Since 1999, contemporary cinematography, similar to literature, has engaged some of the most pressing subjects of the day in Morocco. Films made in recent years such as *Tabite or not Tabite* (2006), *Marock* (2005), *J’ai vu tuer Ben Barka* (I Saw Ben Barka Get Killed, 2005), *Le Grand Voyage* (The Long Voyage, 2004), and *Les Yeux Secs* (Dry Eyes, 2002) have exposed once taboo subjects on the screen. Themes have ranged from political corruption, police brutality, and torture during the Lead Years, to issues entreating discussions about sexuality, women’s emancipation, and certain disadvantageous aspects of Islam for men and women. Immigration to the West and the dismal plight of immigrant groups in Europe have also been subjects routinely depicted.

In general, films and documentaries made since 1999 are significantly more critical of and candid about sociocultural and political issues from the past and present in Moroccan life. Like literature, recent films probe the societal realities of contemporary Morocco. While earlier films metaphorically or symbolically proposed ideas criticizing social conditions, filmmakers rarely dared to be overtly critical, as cinéaste Mustapha Derkaoui suggests in an interview: “We don’t want to make subversive cinema...it’s more that we must make cinema an adequate means of denunciation, and not a force with the goal of blind and intolerable subversion” (Carter 2000, 68).

This chapter discusses not only new trends in Moroccan cinema, but also issues associated with language and distribution that have influenced how films are made in the country. The Moroccan filmmaker, more often than not, does have the choice of making a film in Arabic,
Berber, or French. Therefore, the language of each film influences its marketing, distribution abroad, and audience reception. Thus, a crucial question that arises today is whether or not Moroccan cinema can be considered francophone. Many of the films made in-country are destined for purely Arabic-speaking audiences (however they are always screened with French subtitles). Often funding dictates the language the filmmaker ultimately uses to make his/her film. Blockbuster, large budget films such as *Marock*, *J’ai vu tuer Ben Barka*, and *Le Grand Voyage*, made primarily with French funding and destined not only for Moroccan audiences but also for an international market, for the most part, use dialogues in French. *Les Anges de Satan* (Satan’s Angels, 2007), although considered a blockbuster, was filmed almost exclusively in Moroccan Arabic. Certain, more “artistic” films, such as Nabyl Lahlou’s *Tabite or not Tabite*, use both Arabic and French. It is interesting to note how the language chosen for certain dialogues characterizes the message the filmmaker desires to transmit to audiences. In Lahlou’s *Tabite*, French is the language used by the protagonists to describe the repressive past of the Lead Years, the brutality of the police officer Tabite, and whether or not to go back to Morocco to make their film (the film within a film is conceptualized in Paris).

Thematically, films both in Arabic and French have become increasingly subversive in their content since the late 1990s. In the mid-1990s, Moroccan cinematic discourse opened up, challenging sociocultural and political restrictions. Subjects that were considered taboo in the past, such as drugs, guns, and military rebellion, in the late 1990s begun to be freely depicted (Carter 2000, 74). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, even politics are now open game for Moroccan filmmakers, as evident in Nabyl Lahlou’s *Tabite or Not Tabite* and Ahmed Boulen’s *Les Anges de Satan*.

**The Development of Moroccan Cinema**

France’s conception of cinema as the “7ème art” (the Seventh Art) greatly influenced the cinematographic industries of its former colonies. Newly liberated nations continued to develop cinema according to the models left by the colonizer at the time of independence. Britain bequeathed very little in the way of a film industry because during its colonial era it preferred to invest more in television and radio. Hence, countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe did not cultivate national cinema models like those found in West and North Africa, which had been under French colonial rule.¹