



WELCOME

Directed by Philippe Lioret

“Extremely evocative! Newcomer Ayverdi is a significant discovery.”

-Jonathan Romney, *Screen Daily*



France | 2010 | Drama
In French, Kurdish, and English with English subtitles |
110 min. | 1:2.35 | Dolby Digital

Film Movement Press Contact:

Claire Weingarten | 109 W. 27th Street, Suite 9B | New York, NY 10001 |
tel: (212) 941-7744 x 208 | fax: (212) 941-7812 | claire@filmmovement.com

Film Movement Theatrical Contact:

Rebeca Conget | 109 W. 27th Street, Suite 9B | New York, NY 10001 |
tel: (212) 941-7744 x 213 | rebeca@filmmovement.com

SYNOPSIS

Bilal, a 17-year-old Kurdish refugee, has struggled his way through Europe for the last three months trying to reunite with his girlfriend, who recently emigrated to England. But his journey comes to an abrupt halt when he is stopped by authorities in Calais, on the French side of the Channel. Left with no other alternatives, he decides to swim across. Bilal goes to the local swimming pool to train, where he meets Simon, a middle-aged swimming instructor in turmoil over his imminent divorce. Simon agrees to help Bilal, hoping to win back the affection of his wife, who does volunteer work helping immigrants. But what begins as a relationship based on self interest, develops into something much bigger than Simon could ever have imagined, as he too will ultimately risk everything to reach happiness.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS (Selection)

WINNER – Label Europa Cinemas Award and Ecumenical Prize – **Berlin Int’l Film Festival**

WINNER – **European Parliament Lux Prize**

WINNER – Best Film – **Lumiere Awards**

WINNER – Best Screenplay and Special Jury Prize – **Gijón Int’l Film Festival**

WINNER – Grand Prize for Dramatic Feature – **Heartland Film Festival**

WINNER – Audience Award – **Warsaw Int’l Film Festival**

NOMINATED – **10 Cesar Awards (French Academy Awards)** including Best Film, Best Director and Best Breakout Performance

Official Selection –

Karlovy Vary Int’l FF

Seattle Int’l FF

Istanbul Int’l FF

Shanghai Int’l FF

Helsinki Int’l FF

Haugesund FF

Seoul Int’l FF

Mumbai Int’l FF

Dubai Int’l FF

Palm Springs Int’l FF

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Philippe Lioret

How did WELCOME come about as a project?

First of all, it came from a strong desire to make a film about this particular subject and no other. About guys who, fleeing their homelands in distress, want at all costs to reach this Eldorado, which to their eyes is England. Yet after an improbable journey they find themselves stuck in Calais - frustrated, ill treated and humiliated- just a few kilometers from the English coastline that they can actually see from where they are.

I was speaking about this one evening with Olivier Adam, and I realized that this place was a bit like the Mexican border, our Mexican border, and that it would only take a bit of digging into the subject to come up with a fantastic piece of drama. I spoke about it to Emmanuel Courcol, and we started thinking about a story that could take place in this framework.

How did you go about it?

Emmanuel and I contacted non-profit organizations that do whatever they can to help these guys, and we left for Calais. For several days during an icy cold winter, we followed volunteers from these organizations and shared the infernal life of the refugees: the "jungle" where they find shelter, the smuggler's extortion racket, the endless persecutions from the police – an entire riot police garrison is dedicated just to them – the refugee detention centers, the constant checks of trucks in which they have squeezed themselves in order to get onto the ferries, and in which they risk their lives trying to escape CO2 detectors, heart monitors, scanners, among other things...

What most surprised us was the age of the refugees, the eldest wasn't even 25. There are even kids around fifteen who set off alone on this mad journey. When we spoke with Sylvie Copyans from the Salam Organization, we learned that several of them, as a last resort, had even attempted to swim across the Channel. We returned to Paris after several days, our minds so full with what we had seen and experienced, that we didn't exchange a single word during the car ride back.

How did the framework of the screenplay develop?

We were haunted by the story of a young guy who wanted to swim across the English Channel. It's Emmanuel who said at first : "He goes to the Calais public swimming pool to train." And then I added : "And he meets a swimming instructor." We then had our characters and the story's framework in two sentences – all the while knowing that we weren't creating a cheap "over dramatization", nor were we betraying the truth of the refugee's experience. The subject was so strong, and it was so representative of the migrants' reality, that sincerity had to prevail.

That's how Simon's character came to be.

The documentary side to the story had to be left aside to bring the characters over to their personal stories, to the emotional interactions that condition everyone's life and are often the reason behind everything.

Observing the volunteers, I said to myself that some of them were bound to share their lives with someone who probably isn't as committed and generous as they are. Simon is a fallible person, like all of us, he is far from perfect. At the beginning, like most people from Calais, he isn't interested in the immigrant problem, he just puts up with it: As Marion, his ex-wife says: "He looks away and goes back home." As a younger man, he just missed having a successful career in sports, and this failure has made him bitter. He has retreated into his life as a swimming instructor and today his only problem is that Marion has left him. When he meets Bilal, he helps him for all the wrong reasons. If he offers to take them in, Bilal and his friend Zoran, it's only to impress Marion, to try and prove that he's not the crazed individualist she thinks he is. He does all this in order to win her back. But things get out of control: helping an illegal immigrant is punishable by law.

He gets himself caught up in the middle of a spiral that he can't control.

And the more he is sucked in, the more he becomes conscious of the complete injustice that pervades the situation, the more he becomes attached to Bilal.

Bilal wants to go to England to join Mîna. The film could also be summarized as follows: a man loses a woman and his life is turned upside-down. Another, younger man, loves a woman and wants to join her at all costs.

And these two destinies meet, colliding with the absurd world order. The film demonstrates how an encounter can help someone surpass himself.

The situation makes one think of a far from glorious time period, the Occupation...

Yes, all of this could have happened in 1943, and it could be the story of a guy who hides Jewish people in his house and gets caught. Except that this is happening today, two hundred kilometers from Paris.

Were you thinking of Vincent Lindon when you wrote the screenplay?

In my previous films, I often thought of him during the idea stage. First of all because I find him to be a hell of an actor, and also because I feel a sort of connection between us. But, at the writing stage, I try not to think about the actors and to focus on the characters. Except that this time, we had lunch together between the two stages. I told him about the story and he told me he would do the film without even reading the screenplay. Vincent is a kind-hearted guy, and I think that beyond the character of Simon, he liked the idea of embarking on this particular project. So I was thinking about him while I wrote, and since that day nothing has contradicted our working together. However, people who know both our personalities were afraid that sparks would fly on the set. Yet, as we were both working towards the same goal – the film – there was an exceptional chemistry between us that was bound to influence the final result.

What kind of actor is he?

He is able to convey feelings with just a simple movement or posture. Often, thanks to him, you can do away with a word or a phrase. He is a man who gets involved, a perfectionist. As an actor, he is always ready to listen, and tries to ring true rather than make an impression. Thanks to all of that his portrayal of Simon is astounding. I know that after a film is made it is always polite to speak well of everyone, but here, with him, I definitely made a beautiful encounter, artistically and humanly speaking. We've spoken every day since the end of filming, and we see each other often. We'll make other films together.

And Audrey Dana?

Audrey is what the Anglo-Saxons call “the girl next door”, the opposite of a starlet. It took me some time to find her. I needed a woman believable as a middle school teacher who goes to serve pasta to refugees just because of simple human engagement. Yet I didn't want to see a militant suffragette turn up. I just needed a woman who felt good about herself and who had true inner generosity. Audrey has this generosity. She was a bit scared by the character of Marion, but she loved the story and I was sure she would be able to find her place in it. She's someone who is whole, who takes things seriously without taking herself too seriously.

And how did you find Bilal?

It was like finding a needle in a haystack. The biggest part of the casting process. When we were writing the character, a 17 year old who only speaks Kurdish and English, and who, with Vincent, has to carry the film on his shoulders, we put ourselves into a cold sweat. I didn't even know if this guy existed somewhere in the world. With Tatiana Vialle, the casting director, we traveled for weeks from Berlin to Istanbul, London, and Sweden where a large Kurdish community lives. Finally, we discovered Firat in France. Naturally, he wasn't a professional actor, and the first tests were...somewhat unusual. But he had a truth and intensity about him that made a difference.

Did he want to be an actor?

Not at all. He had come as an amateur. We even had to persuade him to do it, and convince his parents. I initially planned to work on the part with him, to rehearse a great deal, but in the end I preferred to leave him his naturalness, and I didn't do anything. As the shooting date drew nearer, I became increasingly scared, and so did he. Once on the set, he was awed for three hours, then just as naturally he found his place and the right tone for the role.

There are also a number of non professional actors in the film.

All of the young Kurds that Bilal meets in Calais were found while searching for the actor who would play Bilal. Most of them come from Istanbul and Berlin. I learned a great deal from them. You have to film quickly, not rehearsing too much, letting them evolve without overly “framing” them. It was a great adventure for them – moreover for me as well. It allowed me to make a few wonderful discoveries: Derya, for example, who plays Mîna, turned out to be an exceptional actress and now wishes to pursue the acting profession. I filmed a very complicated scene with her in one take, without rehearsals, relying solely on her instinct.

She is incredible. Many other actors whom I like very much have already taken part in my previous films: Emmanuel Courcol my co-scriptwriter, Blandine Pélissier, Eric Herson-Macarel, Gilles Masson... And then Tatiana had me meet key people like Olivier Rabourdin, who plays the police lieutenant - a super complicated role because we see 45 cops a day in TV shows and he had to find a way to make this one unconventional. Patrick Ligarde, the neighbor-informer, Thierry Godard, Jean-Pol Brissard, Yannick Renier...

As in many of your films, the set is a character in itself.

Particularly for the public swimming pool, which acts as a catalyst: not only does it evoke Simon's failed career as a swimming champion, but it is also where Bilal learns to swim with the hope of crossing the Channel. It was very important for me to film right at the actual places where the action occurs. When you shoot in real places, you tell the story

better: the streets of Calais, the gigantic Trans-Channel port, Blériot beach and its nonstop ferries coming and going...all these atmospheres give the film its truthful nature. In order to emphasize this realistic aspect, the producer Christophe Rossignon and I made a point of not going to shoot in the Czech Republic or in Romania, as often happens for budgetary reasons. The film greatly benefits from this decision.

The direction is omnipresent, yet the camera seems to be discreet, almost invisible.

There aren't a whole lot of possibilities for the camera to shoot a scene well, so you have to find the right one. I spend my time asking actors to be truthful, but the camera can also in its own way strike a "false note". If the camera is too noticeable in a scene, if its movements are pointless or ornamental, you think: "Oh yes, it's make-believe" and I always have the impression that instead of gaining, you lose something. And then, as a moviegoer, when I like a film, it's as if I were given a gift. But if the work is too noticeable, then it gives me the feeling that the price tag was left on the package.

In the first 15 minutes of the film, it feels as if you are discovering an unknown world (France).

And yet so near. It's also a good thing at the cinema to discover the country we live in from another angle, one that we don't know. Concerning the problem of migrants, refugees and illegal aliens, an increasing number of television shows that are devoted to the subject end up getting lost in the media circus. The end result is that all of these reports and debates, all of this indignation, serves no purpose because their message has been drowned out. So I prefer making a film, telling a story on the big screen of these two men – and these two women - confronted with their emotions, in the middle of this whole mess. And at the same time I hope to touch the viewer sitting in the dark, helping him or her to form their own opinion about it all, and I hope that the film will stay with them for a while.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

Born in Paris in 1955, Lioret started his film career in the 1980's as a sound engineer, working on films like *La Lectrice*, by Michel Deville, and Robert Altman's *Beyond Therapy*.

In 1993, Lioret directed his first feature, *Tombés du Ciel (Fallen from the Sky)*, starring Jean Rochefort, which premiered at the San Sebastian Film Festival. Since then he has directed seven other films, ranging from romantic comedies to melodramas, as well as a couple of social dramas. Although relatively unknown outside of his own country, he has worked with some of the most coveted French actors in the last fifteen years, like Elsa Zylberstein, Sandrine Bonnaire and Vincent Lindon. His latest film, *WELCOME*, has quickly become one of the highest grossing French films in its native country.

WELCOME (2009)

JE VAIS BIEN, NE T'EN FAIS PAS / DON'T WORRY, I'M FINE (2006)

VACHE-QUI-RIT (2005)

TUE L'AMOUR (2005)

L'ÉQUIPIER / THE LIGHT (2004)

MADMOISELE (2001)

TE NUE CORECTE EXIGÉE (1997)

TOMBÉS DU CIEL / LOST IN TRANSIT (1993)

SELECT ACTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Vincent Lindon

Born in Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1959 to a rich businessman, Lindon made his film career debut as a wardrobe assistant in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*. After a stay in New York and a journalism experience at the daily "Le Matin," he decided to become an actor. His first role was that of an inspector in the 1983 film *Le Faucon*.

After that, he got work as a supporting actor in several films of the decade, landing his first leading role in 1988, opposite Sophie Marceau, in Claude Pinoteau's *L'Étudiante*, for which he won the Jean Gabin Award. In 1990 he starred in *Il y a des jours...et des Lunes*, his first film with director Claude Lelouch, with whom he has since enjoyed a successful collaboration. But the film that brought him fame, and a nomination to the Cesars as Best Actor, was *La Crise* by Coline Serreau, with whom he also worked in *Chaos* a few years later. The end of the 90's and beginning of the new decade saw him finally become one of the most sought after actors of his generation, working with Benoit

Jacquot in ***Seventh Heaven*** and ***School of Flesh***, and Claire Denis in ***Friday Night***, among many others.

WELCOME marks his first collaboration with Philippe Lioret.

Audrey Dana

Audrey Dana was born in 1978, and studied acting at the National Conservatory of Orleans, where she was awarded First Prize in Dramatic Arts. She spent two years in New York with her acting group, before settling in Paris, where she has been gracing the stage for the past ten years.

Her first film role was in the 2006 movie ***Nos Amis les Terriens***, directed by Bernard Werber, who she had already worked with in the theater. It was her performance in this film that impressed renowned director Claude Lelouch, who immediately cast her as Huguette in his hit ***Roman de Gare*** (2007). Thanks to this movie Dana garnered a lot of attention, and was nominated to a Cesar Award for Most Promising New Actress.

Since then she has appeared in several films, while at the same time trying her hand at screenwriting and directing. She has written and directed two shorts, and is about to start shooting her first feature, ***Love, love, love***.

CREDITS

CREW

Directed by

Philippe Lioret

Writers

Philippe Lioret

Emmanuel Courcol

Olivier Adam

Producers

Christophe Rossignon ... *Executive Producer*

Philip Boëffard ... *Associate Producer*

Eve Machuel ... *Line Producer*

Director of Photography

Laurent Dailland (A.F.C.)

Editor

Andréa Sedlackova

Sound Editor

Pierre Mertens

Laurent Quaglio

Eric Tisserand

CAST

Vincent Lindon...*Simon*

Firat Ayverdi...*Bilal*

Audrey Dana...*Marion*

Derya Ayverdi...*Mina*

Thierry Godard...*Bruno*

Selim Akgül...*Zoran*

Firat Celik...*Koban*

Murat Subasi...*Mirko*

Olivier Rabourdin...*Police lieutenant*

Yannick Renier...*Alain*

Mouafaq Rushdie...*Mina's father*

Behi Djanati Ataï...*Mina's mother*

Patrick Ligardes... *Simon's neighbor*

Jean Pol Brissart...*Judge*

Blandine Pélissier... *Family court judge*