

Hope and Indignation in Fortress Europe:
Immigration and the Crisis of Neoliberal Globalization
in
Contemporary French Cinema

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Over the past twenty years, in France, as elsewhere in Europe, cinema has produced an increasing number of films that engage with the thematics of immigration (both legal and illegal) and represent the living and working conditions of first-generation immigrants. In France, such films have also tended to focus on questions of citizenship and nationality as they pertain to the French-born descendants of immigrants, whose presence within the nation demands a reconsideration of previously fixed notions of community, origins and national identity. Though certainly not limited to the perspective of one ethnic minority, the majority of these French films, from militant immigrant cinema in the 1970s, to so-called *beur* and *banlieue* cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, have nonetheless tended to focus on protagonists, politics and narratives of immigrants from France's former colonies in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Maghrebi characters are still quite visible on the screen. However, since 2000, French film professionals of North African descent have nonetheless begun adopting a broader range of modes of production and genres and assuming a greater variety of roles on both sides of the camera. Moreover, the last ten years have seen an increasing range of ethnically diverse immigrant protagonists appearing in French-language films, and not solely those from France's long-established postcolonial diasporas.

In many respects, this cinematic shift is representative of the broader social, economic and cultural transformation that has taken place in the way that immigration has been understood in relation to neoliberal globalization and to its belief in the inevitable primacy of market forces, whereby “the once ‘de-bedded’ economy now claims to ‘im-bed’ everything, including political power” (Mentan 215). This has occurred not only in France, but also across Europe. One area in which the consequences of such market fundamentalism have had a direct impact is on attitudes and policies pertaining to immigration of non-European nationals to the European Union. Here, the desire to exploit an ever cheaper, poorly protected, immigrant work force is served by the (often distorted) perception that non-Europeans have of the continent, which they see as a “promised land” of prosperity and opportunity. Such a dynamic has resulted in new waves of economic migration, both legal and illegal, to the EU, starkly exposing the imbalance of power between what Slavoj Žižek describes as “those ‘who circulate capital’ and those ‘whom capital circulates’” (qtd. in Ezra and Rowden 8). From this context emerges the concept of Fortress Europe. The term reflects an excessive preoccupation on the part of policymakers and media commentators in Europe with controlling the entry and circulation of the non-European Other within, and even outside of the borders of the European Union. At the same time, the concept suggests a need to segregate more than ever rich from poor, insiders from outsiders, Europeans from non-Europeans, citizens from immigrants (Balibar 113). In ideological terms, the notion of Fortress Europe further erects racial, ethnic and religious boundaries in response to an increasingly multicultural Europe, while also denying the fact that Europe, as both a geopolitical entity and an ideological construct, has “historically evolved through a process

of absorbing, hybridizing and assimilating different people from diverse ethnic, religious and national groups” (Loshitzky 2).

In *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (2001), Mireille Rosello notes that since the 1990s, in France, such transformations have been reflected in the increasing visibility of “a widespread, diverse and multicultural debate around hospitality” (2). Such a debate is at once political, cultural and philosophical in nature, raising questions about what our responsibilities as individual citizens and host societies should be to the “immigrant as guest.” This discussion ultimately leads to a consideration of what Derrida has described as the ethics of (infinite) hospitality and a politics of (finite) hospitality (Rosello 7, 11). As the title *Postcolonial Hospitality* indicates, the scope of Rosello’s study is clearly fixed on the place immigrant communities from former French colonies occupy in discussions now taking place in France on matters relating to immigration, integration and hospitality. While not denying the fact that French debates on immigration are still marked by colonial history, Etienne Balibar (2004) treats the relationship between the politics of immigration, labor and transnational citizenship somewhat differently, considering the problem more broadly in the context of an ever-expanding European Union. In particular, he remarks on the apparent tension between, on the one hand, an increasingly globalized system of private practices, social relations and migratory flows towards Fortress Europe that are no longer driven exclusively by the legacy of European colonialism and, on the other hand, a series of mechanisms (political, economic, socio-cultural) for regulating and policing migration that is still firmly located within the framework of the nation (Balibar 110). At the heart of Balibar’s analysis, is the issue of the border:

A world that is now broadly unified from the point of view of economic exchange and communication needs borders more than ever to segregate... wealth and poverty in distinct territorial zones. The poor, at least, need to be systematically triaged and regulated at points of entry to the wealthiest territories. Borders have thus become essential institutions in the constitutions of social conditions on a global scale. [...] It was for this reason that I found it appropriate to speak of a *global apartheid being put in place after the disappearance of the old colonial and postcolonial apartheids*. (110, my emphasis)

Balibar claims here that a shift is taking place from a “post-colonial” to a globalized form of apartheid that is now being imposed on non-European immigrants, a new formation in which migrant populations are systematically deprived of the rights of citizenship, but are also made available for economic exploitation. Balibar also identifies the way in which the nation-state, and, by extension, national cinemas, have become a site of contest through which the uneven politics and social conditions that define relations between the Global North and Global South are represented. He further notes that while migration from south to north, or indeed, from east to west, may continue to flow from former French colonies to the former *métropole* (from North Africa to France, for instance), such migration is no longer entirely shaped by the colonial/postcolonial dynamic.

At a moment in time when the very idea of Europe as geopolitical entity, ideological project, cultural identity, liberal democracy, and common market is being simultaneously defended and redefined, protected and rejected, European cinema has emerged as one of the crucial sites of cultural and political engagement and a sphere in which concerns about immigration, neoliberal globalization, and national and

transnational identity formation are expressed, imagined, and contested.¹ And as the sovereign debt crisis and economic downturn in Europe have deepened since 2009, so has the place of non-European migrant populations (both legal and illegal) become even more precarious. This is particularly the case in Eurozone countries such as Spain and Greece that have been hardest hit by the economic downturn and where growing numbers are now throwing their support behind far-right parties promoting strict anti-immigration policies.

Drawing on the work of Balibar and Rosello, I will consider how three recent films, two French productions and a Franco-Algerian co-production, explore the consequences of neoliberalism for those who are “caught in the cracks of globalization” (Ezra and Rowden 8). Merzak Allouache’s *Harragas* (2009) is an ultra low-budget Franco-Algerian feature that blurs documentary and fictional styles to explore the perils facing a group of young North Africans who illegally attempt to cross in a small boat from Algeria to Europe in search of a better life. Philippe Lioret’s *Welcome* (2009), is an earnest social drama aimed at a mainstream French audience that portrays the unlikely friendship between a seven-teen-year-old Kurdish immigrant and a French swimming instructor from Calais. Finally, Tony Gatlif’s *Indignados* (2012), a film whose publicity materials describe it as “un poème militant et musical (a militant and musical cinematic poem [“Bande annonce”]) is inspired by Stéphane Hessel’s thirty-five-page pamphlet turned multi-million bestseller *Indignez-vous!* (2011), a work that calls for non-violent protest against injustice, exploitation, intolerance and corruption, and, that, some claim, has inspired various anti-capitalist protest movements across the world.

Despair at the Gates of Fortress Europe: *Harragas* (2009)

The low-budget Franco-Algerian production *Harragas* is the tenth feature film by veteran director Merzak Allouache, arguably the most celebrated Algerian director alive today. The film's title is derived from the Arabic حارقة, *ḥarrāga*, *ḥarrāg*, signifying “those who burn.” The term refers to Africans who illegally attempt to cross the waters from Africa to Europe or European-controlled islands in makeshift boats. More specifically, *harraga* refers to the practice of burning immigration papers in order to demand asylum upon arrival in Europe. Allouache's film makes clear, however, that the vast majority of those who attempt this crossing are either forced to return after being caught by border controls on both sides of the Mediterranean; many thousands have paid with their lives attempting to enter Europe this way.²

In Algeria, the phenomenon of the *harragas* has been widely commented on in recent years, in the media, in literature (Boualem Sansal, 2005) and in televised documentary and feature films. Allouache himself claims to have already developed a film on the same subject for the Franco-German television channel ARTE before electing to channel his energies into directing a feature film on this topic. From the European side of the Mediterranean, the *harragas* embody fears of an invasion of illegal migrants from outside of Fortress Europe. However, from an Algerian perspective, they reflect the ongoing crisis of Algeria's lost generation, especially of Algerian men, who have emerged from the instability and destruction of a bloody civil war in the 1990s into a society that remains rigidly controlled by state institutions and Islamic moral and religious codes.

The suicide of an Algerian youth named Omar at the very start of the film offers a violent and extreme expression of the hopelessness and despair felt by this young

generation of Algerians. Omar hangs himself in a dilapidated beach hut which, quite symbolically, faces the same waters that he has already tried, and failed to cross in order to escape Algeria. Later, in an excerpt from his suicide note to his younger sister Imène, Omar describes Algeria as a “dark cloud” (“mon pays est devenu une tache noire qui a grossi jusqu’à envahir mon cerveau” [my country has become darkness that has grown to the point of invading my mind]), articulating the impossibility of his situation in which suicide is seen as the only solution (“si je pars, je meurs, si je ne pars pas, je meurs...” [If I leave, I die, if I don’t leave, I die...]). The film’s narrative is dominated by the perilous journey that Imène, Rachid and Nasser undertake in setting out across the Mediterranean towards Fortress Europe. Ostensibly, the crossing presents the possibility of illegal entry into Europe and the opportunity for Algerian youth to start a new life in a promised land. However, the fact that this journey is preceded by the narration in flashback of Omar’s suicide only heightens the fatalistic sense that any attempt to flee Algeria will meet with failure in the form of arrest, repatriation or death.

The intimate and personal tragedy of the suicide sequence that opens the film is immediately followed by a montage of documentary-style footage in which the camera observes groups of young, presumably jobless men congregating in the streets and market spaces of Mostaganem, one of the coastal towns used as a launch point for the *harragas*. The sequence is accompanied by somber instrumental music on cello and piano, further endorsing a reading of Omar’s suicide as a wider metaphor for Algeria’s lost generation. The montage of street views also includes images of veiled women, hinting at the extent to which religious doctrine enforces a degree of repressive control over Algerian youth and offering yet another explanation for their collective desire to flee to Europe. This

image of veiled women also functions as a visual counterpoint to Imène's symbolic removal of the headscarf in the taxi, an act of ambivalent and, ultimately, fleeting liberation as she journeys toward the meeting point at the beach with the other *harragas*.

At the end of this sequence, the camera finally settles on one figure it follows through the crowded streets. He is immediately identified by the narrator as Nasser, another close friend of Omar's, who will also participate in the next attempted crossing to Europe. Significantly, Nasser is not depicted in miserabilist terms as a marginal, destitute or victimized figure in Algerian society. Instead, he is described by Rachid as the "beau gosse du quartier" (The good-looking guy in the neighborhood). Similarly, when we are first introduced to Rachid as his father breaks the news of Omar's suicide, he is shown reading what looks like a university textbook. Contrary to stereotypical Western views of the non-European illegal migrant, then, *Harragas* shows us that it is not simply the poorest and least educated members of society who see their future and prospects for a better life in Europe, but also a better educated group of young working-class Algerians.

As this brief analysis of the opening sequences of the film illustrates, *Harragas* combines a pseudo-documentary visual style with the concerns and constructions of a more conventional fictional narrative. They include the use of voice-over, which draws us into Rachid's point of view, the dramatic division of the narrative into three ostensible "acts" (preparation, the crossing, the arrival in Spain) and the ever-narrowing narrative focus on the fate of Nasser, Rachid and Imène. This combination of documentary-style images with conventional forms of fictional narration is further re-enforced by Allouache's depiction of the sea-crossing that dominates the film's narrative. The director chose to shoot using lightweight, high-definition cameras, allowing him to

literally place the camera amongst the passengers on the boat. And yet, as a means of connecting viewers to both character and socio-political context, any potential sense of realism imbued by such naturalistic cinematic proximity is undercut by the archetypal nature of the boat's passengers. The characters who come aboard in *Harragas* represent a cross-section of Algerian society, from educated but disenfranchised youth, to the provincial economic migrant, from the radicalized Muslim and to the corrupt cop, (the two latter figures seen by many as those chiefly responsible for the division and bloodshed that caused the breakdown in Algerian society during the civil war of the 1990s).

The experience of exclusion afflicting Algerian youth, which is systematically underlined throughout the film, reaches its climax in the final scenes. The sub-Saharan immigrants who remain on the drifting boat because they are unable to swim are "rescued" by the Spanish coastguard. However, there is no sense of compassion or even human engagement during this initial encounter at the gates of Fortress Europe. Instead, the taciturn border guard simply stares back at the refugees from behind his sunglasses, extending a welcome pitched somewhere between hostility and indifference. The three friends who chose to swim to land fare no better. The only contact Rachid, Imène and Nasser are permitted with European citizens comes in the form of the Spanish *Guardia Civil*. Deliberately shot and framed in a way that obscures the possibility of any direct eye contact with the camera, protagonists and or spectator, the officers appear as faceless enforcers of Fortress Europe's strict system of border control. They first observe the *harragas* as they collapse on the beach after swimming ashore, and then detain a handcuffed Rachid, who weeps as the police radio alerts the officers to the presence of

two more *harragas* on shore who need to be arrested. The momentary elation Imène and Nasser feel as they lie exhausted on the beach after reaching the perceived safety of a European shore is thus cruelly undercut by the spectator's knowledge that the border patrol is already on its way to arrest them. In Rosello's terms, in the final analysis, *Harragas* offers no hope, nor even the slightest possibility of hospitality being extended to the Algerian immigrant "guests." There is no welcome or refuge provided by the host nation, only an aggressive enforcement of Fortress Europe's borders in which all immigrants, regardless of their potential skills, knowledge or their economic, social or cultural "worth" are designated "illegal aliens" and immediately expelled.

The Local Politics of Asylum, the Ethics of Infinite Hospitality: *Welcome* (2009)

Welcome tells the story of the unlikely relationship that develops between Simon, a French swimming instructor at a local pool in Calais (played by the critically acclaimed and commercially successful French actor Vincent Lindon) and Bilal, an undocumented Iraqi Kurdish refugee, (played by unknown first-time actor Firat Ayverdi), who wishes to cross the English Channel to be reunited with his girlfriend, Mina, in London. The title itself is obviously intended to be ironic, since as an asylum-seeker, Bilal is for the most part overlooked and relegated by the French to the refugee camp where he resides on the outskirts of Calais. Moreover, the title points to the way that a discourse of hospitality (figuring a welcoming host nation and grateful immigrant guest) can, in fact, lead to "cynical redefinitions of servitude as gift," while at the same time blurring "the distinction between a discourse of rights and a discourse of generosity, the language of social contracts" (Rosello 9). After a chance encounter at the municipal swimming pool,

Bilal uses what little money he has to pay Simon for swimming lessons, to help him train to swim across the channel. Simon initially agrees, not because of any genuine desire to help Bilal but through a calculated gesture intended to win back his estranged wife, Marion, who works as a volunteer distributing food to refugees in Calais. Simon's behavior thus perfectly illustrates Rosello's observation that even the most generous form of private hospitality may, in fact, conceal a sophisticated calculation of self-interest (11). Indeed, it is even more complicated than that as, from the start, both men use each other for their own ends, confounding relations between the benevolent host and the vulnerable immigrant guest. However, Bilal, at least, enters into an open exchange with Simon, by declaring his intentions from the outset and paying for his swimming lessons. While Simon's attempts to assist Bilal are initially more cynical and exploitative, he eventually establishes a bond with the young refugee that leads him to face prosecution and imprisonment for aiding and sheltering a *sans papiers* (undocumented immigrant). He even takes on the role of the nurturing and protective proto-father in the narrative, alerting the local coastguard to the fact that Bilal is straying into the shipping lanes when he first attempts to swim the channel. To apply the Derridian frame of reference Rosello adopts (11), a tension is created in *Welcome*'s narrative between the politics of finite hospitality (Simon's calculating gesture of offering Bilal a bed for the night in order to impress Marion) and the ethics of infinite hospitality (the Frenchman's ultimate willingness to risk prison in order to help the young Kurdish refugee).

Welcome enjoyed significant and unexpected commercial success, attracting well over a million spectators in France. Even taking into account the casting of Vincent Lindon and Philippe Lioret's track record as an acclaimed director, this success was

surprising, especially given the film's subject matter. *Welcome* also attracted wider media attention due to Lioret's deliberate attempt to promote awareness of and provoke a public debate on L622-1, the law that prosecutes French citizens for assisting undocumented immigrants and which, at that time, carried the threat of a five-year prison sentence. Following its release in 2009, the opposition Socialist Party asked Lioret for permission to screen *Welcome* in the French parliament in support of their (ultimately unsuccessful) campaign to repeal the law. During an interview in which he sought to promote *Welcome*, Lioret was drawn into a very public political debate with a conservative immigration minister, Eric Besson, for comparing the present-day criminalization in France of those who supported the *sans papiers* to that of those who attempted to assist and shelter Jews being persecuted by the Vichy government during the Nazi Occupation (1940-44). In response to Besson's open rebuke of the director's comments during a radio interview on Europe 1 two days earlier, Lioret published an open letter to the minister in *Le Monde* on 11 March 2009. In it, he argued that his actions as a director were in keeping with the responsibilities a French citizen incurred when confronted with injustice of the sort the French government was committing in failing to respect the basic human rights of immigrants (Lioret).

Though he refused to openly acknowledge any political affiliation, Lioret's sympathies appear to be aligned with the Left. He was, moreover, one of the signatories of the 1997 *Appel des 59*, (*Call of the 59*), an open letter published simultaneously in *Le Monde* and *Libération* opposing the proposed law criminalizing the extension of support or shelter to the *sans papiers*. There is even a subtle allusion in *Welcome* to the role French filmmakers played in the demonstrations of 1997. When questioned at the local

police station as to why he gave Bilal and another refugee a lift in his car, Simon replies that he was taking them to the cinema “to help them learn French.” In the interview that accompanies the film’s DVD release in the United Kingdom, Lioret argues that *Welcome* is not a political work but rather a fiction that concerns two love stories and an unlikely friendship that develops between two individuals from markedly different backgrounds. To his mind, the film only “happens to be about immigration.” Nevertheless, Lioret’s previous support for the *sans papiers* movement, his public exchange with Eric Besson, the sympathy his film shows for the refugees and its underscoring of the ridiculous nature of L-6621, inevitably makes *Welcome* an act of political engagement, even if it is not directly associated with a particular political party or ideological position. In this respect, the film continues the tradition of a return to political engagement in French cinema of the late 1990s that was guided by a sense of civic responsibility rather than partisan political dogma (Powrie 11).

Recalling Balibar’s notion of a global apartheid that now exists *within* fortress Europe, and considering his comments on the instant “presumption of illegitimacy in questions of residency and cultural or social rights” (44-45) for non-European immigrants, *Welcome* can be seen as a film that is concerned with the problems immigrants and refugees face *after* they have entered Europe. In this sense, the film focuses on the marginal position and legal limbo of those awaiting judgment on asylum applications. In these circumstances, the professed values of Western democracies (liberty, sanctuary for the oppressed, refuge or shelter) are upheld in theory, even though they are coupled with repressive and sometimes brutal practices of control and the threat of expulsion. Thus the risks involved in illegally entering Fortress Europe found in

Harragas are replaced in *Welcome* by a precarious status of “irregularity” and limited movement even within Europe. A different kind of restriction of movement is experienced by Bilal and his fellow immigrants gathered in the makeshift camps in Calais as they attempt to cross to the UK where there are more established Persian and Kurdish immigrant communities and prospects for the immigrants are generally perceived to be better than in France. France is emphatically *not* the desirable host nation for these immigrants, and Calais is merely a staging ground for the often futile attempts to reach their final destination of London. Lioret deliberately portrays two entirely separate worlds in the diegesis that co-exist in close proximity. However, the liminal spaces occupied by the immigrants and the legitimate, everyday sites of social interaction inhabited by the French citizens of this Northern port town, rarely intersect. Similarly, the film is at pains to highlight the precarious existence that the undocumented migrants and political refugees lead. In doing so, *Welcome* exposes the illusion of Fortress Europe’s impenetrable borders and the notion that, upon gaining entry into the European Union, immigrants are suddenly and somehow effortlessly able to access a wealth of state support and resources. Finally, in scenes such as the one in which a mobile camera captures the violent police arrest of refugees about to board a ferry headed for Great Britain, *Welcome* shows how the movements of non-European migrants in Calais are placed under surveillance and controlled, evoking the existence of borders within borders.

Like *Harragas*, *Welcome*’s narrative focuses on the desire of young immigrants to cross a stretch of water in search of a better life. Simon thus reflects the majority French attitude to the presence of the immigrants, which, more than hostility, appears to be one

of indifference. It is the “system” of border control and the police presence that is shown to be at fault, while the neighbor who denounces Simon to the police is depicted as an isolated and eccentric figure with extreme views on non-European migrants. In a further similarity to *Harragas*, *Welcome* addresses the contemporary socio-political realities of immigration and exclusion through a highly personalized narrative that attempts to stir the spectator’s sympathy for its central protagonist, rather than any kind of ideological or political sloganeering. When interviewed, Lioret commented that much of the film’s success depends on the fact that audiences are drawn to the two love stories, one between Simon and his wife and the other between Bilal and his girlfriend. He describes them as an “emotional magnet” that draws spectators into the story and then encourages them to think about the “real” situation facing the refugees:

Without these two love stories I wouldn’t have had a movie but a documentary about immigrants. I’ve seen many of these documentaries—and they have all been very good—but unfortunately I don’t think people are necessarily moved by them. If people are interested in my film, it’s because it speaks to them emotionally.” (Qtd. in Phillips)

The hardships Bilal faces in *Welcome* are thus contrasted with the positive, transformative friendship that develops between Simon and the young Kurdish refugee. Bilal’s character is humanized through his love and yearning for his absent girlfriend waiting in the UK and, more dramatically, by his inability to place the plastic bag over his head when hiding in the back of the truck as he seeks to avoid detection by French border police searching for elevated carbon dioxide levels. The situation triggers a

traumatic memory of his torture in Iraq – thus simultaneously eliciting audience sympathy and legitimizing Bilal’s claim for political asylum.

Nevertheless, as in *Harragas*, the film’s ending offers little hope for the non-European migrant who looks to Europe as a place of hope and possibility for a better life. Bilal dies attempting to swim the English Channel, while we learn that Mina will be forced into an arranged marriage within the Kurdish community in London, a development that further closes down any hope of social mobility or independence for the young female immigrant. In contrast, Simon’s trajectory in the narrative transforms him from a figure characterized by selfish indifference to the plight of those around him, into a more noble and compassionate individual; at the end of the film he appears to be making steps towards salvaging his relationship with Marion. This power imbalance is further emphasized in the final moments of the film where Simon travels to London to break the news of Bilal’s death to Mina. There is, of course, an obvious irony in the fact that, despite the terms of his bail relating to the impending charge of aiding an illegal alien, Simon is easily able to make the trip to the UK that was impossible for Bilal. The final moments of the film thus underscore the clear imbalance between the privilege and freedom of circulation afforded to the French citizen and the immobility of the clandestine migrant. This inequality is further highlighted by the casting of Vincent Lindon, the son of a rich French industrialist and one of France’s most popular contemporary screen actors, alongside Firat Ayverdi, a young, unknown immigrant cast in his first professional acting role.

In terms of film form, *Welcome* adopts modes of enunciation that are commonly employed in mainstream, western cinema. In this respect, Lioret’s film is quite different

from the pseudo-documentary approach taken in *Indignados* and, to a lesser extent, in *Harragas*, where the spectator is encouraged to view the events that unfold on the screen as something more than a narrative construct. In *Welcome*, for instance, scenes such as Bilal's first attempt to smuggle himself into England in a semi-trailer that is about to board a cross-Channel ferry are carefully staged. Shot from multiple angles inside and outside of the vehicle, these scenes combine atmospheric lighting with smooth camera movements. The film's narrative also adheres to standard forms of continuity editing, such as cross-cutting between shots of the police searching outside and the immigrants hiding inside the truck, moves that heighten the sense of suspense. Similarly, Bilal's final attempt to swim across the channel includes is shot mostly from above, as if from a looming helicopter, and is accompanied by a dramatic piano score. These formal elements emphasize the young man's vulnerability as he swims across the open sea and underscore the impossibility of the task before him, one that can only end in tragedy. Such scenes contrast sharply with those presented by Allouache in *Harragas*. Working on a much lower budget, here the director places a hand-held camera alongside the illegal immigrants in the boat, a more down-to-earth and intimate mode of tracking their experience of crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Lioret's film also approaches its socio-political subject matter in a melodramatic, romantic mode that foregrounds the relationship between Simon and Bilal. This more personalized approach allows Lioret to foster understanding of the experience of clandestine immigrants in Europe but without necessarily obliging audiences to contemplate the wider social, economic and political structures that make Bilal an "illegal alien." In inviting identification with Simon's situation, Lioret encourages viewers to mourn, the tragic loss of Bilal, but again, without

directly challenging them to actually consider their own complicity in the functioning of Europe's asylum system and or to protest the kind of treatment of illegal immigrants that led to his death.

Transnational Solidarity And Neoliberal Globalization: *Indignados* (Gatlif, 2012)

Indignados, the final film I will consider here, is the one that calls most explicitly for a political and social challenge to the inequities neoliberal globalization has caused. Of the three films, *Indignados* is also the most overtly political and the one that directly challenges mainstream ideologies both in its form and content. The film's loosely episodic narrative, which combines poetic and abstract cinematic interludes with documentary footage links the experiences of undocumented immigrants and the continent-wide demonstrations that erupted in 2008 in protest against governmental responses to the economic crisis. The title of Gatlif's film is derived from the Spanish *Indignados* protest movement that features prominently in the film itself. The film is also inspired by the multi-million selling political pamphlet *Indignez-vous!* (2010), written by the former Resistance fighter, diplomat and author Stéphane Hessel who died in early 2012 at age 95. Intellectually, the film also owes a debt (and is dedicated) to Marxist philosopher and activist Jean-Paul Dollé, author of *Le Désir de révolution* (The Desire for Revolution [1972]) and *Territoire du rien* (Territory of Nothing [2005]) with whom Gatlif was collaborating on a film project at the time of Dollé's untimely death in 2011.

Hessel argues that, as under the Nazi occupation and during the struggle for Algerian independence, a sense of moral indignation borne of individual responsibility (rather than simply ideological or party-political opposition) is necessary to effect

collective and lasting change (Hessel 2010). However, in contrast to these earlier resistance movements, just how such outrage might be stirred in the wake of the global economic crisis and channeled into meaningful opposition is more complicated than before because, Hessel argues, the reasons for political engagement are no longer so obvious (“pas les mêmes raisons évidentes de vous engager” [5]). It is, he observes, easier to direct one’s anger towards the figurehead of a corrupt government or regime than it is to rail against a boardroom of largely anonymous executives controlling an investment bank. The strength and appeal of Hessel’s call to activism and non-violent protest (“indignez-vous!” [become outraged!]), lies both in its simplicity and its universality; one must become involved, take responsibility and focus the indignation that impels one to act. For his part, Gatlif claims to have been drawn to Hessel’s text following the mass and forced expulsion of a number of Roma migrants from France in 2010, when, due to his own Gypsy origins, he became something of a spokesperson for the demonstrations against their expulsion. However, the lack of a single focus, context or shared ideological position is the potential weakness of Hessel’s tract. The same criticism was also leveled against Gatlif because of *Indignados*’s lack of narrative cohesion and its apparent failure to offer precise alternatives to the politics of neoliberal globalization that the film challenges (Sotinel).

Unlike the previous two films analyzed above, *Indignados* directly correlates the film’s political/ideological engagement and its subject matter. *Indignados* rejects the high production values of *Welcome* as well as the kind of intense dramatic focus on an individual immigrant’s fate that characterize both *Welcome* and *Harragas*. The film employs Betty, an illegal immigrant from sub-Saharan Africa, as a figural means of

navigating its way across three countries and of linking the various social outcasts and protestors she meets. She is, though, presented as a rather distanced and unknowable character. Betty does not speak any European languages and so cannot communicate readily with others. Nor do we know precisely from where in sub-Saharan Africa she hails, or exactly how she came to be washed up on the shores of Europe. Gatlif situates his fictional character Betty in actual locations such as makeshift camps and refugee detentions centers in Greece and in the thick of real events such as mass demonstrations in Paris and Madrid that are seen unfolding on screen. Gatlif is not so much making a point about the boundaries he is blurring between documentary and fiction as he is emphasizing that his film is firmly grounded in contemporary socio-political reality. The immediacy of this context is also apparent in his evocation of Stéphane Hessel, whose writings are quite literally writ large on the screen. In *Indignados*, excerpts from *Indignez-vous* are superimposed over images of protestors, illegal migrants and homeless people struggling in Paris, Athens and Madrid. We also see quotations from Hessel's text displayed on banners and placards carried by the *indignados* Betty encounters in her movements across Europe

In one particularly poignant scene, the camera surveys an array of empty mattresses and cardboard boxes lining the streets of Paris, while captions inform us of the names, ages and places of origin of those who sleep upon them. Here, the politics of form are again brought into play. By highlighting their absence from the screen, Gatlif comments on the ways in which neoliberal society erases the homeless who sleep on the streets of Paris, denying them any form of social or political visibility. Moreover, the scene mirrors an earlier segment in the film in which a montage sequence of hand-held

camera shots leads the spectator through a makeshift refugee camp in Greece located beside a railroad track. Both scenes exemplify Gatlif's use of film form to suggest a transnational solidarity amongst marginalized victims of the global economic crisis. Far from indulging in empty sloganeering, sermonizing or accusing his audience of ignoring the plight of the destitute, Gatlif uses this technique to engage his audience in a dialogue, remarking: "Dans le film, au lieu d'écrire sur les murs, on écrit sur l'écran, avec la caméra. Pas de discours, pas d'interview. Je me sers des slogans comme de véritables dialogues" (In the film, instead of writing on walls, one writes on the screen with the camera. No speeches, no interviews. I use slogans as real dialogues [qtd. in Mouchi]). The notion that written text superimposed on the image offers a means of opening a dialogue with *Indignados*'s spectator is also suggested in an earlier scene that takes place in Greece outside a detention center for newly arrived migrants. Here, Gatlif breaks the fourth wall and has an actual sub-Saharan African immigrant speak directly to the camera about the hardship and disillusionment he has experienced as a *sans papiers* in Europe. As powerful as this scene may be, *Indignados* raises pointed questions concerning the extent to which the provocative presence of "slogans [serving] as real dialogue" or of illegal immigrants directly addressing the camera, can amount to meaningful cinematic praxis. How, for instance, can the 'theory' behind Hessel's text be combined with *Indignados*'s unconventional cinematic form to produce a coherent form of political activism? In other words, rather than engaging in provocative, though potentially empty sloganeering that decries the destructive effects of neoliberal globalization, what specific solutions does the film actually offer to our current crisis conditions that are affecting both the bleak labor market and the status of immigrants?

One potential answer to this question can be found in the way *Indignados* foregrounds the potential for solidarity between Europeans, especially the young who have been marginalized and politicized by the economic crisis afflicting the Eurozone and, the region's refugees and undocumented economic immigrants. Such camaraderie is envisioned in *Indignado's* loose narrative structure which is held together by Betty, an illegal migrant who is buffeted from one country to another, and is seen mixing with protestors in Greece, France and Spain as she drifts across a Europe in social crisis. But while Betty is permitted a degree of mobility within Europe as she moves across internal national borders, her presence as a migrant from the global south is still monitored with suspicion. She is arrested on the streets of Greece and then detained and fingerprinted by police. In this respect, *Indignados*, like *Welcome*, highlights the surveillance and control that ensure what Balibar calls the "apartheid" form neo-liberal globalization has taken (Balibar, 110) and that continues to be applied to Europe's non-western migrants even within the confines of fortress Europe.

Gatlif even takes the implied links of transnational solidarity between Betty and the youthful European protestors one step further by suggesting a commonality between the disposed and disaffected victims of neoliberal globalization and the pro-democracy demonstrators involved in the Arab Spring uprising of 2010. At one point in the film, without warning, attention shifts to a young, unidentified Arab woman who rejoices at news of resistance and revolt against the ruling dictatorship sent by activists in Tunisia that appear on her smart phone. This interlude can also be seen as an acknowledgement of the way social media and the internet functioned as key platforms for mobilizing protest in the Arab Spring. It is followed by one of the film's most visually arresting

moments: a montage sequence showing thousands of oranges tumbling down the streets of an unidentified Arab town – a symbolic link to the goods sold by Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor, whose act of self-immolation in protest against the repression and humiliation he suffered at the hands of the Tunisian authorities sparked the Tunisian uprising that led to the Arab Spring. In this respect, the combination of aesthetics and politics as an inseparable form of revolt offers a potential intellectual and artistic link between Gatlif’s experimental, militant form of cinematic docu-poetic activism and the Situationist International movement in Europe of the 1950s and 1960s. This blending of art and politics is also well illustrated in the scene where a young flamenco dancer performs defiantly in the courtyard of a deserted apartment complex while other performers/protesters shout anti-capitalist slogans and shower her with strips of colored paper. As with the text that most directly inspired the film, this scene is more Gatlif’s call to action than the offer of a coherent political solution to Europe’s current socio-economic crisis, constituting what the director clearly hopes is the film’s lasting political impact.

Conclusion

It is perhaps unsurprising that French cinema should appear so willing to take up issues of immigration and to challenge neoliberal globalization, given France’s history as both a *terre d’acceuil* (haven) for migrants and a nation that, in recent decades, has been “one of the heartlands of political counter-globalization” and this, despite the “progressive and seemingly inexorable internationalization of its own economy” (O’Shaughnessy 328). Nevertheless, what is noticeable about more recent films such as

Harragas, *Welcome* and *Indignados* is that they consciously place the issue of immigration in a transnational context that is less concerned with the place of the migrant in relation to the legacy of French colonialism and far more centered on a global or transnational critique of the socio-economic consequences of contemporary migratory flows. In *Harragas*, for example, Allouache pays no attention to Franco-Algerian colonial history as the determining factor in modern migratory paths. The destination of the *harragas* is Europe, and more precisely Spain, *not* France.

So what exactly can these three films tell us about immigration and the challenge to neoliberal globalization in contemporary French cinema? As summarized in my opening comments, Etienne Balibar views the formation and continued expansion of the European Union as having created two possible circumstances for immigrants to the region. On the one hand, a new form of “apartheid” has emerged that deprives residents hailing from non-European Union countries of the rights granted to nationals of member nations; they are included economically, but excluded politically. On the other hand, Balibar imagines the possibility that a new vision of the EU will emerge, one that reinvents the very idea of sovereignty, citizenship, and political belonging for its citizens. For Balibar, the solution to this problem is the formation of *un droit de cité* wherein “a resolute liberation of the rights of residency and labor” occurs, and where members of the host nation and immigrant communities jointly manage public affairs in ways that prevent the nation state from becoming “cut off from society and petrified in its own abstraction” (48).

However, applying Balibar’s idea of a new European model of transnational citizenship that opposes the kind of social and political apartheid we see represented in

the three films discussed here leads to an impasse. In *Harragas*, there is no way to overcome the “abstraction” of Fortress Europe. The only contact Rachid, Imène and Nasser make is with the Spanish *Guardia Civil* - faceless enforcers of strict border controls who observe and immediately arrest the *harragas* as they collapse on the beach, thereby foreclosing any possibility of an actual encounter with or acceptance by citizens of the host nation.

Indignados offers the most explicitly politicized example of the kind of transnational European citizenship that Balibar envisions. While almost exclusively confined to the liminal, crisis heterotopias of the Greek refugee camp and Parisian homeless shelters, Betty, the undocumented African immigrant, is welcomed by youthful protestors in Spain. However, even this apparent solidarity is based largely on their shared marginalization rather than a sense of genuine and sustained connection based on empathy and common ideological position. For one, Betty lacks the knowledge of Greek, Spanish or French to communicate with the protestors, other refugees and the marginalized groups she encounters. The only trace she leaves of her presence as she crosses Europe is the copy of her fingerprints that are taken by the police. Though she momentarily joins with the young protestors in Spain, her inability to communicate means that she understands little of their aims and demands. Betty does establish a fleeting connection with one protester. Confounding once again the status of host and guest, in this encounter, it is Betty who offers to share what little food she has with a Spanish *indignada*. The immigrant is then left to go her own way as the demonstrators move on while she ultimately finds herself isolated. This is simultaneously confirmed and denied in the last sequence of the film. Having left the demonstration, Betty wanders

into a ghost town of apartment complexes that remain unsold due to the economic downturn. Sheltering alone in the underground parking lot of one of the deserted complexes, she accidentally triggers the doors to shut and locks herself in. No one can hear her cries for help and the sound of her banging on the door. However, in the transition to the film's final segment, Gatlif melds the rhythmic sound of Betty's fists pounding on the doors with the sound of demonstrators protesting, thereby suggesting that the potential for solidarity remains between the immigrant and protestors, however tangentially related their interests might be.

The most surprising possibility for the emergence of a set of social practices approximating Balibar's proposed model of transnational citizenship can be found in *Welcome*. As noted above, Lioret largely shies away from direct political engagement and sloganeering and he denied the political significance of the melodramatic relationship he forms between Simon and Bilal. However, for whatever reasons and for however problematic the placement of a white French male character at the center of this "immigrant" narrative is, the transformation that takes place is remarkable. By the end of the film, Simon's indifference has been transformed into empathy and he exhibits an active desire to protect Bilal's interests and to see the host nation grant him rights. A genuine bond has been established between the aging swimming instructor and the young refugee. When measured by audience numbers and social impact, *Welcome* has done more than either *Indignados* (18,000 spectators) or *Harragas* (just over 10,000 spectators) to engage both the French political class and the broader public in a sustained discussion of the legitimacy of a law that criminalized the conduct of French citizens who shelter homeless illegal migrants. The film can thus be credited with extending the

debate taking place in France concerning just how those “caught in the cracks of globalization” are policed and their movements controlled in Fortress Europe.

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¹ For further discussion of these issues, see Loshitzky,

² At the end of *Harragas*, Allouache cites figures of at least 9000 would-be immigrants who have “disappeared at sea,” and more than 16 000 who died in the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean between 1988 and 2000.