

Harbor (Jeter l'ancre un seul jour): A young refugee in need finds allies

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Directed by Paul Marques Duarte; written by Duarte and Blandine Jet

A short work by a young French filmmaker is one of the most complex and moving recent works on the global refugee crisis.

Harbor, directed and co-written by 23-year-old Paul Marques Duarte, offers a concrete example of what the European powers' reactionary policy on immigration has produced, including resolute, if inarticulate opposition. The film concerns a teacher who, with the assistance of one of her most apparently troublesome students, helps an undocumented 15-year-old refugee make his way from France to England.

The alternate English-language title of the film, *Find Harbour for a Day*, comes closer to the original French, *Jeter l'ancre un seul jour* (literally, “to drop anchor for a single day”). The latter derives from a line by French Romantic poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) in one of his most famous poems, “The Lake” (1820):

“So then, forever pushed toward new shores like this,
Swept away into eternal night without return
On the ocean of the ages—can we never
Drop anchor for a single day?”

Adèle (Marie Bunel) is a middle-aged teacher in charge of a class of French high school students taking a trip to England by ferry. Based on our brief introduction to her in the film's opening moments, on board a chartered bus with her students, she seems fed up with both her personal and professional lives. One student in particular, Elliott (Victor Bonnel), seems determined to get on her nerves. She confides in a low voice to her colleague, Romain (Ali Marhyar), “I can't stand them any more ... It's me. I should have turned down the trip.”

Embarking on the ferry at St. Malo, the teachers hand out blue baseball caps to every student (and take caps

for themselves), a means of identifying the class. Adèle notices that a black youth (N'Tarila Kouka), presumably African and presumably undocumented, has surreptitiously joined her group of students. She stares for an instant, says nothing, then quickly places her cap on his head. “Let's go.”

Immigration police count the students, but one of them, the same troublesome Elliott, has fallen way behind and in the general confusion, the group is eventually waved on through.

On board the ferry, Romain angrily confronts Adèle. “It's a serious offense.” “I had no choice,” she replies stolidly. When she has a chance to be alone with the boy, she tries both French and English, but receives no response. “Not very talkative.” In fact, he never speaks in the 24-minute film. Adèle tells the wondering students that he has “just arrived from another school.” She gives the African boy her cabin and wanders the ship.

Later, in the middle of the night, some of her students pull a dangerous prank and then try to pin it on the boy in front of outraged ferry company officials. Although he had no part in the business, Elliott takes the sole blame on himself, although there may be legal consequences. Afterward, Adèle asks, “Why did you do all this?” He responds with a question of his own, referring to her course of action, “And you, why are you doing this?”

The ferry journey lasts the course of one night. On landing in Portsmouth, Adèle cannot find the immigrant boy, whose name we know by now is Nassim—because he writes it in black magic marker on the back of his cap. She futilely searches the by now empty, hulking and somewhat menacing ferry. Adèle eventually figures out that the resourceful Nassim, thanks to fellow conspirator Elliott, has found his own

means of disembarking.

The understated, well-made film (with cinematography by Yann Maritaud) is emotionally and socially convincing. Bunel, a veteran of French filmmaking, is excellent as Adèle, who “merely” follows her healthiest instincts. Behind that “merely,” however, lies a great deal of history and historical resonance, including the memory or image, for many French people of a certain age, of hiding Jews from the Vichy regime or the Nazi occupiers during World War II.

Hostility to those hunting down refugees comes naturally to Adèle and also to Elliott, the “outsider” in his school class. For such people, to cooperate or collaborate would present insurmountable difficulties. Nonetheless, it takes a certain courage.

The overnight ferry voyage between countries represents a transition, a passage in more than one sense. Adèle, Elliott, Romain and Nassim arrive in England as changed people. What begins as a mundane school outing becomes, as the result of global economic and social processes beyond their control and even knowledge, a “clandestine” operation with significant implications for everyone involved. Such is the nature of our period, one of abrupt and even brutal shifts, posing critical political and moral questions without much notice.

According to the Global Peace Index 2019, “Refugees made up almost one per cent of the global population in 2017 for the first time in modern history, at a rate 12 times higher than in 1951. The number of refugees has been increasing steadily since the 1970s, but began to rise dramatically in the early 2000s. There were 68 million refugees and internally displaced people in 2016, a rate of 910 people per 100,000 or 1 out of every 110 people on the planet.” No coincidence, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which have been followed by unceasing imperialist military interventions in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, of course, were launched “in the early 2000s.”

Under conditions of worsening economic conditions for broad layers of the population, right-wing forces around the world are attempting to stoke up hatred against immigrants and refugees, blaming them for the social misery. Dividing the working class along such lines is critical to the survival of capitalism.

Most young people, having grown up in a thoroughly

globalized, ethnically mixed world, are instinctively hostile to these efforts. Moreover, Duarte’s generation has come of age in the midst of the fraudulent “war on terror” and the relentless state provocations and repression.

In France, according to a recent Pew Research poll, despite the barrage of anti-immigrant propaganda, only 11 percent of younger adults 18 to 24 have an unfavorable view of Muslims. In 2017, the World Economic Forum’s annual “Global Shapers Survey” found that an overwhelming majority, 73 percent, of people aged between 18 and 35 would welcome refugees into their country.

Duarte told OC Movie Reviews, “I was working with an association in the refugees camp in Calais and I met a young boy there. We were there during the wintertime and so we wanted to help him. He just wanted to go to England. After a while, he realized that it indeed was easier and safer for him to ask for asylum in France, so we helped him with that for a long time. While helping him, we never asked ourselves ‘is this illegal or not?’ We just tried to help him.

“After experiencing that, I wanted to make a film about migrants and about the times we’ve been through. When I decided that I was making this movie, I met Blandine Jet, who’s the co-writer of this film, and I told her about my idea of a young boy on a ferry boat. From that, we wrote the script. We kept that message ‘helping someone without thinking if it’s legal or not’ in the film because it’s important. The teacher in the film realizes that she can do something to help the boy and have a positive impact on his life.”

Duarte previously wrote and produced several self-funded shorts. *Harbor* is Duarte’s first professional film. It has deservedly won recognition and dozens of awards at film festivals in Europe, North America and Asia.



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