperfect and an unknown future. If dictatorship and market reforms have changed the structures of Moroccan society, Lasri’s own subjective experience projected onto Mikhi is what matters most: personal experience. Through it one can glimpse the general picture of Morocco in the late 20th century in general, and July 1999 in particular. The oneiric rhythm of the film is a reflection of this disaffected and drug-addicted youth’s inner subjectivity. His point of view frames both the filmed reality and our viewing experience. *The End* is primarily a portrait of the sudden void in Mikhi’s life in late July 1999. The time could not have been more apocalyptic. Mikhi was living on the edge of time as the rest of the world was gearing up for the new millenium. For both Lasri and the lackadaisical Mikhi, the feeling was one of millennial fear and uncertainty rather than celebration and hope. This affective experience is projected outward and inscribed into the more-or-less present of a Casablanca driven by spatial fragmentation, social insecurity and the uncertain times of globalisation. Besides standing in for the young Lasri in July 1999, Mikhi is also inevitably an allegory of the whole of Morocco feeling confused at having to walk into the future with an unresolved past and without the Father.

It is not only the plotline of the film, centred on a personal story, which is subjective. Its aesthetic is subjective too in the sense that *The End* embodies the third-strand NUC’s championing of stylistic innovation in search of a film grammar capable of telling the specific yet universal stories of Moroccan subjects today. Lasri’s film is subcultural in form and content. If the story is about youth and loss in urban space, the style borrows from all the
media which pervade the everyday life of young people. Lasri relishes in screening a Casablancan everyday permeated by new media, social network technologies, commercial advertising. His filmmaking techniques rely heavily on these very digital cultures to convey on screen a city where the everyday is already replete with cinematic potential because it is traversed by global images. There is no city outside images. Casablanca is an amalgam of images from colonial to neoliberal times and has existed as icons and images as much as a real city. From videogames and toys to football and trash culture down to the new media, *The End* is made to be seen and appreciated as a filmic amalgam of all these media which have dominated youth’s social life under globalisation. Shot on digital and saturated with the effects of MTV videos and commercials, *The End* inscribes its aesthetic within that of the Nayda subcultural movement and youth cultures in general. For example, the anti-hero at its centre is named, in a typical Lasri gag, Mikhi, in parody of Mickey Mouse, as previously indicated. Lasri does not attempt to make a sociological survey of this dominant age category, but rather tells his own story as a Casablancan youth brought up under the the dictatorship of Hassan II and finding escape in mainstream films, television and globalised American culture since the 1980s, which coincided with the introduction of socioeconomic neoliberalisation and the zenith of political repression.

This aesthetic of subjectivism, I argue, is a reflection of the entrenchment of the values of extreme individualism in society. The waning of class- and even identity-based solidarity in Casablanca has been accompanied by the ascent of neoliberal social relations in everyday life. However, a close reading of *The End* and the films of Moroccan cinema’s *enfants terribles* (Bensaïdi, Achaour and the Nourys) reveals that the focus on singular subjectivities through unconventional film syntax is not synonymous with the loss of critical totality and the potential to foreground or construct counter-archives to social and political metanarratives. Their films rather provide cognitive maps of Casablanca and Morocco
through the micro-details of individual subjectivities. Like their antiheroic leads, the films are haunted by the quest for new meaningful ways of being Moroccan and free from domination in the present and the tyranny of the past. However, the experimental and sometimes outright playful styles of these filmmakers can leave the audience asking whether the violence in their films, for instance, is real violence that boils forth from the social and concrete structures of Casablanca under globalisation or mere spectacle. In other words, some critics might wonder if NUC has gone mainstream and given in to the commodification of violence on screen. As we have seen thus far in this dissertation, violence permeates NUC films so much so it would not be beside the point to say that it has become the most important channel for the cinematic production of subjectivity on screen. In third-strand NUC, as we will see further shortly, violence has become not only more visceral in response to the changing everyday social life in the city, but also more subjective than in this cinema’s first decade.

Violence was central to colonialism as well as to King Hassan II’s post-colonial dictatorship, and the ghosts of this brutality continue to haunt contemporary Morocco. Casablanca in The End, and more generally in recent NUC films, is a volcano of dark horror lurking beneath the wholesome surface. Take Captain Daoud, for example. Here is a man at the end of his tether. Bar the pathological love for his wife, his life is a tale of extreme paranoia and psychological torsion. He takes umbrage at everyone and unleashes violence at the smallest provocation (sometimes making the film a gruelling watch). Violent and psychotic, the captain is no ordinary psychopath. His abrasive rage is historical rather than primarily personal. Bearing in mind the analogy to King Hassan II, the symbol and incarnation of his country, and placed in the specific context of 1999, Captain Daoud is an allegory of a dying Morocco and the new one that refuses to be born. For Mikhi and Moroccan youth to come out of the old womb, the ruthless tyrant has to die (Fig. 28). However, the labour of death has uncertain consequences. In the penultimate scene of the
film, he is stripped naked of his clothes and power by the crowds of ordinary people running around and ransacking all state and commercial institutions. They leave him stranded and naked on the tarmac. The future is opaque with the streets of Casablanca becoming full of white smoke and people running about as if an atomic bomb has fallen from the sky and everything will come to an end at any moment.

![Image of a man with a shout expression]

*Figure 28. The System’s Pitbull refuses to die*

The death of King Hassan unleashes great confusion in society, revealing that his reign of terror was perhaps the only thing holding it together. However, on another reading, the apocalyptic chaos is an expression of the repressed energy of a society which became used to a certain form of everyday life. Society’s quiescence is the thing that troubles Captain Daoud
or the System’s Pitbull. Conscious of the multitude’s “sly civility,” to use John Stuart Mill’s description of civil disobedience masquerading as civility among dominated people (qtd. in Bhabha 1994: 99), he is nervous and unleashes violence on himself and on others in the face of a seemingly subservient society. Sly civility is a form of subaltern class consciousness or tactic of everyday resistance to control. Captain Daoud’s rule or rather the reign that he protects is haunted by the threat of a social explosion or popular revolt at any moment. Until the end of the film, the only open threat that he faces comes from the four outlaws. For the love of Rita, Mikhi uses his sly civility to plot Captain Daoud’s kidnap by the gangsters. Naima, Daoud’s wheelchair-bound wife, dies alone and unattended at home in his absence. The four social outcasts create chaos around the city through their heists and cat-and-mouse games with the police. More organised forms of opposition to the regime have been decimated by the Years of Lead. However, having silenced organised opposition, the regime has to face the everyday anarchy of society’s marginalized classes. Sly civility and scattered incidents of direct engagement are the last and most insidious forms of popular resistance in urban space. Being neither fully conscious nor organised, this old new resistance is more difficult to co-opt, control or eradicate.

The clannish outlaws live in a junkyard located in a wasteland that once housed factories in the outskirts of Casablanca. Abandoned under the post-Fordist deindustrialisation programme, such sites become havens for social outcasts and outlaws. Some turn into hideouts from which to launch attacks on the mainstream city (the last heist of the outlaws targets Frik$, a company that supplies banknotes to Casablanca’s financial institutions). The End’s outlaws are, in Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, “social bandits” (1972: 13). Their activity is “a conscious, almost a political, challenge to the prevailing social and political order and its values”; such banditry, he continues, “occurs when there is a conflict of laws, e.g. between an official and an unofficial system, or when acts of law-breaking have a distinct element of
social protest in them, or when they are closely linked with the development of social and political unrest” (Hobsbawm 1972: 5). In The End, Hassan II’s dictatorship, which killed their father, and the economic system, which has reduced them to poverty, forces the bandits into a life of robbery and plunder. They are engaged in an everyday insurrection.

The End’s form sticks to this subjective vision through a trash aesthetic which both recycles and signifies through all the media that affect Mikhi’s everyday life. It relies on deadbeat humour, absurd violence, and indexical realism to reconstruct a violent metropolis from its material trivia and human refuse of insignificant objects and marginalised characters. Like Mikhi’s life, the city is full of trash and filth. We do not see any shiny buildings, architectural wonders, upmarket estates or tidy areas of town. Urban space is reduced to piles of garbage or walls painted with dirt in a graffiti of despair. Narrative dialogue intensifies the filthiness of everyday life. The characters use Rabelaisian metaphors to describe how ghastly their city and lives have become. Centred on the mouth, the belly and the phallus, their words and images are “parodies that undermine officialdom” (Mbembe 2001: 103) and the social order from below. Mikhi’s prostitute friend likens McDonald’s logo to a bum. Their dreams and thoughts are no less excremental. When kidnapped by the outlaws, Captain Daoud is buried under the garbage dumps of Casablanca. The End hereby gears the spectatorial gaze toward seeing Casablanca from the point of view of its material and social waste. The garbage dump in this scenario, “becomes a critical vantage point from which to view society as a whole” (Stam 1997: 45). Lasri’s experimental style renders this filth faithfully through a trash aesthetic and narrative tropes in congruence with the gritty imagination of his characters, particularly Mikhi. Casablanca is filmed from below through the eyes of its social waste. We experience the social and urban landscapes of the city through the eyes of Mikhi, the outlaws, Rita and the prostitute. The spectator thus glimpses the sociospatial maps and cognitive geography of Casablanca from below. This subalternist point of view and cognitive
mapping of urban space is rendered through the visual metaphor of garbage, which as Stam argues in his influential essay on Brazilian cinema, “reveals the social formation as seen ‘from below’” (1998: 45). Captain Daoud represents the people from above. As the System’s Pitbull, it is his job to prevent the wretched of Casablanca from rising up to reclaim their political and economic rights. He is the custodian of the temple against the “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966: 41). On many occasions he admonishes Mikhi for stinking and sprays perfume on him. This conflict between the System and the unwashed outcasts’ “secular defilement” (Douglas 1966: 30) of its values animates the film from beginning to end.

The characters’ names and costumes in The End reflect their political subjectivities as well as the penetration of global popular culture into the deepest recesses of urban space. The eldest brother among the outlaws wears his dead father’s jail uniform throughout the film. Mikhi, it bears repeating, gets his name from Mickey Mouse. His Moroccan proper name M’Key (a respectable forename with a Meccan etymology) becomes Mikhi, a trashy form of the Walt Disney character. This form of postcolonial trash culture is recycled global popular culture. Late 20th-century Casablanca is saturated with multiple icons of globalisation. From material culture to audiovisual trends, everything is of a global provenance, yet most things have been recycled to fit in with a postcolonial geography. The film adopts a trash aesthetic in accordance with this reality and in order to create a carnival of radical effects at the affective level. From MTV aesthetics to videogames, The End frames reality through an aesthetic that refuses to glamourise the filmed objects and subjects. It instead portrays them lightly by borrowing from different subcultural media. Take the soundtrack, for instance. It is replete with rap and other subcultural music from the African American inner cities of the United States to Casablanca, where the Nayda mouvement revitalised marginal voices through similar strategies of vernacular speech. If Nass El Ghiwane’s music was a serious response to the condition of the dispossessed in Casablanca and Morocco during the 1960s
and 1970s, their music is prevalent in *The End* but has been remixed to respond to the new structures of feeling of a new Morocco in the late 20th century. As Dominique Caubet, who has devoted sociolinguistic studies to Nayda and co-scripted *Casanayda!* (2007), writes: “Despite the passage of time and even if the climate is incomparable, it seems that Nass El Ghiwane music’s rich poetry and imagery still speak to their Nayda offspring” (2011: 283).

A movie-besotted adolescent in the 1990s, Lasri came of age under the Nayda movement in Casablanca, where he was born in 1977. In its reproduction of Nass El Ghiwane in the final and only soundtrack, *The End* is the product of this subcultural movement, but its use of the trash aesthetic subsumes rather than imitates protest culture. The film does not set out to outline a revolutionary programme through Casablanca’s everyday space but rather gives an account of it through the subjective eye of a lone character, whose reality and point of view are a mix of hard reality and psychedelic dreams. Between exuberantly choreographed mayhem, absurd and garrulous characters, sordid humour, and flamboyant performances, *The End* is a subcultural film that parodies the cultural dominant through the original gaze and deranged imagination of a social outcast.

The film also deploys a trash aesthetic in its presentation of commodity culture in urban space. Lasri relishes in de-iconising and re-iconising the city or deterritorialising and reterritorialising its visual identity. Following in the footsteps of his film *The Iron Bone* (2007), which projects the city of Agadir through the eyes of three hitists (unemployed youth spending their time leaning on city walls), Casablanca in *The End* is a ghostly landscape of icons. It is a city saturated with capitalist commodity culture. From Android logo graffiti to Rolls-Royce and other car brands, commodity fetishism permeates the everyday life of Lasri’s film characters. However, the film adapts commodity culture to suggest meanings other than just markers of presence in urban space. The commodity icons are made to signify

44 “Malgré les années, et bien que le climat ne soit pas comparable, il semble que ces textes poétiques et imagés parlent encore aux enfants de la nayda” (2011: 283).
the condition of social outcasts. The Rolls Royce, for instance, is an ironical gag not only in being out of place but also as a nod to 1950s American glamour cinema, especially film noir and the gangster movie. The black and white editing re-presents the period aura in a postcolonial context. The social outcasts are immaculately dressed in the costumes of sci-fi movies, slapstick and romantic comedies whilst their everyday life involves situations and conditions of living far removed from their appearance. Commodity culture can also be a sign of ordinary people’s imagination rather than alienation. They appropriate high and popular cultures in ways that serve their subjective experience. The costumes and icons are thus political in their deployment in *The End*, an effect enhanced by the absence of a musical soundtrack.

Another satirical use of commodity culture from below concerns cars in the film. With a heavy deployment of Hollywood movie tropes such as car races, violence and fast-paced, hard-hitting action, *The End* looks like a *crash film* at certain moments. This is in fitting with its representation of Casablanca as a city of youth and extreme brutality. This stylistic element foregrounds a city caught between the *imaginaire* of globalisation and the harsh reality of social outcasts and crime culture. Here too Lasri embeds a level of irony through a parody of a global visual culture which only stages its incongruence with the local social reality. The violence that ensues from car crashes is often an expression of satire rather than pure violence. It is shot through with the overload of cinematic references and heavy satire of the local and the global alike. With its oneiric cinematography, refined technique and appropriation of postmodern pastiche, *The End* is replete with a ‘neon’ violence which is both superficial by making no pretense to depth and ironically political because it is the expression of youthful visions in a splintering city and globalising world.

Melancholy characters are an essential part of *The End*’s cognitive mapping of Casablanca. Captain Daoud is lonely, pensive and a man on the edge. His character and
affective states materialise in an aggressive idiolect followed by outbursts of real violence. As an allegory of the Makhzen, the Pitbull’s character condenses the persona of King Hassan II, an egomaniac tyrant who lived to see Morocco and the world around him change and fall out of step with his anachronistic rule. Melancholia in *The End* is thus a worldly condition that anchors Lasri’s apocalyptic story of Casablanca in the reality of Morocco at the end of the millennium. Rather than a mere soufflé of self-indulgent experimentalism, *The End* is realist in its filming technique and aesthetic reconstruction of a harsh reality. Using digital and other hybrid aesthetics, it probes the nervous condition and state of mind of a city, a regime and a people on the edge of the millennium. A melancholy Casablanca is a sign of other psychological and political structures on the edge. If in the film’s allegorical tapestry Captain Daoud stands for a regime tormented by doubt and fear for its survival, the ordinary people are also living in uncertainty under its reign and that of globalisation. All the characters are melancholy and stuck in a claustrophobic urban space. The outside world is absent from the screen and NUC characters’ commonplace dreamscape of migration is passé. Everyday life in Casablanca is nearing an apocalyptic end and everyone is passively waiting for death to take them away. When death comes in the end, almost everyone dies and those who have the misfortune to survive are at a loss about what to do with the remainder of their lives. Captain Daoud lies naked and passive like a corpse on the tarmac in the supermarket car park. This is an ambivalent end characteristic of NUC films in general, and its third strand in particular. It leaves the future of the city uncertain and open to new developments.

Casablanca on screen is an open-air prison. If we have seen it on fire in other films analysed in this dissertation (e.g., *Casanegra, The Satanic Angels*), in *The End* it is a city of ashes. The black and white editing is called for by the sombre state of the city. It is a burnt metropolis on the verge of apocalypse. Here is a city devoid of life and hope. In addition to the proliferation of cemeteries and the imagery of death in the film, the characters walk like
the dead in a vast cemetry of cement buildings, rundown districts and colonial ruins. Lasri’s quirky, youth-oriented camera frames Casablanca as a necropolis. If Captain Daoud is a concentrated representation of the regime, Mikhi is the incarnation of Casablanca, a dying city. He is a young man adrift in an urban wasteland with an apocalyptic aura. The solitary figure of the Casablancan subject lost in space is a very common type in NUC since its beginnings. This NUC type provides historical continuity and thematic coherence across the otherwise heterogeneous terrain of this cinema. Mikhi spends nights on top of the white tower inhaling the smoke of burning cannabis. He is dependent on the nocturnal dose, a reward from the police for his information services, to take him through the next day. From anonymous streets to vast wastelands in the abandoned industrial zone, Casablanca is an anonymous space of gruesome violence and extreme alienation. The ashy hue and post-apocalyptic aura make it alien, menacing and visceral. However, rather than this being a purely negative vision, it is best seen as a realist mobilisation of the affective energies and potential for decisive violence or love in everyday urban life. Lasri chooses to foreground certain aspects of the psychic ecology of the city to open new spaces for the possible beyond the naturalistic register of TV news and the immediacy of consumer culture. The city is thus filmed as a force field of energies and potential that carry both alienation and subversion. The city is the world of the possible as much as the gruesome. This is why everyday life in The End’s loose realism is the space of what Lefebvre calls “an open totality” of social relations (2002: 370). Casablanca is not just the stage of neoliberal values, but also a space of civic activism and hope for alternative futures.

In conclusion, Casablanca under globalisation is a city inhabited by fear, filth, ashes, melancholia and, against all the odds, positive dreams and hope for a better future. These phenomena are the symptoms of everyday violence and the social and existential conditions under which postcolonial subjectivities are produced in Casablanca today. The city is strewn
with both negative and affirmative violence. On the one hand is the state-sponsored violence represented by the police with captain Daoud. One the other is the everyday violence of the social outcasts, strangers in the neoliberal market-place. This aggressivity can be directed against themselves as in the case of Mikhi with blood streaming from his head, after spending the first night of the film in the cannabis tower. However, in a film that adopts a subalternist point of view, violence has a critical function. It parades as resistance to the System (e.g., when it is inflicted on Captain Daoud) or against the holders of economic power in Casablanca. Another way in which the violence from below works is as a consequence of neoliberal policies, which have created a wasteland of poverty and class alienation (as embodied by the vast urban jungle of deindustrialisation where the brutal outlaws live). Cinematic violence is a symptom of the demise of the social contract between state and society with the transition from the developmentalist to the neoliberal state since the early 1980s (as I analysed in Chapter 1). Lasri’s scorched-earth approach to violence in urban space unveils the dirty side of political and economic oppression on the downtrodden and the latter’s resistance to it. At first glance it might seem that dictatorship and market reforms are two different systems with nothing in common, but in the end they are one regime that relies on violence for political survival and post-Fordist control. Mikhi and other ordinary people live under the control of both the police and commodity capitalism. When they rise up against systemic violence in The End, they pillage both in retribution for their oppression.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen in this chapter, NUC’s third-strand filmmakers have filmed Casablanca as a city of fragments. The Nourys, Lasri and Achaour are innovative cartographers of their native city. These alternative urbanists have projected the metropolis through novel frames of representation which unveil new cognitive maps of postcolonial subjectivity. Their films shun
seamless and easy portrayals of urban space. The audience is challenged to piece together a map of Casablanca from a spate of tableaux and figments of reality. This, I have argued, is both a response to the consumerist commodification of place and a new experiment in cinematic realism. The directors avoid naturalistic depictions of the city and instead rely on the capacity of the audience to partake of the affective experience of youth caught between the everyday violence of capital and the symbolic oppression of its phantasmagoria. Ironically, while this maverick cinema, keen on experimentation, is less local in appearance than the other two strands of NUC, it is impossible to comprehend its globalised frames meaningfully without an adequate understanding of the spatial and temporal lineaments of Casablanca in the 21st century.

In addition to the stylistic experimentation of third-strand NUC films, we have seen how their novel realism both perpetuates and deepens this urban cinema’s interrogation of Moroccan subjectivities under globalisation. Besides zooming in on the stylistic elements and unconventional plots of the analysed films, I have focussed on the key significatory sites of absent fathers and uncensored violence to reveal their thematic audacity. I revealed how the fathers are absent, ill or alcoholics leaving their progeniture lost in the jungle of a sprawling metropolis. The father’s absence in its many shapes in third-strand NUC is a reference to a young generation of Casablancans left on their own in a complex and rapidly changing world. In critical terms, the structuring absence of the father paves the way for a new cognitive mapping of postcolonial subjectivity beyond the well-trodden paths of traditional society or the short-lived developmentalist state of post-independence. Neoliberalism has altered both the spatial, temporal and identitarian landscapes of Casablanca urbanism and the way young people live their postcolonial subjectivity. Enabled by radical market reforms since the 1980s, globalisation’s economy of flows has altered the habitus of young people in urban space. Morocco on and off the NUC screen is a society demographically dominated by youth
struggling to cope with material precarity and the world’s uneven globalisation on their own, that is, beyond the traditional society dominated by the the Father.

Closely tied to the theme of absent fathers is violence, which has come to dominate everyday life on screen. A close reading of four films in this chapter has revealed how violence draws parallels between increasingly fatherless youth in Casablanca on screen and the disintegrating social contract between the post-colonial state and the people in the new political economy of globalisation. In *Heaven’s Doors*, for example, we have an elaborate account of violence in neoliberal space. It is similar to *The End’s* cognitive mapping in that the visceral violence of the city is inscribed in its local structures of alienation, on the one hand, as well as in a continuum of flows between global and local sites of onscreen violence and its intertextual fabric (e.g., Hip hop in Casablanca and the African American urban subcultures). The Nourys’ film is lettered/littered with and often shot in MTV fashion in places where Lasri would have drawn on the new media. This translocal presence of representational languages is part of the films’ postmodern drive to recycle violence and pastiche its presence and representation in previous local and global films. In Lasri’s self-reflexive film, this postmodern strategy of articulation is even more intricate because global references are trashed or made to disguise translocal influences where the Noury brothers would have stopped at using hip hop music and iconography to signify local youth’s structures of feelings as trans-national subjects. When it comes to violence, the Noury brothers are no less subtle than Lasri in exploding the local urban space and projecting it as the source and stage of the plurality of youth’s everyday life in a city where opportunities are in short supply for them to craft identities around jobs and fulfill their dreams through quality leisure time. Bensaïdi and Achaour carry on in both similar and divergent directions by multiplying cinematic influences to a point of saturation (the former) and questioning the wisdom and utility of making Moroccan films today (the latter). The extreme subjective
points of view in *WWW* and *A Film* are a reflection of the young Moroccan filmmaker’s drive to innovate and challenge common film language, a politics they have in common with Lasri and the Noury brothers. In sum, the combination of stylistic and thematic innovation makes the films of NUC’s younger generation a serious engagement with the transformations of Moroccan society and the wider world. Their films have captured the crisis of neoliberalism and projected a generation of disaffected youth desperate for change, uncannily preempting the mass protests of 2011 long before they happened and the attention of world media turned to a little known region.
CONCLUSION

When I embarked on this research project in October 2010, I did not know that urban space and social change, the two questions at the centre of my academic inquiry, were about to burst dramatically onto both the streets of North Africa and global media screens. The first weeks of what came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’ found me doing fieldwork in the Moroccan capital Rabat. Sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010, the Jasmine Revolution was rapidly unfolding in Tunisia while I spent my days in the national film archives. As I walked every morning down the elegant boulevard housing the Moroccan parliament, I sensed a poignant air of suspense and tension among fellow pedestrians and the groups of Diplômés Chômeurs (unemployed graduates), who had been demonstrating there almost daily since the 1990s. The latter’s marches for the right to employment had become almost a banal sight, and the regime did not seem threatened by their growing momentum. However, the problems behind the simmering revolution in Tunisia were present in Morocco too, particularly high levels of youth unemployment, corruption, social injustice and political repression. Something undefinable at that historical moment was on the horizon. When President Zinedine Ben Ali was forced out of power by street protests in 11 January 2011, the simmering tension in Morocco became even more intense. Back in Scotland at the end of January 2011, I began to follow online the daily news of street uprisings across the MENA region. The first major demonstrations in Morocco took place on 20 February, when 300,000 people took to the streets to demand social and political reforms. The protests temporarily brought together all stripes of the Moroccan public sphere under the banner of the youth-led February 20 Movement. King Mohamed VI swiftly seized the initiative and delivered a speech on 9 March, promising democratic and welfare reforms. An amended constitution passed the test of national referendum on 1 July 2011. The wave of
street protests ebbed, but the demand for more substantial reforms has remained. Upon my first trip back to post-Arab-Spring Morocco in September 2013, the daily marches of unemployed youth among other protesters in front of the parliament in Rabat and their often brutal repression by the police were evidence that little if anything had changed in the country during my three-year absence.

The series of historic events which unfolded during the three-year course of this doctoral research project forced me to probe the historical roots of social change in Morocco and the ways in which cinema has both reflected and accompanied a rapidly changing society. The 2011 upheavals crucially had a decisive impact on this dissertation’s conceptual framework. Instead of the theory-heavy approach to time and subjectivity I had in mind when I started this PhD in autumn 2010, I gradually settled for a historical framework that draws from various academic disciplines and theoretical traditions whilst prioritising the primary sources. This approach forces the films to disclose clues toward a situated understanding of their representation of neoliberal Casablanca and the cinematic production of postcolonial subjectivity. These critical clues are constantly brought into dialogue with social and cultural theory.

In his contribution to *Culture Toute!*, a manifesto for cultural change in Morocco initiated by the poet Abdellatif Laâbi in 2010, Abdelkader Lagtaâ writes: “[In] our country, cinema remains the most popular narrative mode of expression and, as such, the most relevant for projecting the concerns and aspirations of the Moroccan subject, including sharing with him unique experiences and enriching his imagination” (2010).

45 He goes on to ask: “In what ways should Moroccan cinema engage with the reality of the society in which it evolves, accompany its transformations and question the certainties which govern it?”

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45 “[…] notre pays, où le film demeure le mode d’expression narratif le plus populaire et, en tant que tel, le plus pertinent pour prendre en charge les préoccupations et les aspirations de l’individu marocain, notamment en partageant avec lui des expériences singulières et en contribuant à enrichir son imaginaire” (2010).
In the light of this dissertation’s close analysis of over a dozen films set in Casablanca over the past two decades, this is obviously a rhetorical question. Lagtaâ and the filmmakers of the cinematic movement to which he gave rise with his popular film *A Love Affair in Casablanca* (1991) have screened the everyday life of a changing society in conditions of neoliberal globalisation. This dissertation has thus examined the representations of postcolonial subjectivity in Moroccan cinema since the 1990s. We have seen how, in the process of combating a deep economic recession, Morocco has implemented the IMF-designed structural adjustment policies since the 1980s. Radical market reforms brought about new spatial and social relations in Moroccan cities. NUC emerged in the early 1990s and has projected the complex structures of everyday life in urban space. Casablanca has been the setting for some of this cinema’s most original portrayals of Moroccan postcolonial subjectivity under globalisation. Taking space, affect, violence and youth as intertwined sites of close film analysis, I have examined the new forms of postcolonial subjectivity that have evolved on the screen. Drawing on postcolonial, film and urban studies, my aim has doubly been to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship on cinematic affect as well as artistic responses to neoliberal globalisation, and to a cultural critique of contemporary Morocco. By focusing on Morocco’s largest city and the most influential strand of national cinema over the last two decades, this project can help toward understanding a rapidly urbanising country and contribute to scholarship on postcolonial cinema and society under globalisation.

*Love Affair* is a paradigmatic example of NUC’s realist matrix and political stakes. It is a pioneering demonstration of this cinema’s intertwined audience appeal and investment in everyday life’s critical potential. The focus on the everyday world of ordinary Moroccans has garnered a mass audience base for NUC’s articulation of postcolonial subjectivity. Moroccan filmmakers have also forced cinema to the forefront of debates on the urgency of a post-

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46 “[C]omment le film marocain peut-il prendre en charge la réalité de la société au sein de laquelle il se déploie, accompagner les mutations qui la travaillent et questionner les certitudes qui la régissent?”
neoliberal (qua postcolonial) critique of socioeconomic inequalities and political repression through critical explorations of their mundane enactments and affective economy in everyday life. NUC’s critique is woven around a poetics of quotidian attractions which unveil the residual contradictions and critical potential of everyday life in the city for a postcolonial “reinvention of the collective” (Jameson 1981: 92). One outcome of this resurgence of a vision as old as the cinematic medium itself is the capacity of the films of this popular cinema to quench the general public’s desire for a critical understanding of the present. This capacity to draw new cognitive maps of and beyond the social present represents NUC’s ethics of realism, which anchors cinema in its historical circumstances of production and reception.

The immediate success and enduring appeal of Lagtaâ’s *Love Affair* are largely due to its ethnographic attention to everyday life in Casablanca as the postcolonial city’s socioeconomic fabric was undergoing deep transformations under neoliberal globalisation. Salwa’s love affairs with Jalil and Najib are inscribed in contemporary Casablancan urbanism. The film is shot through with the ordinary rhythms, affective intensities and residual contradictions of everyday life in a sprawling metropolis. *Love Affair* thus registers the return of ordinary social history in its spontaneity and ambivalence to haunt the neoliberal present on screen and, by an uncanny extension, recast the terrains of postcolonial subjectivity in Morocco. Lagtaâ’s groundbreaking NUC film stages everyday life in a way that not only deconstructs the present of a city and a society in transition under the world-systemic agency of neoliberalism, but also functions as a vast reservoir of historical memory by bearing witness to the ordinary experiences of postcolonial subjects. *Love Affair* also foregrounds these subjects’ daily imagination of alternative venues and new horizons of becoming postcolonial beyond local and global structures of domination. In this critical vein, everyday life in the NUC film becomes the stage not only for the mundane experiences of
urban life in both its alienating and emancipatory capacities, but also the ground for the enactment of a new historical consciousness of the postcolonial subject. A paradigmatic text of NUC, Lagtaâ’s film thus allows attentive viewers to grasp the rich worldliness of postcolonial everyday life as a reservoir of human experiences calling for thick descriptions so that their potential for novel articulations of human subjectivity can be appreciated. In addition, Love Affair is also symptomatic of NUC in its engagement with everyday life through a lens which manages to be popular while remaining critical by steering clear of overly melodramatic representations of reality. As we have seen, the film almost singlehandedly initiated a politics of popular aesthetics on the screen which continues to draw large audiences in a Moroccan film market set up to favour global imports to the detriment of local productions at the points of distribution and exhibition.

Over a decade into the new century and still growing stronger in appeal and creativity, NUC has mobilised “the buds and shoots of new potentialities” (Bakhtin 1984: 73) in the ordinary experiences of postcolonial subjects in the neoliberal city. In addition to everyday life’s banality and potential for historical change, NUC films are traversed by the political trope of the absent father in rendering the subjectivity of Moroccan society today. The father’s absence in its many shapes is a sign of the fragile social contract at the hyphenated centre of the Moroccan nation-state under globalisation. From the Neo-Neorealist Ali Zaoua to recent youth-themed films by the Noury brothers, Lasri, Lakhamri and others, the structuring absence of the father paves the way for new cognitive mappings of postcolonial subjectivity today. Neoliberalism has altered both the spatial, temporal and identitarian landscapes of Casablanca urbanism and the way young people navigate their way in its everyday world. Intensifying in the wake of structural adjustment policies, global flows of media cultures and ideologies have further impacted Moroccan society.
When Hicham Lasri’s *They Are the Dogs* (2013) arrived on my desk in July 2013, I had already finished the full draft of the dissertation. Even though this talented young director’s debut feature *The End* (2010) is amply explored in Chapter 5, I was worried that I might have to rewrite substantial parts of the dissertation after watching his second film. Lasri’s second feature exceeded my expectations with its original style and cognitive mapping of the affective subtexts of Casablanca and Morocco at the moment of popular upheavals in 2011, but its contribution to NUC only confirmed my analysis of a body of filmmaking spanning over two decades. However, after finishing this dissertation, I believe that there remains a major gap in research on Moroccan cinema, namely the absence of a comparative study of cinema and social change that would provide greater historical and geographical depth to our understanding of the field both across the Maghreb and over a longer period of time. North African filmmakers have drawn subtle portraits of their societies over the past few decades. For a host of complex reasons that would have to be explored in depth in such a comparative study, national cinemas from Egypt to Morocco have been replete with the imagery and signs of the looming upheavals in the region since 2011. Contemporary Maghrebi cinema’s predominant realism needs to be situated within the region’s broader historical, social and economic transformations since independence (1956/1962), thus providing a much-needed longer-term and transnational perspective on recent socio-political and cultural developments. Unlike the dominant narratives disseminated by the mass media since 2011, which have concentrated on political dynamics, a research project of this kind can, amongst other things, illuminate some of the deep sources of the region’s ongoing and recent turmoils from a cultural studies perspective. Key historical events and transformations such as the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the IMF structural adjustment policies implemented across the region since the 1980s have engendered novel representations of reality in Maghrebi cinema. What the Tunisian filmmaker Nouri Bouzid calls “New Realism” prevailed on North African screens.
after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (1995: 249). To filmmakers across the region, 1967 brought home not only a sense of historical defeat but also, to borrow another Bouzidian term, an awareness of the “decadence” of their civilisation. The filmmakers consequently turned their cameras away from grand narratives to the projection of what the sociologist Asef Bayat calls “social non-movements” or the collective action of dispersed subaltern actors, particularly the poor and disaffected youth. New Realism marked a transition from the cinema of the collective hero, which prevailed particularly in Algerian cinema during the 1960s and 1970s, to a preoccupation with embattled individuals in everyday life. In addition to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, political authoritarianism, social injustice and gender inequality contributed to what Hélé Béji terms désenchantement national (national disenchantment). Collective disenchantment bred an uncompromising realism on the big screen. Despite the existence of a few publications in Arabic, French and English of this crucial period of Maghrebi cinema, there is as yet no critical study of New Realism through the lens of social change and postcolonial youth, two crucial elements at the heart of North Africa’s recent history. In this regard, a combination of original research and an interdisciplinary cultural studies perspective that brings together scholarship in the above languages can go beyond the common divides in academic scholarship on the Maghreb, both language-based and disciplinary.

This comparative study would also need to dwell on Maghrebi youth and social change under globalisation, identifying, defining and examining the rise and aesthetic evolution of a new urban cinema in the entire region since the 1990s. Economic, demographic and political transformations in the wake of structural adjustment policies implemented in the 1980s have been accompanied by the rise of a Neo-Neorealist cinema in the following decades centred on the representation of young people’s everyday life and existential uncertainty in sprawling urban spaces. The protagonists of this new cinema are often Maghrebi youth in search of emancipated subjectivities and historical agency in societies undergoing rapid
transformation. Contemporary Maghrebi cinema in its two broadly defining moments, New Realism and Neo-Neorealism, has been characterised by consistent attempts to articulate the historical subjectivity of ordinary North African youth from below. Besides exploring the implications of realism and subalternity on the screen, the study will need to examine the stylistic differences, historical contingencies and deep aesthetic as well as political continuities between post-1967 realism and its new counterpart born in the 1990s.

Unlike the first realist period of Maghrebi cinema, which has benefited from some scholarly attention in recent years, post-1990s cinema has yet to receive overdue critical attention from film scholars and specialists of the region. Besides beginning to redress this scholarly void, a comparative study of this kind might constitute a significant step towards a new history of Maghrebi cinema through the as yet unexplored lenses of globalisation, social change and postcolonial youth – three intertwined elements at the heart of the recent history of the region. The project would do well to deploy an interdisciplinary methodology that combines close film analysis with an engagement with recent scholarship in history, anthropology, sociology, film and postcolonial cultural studies in order to illuminate the complex relationship between cinema and history in the post-colonial Maghreb. In addition to multilingual fieldwork in national and international film archives in North Africa and France, the project should involve in-depth interviews with filmmakers and other actors in the cultural field for an informed analysis of a carefully-selected corpus of films, which have critically chronicled the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural transformations of the Maghreb in recent decades. A study of this kind would also allow us to make broader conclusions about the complex articulation between social, political and economic change and the under-studied filmic as opposed to better-known literary responses to such shifts.

This dissertation has focused on two decades of North African filmmaking from Morocco and I hope it will contribute to wider comparative projects of this kind in the years to come.
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