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# Marock in Morocco: Reading Moroccan Films in the Age of Circulation

BRIAN T. EDWARDS

**ABSTRACT** This article discusses a number of recent Moroccan films—created by artists based both in Morocco and the diaspora—that engage questions of globalisation and culture. The author argues that ‘circulation’ is a common thematic concern in several such films of the past decade and offers a means by which to understand the relationship of globalisation to recent Maghribi cultural production. The central text analysed is the 2005 film *Marock* (directed by Laila Marrakchi), and the 2006 controversies surrounding it, which most clearly exhibit the shift in Moroccan representations in the age of global capital and cultural flows. Attention to circulation allows us to put in dialogue the cultural production of the Maghribi diaspora and the Maghrib without collapsing their differences; to identify a new paradigm of cultural production that follows the ‘postcolonial’ period; and to link elements within these films to the material and geopolitical concerns they engage.

## Rocking the Casa

‘The film of all taboos’, it was called by its sympathisers. In the late spring of 2006, a controversial new film named *Marock* was all over the Moroccan papers and culture magazines. Made by a 29-year-old Moroccan woman named Laila Marrakchi, who had left Casablanca for France a decade earlier, the film was released in Morocco on 10 May 2006, a year after it had premiered at the Cannes film festival, and a month after its general release in France. These dynamics—a director with a Moroccan upbringing but a French address, and a film about Morocco with French funding and a European provenance—would haunt the film. In Morocco, its arrival on local screens was heralded with the sort of media coverage of an American *succès de scandale*, with the free publicity from excessive news coverage obviating the need for paid advertising. Indeed there were multiple parallels to Hollywood films, both within the film itself with its Hollywood look and American teen movie soundtrack, and in its wide distribution via both formal and informal circuits. Soon after its run at cinemas in Casablanca, Rabat, Fez and Marrakech, contraband copies of the film were available for sale on the sidewalks of Moroccan cities, where it stood alongside pirated copies of Hollywood blockbusters such as *Syriana*, *Jarhead*, Spielberg’s *Munich*, *Ice Age 2* and *Cars*, to name those with the broadest

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informal circulation in June–July 2006.<sup>1</sup> But if part of the surprise about *Marock*'s reception in Morocco was just how Hollywood it all seemed, the controversies it provoked in Morocco revolved around the representations of Moroccan particularity within it. That was the problem.

*Marock*, Marrakchi's first feature, built on a theme she had explored in her first film, a 12-minute short called *L'Horizon perdu* (2000) about a young man broken by life in the Tangier medina who leaves Morocco for Spain in clandestine fashion. In the case of *Marock*, however, the protagonist's departure from the homeland is deferred for a full 90 minutes and comes at the conclusion of a coming-of-age tale. Though the protagonist is no less broken by her milieu than in the short, in *Marock* the character's elite socio-economic status is never in jeopardy and the emigration is legal and transparent (the last spoken word of the film is the passport control officer's demand, 'Passport', which causes no anxiety). Nearly everything that precedes this final word justifies the departure, which comes both as a relief and as the tearful leave taking from adolescence and Morocco alike. The 17-year-old female protagonist's departure from Morocco was not, however, what made *Marock* controversial, even though the film associates Morocco itself with adolescence and departure from Morocco with the process of maturing. (To be sure, the fact that the director herself had emigrated to France was repeated by the film's detractors.<sup>2</sup>) Rather, what was provocative was the director's frank portrayal of premarital sexuality among elite Casablancans and her flaunting of religious and cultural conventions.

Three plot strands in particular stood out: the open refusal of the protagonist Rita (played by Morjana Alaoui) to fast during the month of Ramadan, when the film is set; Rita's mockery of her brother Mao (Assad El Bouab) at prayer; and her open affair with a Jewish teenager, Youri (Matthieu Boujenah), an affair that is apparently consummated sexually. As the last plot element suggests, the frank treatment of teenage Moroccan sexuality and a disregard for the sanctities of religious tradition were, in *Marock*, deeply intertwined. Across the board, the moment in the film that most disturbed commentators was an intimate scene between Youri and Rita, the two entangled in each other's arms kissing in an isolated seaside shed. Youri, following Rita's eyes to the silver Star of David he wears around his neck, removes the chain and places it around the Muslim girl's neck. 'This way', he says, 'you won't have to think about it'. The film's defenders, such as the liberal cultural magazines *Tel Quel* and *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, both of which put it on the magazine's cover and dedicated long articles to it, found this the most difficult aspect to watch. Those individuals who supported the film, and those who continue to champion it, still find it difficult to reconcile that disregard for religious decorum.<sup>3</sup> Its detractors used the moment as evidence that the film was part of a Zionist plot and were quick to discredit her. Strong criticism was delivered to Marrakchi in person in Tangier, where the film was screened at the national film festival in December 2005, and in cyberspace, where an active discussion about the film took place among the Moroccan diaspora in France on the French release of the film in February 2006, wherein Marrakchi was taken to task for claiming to speak on behalf of the young generation of Moroccans.<sup>4</sup>

In the public debate that ensued upon the film's general release in Morocco, *Marock* and Marrakchi herself quickly came to stand for multiple positions—freedom of speech, the young 'rock' generation, intellectual and artistic honesty, and humanism, on the one hand, and disrespect for Moroccan tradition, diasporic elitism cut off from the homeland, neo-colonialist pandering to Europe's Islamophobic preoccupations, and savvy

self-publicity/provocation, on the other. We might note that these positions are not mutually exclusive. The debate itself, of course, is the first thing to understand. The anxieties that *Marock* provoked were intense across the cultural and political spectrum. The ways in which it was received—the misapprehensions about its novelty or its crimes against the nation—offer a lens through which to make sense of Moroccan culture in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Whatever the validity of the critiques of the film's aesthetic quality (see Dahan, 2006), therefore, or whatever the anachronism of its attempt to offer a national allegory of twenty-first century Morocco via a tale of departure (which recalled mid-twentieth century modes of the late colonial and early postcolonial period), we should not ignore the film. This is, to be sure, not the same as the American marketing adage that any publicity is good publicity. *Marock* struck a nerve. And if Marrakchi herself predicted that it would do so in a statement made in France before the film had made it to Moroccan screens, a comment which of course antagonised in itself, her success in so doing is no less important to understand.

### The Age of Circulation

*Marock* deserves our attention not only for the debates it occasioned, but also because it is a film text that makes vivid a variety of intertwined features of urban Morocco in the era of globalisation. By 'globalisation', an overused and frequently undertheorised term that is especially subject to what Edward Said called 'travelling theory', I mean something akin to the use of the term by cultural anthropologists who are sensitive both to economic and demographic change and to the category of the imagination. Namely, globalisation is the accelerated transnational movement of capital that follows the world wide shift away from nationally anchored currencies in 1973. 'Globalisation' is also the episteme that emerges during this period—the cultural imaginaries that are formed by subjects brought into new communication by a variety of digital technologies and accelerated or enhanced transport of bodies, images, finances and ideas (Appadurai, 1996, 2001). Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma have announced this cultural shift in even starker terms: 'The advent of circulation-based capitalism, along with the social forms and technologies that complement it, signifies more than a shift in emphasis. It constitutes a new stage in the history of capitalism' (2002, p. 210). If we are to take this proposition seriously, which I think we must, there will need to be a reassessment of social forms—including art, literature, cinema, etc.—that emerge within this new stage. Needless to say, this would be a major undertaking.

In their groundbreaking essay, Lee and LiPuma provide an analysis of the forms of collective agency that emerge from within different economic stages in the history of capitalism. Their attempt is to show how the transition from gift-exchange societies (pre-market capitalism) to market capitalism to 'globalisation' after the demise of the gold standard and the floating of currencies creates different forms of imagining the relationship of the individual to the collective and, therefore, different forms of social organisation (see also LiPuma and Lee, 2004). Theirs is a technical analysis that brings together structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic theories of performativity and economic analysis of financial derivatives—the latter are understood as akin to performative speech acts in that they call into being the world they name and thus shape the (economic) future. At stake for critics of contemporary cinema is Lee and LiPuma's claim that

analyses of contemporary 'culture', particularly those that attend to 'meaning and interpretation as the key problems for social and cultural analysis', are playing 'catch-up to the economic processes that go beyond it' (2002, p. 191). This statement poses a direct challenge to those who would analyse cultural production since the transition to globalisation, whatever the location where the cultural object is produced.

Lee and LiPuma's essay has resonated through work in transnational cultural studies, though its implications on literary and film studies have not yet been adequately considered. This may be because their challenge to prevailing modes of reading film and literary texts of the past three decades is direct, on the one hand, and not spelled out, on the other. Following Lee and LiPuma's essay, Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli (2003, p. 388) have addressed the implications of attending to circulation for the analysis of public cultural texts, events and practices and called for attention to the 'dynamic transfiguration of forms across circulatory matrices'. They go yet further with respect to the velvet trap of interpretation when they suggest that critics resist the 'temptation of reading for meaning' and instead pay greater attention to 'the proliferating copresence of varied textual/cultural forms in all their mobility and mutability' (pp. 386, 391).

In this essay, it should by now be clear, I would like to take up the challenge of reconsidering Moroccan cinema from a perspective that attends to its relationship to 'cultures of circulation'. What this will mean with respect to a film such as *Marock* or indeed contemporary Moroccan cinema in general is straightforward enough. First, that we should attend to the ways in which such films operate within diverse Moroccan media worlds pervaded by the global flow of images, visual technologies and representations. And second, that we must consider the ways in which such films address, create and sometimes mystify Moroccan publics who are confronted on a daily basis with the struggles and conditions posed by the Moroccan encounter with economic globalisation.

Following Lee and LiPuma's lead, then, an expanded sense of 'globalisation' will allow us to specify what is particular about the past three decades and to establish a framework within which to analyse literature, film and other forms of cultural production that are created within such a changed environment. Globalisation conceived of merely as transnational trade and the cross-border contact of bodies and ideas may be as old as trade or the world system itself (Frank, 1998; see also Arrighi, 1994), but since the mid-1970s, the combination of financial deregulation and technological innovation has sped up these processes at exponential, asymptotic rates. That combination has exacerbated the number of dislocated peoples even while it has allowed for new experiences of the age-old conditions of dislocation and diaspora. In other words, the same people who are put in accelerated motion in pursuit of financial possibilities or in flight from political and economic crises have the possibilities to remain in a particular form of contact because of digital technologies that have been so quickly developed in this period. This leads to specific forms of diasporic experience and new forms of cross-diasporic community, as Hamid Naficy (1993) has shown in his important work on diasporic media and the cross-ethnic diasporic communities they form in Los Angeles in the 1980s and early 1990s. Such work can be extended to the digital environment of the later 1990s and 2000s, wherein Internet chatrooms, web sites and blogs bring together not only diverse diasporic communities, but put into contact (sometimes uneasy contact) members of the diaspora and nation itself. Said Graiouid's (2005) thinking about what he calls 'virtual *h'rig*' in the Moroccan cybersphere has explored what sorts of immobilities can also come along with the perceived mobility of the Internet.

Shana Cohen and Larabi Jaidi's recent consideration (2006) of the Moroccan encounter with globalisation is particularly useful in attending to the interplay of economic and political pressures from outside and the protean forms that the Moroccan kingdom has assumed in responding to the pulls and pressures of development. One of their findings that will prove particularly useful for my purposes in this essay is the ways in which Moroccan youth have, despite an environment that seems most closely poised toward political inclusion, retrenched into a cultural apathy and apoliticism. For Cohen and Jaidi, Moroccan youth may be seen in the terms of what Susan Ossman (2002) has called 'lightness' of bodies, in her own important study of the transnational circulation of forms of beauty between Casablanca, Paris and Cairo. And though they are focused on economic and political processes, Cohen and Jaidi suggest some of the forms of cultural production that may be implicated by attention to Morocco's complex relationship to globalisation when they focus their attention briefly on a diasporic, anonymous Moroccan rapper who challenges from afar the cultural contradictions of Moroccan national culture.

If what we mean by 'globalisation' implicates an impossibly broad fabric, it is necessary to localise our attentions on particular texts and contexts in order to understand how such a changed or changing episteme works on the imaginary. This critical tactic need not reject Gaonkar and Povinelli's (2003) warning about the dangerous captivation that 'meaning' can pose. Indeed, by attending to the global flow of a Hollywood 'look' or 'form', and the ways in which a filmmaker's work both attends to and is caught up in the circulation of commodities and diasporic-national ideas, we may make progress toward better understanding how 'cultures of circulation' work within the Moroccan context of the past decade. Work such as Naficy's on TV (1993) and Graioui's on cyberculture (2005) shows how this might be done and what is to be gained by so doing. And despite the ways in which television and cyberculture highlight the technological changes in the environment within which subjectivities operate in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we need not only attend to new media in order to see such a shift. We may see a marked shift in cultural production more generally. Furthermore, such concerns are made visible within cultural production, sometimes in the media within which they are produced—as with the digital pirate-artist Miloudi, whose montage VCDs from 2003 to 2005, half-CGI Hollywood clips, half-Moroccan *chaabi* music, seemed to create a new art form (see Schultheis, 2005), and also blogs and chatrooms—and sometimes thematically in works created in more traditional media. When 'older' media are chosen by artists as means of expression, we may see a cultural shift in a variety of ways, both thematically and stylistically, as well as the changed environment within which such traditional media now operate. For these reasons, it may be especially useful to examine such 'older' media (cinema, novels, etc.) to understand better the shifts surrounding the choice of media itself.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, if we are to continue reading critically and analysing cinema produced after the shift I am describing, we must avoid doing so armed only with the critical modes developed within the prior episteme. This will mean attention to a variety of factors, both internal and external to the film texts themselves. When so doing, for example, we must not neglect to note the new technologies within which those older forms circulate, are marketed, or are discussed. Thus for *Marock*, the importance of the discussion of the film in Internet chatrooms, and of its distribution first by digital pirates, and eventually by YouTube, and for fiction, its marketing via Amazon, authors' blogs and web sites, to say nothing of the fact that many read such fiction (or snippets of it) via the free pages

available on <Amazon.com>. But as we'll see, such concerns also figure largely within many recent Moroccan works in these 'older' media. Watching a feature film such as *Marock* on YouTube, or on digitally pirated copies purchased off the street, or on a laptop computer in a train, on a plane, or lying in bed, one wonders whether it is correct to consider the 'feature film' an 'older' form of cultural production any more. Those who will view feature length films in the darkened social space of the cinema, with its implications on creating a public, must be counted in the minority. And if so, the functioning or breakdown of technology (see Larkin, 2004), the poor quality of DVDs, VCDs and downloaded versions of films, and the cramped spaces of computer and television monitors must all be considered.

By 'globalisation', then, to take this a step further and to localise it to Morocco, I mean a period of time and a set of cultural concerns in Morocco and Moroccan art and literature that succeeds that which we call the postcolonial period, even while many of the obsessions and anxieties of the postcolonial still are present. This transition to the 'age of circulation' and this tension with respect to the postcolonial period can be felt from the start of our appreciation of the controversies around *Marock* announced at the outset: the anxiety over the French provenance of, funding for and diasporic location of the director of the film (postcolonial considerations) vs. the Hollywood 'look', global 'morals' and cybermediated/cyberfacilitated discussions of the film (we will see these echoed within the film later). Films such as *Marock*, *Baidaoua* (dir. Abdelkader Lagtaa, 1999), *Ali Zaoua* (dir. Nabil Ayouch, 2000), *Khahit errouh/Threads* (dir. Hakim Belabbes, 2003), and *Le Grand voyage* (dir. Ismael Ferroukhi, 2004), which in various ways engage the question of the state of the Moroccan nation (the last two explicitly through the lens of diaspora), do not do so burdened by the anxieties of carving out an independent, postcolonial nation free from the pull of French culture and epistemologies. Rather, they are concerned with what place Morocco and Moroccan culture might have in a global setting within which ideas, products and commodities, lifestyles and technologies have complicated what was once, perhaps, a more binary situation. I say this without meaning to reduce colonial (and postcolonial) Morocco to a binary, either internally, with respect to French division of Arab and Tamazight cultures/languages/populations, or globally, with respect to the changing position of the US toward Morocco (and Morocco toward the US) in the late colonial and first two decades of the postcolonial period. As I have argued elsewhere, from the arrival of American troops in Morocco in November 1942, and certainly after Franklin Roosevelt's participation in the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, there was a vivid and visible triangulation of paradigms available in Morocco, within which the American position might offer liberty from the French; the promise/threat of American commodities was the harbinger of this new paradigm.<sup>6</sup> To say so is not to confuse the American 'alternative' as liberating, though that was the terms within which Roosevelt spoke to Mohammed V, but rather with a postcolonial arrangement which would threaten to place Morocco in the time lag of American neoliberalism *avant la lettre*. But even if we agree that the postcolonial period be reconsidered itself outside the terms of binarisms, we still will note the shift, with the 1970s, into a new set of concerns and ways of engaging with social collectivities in Morocco.

In geopolitical terms, attending to an episteme associated with globalisation is to account for the changes in the world order after a variety of demarcations: 1973 (the shift off the gold standard, end of major fighting in Vietnam, waning of *années de plomb* period in Morocco, end of student unrest of the late 1960s in Morocco; see

Tessler, 1993); 1991 (end of the cold war, dissolution of USSR, US war in Iraq); 2001 (11 September attacks, US war in Afghanistan); 2003 (US invasion of Iraq, bombings in Casablanca). These are markers that matter particularly in the realm of national and global politics. Cohen and Jaidi, in their consideration of globalisation and its effects on Moroccan politics and economy, designate the period from the mid-1970s until 1996 as one of semi-liberalisation, a period that begins when the contest over the monarch's power and place in Moroccan governance is finally accepted (after the harsh repressions of the *années de plomb*), and a combination of scepticism, apoliticism, self-censorship and mobilisation 'from outside'. The political unrest that builds through the 1980s into the early 1990s, with a series of large and sometimes violent demonstrations, may be seen to lead to the arrival of the government of 'alternance', or the coming to power of the opposition party in 1997 (coincidentally, the year when *Marock* is set). In the terms that matter particularly to the analysis of film and literature, it is also to recognise that the conditions within which such forms of artistic production operate now include other dramatically space-time collapsing technologies such as satellite TV, fax machines, mobile telephones (and forms of textual production such as TXT messaging that emerged alongside them) and the Internet, all of which had positive effects on the loosening of political censorship and opening of political communication with the outside.

I do not see these geopolitical and cultural-technological shifts as separate or even as separable. This is something that Moroccan films such as *Marock*, *Baidaoua*, *Le Grand voyage*, *Threads* and *Ali Zaoua* make vivid, all in markedly different ways. *Marock*, made in 2005, is set in 1997, and thus sensitive to the moment before cell phones and the Internet pervaded daily life in Morocco, but no less attentive to the new circulation of cultural objects in its setting, and acutely aware of the use of new technologies to market the film. *Baidaoua*, with its interest in circulation, censorship and morality police (who represent the lack of free circulation), is less interested in technology and more in immobility in time and space as a challenge to contemporary Morocco—the contrast between the feminist protagonist Salwa's desire to get a restricted book, which may require her to leave the country, and the Islamist teacher's comments that the Koran is good for all times and places suggests the ways in which circulation is associated with temporality and stasis. *Le Grand voyage*, a road movie from Paris to Mecca, portrays the cell phone in connection with travel, as a technology that challenges the authority of face to face contact, and also symbolises the generational gap. Hakim Belabbes's *Khahit errouh/Threads*, an experimental, avant-garde film, associates the ruptures of generational and diasporic change, of its shift in setting from Chicago to Boujjad, and perhaps of its own avant-garde fragmented technique with the interruption of the telephone, a technology of connection that ruptures. And *Ali Zaoua* demonstrates in two ways a sense that the world of young street children may be seen in relationship to the technologies and economic forces of globalisation: its framing device of mass media attention to the subculture the film itself represents and its creative use of digitally generated animation to depict the imaginary of these children. By forwarding these concerns, I do not mean to suggest that these are the only interesting things going on in the films, nor to suggest that the primary consideration in them—with the exception of *Le Grand voyage*—is not the nation itself. *Le Grand voyage* is a film about diaspora and movement, even if it can also be read as a film about the transition between generations of Maghribis as they move into diaspora.

Yet even narratives that are centred around the nation, or a critique of the nation, must be considered in the changed framework within which the nation operates within globalisation.<sup>7</sup> For *Marock*, sensitive to the global movement of ideas, images, bodies and commodities (to say nothing of politics and technologies), awareness of this framework is crucial to judging the film and whether Marrakchi's national critique is anachronistic, daring, or both. In *Baidaoua*, awareness of this context allows us to see how the film is concerned primarily with circulation, whether or not one can move socially, across borders, within a city. In *Ali Zaoua*, taking this in another direction, social immobility is contrasted with the mobilities represented by media and digital animation. Shifting the conversation to 'circulation' is partially to register frustration with a logic that insists that all Moroccan cultural production after 1956 forever after is in reference to France, and to insist that other concerns and other networks do in fact take centre stage in recent years.<sup>8</sup> *Marock*'s intertwined set of concerns include questions of circulation, diaspora, cultural clash, friction with (or rupture from) Moroccan traditions, together which suggest that the analytics of 'postcolonialism' do not here apply, *even though* postcolonialism may be the register within which Marrakchi imagines the narrative resolution of her film via Rita's departure from Morocco to France, which I will associate with the film's anachronism below. I am not the first critic to suggest that the postcolonial period (and more provocatively postcolonial theory itself) be considered a temporal stage that has been succeeded by something else.<sup>9</sup> Given that 'globalisation' is still in danger of being misread, and given the importance of the intertwined movements of commodities, bodies and finances suggested above, I use 'age of circulation' as synonymous. Also, 'circulation' will open up a way of reading the text and the conditions for its movement that will prove useful in understanding both how *Marock* works and what it shares with other recent Moroccan films and cultural products, even those that take different positions with respect to domestic Morocco, diaspora and emigration.

To focus on the stage of 'globalisation' will mean to attend to a different sort of engagement with the US and American culture, and *Marock* is notable for the way in which American objects, songs, and what I called above a Hollywood 'look' run through a film that otherwise is not geographically concerned with the United States. Here we have perhaps our clearest explanation for how what I'm calling the 'age of circulation' follows the concerns of the 'postcolonial' period. If the cultural concerns of postcolonial Maghribi cultural production revolve around an anxious relationship to French history, culture and language—perhaps the pinnacle in Morocco is Abdelkebir Khatibi's novel *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971) or in historiography Abdellah Laroui's *L'histoire du Maghreb* (1970)—in the cultural production of what I am calling the age of circulation, or globalisation, the concerns are different. Perhaps it is not coincidental that in recent cinema we see this engagement most visibly, or most centrally, and earlier (for example, Abdelkader Lagtaa's 1991 film *al-Hubb fi al-Dar al-Baida*; see Edwards, 2003), for even within the colonial period, American cinematic representations of Morocco (such as *Casablanca*) were a harbinger of the later geopolitical order that would follow the colonial era. But we do see this interest in circulation in recent Moroccan literature (e.g. Aicha Ech-Chana's socially committed documentary text *Miseria*, 1996, and Soumya Zahy's 2001 novel *On ne rentrera peut-être plus jamais chez nous*), and less surprisingly in literature of the Moroccan diaspora, such as Abdelkader Benali, writing in Holland (in Dutch), Laila Lalami, writing in the US (in English), both of whom narrate tales of Moroccans in motion to and from Europe.

What I am interested by in *Marock*, then, is less the film as aesthetically pleasing or narratively original. In these categories, it disappoints. It does after all look much like a 'teen picture', or familiar romantic tragedy. Lagtaa's *Baidaoua*, which summons an innovative visual technique in the service of a complex narrative exploration of circulation, is significantly more original from an aesthetic point of view (see Edwards, 2005b). But *Marock* is nonetheless successful in making clear the forms of social organisation produced by and within the 'age of circulation'. My contention is that a careful reading of the film will help us derive those concerns in the Moroccan case.

### Reading Marock

In its coverage of the debate over *Marock*, the maverick weekly *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* staged a debate between Bilal Talidi, a representative of the Islamist PJD (Parti de la justice et du développement), which had called for banning the film, and Abdellah Zaazaa, the leader of a network of Casablanca neighbourhood associations called RESAQ (Réseau des Associations de Quartier du Grand Casablanca) and representative of a liberal, secular position (Houdaifa and Tounassi, 2006). In the debate, printed in the pages of *Le Journal*, the question of aesthetics became a screen against which to debate larger questions about Moroccan society. Talidi, who had published an editorial against *Marock* in the paper *Attajdid*, claimed in the pages of *Le Journal* that 'one should not judge a film without watching it'. His indictment of the film was, in this venue, pitched in terms of aesthetic reasons: a 'maladroit' use of French and Arabic, an 'extreme lightness of plot' and a lack of 'dynamism, drama or life'; for him, it was closer to a documentary than a 'true film'. Zaazaa, on the other hand, resisted the analysis of the film's language or aesthetic quality and launched his own defence on political grounds. The film's ability to 'trace Moroccan realities', in particular, justified its screening in Morocco, and he called attention to the ways in which its opposition was manipulating the film for its ulterior motives of creating a 'State of law' (*Etat de droit*). But he too made recourse to aesthetic judgment. He notes: 'I saw the film in the company of my wife. We left struck [*bouluversés*] by how well it had traced Moroccan social realities. The story pleased me in every way.' The point that he had seen the film in the company of his wife, clearly, was part of his implied defence. If *Marock* posed a challenge to 'traditions of the country', 'religious values' and the 'fundamentals of Islam' (as other religious politicians had suggested, including those who did not call for its censorship, but rather for a national boycott; Houdaifa and Tounassi, 2006, pp. 20–1), Zaazaa claimed that the film could educate the Moroccan conjugal couple on the new realities of Moroccan society. Still, Talidi called Zaazaa on the latter's expression of 'pleasure' on seeing the film, which the former said was not an 'objective response', and therefore to be discarded. Talidi claimed such objectivity for his own analysis of the film; Zaazaa's pleasure was seen as subjective.

*Marock*, the viewing of *Marock*, the response one had to the viewing of *Marock*, and what the nation's appropriate response to *Marock* should be, became in 2006 fraught places to debate the status of national culture itself. Talidi's comment about Zaazaa's pleasure begs the question of an 'objective' reading. How do we read this film? How do we avoid the trap of reading for 'meaning'? And can an 'objective' reading of the film by a representative of a political party stand in for that of a citizenry?

Talidi and Zaazaa notably agreed that *Marock* offered a representation of Moroccan reality, though they did not call attention to their agreement on this question. For

Talidi, *Marock* was more documentary than film; for Zaazaa, it was a shocking representation of a reality he recognised, but about which he did not know before. Their implied disagreement is over what role the elite and Westward-looking Moroccan youth of *Marock* might have in society at large. As we will see, it is the very 'teen' look of the picture, inscribed within a style deeply redolent of American cinema, that is perhaps the most upsetting, though these were not the terms used in the debate. PJD's call for the film to be banned drew on the law's defence of 'sacred values and good morals'. Therefore, the question of whether the film was Moroccan or not could be linked to whether it should be banned under Moroccan law. Marrakchi's Moroccanness or her Frenchness was itself a cipher for a question of *style* and what I call the film's 'look'. A closer examination will show how *Marock* itself exhibits, on the level of style, the circulation of an American look doubled by the film's interest in (both visually and in the scenario) American commodities. This is the threat that is harder to speak of, but the one which makes the PJD position ultimately anachronistic, as other commentators realised. Mohamed Ameskane, representative of UMP, stated in the same pages that the film could be boycotted, 'if it was judged contrary to our principles. [But] one must sign up for this new world, the world of the Internet and of globalisation.' Seen in this light, the resistance to *Marock* by many Moroccan commentators should be seen as aligned with an anxiety about globalisation, and the championing of it on grounds of 'free speech' can be seen as a celebration of the open borders (of both information and trade in commodities) associated with globalisation. My point is not to take a side, but to show that *Marock* heralds, but does not initiate, a new stage in Moroccan cinema. From *Marock*, we'll be able to look backward to see this interest in circulation in a number of places. But first we must describe how a 'look' circulates.

The story *Marock* tells is familiar enough to those who have watched Hollywood teen romances, and on the level of plot it borrows from a number of Hollywood films and TV serials. To say so is not to denigrate it, *per se*—though neither is it a compliment on artistic grounds—but rather to note why the familiarity of the formula could itself be so bothersome to some Moroccan critics such as Talidi, and also why for others it immediately raised the question of protection on the grounds of free speech. What I will call the 'circulation' of this look operates on both the level of plot/scenario (which allowed politicians to target the film) and the visual and aural registers of the film (that which politicians did not invoke). *Marock* borrows what we can call, following Miriam Hansen, a 'vernacular' familiar from Hollywood cinema, in this case the teen romance, and brings it into Moroccan circulation. That combination of a familiar 'look' and the familiarity of the Hollywood formula of the 'problem' picture-cum-teen romance will emerge as the most interesting form of global culture in circulation in this film. But we will also note the many explicit indications of global circulation: the music, apparel, food, products and commodities that animate the world of these Casablanca youth. If these youth look to Europe for their futures after the *bac*, the commodities, products, and culture that they consume are for the most part American. More accurately, these objects of consumption are 'global', and generally rendered in 'global English', both of which are associated with the US irrespective of the national origin of the cultural product or artist.

*Marock* is a 'teen pic', which seems at once a comfortable and uncomfortable phrase to describe it, given that the phrase implies an American relationship to the family and society that is not the norm in Morocco. From the evidence of *Marock*, however, not only does 'teen pic' sound appropriate to describe the film, but the film so successfully

mobilises this style to describe a social milieu that it effaces for its non-Moroccan audiences much of the particularity of Moroccan adolescence. Such particularity is swept away by *Marock's* depiction of a world of discos, parties, romance and preparation for a life after high school that will be spent in France. Whatever the accuracy of this representation of the young elite of Casablanca, it is clearly not the life enjoyed by most Moroccans. (As a pedagogical strategy, juxtaposing *Ali Zaoua*, with its representation of the poor homeless children of Casablanca, and *Marock*, the two Moroccan films of the first decade of the twenty-first century with the largest international success, would be provocative.) With poverty and social class for the most part dispensed with by *Marock's* fascination with the elite, the 'problems' that remain in the 'social problem' aspects of the film are those presented by Moroccan society itself. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that the solutions to those problems are also brought in from abroad (American music, for example, and the characters' choice to depart from Morocco). The way what I will call the film's Hollywood 'look' functions, then, is to naturalise the import of foreign solutions to domestic problems, and to make domestic recalcitrance to them seem itself foreign or anachronistic. That is, the film's adoption of an American vernacular, within which the social problem of a romance between a Jewish young man and a Muslim young woman may be overcome naturally by the power of love (and romantic comedy as a genre), was a solution that made its own difficulty to imagine for most Moroccans seem irrelevant or retrograde. Indeed, the film ends in tragedy with respect to the love story, not the comedy it has suggested, which we may see as the translation of the vernacular to local 'realities'. This relationship to the Hollywood vernacular is the deep level on which Marrakchi's outsider perspective functions, and though unnamed by its opponents, it produced the relationship to Morocco that many found bothersome about the film—and which titillated others. But without the language to discuss this vernacular as that which was foreign to the Moroccan film, the debate revolved instead around the question of Marrakchi's roots as a Moroccan or the route she took to France as ways to prove that she and therefore her film were not after all 'Moroccan'. This, it should be clear, was a dead-end.

The story is a simple problem tale set during the month of Ramadan. Rita is a high school senior; it is the year of the baccalaureate exam, a year that in her circles is spent studying, partying, listening to music, and thinking about the next stage of life. For Rita and most of her friends at the privileged Lycée Lyautey, the next stage of life often means leaving Morocco for Europe (though not for all); the present is generally met with abandon. Drinking alcohol, smoking hashish, flirtations, and a fair amount of sexual activity are the norm for weekend nights, which are spent racing around in sports cars between nightclubs and homes without parents, where prostitutes may be called in for quick fixes for the boys. Rita's brother Mao has returned home from London for Ramadan, and from the start we can see that he does not approve of the milieu. We see Mao praying, to the surprise of his sister, and wearing a close cropped beard; he is clearly disturbed by the frivolities of his old circle of friends. He rarely comments directly, except to Rita, whom he says looks like a 'whore' because of her makeup. At a party, Rita falls for a young man she has observed at a nightclub. She learns his name (Youri) through a mutual friend, and bets her friends that she'll have him by the end of Ramadan. The problem, though, is not whether she can or will have him—there are meaningful glances between them from the start that make this clear—but what it will mean if she does have him. Youri is after all a Moroccan Jew, and while this seems to bother no one too much in the present (except Mao, who is teased by friends and reports it to his

parents), the fact that these young people's future always is on their minds poses the question that Rita rarely asks herself. Can this relationship have a future? Learning about Rita's social life from Mao, Rita's parents ground her until the *bac* is over and done with. Still she escapes, consummates her affair with Youri, passes her *bac*, and worries about what to do with her romance if it cannot be shared openly. She suggests to Youri that he could convert to Islam; he suggests the same to her about Judaism. No sooner has this been discussed than Youri kills himself in a car crash. Rita, distraught, retreats into herself. Her brother apologises for his part in her unhappiness. They reconcile. Two months pass. Rita leaves for Europe.

The plot is fast and efficient. The film is visually sensuous; its world is socially vapid. Rita, played by a newcomer to the cinema that Marrakchi plucked from Paris and who admitted in interviews to being from the same elevated Casablanca class that is depicted in the film, is attractive and starry eyed. (Morjana Alaoui was in fact a student at the American University in Paris when Marrakchi cast her in her first film role; after passing her *bac* in Morocco, she had lived in Florida. Her own pathways neatly demonstrate the triangulation of colonial/postcolonial and global that I have discussed above.) She is also barely clad much of the time, in close fitting tank tops and boxer shorts, in a string bikini another time, or faded Levis, costuming choices that are both part of the film's verisimilitude in representing the young Casa elite—from press photos and in film festival appearances, it is striking how much Marrakchi herself looks like and dresses like her own characters<sup>10</sup>—and part of Marrakchi's juxtaposition of the visual appearances of the libertine Casablancon youth and the more traditional members of the community. The most famous example of this juxtaposition appeared in the film still circulated as part of the film's publicity and which appeared on the cover of *Tel Quel*. In the still, Rita wears skin-tight shorts and a cotton camisole, hand on hip, navel exposed, and stands over her brother at prayer. In the film's scene, she provokes him: 'Are you sick or what? What are you doing? Did you fall on your head?' Then, more aggressively: 'Do you think you're in Algeria? Are you going to become a fundamentalist (*barbu*)?' The pose, reproduced on the cover of *Tel Quel* next to the words 'the film of all taboos' (my translation), presents a vivid example of the changing look of young women in Casablanca, not only in terms of clothing and brands, but in body size and type itself. During the period when *Marock* is set, in the late 1990s, sociologist Fatima Mernissi was writing columns in the Casablanca-based women's magazine *Femmes du Maroc* that remarked on the generational shift of young Moroccan women increasingly toward western body types as models of beauty; this was a shift Mernissi lamented as she called for Moroccan women to resist the emaciated 'waif' look of then prominent models such as Kate Moss (see Mernissi, 1998).

Mernissi's comments on the ways in which Moroccan women's body types could represent a form of cultural circulation, along with Susan Ossman's subsequent ethnographic work that charted the transnational circulation of western models of beauty and body type, open up the ways in which we can discuss the western 'look' of the film, both in terms of the individual actors, their bodies and clothing, and the cinematic vernacular that Marrakchi mobilises. It is after all the 'look' thus conceived that is the most immediate presence of America in a film that only once invokes the US as a geopolitical entity (and then quickly dispenses with it as a place where the characters know 'no one', as we'll see). Still America plays a major, if imagined and silent, presence in the film. In so doing, *Marock* presents itself to us as a film that is not postcolonial but rather one that

inhabits the 'age of circulation' in an interrelated series of ways. Before we come back to the literal markers of this presence of global culture, let us attempt to describe the more slippery question of what I've referred to as the film's Hollywood teen pic vernacular.

Miriam Hansen has in several recent essays presented a powerful argument that broadens our understanding of what she calls the 'vexed issue of Americanism' for transnational cinema studies, namely, the ways in which 'an aesthetic idiom developed in one country could achieve transnational and global currency' (1999, p. 60). Her focus has been on the circulation of the 'classical' style of Hollywood cinema, namely, the narrative cinema produced during the dominance of the studio system (roughly 1917–60), and the ways in which that style has been translated and differently understood in a variety of other national cinemas—most notably, in her own work, Shanghai cinema. There are at least two lessons from Hansen's rich work that I want to bring in here. First is her analysis of the way in which classical narrative Hollywood cinema masks the 'anachronistic tension' of its 'combination of neoclassicist style and Fordist mass culture' (p. 66). The anachronism of classical cinema is that it takes on neoclassicist aesthetics (it is readerly, transparent, has linear narratives, coherent subjects, etc.) even while it was an art associated with the 'new' and the 'modern', both as a new technology and with respect to the Fordist mass (cultural) production perfected by the studio system. By naturalising its own form of narrative, Hansen argues, classical Hollywood cinema developed a rhetoric that could in fact articulate 'something radically new and different under the guise of a continuity with tradition' (p. 67). Part of what is articulated is the very messiness of Fordism and modernity itself, with its various forms of structural and literal violence and how (certain) individuals could find a place in that system. Hansen's second lesson, then, follows from this first one, and is related to our discussion of circulation. Namely, that Hollywood cinema travelled so well, and so much better than other national cinemas, because of the way it 'forg[ed] a mass market out of an ethnically and cultural heterogeneous society, if often at the expense of racial others' (p. 68). This—the 'first global vernacular'—worked because classical Hollywood cinema mobilised 'biologically hardwired structures and universal narrative templates'; mediated competing discourses on modernity and modernisation; and because 'it articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience' (p. 68). Much of the way Hollywood cinema found its way influentially into other national cinemas was not because classical cinema universalised the American experience, but rather because it was translatable. '[I]t meant different things to different publics, both at home and abroad', Hansen writes (p. 68). On the level of reception, the Hollywood films, followed by that which might be taken from them (their rhetoric), could be changed, localised and adapted.

Hansen's work is generative. What I want to borrow here, at the risk of playing too loosely with the historical categories Hansen is discussing, is her discussion of the contradictions that the classical style masks and allows, and her sense of how that particular conjunction itself is particularly well suited for global circulation. This allows us to revisit the discussion of 'cultures of circulation' that Lee and LiPuma advance and to balance the temptation to read for meaning with an attention to what Gaonkar and Povinelli called the 'circulatory matrix'. *Marock's* engagement with a Hollywood 'vernacular'—no longer the classical vernacular, pure and simple, though at most times borrowing from it—allows it to smooth over some of the more troubling aspects of economic globalisation that affect the world behind that which is represented in the film. The film does attend to class and economic differences repeatedly, even while too comfortably keeping them at

the margins. But this smoothing over of the crises of economic globalisation happens naturally, as it were, in the fluid way in which *Marock* adopts the cultural style or look of the Hollywood teen pic. In other words, the ways in which the film may be seen in terms of 'globalisation' are multiple and reinforce one another: the circulation of the Hollywood vernacular and the fascination with American cultural products and commodities serve both to double the elite characters' ability to circulate across national borders and to efface the ways in which the Moroccan underclass may not. When Rita's friend Asmaa (Razika Simozrag) tells Mao that she will not be relocating to Europe after the *bac* because her parents don't have the means, he does not know what to say. Mao's surprise—'je savais pas', he mutters and looks down—is echoed, as it were, by the film's inability to dwell on those who do not circulate. Though the film notes these individuals who represent dead-ends, it cannot itself resist always remaining in motion.

*Marock*, to be clear, is most fascinated by upper middle class teenagers in Casablanca, a group whose own ability to circulate is strikingly more capacious than other Moroccans. This is a point the film does suggest, particularly vividly in a climactic scene when Rita denounces her parents for paying off the family of a young poor child whom Mao apparently struck with his car and killed at some time in the past. And while the film does offer sympathetic portraits of working class Moroccans as minor figures (most often as servants, by which it offers an additional critique of upper middle class Moroccan family values), its portrait of Morocco is clearly delimited to a small portion of the population. That it did apparently speak to a much larger public than that it represented, though, should not be doubted, in part perhaps because of the film's own subtle critique of class dynamics, but otherwise because of the apparent translatability of some of the aspirations of its characters to other social classes among Moroccan youth. Still, the visual pleasure the film takes in depicting sumptuous residences, cars, parties and bodies of Casablanca's elite ally it with the Hollywood 'teen picture' and not with class critique. To be sure, *Marock* is not a critique of globalisation, either economic or cultural.

The immediacy and power of the Moroccan debate around *Marock* with which I began this discussion, then, can be seen as the resistance of Moroccans left behind by those very processes of globalisation, both cultural and economic, which Marrakchi's film represents and enacts. Hansen's crucial point that the classical style was anachronistic—because neo-classical and modern, which I might recast as 'preposterous', meaning simultaneously 'before' and 'after' (see Edwards, 2003)—may be borrowed with respect to Marrakchi's translation of the Hollywood 'teen pic'. In this sense, *Marock* is a film that struck many Moroccan viewers as new (Zaazaa's comments in Houdaifa and Tounassi, 2006), and yet it is a film that is clearly nostalgic for a different form of looking at and being in the world, a world before the advent of digital technologies. *Marock*, with its familiar soundtrack of rock and roll, dance club and disco hits, offers then the newness of a 'modern' Morocco, engaging the putatively taboo topics of teen sexuality and inter-religious relationships, along with a reassuringly retro soundtrack—some of the songs featured most prominently are Snap!, 'The Power' (1990); David Bowie, 'Rock 'n' Roll Suicide' (1972); Peaches and Herb, 'Shake Your Groove Thing' (1978); Ronnie Bird, 'Sad Soul' (1969); and The Auteurs, 'Junk Shop Clothes' (1993). It is that 'retro' soundtrack that hints at the retrograde anachronism of Marrakchi's resolution of her tale. The nostalgia for a world before digital technologies overwhelmed daily practice substitutes or overlays smoothly, as I've suggested, an allegory of the Moroccan nation for the more complex situation of contemporary Morocco in the age of circulation. That is, the

way in which *Marock* proposes itself as something radically new on the Moroccan cultural scene and then delivers in multiple ways something more comfortably nostalgic is the way in which its look and soundtrack betray the trap that the film slips into: the idea that national allegory provides an adequate mode within which to comprehend twenty-first century Moroccan reality.

In *Marock*, the interplay of new and nostalgic is associated throughout with the Hollywood look. The camera savours the streets, exteriors and interiors of the wealthy Anfa neighbourhood of Casablanca, to a slow sensual rock and roll soundtrack. Even to those who have been to privileged neighbourhoods of Casablanca and Rabat, the scenes depict an almost impossibly wealthy milieu. *Marock* includes several scenes that do nothing to advance the plot but which are nonetheless crucial to comprehending its meaning: a car chase through the streets of Anfa, several scenes of the young characters sitting around swimming pools, nightclubs, and outdoor cafés. They curse, they drink alcohol, the young men harass the female maids. The film's global audience and its Moroccan audience alike are in a familiar world, but one not familiar from film images of Morocco in general or Casablanca in particular. It is a world familiar from TV and Hollywood images of Beverly Hills. The language of the film is for the most part French (only the servants speak in Moroccan Arabic), a choice that Marrakchi defended on the grounds of realism (Antona, 2006). If this is more 'real' a representation of the bourgeoisie, it also comes in the look of a foreign film, and that is precisely the point. Antona, a French interviewer, asked if the (limited) amount of Arabic used in the film would limit the film's 'accessibility', presumably to French audiences. If to some younger Moroccan audiences the film brought together a Hollywood look with Moroccan actors and backgrounds, to the French interviewer the global circulation worked in a different direction—the difference of Moroccan Arabic stood out.

What the exchange between Antona and Marrakchi reveals, almost painfully, is how Marrakchi's choice to write out Moroccan Arabic and with it the bulk of the Moroccan population (save the elite of Casablanca) follows the directives of globalisation as form of economic distribution. This silent translation of Moroccan Arabic is the flattening of language so that it might circulate more easily, the reduction of local/national particularity to global 'value' (see Judy, 1997; see also Spivak, 2003). By claiming that her choice to render so much of her film in French was based on realism, Marrakchi not only reveals the partial nature of her regard of contemporary Morocco but also demonstrates her intention that her film *stand in* for the Moroccan nation. The moments in *Marock* that gesture toward those who are left out of its perspective are thereby deleted (or put in parentheses), as with a keystroke, as illegible and thereby irrelevant.

That the film imagines itself as an allegory of the nation itself is clear from its title, which plays on the French name for Morocco, adding a 'k' to suggest contemporaneity via the reference to rock music. Organising its narrative around the coming-of-age of its protagonist as she comes up against the recalcitrance of her own society invokes a well-worn formula. But if *Marock* claims contemporaneity, it is unable to offer more than a repetition of that oldest of postcolonial narrative resolutions: the departure from the nation that cannot contain the enlightened consciousness of the protagonist. This resolution, however, exceeds the cultural conditions of the moment being represented, in that departure and travel itself do not have the status they once did—particularly not for Rita's class. Departure from Morocco, therefore, cannot equal renunciation or enlightenment without eliminating the very contemporaneity that the film wants to claim. The import

of what I consider an anachronistic formula to resolve the film narrative suggests how important nostalgia is for Marrakchi in the attempt to efface that anachronism (or the audience's awareness of it). Further, it suggests why the category of 'circulation', which is the obsession of the film, is a contested one. Not surprisingly, 'circulation' operates or signifies multiply within the film.

Contested interpretations of 'circulation' within *Marock*—those uses which Marrakchi makes of it, on the one hand, and how I think it offers an analytic tool by which to suggest the anachronistic limits of her project in national allegory, on the other—demonstrate Hansen's point about the way in which global vernaculars can mean different things to different audiences. As a way to further elaborate this point and to move toward a conclusion of this analysis of the film's relationship to circulation, the car race scene is perhaps worth a second look, precisely because it is so formulaic and unoriginal. There is little apparent importance to the scene, other than that it appears in a Moroccan film at all. Youri has Rita in his car and races two other cars driven by his buddies, each of which is stocked with a young woman in the passenger seat. Youri of course wins the race because of his daring, cutting down a side street recklessly; that he will eventually die in a car crash is clearly signalled. The scene's very banality makes it interesting for our purposes: it is literally about circulation in two ways that French language makes possible. First, there are no cars on the streets of Anfa, presumably cleared by Marrakchi and her crew; as an audience we never fear that a car will appear out of nowhere. We are in a pure space of cinema. The cars may circulate without traffic. Second, the Hollywood B-movie staple is here represented in a Moroccan film. It is not the first car chase in a Moroccan film, surely, but it is one that signals the *circulation* of the Hollywood vernacular (of the 'teen pic', of the banal movie, of the picture in which 'true love', forged between a young man and a young woman across the space of a passenger car, can cure all social ills).

Indeed, in its very familiarity from Hollywood films, *Marock's* car race scene evokes an earlier scene in the film in which the fact that the free circulation of automobiles is inhibited allows for romance. If the car race seems to invoke Hollywood, the earlier scene invokes Morocco in its attention to social details, or at least the Morocco of the *haute bourgeoisie*. What happens is this: Rita is being driven home from school by the family chauffeur when they come across Youri's car and his family's driver, broken down at the side of the road. Rita (or rather her driver) offers Youri a ride home, which allows the couple to make eyes at one another and begin their romance. This scene works within the teen pic vernacular, but it also localises it to its own particular class/national location. That Youri's car is not in circulation, suffering a moment of Moroccan technological breakdown (see Larkin, 2004), should be juxtaposed with the rapid and easy circulation in the car race scene, an easy adaptation of the Hollywood vernacular; it is what I call an 'end of circulation'. The fact that this scene allows Rita and Youri to enjoy the later car scene (the race) in which their love is symbolically consummated (as it will be sexually consummated later), will in turn produce a second Moroccan response that forces a temporary end to circulation. Namely, that Rita, found out by her parents, will be enclosed in her own enormous house. Her own social circulation is cut off, at least for a moment until her bac is passed when she may continue her circulatory trajectory toward Europe. The car chase, banal and not visually compelling, thus can be understood as the key to the ways in which circulation operates multiply in *Marock*.

If driving around in cars—racing, being driven to and from school, drinking and driving—is an important component of the film's grammar, *Marock's* obsession with

the circulation of commodities provides the conjunctions to those sentences. In the world of *Marock*, pirated Hollywood films get delivered to your driveway by video rental agents with their inventory in the trunk of their car and friends from Miami send you authentic New York Yankee caps (to pick two details that are given attention within the film). These products not only lubricate the social relations of the characters' interactions, but they sometimes provide the film with spoken or visual words that echo the cinematic vernacular I have discussed. Words, products, and phrases on t-shirts may be seen to offer further verisimilitude in Marrakchi's representation of her milieu. But they eventually jump right off the page. My eye is drawn to the American t-shirts running through *Marock*. 'Hopper for State Senate' reads one that Youri wears; 'Where in the Hell is Slippery Rock' reads another. Why wear such particular phrases? Are they markers of distinction, like Driss's (Rachid Benhaïssan) cherished NY Yankee cap, tossed around the swimming pool away from its owner's grasp? Our eyes are drawn to English language phrases on the characters' clothing, clothing which may or may not be authentic imports, just as the detached signifier of American phrases (often with spelling or grammatical errors) appears on clothing for sale throughout Moroccan cities today.

For the bulk of the film, these phrases and the commodities they decorate serve merely to echo and solidify the theme of circulation I have identified. But in one of the final scenes of the film, there is a twist. Youri's death in a car crash, though apparently accidental, occurs shortly after Rita and he have discussed their society's unwillingness to admit an affair between a Moroccan Jew and Moroccan Muslim. Mao is the character who most assumes the guilt of this societal intractability, since it is he who had informed his parents about Rita's affair and he who seems most disturbed by the affair (also, symbolically, since Mao had struck and killed a boy with his car before the action of the film, and the compensation for this killing has not been yet satisfied). After Youri's death, we are forced to watch the impossibly painful melodrama of a high school girl mourning the death of her boyfriend. There is nothing that can be said, and the film is silent—without words. Silent that is until Mao comes up to Rita's rooftop perch and reconciles with her. When he arrives, he is wearing a t-shirt printed with the word 'America', a small heart dotting the 'i'. There is no justification in the plot for his shirt (Mao supposedly lives in London), and it is unlike anything he has worn before. In fact, it seems impossible to imagine the character Mao wearing this shirt. But his shirt, which speaks before he does, suggests something about the depth of the apology he is making and underlines his implied renunciation of the intolerance he showed earlier toward Youri's religion.

The suggestion this t-shirt makes is complex. Given the association in Morocco and throughout the Muslim world of the US with support for Israel, wearing the 'America' shirt here presents a layered message. The America of the cultural products and film vernacular is now the America that loves the departed Youri, and the liberal sentiment toward tolerance and inclusion that the film is offering as its solution to the film's problem. It is important to note that America is not a place that the characters imagine going to literally—it is mentioned once, as a place not possible. Rita had asked Youri what he will do after passing the *bac*. He says that his parents want to go to America, but he knows '*personne*' (no one). The nobody that he knows is modulated by his parents' suggestion that America is the place where they, as Moroccan Jews, will go to after he graduates high school. The potential of Youri's circulation in America is named by Mao's shirt, but of course Youri will not circulate in America because he will be dead. Thus the

t-shirt initiates its own conversation about the possibility or impossibility of Moroccans to circulate along the multiple registers I have been naming.

The appearance of the startling t-shirt here demonstrates how Marrakchi associates the circulation of commodities with her own national allegory. 'America' appears on the t-shirt to signify the tolerance that the film argues Morocco does not have but should learn to have. The t-shirt also suggests how Marrakchi anachronistically combines the national allegory form and the resolution she arrives at for her allegory (departure) to grapple with a Morocco already within the grip of globalisation, as represented here by the t-shirt, the last of the global commodities to make a cameo appearance. The Morocco that she represents in *Marock*, that is to say, is already within what I have called the 'age of circulation' within which national allegory must be insufficient. Thus, despite the fact that Rita is in tears when Mao (wearing 'America') embraces her, the fact that her friends are in tears as she leaves Morocco for France, and that the price for both scenes is the death of Youri, the film makes it possible to see Rita's departure for France and reconciliation with her brother as a particular form of comic resolution. This should be disturbing. Indeed, *Tel Quel* called it a 'happy end', using the American expression, and claimed that this reconciliation between siblings without religious conversion was the final 'taboo' the film had broken (Boukhari, 2006). Since *Tel Quel* was one of *Marock*'s greatest champions precisely on the basis of the film's willingness to challenge Moroccan taboos, the ease with which the magazine's editors might slip into the epistemological trap of falling for Marrakchi's national allegory may be explained, yet again, by the peculiar seduction of the film's vernacular.

### Envoi

As *Marock* circulated from Paris to Cannes, and from Tangier to Casablanca to the streets of Fez, where I bought my pirated copy on the sidewalks of the *ville nouvelle*, it was following yet another trajectory than the one it depicts. (I later bought a legal copy of the film, which is currently distributed in Canada and France.) The trajectory of the film's circulation in 2006 was much more complex than the social world represented by a young woman taking an airplane from a Casablanca that has disappointed her to a Paris that offers her escape. Discussions of the film raged on the Internet, in blogs and chatrooms, from 'bladi.net' to Islamist sites (where Marrakchi's alleged support of Danish newspapers publishing cartoons depicting the Prophet was marshalled against her in one strand of discussion). The space in time from 1997, the fictional world of *Marock*, to 2005 when it was made, was immense. And to imagine a social world of elite young Moroccans that did not involve mobile telephones, TXT messaging, or Internet-enabled video chatting seems as nostalgic as the classic rock and disco soundtrack sounds. To be sure, Marrakchi chose this time period in part because it approximated her own adolescence in Casablanca, as she stated in interviews, but also because she knows that the technologies that would soon dominate alter the social environment within which an individual's relationship to the collective takes shape. This is to bring the lessons of Lee and LiPuma's meditation on 'cultures of circulation' back together with the debate that Marrakchi's film produced in Morocco in 2006. Because if Marrakchi's and *Marock*'s 'Moroccanness' were up for discussion, the location of the 'Morocco' in which that debate might take place was no longer immediately clear or perfectly bound. Where is the Internet? Are the boundaries around discussion boards and diasporic conversations clearly marked? To ask these

questions at the conclusion of this essay is not in any way to suggest that we have entered a world of open borders and free circulation of ideas, representations and commodities, such as that championed by the steadfast proponents of globalisation and the Internet. It is, rather, precisely because an awareness of questions such as these led some of those who felt deeply uncomfortable by *Marock* to see its arrival in Morocco as inevitable and ineluctable that we must remind ourselves of them. To do so is meant to offer a bulwark against slipping back to familiar modes of reading film and other rich forms of cultural production for ‘meaning’, as if the social and interpretive worlds they operate in were clearly bound.

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### Notes

1. Later in 2006, new legal restrictions against the piracy of Moroccan films made *Marock* harder to obtain in this way. But in 2007, it was still possible to obtain contraband copies of Hollywood and other foreign films openly on Moroccan sidewalks.
2. The director and actor Nabil Lahlou, for example, a harsh critic of the film, stated simply that neither the film nor its director were Moroccan at all (MAP, 2005). Others called for a demand for reimbursement of CCM funds on similar grounds. Nourredine Sail, director of CCM, defended the film and its Moroccanness.
3. In addition to traditional research methods, my research for this essay includes a wide range of web sites, chatrooms, blogs, and Internet reviews. In addition, I opened an online, password-protected discussion of *Marock* with graduate students in cultural studies at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University, Dhar Mahrez, Fez, where I am an affiliate. I thank participants for sharing a diverse range of views on the film and its controversies.
4. See “‘Marock’ Sparked Clash in Tangiers’ (2005). In Feb. 2006, an Islamist web site, Mejliss al Kalam, further discredited the director by highlighting Marrakchi’s apparent support for cartoons representing the Prophet (<<http://www.mejliss.com/showthread.php?s=a0c1b0269e7766387faede413d33a917&t=227880>>, dated 14 Feb. 2006). ‘Mago 57’ (a contributor) rails against Marrakchi for calling herself favourable in the name of freedom of expression (‘Leila Marrakchi (sur Ile programme de canal + “LA MATINALE”\*) se dit “\*au nom de la liberté d’expression\*” a la diffusion des caricature de sidna mohamed (alih salt)’; accessed 10 Feb. 2007).
5. Though she employs a different rubric with respect to understanding Maghribi literature that does not fit within the familiar terms of ‘postcolonial’ literary studies, the tensions between ‘nationalist’ and ‘nomadic’ that animate Valérie Orlando’s compelling discussion (2006) of recent francophone Maghribi literature by women seems to me relevant to the present argument.
6. See Edwards (2005a, Chapter 1) for a discussion of Franklin Roosevelt’s famous conversation with Sultan Mohammed in terms of racial time and deferral of Moroccan rights; and Chapter 2 for a discussion of the flood of commodities that followed the arrival of American troops in WWII, as well as some Moroccan responses to that flood (such as by Fatima Mernissi, Houcine Slaoui). By promise-threat, I am alluding to Jacques Derrida’s formulation in *Monolingualism of the Other*, in which he suggests that a promise is a threat risked.

7. Lee and LiPuma put this efficiently: 'The contemporary decline of the nation-state as the relevant unit of analysis for global capitalism is reflected in two distinct circulatory movements; the increasingly transnational character of labour and the global mobility of finance capital' (2002, p. 208). See also Appadurai (2006).
8. The idea that contemporary Moroccan cultural production not be caught forever in the logic of postcolonialism is not a unique position, but I want to attribute it to Mohammed Dahan, who stated it eloquently at an academic conference at Mohammed V University, Rabat, on 3 Oct. 2004. The setting was a open session following a major conference called 'Urban Generations: Post-colonial Cities' at which Dahan had spoken on 'Cinéma et culture urbaine'. I attended the meeting as well, and draw on my notes. The minutes of the meeting, with Dahan's comment, may be viewed online at: <<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/AfricaNetwork/Documents/mins03october2004tb2.pdf>>.
9. See, for example, the collection *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005).
10. See, for example, the photos at <[imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)>.

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