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Will Higbee, *Post-Beur Cinema: North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France since 2000*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013. 228 pp. 21 B/W illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$120.00 U.S./ £70.00 U.K. (hb). ISBN 9780748640041; \$40.00 U.S./ £24.99 U.K. (pb). ISBN 9780748697373.

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In *Post-Beur Cinema: North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France since 2000*, Will Higbee forcefully argues that during the 2000s, directors of Maghrebi origins have broken through the limitations they and their films experienced and represented in the 1980s and 1990s: the generation of so-called Beur Cinema. This text comes as a very welcome intervention for those frustrated by the level of discourse articulated around Beur Cinema—a category and critical concept limited by the “strategic essentialism” (p. 13) of the contemporaneous identity politics that inflected both the films and the critical language used to talk about them. Higbee is not exactly the first to posit that there might be something beyond Beur Cinema—indeed, he tidily synthesizes the critical debates on the question in the recent decade—but his monograph cogently articulates the *état des lieux* of this particular bit of real estate in the land of French national cinema.

What precisely *is* Post-Beur is somewhat harder to encapsulate. The book’s composite subtitle and the time dedicated to nomenclature in the introduction are symptomatic of the challenges faced by Higbee. The author rightly wishes to recognize that émigré directors are not the same as those born and raised in France or those who immigrated to France at a very young age, that there are distinct national differences across the countries of North Africa (as well as ethnic differences within those countries), that subsequently these directors exhibit a multiplicity of positions vis-à-vis the relationship between France and their “place(s) of origin” (at however many generations’ remove). Simultaneously, he respects and examines the variety of professional trajectories embraced by these filmmakers (and indeed actors, since some of the figures considered in the book have worked both as directors and actors, and the star power of some of the actors in question makes them as influential in film production and reception as the directors). But, he also would maintain that there are nonetheless enough similarities and shared concerns to justify demarcating a group within the broader field of French filmmaking. So, while the author can easily establish that the current state of filmmaking by North African émigré and Maghrebi-French directors is *not* what it once was (either consensual comedy or social realism systematically tied to the urban margins of the *banlieues*), what it *is*, in Higbee’s account, is something much more diverse and indeed, diffuse—resistant to easy pigeonholing.

This diversity and mobility motivates the book’s organization and justifies its methodology. The introductory chapter (one), “From Immigrant Cinema to National Cinema,” gives a historical summary of representations of North Africans in French cinema from the 1970s on (with a very brief mention of colonialist cinema prior to the 1970s). This summary is most concerned with the 1980s and 1990s, as well as clarifying Higbee’s choice of terms throughout the book. As can be intuited from the chapter’s title, the trajectory involves the transition from immigrant, to Beur, then Post-Beur, progressively asserting these filmmakers’ position as a solid and active part of French national cinema. Over the course of the subsequent chapters, the reader will see how this entails diverse professional strategies.

In chapter two, Higbee shows that Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers have been primarily associated with three areas of filmmaking: medium- to low-budget features (usually social realist, comedic or episodic narratives) that focus (characters and themes) on the North African diaspora in France; the *cinéma du milieu*—primarily auteur-driven films with crossover potential; and *le mainstream*. While the first two categories were already very active in the 1980s and 1990s, it is the breakthrough of Maghrebi-French and North African émigré filmmakers into mainstream markets that marks the significant difference between Post-Beur cinema and the productions of the earlier eras, as well as this cinema’s diversification. In this chapter, Higbee relies heavily on data regarding box office entries, production budgets, genre, and star presence in order to document the emergence of ethnically marked directors and stars as a still relatively small, but increasingly significant market force in the French industry. After briefly establishing some historical background and defining “mainstream” for the French context, Higbee spends the first two-thirds of the chapter breaking down what types of films Maghrebi-French and North African émigré directors and stars have made, and detailing the relative success of those pictures in the national and international markets. The chapter’s final third considers director Djamel Bensaleh, “arguably the most consistently successful director in terms of audience popularity” (p. 48) in the 2000s. Two short sections focused on individual Bensaleh films (*Le Ciel, les oiseaux et...ta mère!/Boys on the Beach* [1999] and *Neuilly sa mère!/Neuilly Yo Mama!* [2009]) present primarily thematic/narrative analysis that suggests how the move into successful mainstream production often correlates to films that “fall back on the largely reductive practices, structures and representational tropes employed by other mainstream, majority-ethnic-authored comedies dealing with issues of exclusion, difference and multiculturalism in contemporary French society” (p. 60).

In chapter three, “Colonial Fracture and the Counter-Heritage Film,” Higbee argues that the “most visible and potential transformative challenges to the denial of colonial history” (p. 66) have emerged in the domain of the heritage film during the 2000s. This chapter follows logically from the question of what is “mainstream” posed in the previous chapter, since, as Higbee observes, heritage film is “widely perceived as the most conservative, middlebrow and hegemonic of representation trends in contemporary French cinema” (p. 66). Heritage film can achieve both critical and box office successes, but it relies on the mobilization of cultural capital to tap into the intellectual, as well as economic and social mainstream. This chapter has one of the most pointed theoretical framings in the book—opening with a consideration of the relationship between memory and history as articulated by thinkers like Pierre Nora and Paul Ricœur. Using a similar structure as he deployed earlier, Higbee moves next towards a concise account of his terms (“heritage” and “counter-heritage”) and the filmed representations of Franco-Maghrebi history in the 1980s and 1990s, before spending the remainder of the chapter on more detailed consideration of individual films: Yamina Benguigui’s *Inch’allah dimanche/Inch’allah Sunday* (2001), Mehdi Charef, *Cartouches gauloises/Summer of ‘62* (2007), and extensive comparative analysis of Rachid Bouchareb’s, *Indigènes/Days of Glory* (2006) and *Hors-la-loi/Outside the Law* (2010). As is the case throughout the book, Higbee emphasizes both the similarities between counter-heritage films and also the diversity of articulations, contestations, and claims made about French history by these films.

Abdellatif Kechiche, as representative of auteurist *cinéma du milieu*, and his four well-known films, *La Faute à Voltaire/Poetical Refugee* (2001), *L’Esquive/Games of Love and Chance* (2004), *La Graine et le mulet/The Secret of the Grain* (2007) and *Vénus noire/Black Venus* (2010), are the focus of chapter four, “Of Spaces and Difference in the Films of Abdellatif Kechiche.” Dedicated to a single director, this chapter has more room for extended close reading and formal analysis than previous chapters, although Higbee continues to usefully supply data about spectatorship and budgeting as it helps to highlight the significance of particular films. Higbee clearly delineates Kechiche’s auteurist signature: “the use of everyday locations, a mixture of professional and non-professional actors and the exploitation of the theatrical, performative potential of the selected locations and architecture of the film,” as well as a “preference for shooting on digital with a two-camera set up, combining static shots with hardly any

pans or tracking with a second, roving camera that locks in on close-ups and extreme close-ups on the actors” (p.112). These characteristics are studied across the four films, as is Kechiche’s penchant for engaging canonical French literary works as significant intertexts. Higbee’s conclusion is that Kechiche tends to privilege class over ethnicity as a critical axis, exemplifying a type of “skeptical” Republicanism (embracing Republican values, though not uncritically) that asserts Maghrebi-French filmmaking as “occupying a legitimate place within the [French] nation” (p. 128).

The book’s final two chapters, “Home, Displacement and the Myth of Return: Journey Narratives in the 2000s” and “Screening Islam: Cinematic Representations of the Muslim Community in France in the 2000s,” both undertake to chart a representational problem across a series of films. In the case of “journey narratives” the argumentation logically but light-handedly engages with the road movie genre—more importantly, Higbee considers how films like *Ten’ja/Testament* (Hassan Legzouli, 2004), *Bled number one/Back Home* (Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche, 2006) and *Exils/Exiles* (Tony Gatlif, 2004) figure and refigure the myth of return. The goal in this chapter is to suggest that such films demonstrate (yet again) a markedly different and notably more fluid relationship to the notion of “return” from that seen in films of the 1980s and 1990s. Higbee contends that this fluidity can be further interpreted as offering a revision to Hamid Naficy’s notion of “accented cinema”—“scrambling or displac[ing]” the accent so as to give evidence of the protagonist’s (and filmmaker’s) constant renegotiations of the relationships between French and North African homelands (p. 149). The chapter on Islam deals with another sort of representational displacement: the structuring absence in French cinema of characters for whom Islam is a central part of their identity and story (while not so incongruent with French *laïcité* and the filmmaking choices of directors/screenwriters of other religions in that country) results in the transnational narratives of *Le Grand Voyage* (Ismaël Ferrouhki, 2004) and *London River* (Rachid Bouchareb, 2009), and the class politics-dominated *Dernier maquis* (Rabeh Ameur-Zaïmeche, 2008). Higbee speculates that there is type of self-censorship at work in the persistent, relative absence of Islam on French screens, and asserts that although the sheer existence of certain recent features would indicate that some change is underway, “screening Islam [in France] remains fraught with difficulties and tensions” (p. 179).

Post-Beur Cinema is a highly readable and informative text. It will likely be of most interest to specialists of French or post-colonial cinemas, and French and North African cultural studies, but I think it could comfortably be read by undergraduates and interested cinephiles. Certainly the chapter on counter-heritage film would make an excellent reading for a variety of courses, from history to film studies to French culture. The prose is clear, theorization extremely accessible, and when individual films are considered, the dominant analytical focus on narrative and theme should make the text very understandable even for individuals who might not be familiar with the film in question. The book’s chapters respond nicely to each other—Higbee’s consideration of *Vénus noire* gives a counterpoint to the chapter on counter-heritage within the chapter on auteurism, for instance. While individual chapters can easily stand alone, this is definitely a well-knit monograph that benefits from being read cover-to-cover. In all of the chapters, Higbee consistently and convincingly articulates how North African émigré and Maghrebi-French filmmakers in the 2000s have moved beyond Beur Cinema, demonstrating the variety and richness of this flourishing and increasingly self-legitimated area of French national cinema.

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