

Synopsis

Bilal (Firat Ayverdi), a young 17 year old Kurdish boy, has travelled through the Middle East and Europe to join his girlfriend, freshly immigrated to England. But his journey comes to an abrupt end when he is stopped on the French side of the Channel. Having decided to swim across, Bilal goes to the local swimming pool to train. There he meets Simon (Vincent Lindon), a swimming instructor in the midst of a divorce. To impress his estranged wife (Audrey Dana) and win back her heart, Simon decides to risk everything by taking Bilal under his wing, and give him shelter and swimming lessons.



An ode to the abandoned immigrants trapped on the shores of Calais and the good Samaritans who take risks to help them, the ironically titled *Welcome* stars popular French actor Vincent Lindon as Simon and talented newcomer Firat Ayverdi as Bilal, in his first role. Although Simon and Bilal develop a sincere father-son relationship, Simon takes the risk of being arrested for helping an illegal immigrant.

A hard hitting drama that has garnered both critical and box office success (with over 5 million admissions in France) *Welcome* is in the same vein as other abiding French contemporary issue films such as *La Haine*, and last year's *The Class*. Coming at a time when displaced migrants are being forcefully evicted from ramshackle settlement camps in Calais, the film focuses on issues of concern to audiences on both sides of the channel.

WARSAW INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2009 - AUDIENCE AWARD FOR BEST FEATURE FILM

BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2009 - PRIZE OF THE ECUMENICAL JURY, EUROPA CINEMA AWARD

A Question to Director Philippe Lioret - How did *Welcome* come about as a project?

"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."

Booking Details

HD Digital, 35mm & DVD bookings: Allison Gardner | aligardner@blueyonder.co.uk | 07970 025243

DVD bookings on BFFS Block Booking Scheme: Jacqueline Chell | info@bffs.org.uk | 0114 221 0314

Theatrical release date: 6th November 2009

www.cinefile.co.uk/newweb/WELC-filmpage.htm

DVD release date and available for booking on DVD | 28th February 2010

Cast and Crew

Simon	Vincent Lindon
Bilal	Firat Ayverdi
Marion	Audrey Dana
Mina	Derva Ayverdi
Bruno	Thierry Godard
Koban	Firat Celik
Zoran	Selim Akgul
Director	Philippe Lioret
Screenplay	Olivier Adma, Emmanuel Courcol, Philippe Lioret
Costumes	Magali Cohen
Editor	Andrea Sedláčková
Music	Wojciech Kilar
Casting	Tatiana Vialle
Producer	Christophe Rossignon

Quotes

Welcome has won critical acclaim and seems certain to become an art-house hit ... Another example of gritty French cinema that will provoke a storm of controversy.

- **The Observer**

A subtle study of human connections...with a set of superlative performances bearing it forward, many from non-professional Kurds, it's an honourable and effective melodrama.

- **Sight and Sound**

A superb director of actors, Lioret blends French professionals with Kurdish amateurs in a seamless mix... A beautiful sense of rhythm and structure generally mark Lioret's style.

- **Variety**

Vincent Lindon's gruff, hangdog persona limns Simon as a hard-bitten type guy with a soft, needy core. The actor's no-nonsense turn – in rusty English as well as French – confirms Lindon as French cinema's current incumbent of the Jean Gabin niche of bullish-but-sensitive blue-collar roles. He is well matched by up-and-comer Dana as Marion, while newcomer Ayverdi is a significant discovery, his tough, candid ease persuading us of Bilal's reckless determination.

- **Screen International**

*Welcome is an outstanding film - **Le Journal du Dimanche***

*This intense and beautiful film gives shivers. - **Télérama***

DON'T FORGET TO DISCUSS THE FILM:

www.bffs.org.uk/forum/

France hails film drama of refugee's desperate swim across the Channel

The tale of a young Kurdish immigrant's all-or-nothing bid to enter Britain is set to storm French cinemas.

Jason Burke

The Observer, Sunday 8 March 2009

On the beach is a middle-aged Frenchman and a Kurdish teenager. In the distance a ferry sits on the horizon and beyond it, on the other side of the Channel, is England. The older man, a swimming instructor at Calais's municipal pool, dreams of winning back his wife, a charity worker who has tired of him. His young friend dreams of reaching the UK, joining his girlfriend and playing for Manchester United. The refugee walks into the foaming, freezing, grey waters and starts swimming.

The scene is from the film *Welcome*, opening in French cinemas this week. The work of director Philippe Lioret, it portrays with brutal honesty the lives of refugees trying to reach the UK from France - the cold, hunger, casual violence from police and the risks run by some to help them. *Welcome* has already won critical acclaim, playing to packed cinemas in pre-release screenings, and seems certain to become an art-house hit.

Like *The Class*, a hard-hitting depiction of life in an inner-city school released last year, and *La Haine*, the cult film that brought the plight of young immigrants in France's deprived suburbs to global attention in 1995, *Welcome* is another example of gritty French cinema that will provoke a storm of controversy. To win back the affections of his liberal wife, the swimming instructor - played by one of France's best-known highbrow actors, Vincent Lindon - prepares his Kurdish protege for a cross-Channel endurance test in which the most difficult obstacle will be evading immigration officials when he reaches the English shore.

In Calais, where *Welcome* was filmed and set, audiences cheered at the preview screenings. "It's the most beautiful and most upsetting film I have ever seen," said Laure Ducastel, 31, a local resident. "It shows how the refugees and the charity workers are heroes and what dirty work the French state does to make their lives a misery."

In one scene, the swimming instructor is raided by French police and charged with helping illegal immigrants. Lioret, who conducted months of field research before filming, said that he "toned down" rather than exaggerated what he found in Calais and elsewhere. "We decided to make the film when we heard that refugees had really tried to swim across."

He said the constant raids and arrests were "like something out of the 1940s ... I just wanted to show that a foreigner is like you or me," said Lioret, who has said he chose to set the drama in Calais because it resembled "our version of the Mexican border".

The role of the 17-year-old Kurd, Bilal, was finally filled after a lengthy search for a young actor who could speak French, Kurdish and English. Played by novice actor Firat Ayverdi, Bilal decides to learn to swim across the Channel because he does not have the €500 (£450) needed for a passeur (help in getting across illegally). As Lioret notes, similar real-life dramas are taking place across a swathe of northern France, despite the closure of the Sangatte refugee camp on the edge of Calais in 2003. Stringent new security measures imposed by the British government at the Channel ports mean that refugees, once concentrated on Calais, have now dispersed far and wide. The result is that an estimated 1,500 are living in makeshift

camps alongside motorways or in squats from Cherbourg to the Belgian border. In Calais, aid workers were able to find and help the migrants. Dispersed, they are much harder to assist.

One of the new camps is near the small town of Norrent-Fontes, only 70 miles from Paris. Three tents clustered in a ditch are home to 30 young Eritreans trying to get to Britain by hiding themselves in the lorries that stop in a lay-by on the A26 motorway 500 yards away.

"Why do I want to get to Britain? Because it has to be better than everything I have seen on my way from Eritrea," said Anthony, 24, who left his homeland seven months ago to escape compulsory military service that he says could last five or 10 years.

Most of the immigrants do eventually reach Britain. "My brother got over 10 days ago in a Polish lorry. He sent me a text from London," said Santush, an 18-year-old Indian interviewed near Dunkirk. In Lioret's film, horrific scenes show migrants hidden in trucks wrapping their heads in plastic bags to avoid heat detectors, and running from dogs and baton wielding police.

Inok, a 23-year-old at Norrent-Fontes, said he had paid about £3,000 to get from Sudan to Turkey and a further £2,500 to get to Greece hidden in a car. He found the Norrent-Fontes camp after being tipped off by other East Africans. "I've been unlucky so far and haven't got a good lorry yet," he said.

Lioret said the plight of the migrants shocked him: "There was no need to dramatise anything for the film."
Counting heads

Facts:

- The UK Border Agency has stopped 61,000 people entering the UK illegally from France in the past five years.
- Last year, more than 66,000 people were expelled or left the UK voluntarily.
- There were about 30,000 applications for asylum in the UK last year.
- Almost 6,000 "foreign criminals" were expelled last year.
- In seven months last year, the Border Agency dealt with almost 1,200 stowaways in trucks at Dover.