Wulan Tri Astuti
Media and Cultural Studies, Graduate School of Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (email: wulanastuti@ugm.ac.id)

Faruk
Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (email: farukkan@ugm.ac.id)

Budi Irawanto
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (email: birawanto@ugm.ac.id)

Astuti, Wulan Tri is a doctoral candidate at the Media and Cultural Studies Department, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada. She was born in Yogyakarta, 25 March 1976 and obtained her Master of Arts from the Media and Cultural Studies Department, Graduate School Universitas Gadjah Mada in 2011. She completed her undergraduate study at French Department, Universitas Gadjah Mada and became the best student at graduation in April 1999. She currently dedicates her experience and knowledge to teaching in the French Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. Wulan Tri Astuti has research and writing interests in the areas of cinema studies, French literature, and cultural studies.

Faruk is a lecturer at the Department of Indonesian Literature, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada and Media and Cultural Studies Department, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada. He was a visiting lecturer at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea from 2007 to 2009. He completed his doctorate studies at the Faculty of Literature and Culture, Universitas Gadjah Mada. He has published numerous books, namely *Metode Penelitian Sastra (*2012*), Novel-Novel Indonesia Tradisi Balai Pustaka (*2010*), Belenggu Pasca-kolonial (2007), Beyond Imagination (2001),* and *Politik dan Poetik dalam Sastra dan Film (*2021*).* He is currently the head of Humanities Studies Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Understanding the Mandatory Language Policy for Immigrants and the Impact on *Beur Cinema* in France

Abstract

This article seeks to fill gaps in the literature regarding French cinema's treatment of immigration. Previous investigations of this theme have tended to position immigrants as objects, individuals perceived as creating problems, and as individuals using violence to resolve issues. This article highlighted in French films under a new genre, *Beur* Cinema, notably in the film *Fatima* This research discusses French cinema's depiction of immigrants' experiences with cultural negotiation mainly related to the French government's policy of Language Mandatory as one of the requirements for migrants to be granted citizenship. This article will also discuss the portrayal of the French government's policy toward immigrants and how immigrants cope with the barriers and offer solutions to the problems in *Beur* cinema. The film *Fatima,* which was first published in 2015, will be analyzed by its cinematographic signs using the theory of cinematographic semiotics. This study finds that what has been understood as the cause of the lack of integration of immigrants is mainly that the residence permit is not justified. This research finds that the challenges of immigrants are also represented by difficulties in adapting to language skills, daily life routines, raising children, and even communicating with their diaspora community and the local residents.

Introduction

Today, questions regarding international borders, communities, and language are omnipresent. Several demographers, such as Michael T. Martin and Marilyn Yaquinto (2007: 20), have termed the 20th century as "the century of migration," since during this period—especially during its latter half—voluntary and forced migration became increasingly common. Collectively, migrants

Irawanto, Budi is a lecturer at the Communication Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada and Media and Cultural Studies Department, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada. He was a visiting lecturer at the James Cook University, Singapore, and at the Faculty of Cinematic Arts, Multimedia University, Malaysia. He completed his doctorate program at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. Since 2017 he dedicates his work as the director of JOGJA-NETPAC ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL (JAFF Festival). He has published numerous articles and books, including *Film, Ideologi, dan Militer* (1997/2017) and *Menguak Peta Perfilman Indonesia* (2004). He is currently Head of the Performing Arts and Visual Studies Programme, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

from similar countries of origin are known as diaspora (Budiman, 2020). One of the main destinations for migrants in Europe is France. With the significant number of migrants in France, the multiple layers in achieving the goal of acculturation has been spread not only in political policy but also in the social lives of both the migrants and French citizens.

In recent years, Muslims—particularly those of Arabic heritage—have experienced significant racial prejudice within the French judicial system. In France, the question of immigration in France is not merely one of economics or citizenship, but also politics; it has remained omnipresent in French political discourse ever since the Front National rose to prominence in 1972, using xenophobic and discriminatory discourses to explicitly challenge multiculturalism and reject immigration. The party argues that immigration, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, undermines French national identity, causes harm to the state, increases crime rates, and exacerbates insecurity and risk of rebellion (Marthaler, 2008: 386).

France's experiences with xenophobia and racism have long been explored in the media, including in such cinematic works as Mathieu Kassovitz's independent film *La Haine* (1995) and the hit dramatic comedy *Les Intouchables* (2011), remade by Escape Artists in the United States as *The Upside* in 2017. Of the numerous films that deal with immigration in France, of particular note is Philippe Faucon's *Fatima* (2015). Focusing on the life of its female protagonist, *Fatima* offers a fresh view of France's Arab immigrants and their culture, focusing on their everyday trials and avoiding the specter of violence that permeates media coverage.

Fatima tells the story of a middle-aged Algerian woman forced to live in a foreign land despite being unable to speak its national language. She has difficulty connecting with her daughters, who are growing within an environment and developing a worldview that she cannot understand, and she experiences racial prejudice every day in the workplace. *Fatima* is a free adaptation of Fatima Elayoubi's poetry collection *Prière à la Lune* (A Prayer to the Moon) (2006). Its director, Philippe Faucon, had often dealt with issues of migration since beginning his career in 1984; three of his films, *La Trahison* (2005)*, Dans la vie* (2007), and *La disintegration* (2012), had followed the trials and tribulations of newly landed immigrants. *Fatima* was selected based on the consideration of the many recognitions and awards from various film festivals and the number of positive reviews from critics who praised this film, including *Variety, New York Times, LA Times, Hollywood Reporter, CineEurope*, etc. The film won the *Louis-Delluc Critics' Prize* for Best Picture in December 2015, which the prize was awarded by a jury led by former *Cannes* Film Festival President Gilles Jacob and 16 of France's top film

critics and personalities. *Fatima* also received four nominations at the *41st César Awards,* the national film award of France equivalent to the *Academy Award* in the United States. *Fatima* won the category of *César du meilleur film* or Best Film which is considered the highest film honor in France, followed by Most Promising Actress and Best Adaptation award.

This article seeks to fill gaps in the literature regarding French cinema's treatment of immigration. Where previous investigations of this theme have tended to position immigrants as objects, individuals perceived as creating problems, and using violence to resolve issues, this article uses the example of *Beur* cinema, especially the data form film *Fatima,* to discuss French cinema's depiction of immigrants' experiences with cultural negotiation related to the French government's policy of Mandatory Language as one of the requirements for migrants to be granted as citizen. To do so, it seeks to answer several questions. First, the French government's policy toward immigrants and, second, how immigrants cope with these barriers and offer solutions to the problems faced by the immigrants as an impact of the policy as portrayed in *Beur* cinema. These two questions not only explain the pattern of relations between culture and the country of origin of immigrants, but they also explain the integration of immigrants represented in *Beur* cinema.

Martin and Yaquinto (2007, p. 22) note that migration has been driven by several factors, particularly the rise of the global economy, the internationalization of capital markets, the political instability caused by interethnic conflict and civil strife, reduced population growth, human rights violations, and the plummeting cost of transportation. In recent decades, this has resulted in a global immigration crisis, with almost 175 million migrants seeking better lives in North America, Asia, and Western Europe. Globalization and other geopolitical phenomena have, in conjunction with developments in communication technology, seemingly erased international borders and accelerated the diaspora.

As a result, new communities have emerged within existing ones. These communities are commonly identified as causing cultural and social disruption, in part through competition between established and migrant communities. Different communities are identified based on their cultural affiliations (including their shared religion, language, and cultural practices). At the same time, certain qualities are upheld by the state as evidence of fealty, and diaspora communities are expected to assimilate into majority society. Immigrants, particularly those from poor nations and postcolonial societies, become dependent on the state.

At the same time, it must be recognized that nations are divided not only by territorial boundaries but by social, cultural, political, psychological, physical, and experiential ones (Brah, 1996, p. 3). These borders distinguish communities, thereby creating social stratification. As Brah (1996, p. 3) notes, borders may be completely erased, as with the East–West German border in 1989, or created where no borders existed, as in the case of South Sudan.

One important concept when discussing borders and distinguishing between nations is the role of the state in creating and maintaining policies that regulate society's behavior, including discriminatory behavior that stigmatizes people for their race, gender, class, caste, ethnicity, or sexuality. Borders shape identity through complex processes, as nations (for instance) have regulations and social norms that prevent Muslims or LGBT communities from freely expressing their identities. States thus control the flow of human beings, trade, capital, and information, and even the countries deemed most friendly to immigrants may hinder migrants' efforts to obtain visas.

In France, discourse on migration has been seemingly unending. Since the 1960s, filmmakers—particularly those from diaspora

communities—have sought to explore and elucidate the experiences of these migrants. In this, they are part of a global trend that is also evident in the United Kingdom (African and Asian migrants), the United States (Iranian migrants, African Americans, and Asian Americans), and Canada (South Asian migrants) (Desai, 2004; Higbee, 2014).

Generally, works of diaspora cinema tend to use imagery to explore questions of national and state identities. Using a postcolonial lens, these films are capable of deconstructing and challenging the hegemonic identities that subjugate migrants in their everyday lives (including those presented through film). They may thus be considered political projects, works that present the lived realities of migrant and border communities in the current postcolonial era, capable of indirectly challenging the inequality, injustice, and violence experienced by marginalized communities (Summermatter, 2012).

This article departs from three arguments. *First*, owing to their significant numbers, immigrants in France may be identified as subjects with the same rights and ability to assert their interests in all aspects of everyday life. In the 1980s, a new cinematic genre emerged in France: *beur* cinema. The word *beur,* a phonetic reversal of the word *arabe* ("Arab"), is commonly used to refer to the second- and third-generation Maghrebis as well as the France-born children of migrant workers from North Africa (Hron, 2009, p. 88).

Even earlier, in the 1960s, African migrants in Lyon and Marseille had begun making documentaries that reflected their experiences (Bosséno, 2013, p. 51). The emergence of such films cannot be separated from the influence of contemporary politics and policies that proved detrimental to them. Even in the 1980s, few starring roles in French cinema were offered to immigrants (Higbee, 2007). Consequently, many directors—both migrant and French—began producing their own films, highlighting their own

perspectives of contemporary culture and politics. Such films include Mahmoud Zemmouri's *Prends 10.000 balles et casse-toi* (1981), which follows two young African immigrants who are forced to escort their parents to Algeria with nothing more than 10,000 francs; Mehdi Charef's *Le thé au harem d'Archimède* (1985), adapted from a novel, which explores a young immigrant's inner turmoil as he decides whether to remain in France or return to his homeland; and Jacques Champreux's *Bako, l'autre rive* (1979), which follows the tragic journey of a young man from Mali.

Second, immigrants' involvement in French social life strongly informs their willingness to integrate themselves in French society, as seen in the film *Bako*. At the time, the word *bako* was used as a euphemism for French job-seekers without any formal documentation (i.e. *sans papier*). In the film, the main character was forced to leave Mali during a lengthy drought, when his homeland experienced increased famine and cases of kwashiorkor. He travelled to France illegally, traversing Senegal and Spain before crossing an icy river at the French border. He experienced great difficulty, and although he successfully reached France, he ultimately died of exhaustion on a doorstep. All three of the aforementioned films depict migrants' difficulty living in their homelands and in France.

Third, the cultural integration of immigrants is only possible when facilitated by the state through its policies. Important in this process is the classification of immigrants at a country's national borders over time. According to Laayouni (2012, p. 30), immigrants in France fall into three categories: immigrants, naturalized immigrants, and *beurs*. These categories are used to distinguish between immigrants' viewpoints, characteristics, and experiences, recognizing that these will differ between first generation immigrants and their descendants. Such differences are also evident in creative works, including films, novels, poems, and short stories. They are particularly prominent

in, for example, Abdelkerim Bahloul's film *Le Thé à la menthe* (1984), which follows a young Algerian man who travels to France in search of employment. However, this plan is ultimately unsuccessful, and his mother must thus come to bring him back to his homeland. This man is not depicted as experiencing an identity crisis or as seeking to integrate himself in French society; rather, he is only shown as trying to survive.

Methods

This research emphasizes qualitative descriptive analysis and the result will be represented via description. This research is conducted in several steps: first, the bibliography research on French Policy toward immigrants including the speech of France Presidents. Next, determining the film under the *Beur* cinema category to be analyzed, a film entitled *Fatima* was chosen because this film deserves attention for its honest restraint in dealing with issues that are too often neglected until erupting into uncontrollable outrage (violence) both in film and in real life. This film was published after a series of incidents of violence in France linked to immigrants since early 2000 with a climax in early 2015 known as the Charlie Hebdo incident. Several *beur* films published during 2000-2015 discussed the life of immigrants, but most of them include violence or riots as part of immigrant's life, while Fatima captured the more intimate corner of daily life of immigrant women that is far from violent yet struggling in fulfilling their dreams. In this research, film is treated as text, reading is conducted repeatedly, initially reading is for images (scenes, shoots), then it is continued with reading the contents of the dialogues and the setting of scenes. After making observations, it is to classify the dialogue or text in the film to see which parts of the film represent the negotiation of cultural identity related to language mandatory policy and the conflict resolution offered. The third step, determining the approach or method

of descriptive analysis process of filtered data based on the film semiotics theory. The next analysis is the discussion on the representation of the negotiation of cultural identities and solutions of conflicts offered. The dialogue and image analysis will be discussed in the linguistic dimension of filmic facts. This study will view films as text in relation to emphasizing the singularity and totality of their markings which is called the analysis of the film text and emphasizes the theoretical perspective in an effort to explain the mechanisms of meaning production known as cinema language analysis.

Results and Discussion
Immigrants in French Politics

Migration cannot be separated from its historical and political aspects. Migrants, both forced and voluntary, must be able to adapt to and integrate into the systems in their host countries. Since 1948, the reunification of migrant families has been supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has also been incorporated into French law through Decree No. 76-383 of April 29, 1976, and the state has sought to facilitate stateless migrants and their families. However, France also passed a policy in 1974 that limits opportunities for unskilled immigrants.

In 1993, a left-wing party proposed policies intended to strengthen family reunification laws by imposing fines on undocumented families. The government also made efforts to control marriages between French nationals and migrants; to compel individuals who immigrated as children to leave France by a certain age; and to preclude foreign citizens from receiving social assistance if involved in any criminal cases. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), employment-driven migration has effects at the macro and micro level, with implications for nationalism, law, and culture at the former level and implications for families, communities, schools, and everyday dynamics at the latter. Similarly, individuals'

acceptance and integration into their host communities is often hindered, and thus they must create their own cultures. This has become particularly evident in France since the 1980s, when the government opened national borders in order to attract immigrants as a means of minimizing the economic consequences of an ongoing financial crisis.

According to Gallagher (2003, p. 34), the social and economic integration of migrants can be measured through five variables, first, the *Linguistic Integration*: language used in everyday life; fluency in the national language; language used at home and within the family, second, the *Labor Market Integration*: level of education, labor force participation (men and women), unemployment, mobility, individual income, household income, third, the *Civic/ Political Integration*: participation in political parties, associations, religious institutions, and communities, fourth, the *Educational Integration*: performance in school, choice of school, student– teacher relations and the last one, the *Residential Integration*: settlement patterns, mobility, asset ownership, market discrimination.

One major subject of debate has been the citizenship of immigrants. This is particularly problematic in France, where the prevalence of discourses that denigrate immigrants has hindered the acculturation process. From a political perspective, immigrants are indeed French citizens; however, from a social perspective, they continue to be seen as outsiders. To expedite integration, the French government has implemented an assimilation that has compelled immigrants to construct and reconstruct their cultural identity. This is particularly evident at the family level, where these identities are first created and practiced by families.

Immigrants in France, unlike in other members of the European Union, have no political rights until they become naturalized. As such, foreign nationals are absent from such political movements as presidential elections. It should be noted that, between 1983 and 1986, President François Mitterrand of the Socialist Party sought to promote a new paradigm on immigrants' political rights. His government proposed employing a color-blind approach to public policy, in which all citizens received equal rights before the law. This proposal was intended to challenge the continued anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Front National, an extreme-right party that supported zero-immigration policies and that sought to block immigrants' access to citizenship (Joppke, 1998). Mitterrand ultimately decided to enfranchise immigrant populations in legislative elections, which he believed would strengthen the party's support and maintain its power. Nonetheless, in their search for power, politicians have continued to use such social issues as immigration, national identity, and terrorism as political tools.

In the two years preceding the 1995 French presidential election, the issue of immigration was seemingly pushed aside by both leftist and rightist parties, thereby reducing tension over this issue. However, immigration remained a hot-button issue in the 1990s (Bertrand, 2006). After a Spanish migrant youth was struck and killed by a police cruiser, immigrants in Vaulx-en-Velin came into open conflict with the local police; a similar conflict occurred in 1991 after an Arab youth was shot dead by a clerk. Periodic unrest continued until 1995, when fighting in southern Lyon resulted in the death of Khaled Kelkal, a member of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA) who was suspected of being involved in attacks on the public transport systems in Paris and Lyon (Rossignol, 2016).

Into the 2000s, political unrest and anti-immigration rhetoric continued, exacerbated in part by the continued rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his Front National. Le Pen reached the second round of France's 2002 presidential election, drawing international attention. Ultimately, he lost to Jacques Chirac, a candidate backed by a

coalition of rightist parties who received 82.2% of votes. As president, Chirac implemented immigration policies designed to combat illegal immigration and to deport an estimated 25,000 migrants to their countries of origin (Marthaler, 2008, p. 389).

Around this time, France implemented several policies that significantly affected its Muslim population. In his capacity as Minister of Domestic Affairs, Nicolas Sarkozy—the leader of the center-right Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, UMP)—established the French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) to shape Muslims' religious activities and provide them with a vehicle for their aspirations. Not long afterwards, in 2004, Chirac prohibited the usage of religious symbols in schools, citing the constitutional principle of *laïcité* (the separation of Church and State). Within months, forty-seven students who refused to remove their hijabs had been expelled from school.

Such 'integration' programs were perceived as problematic by second-generation Arab immigrants, who refused them on principle. Unconvinced by the government's reason for forcing them to adapt themselves to their environment, second-generation Arab immigrants felt that they had been born in France and were equally part of its society. Likewise, they felt that, although equally protected by France's laws, discrimination was normalized to the extent that their opportunities to gain employment and establish social relations were limited. Ultimately, in October 2005, tensions reached a breaking point. Riots began after two youths in Clichy sous Bois died from electrocution while hiding from the French police in an electrical substation (Le Figaro, 2015). Over the course of three weeks, thousands of vehicles were destroyed, as were dozens of public facilities: schools, libraries, cinemas, and religious facilities (including three mosques and two castiles).

The policy regarding the obligation to master French in an article written by Vicent Climent-Ferrando (2015) states that the language policy is changing progressively from the goal of integrating immigrants into re-control. Climent-Ferrando writes about the obligation of immigrants to master the French language to enter France, live in, or naturalize in the country. Furthermore, he explained that the word *intégration*, which has been a consensus term used by various French political parties since the early 90s, began to be questioned in the early 2000s, giving rise to a new term, namely *"l'intégration républicaine"*. The emergence of the term is not just a matter of adding new words, but there are implications that are interpreted by the absence of integration other than republican integration and assuming that Republicans are integrative. *Intégration Républicaine* regards language as the center or the foremost thing. This was confirmed legally in a 2003 law on immigration policy so that since 2006, knowledge of the French language has become an obligation for immigrants who will enter French territory. This is in line with Home Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's statement, who stated that "*L'intégration républicaine* is about learning French, about respecting Republican law and values."

In 2008, the government established a specification of language requirements in the law stating that the language skills required are not only oral skills, but also writing skills. Although this requirement looks small, it actually expands the government's authority to supervise immigrants, because around 20% of immigrants in France are illiterate even though their mastery of spoken language is high, especially for those who came from the former French colony. Thus, the language proficiency requirement made most immigrants ineligible to enter France which then became a control for them. In 2006, through a speech delivered by Sarkozy, it was said that "*France must be able to sort out immigrants which*

it accommodates, in accordance with the goals and conditions". The idea of selection was the goal of the UMP, the party led by Sarkozy.

The idea of integration gradually turned into a technique of regulating immigration control which was administered by the state. The language acquisition requirement for integration implies that the failure of immigrants to fulfill these obligations may, in turn, justify the state from denying immigrants' access to France by not granting visas, refusing to extend residence permits, or even imposing deportation. Language, in this sense, is far from being a tool for integration, being an effective tool for immigrant control. Climent-Ferrando briefly concludes that as a new instrument, language can represent the thought of the French political elite to use the discourse of integration, participation and inclusion into a discourse of exclusion and control of immigrants that is potentially discriminatory.

Immigrant's Diaspora in *Beur* Cinema

Although France is home to many migrants from the country's former colonies, not all are perceived equally. Some are rarely presented as subjugated minorities, as in Jean-Marc Barr's *Lovers* (1999); Christian Vincent's *Sauve Moi* (2000), which depicts immigrants from southern Europe; Tony Gatlif's *Swing* (2002), which follows Italian migrants; and Phillipe Lioret's *Welcome* (2009), which focuses on West Asian migrants. High levels of inequality are evident in French cinema, most prominently among African, Antillian, Carribean, and Maghrebi (Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian) minorities. Opposition to such marginalization is, however, evident in *beur* cinema.

Two prominent categories are recognized in cinema: films that present a shared imagination and films that oppose the dominant ideology by depicting lived realities. In the first category is Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001), which presents an idealized view of France as a land of comfort and simplicity. Conversely, Matthieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) depicts rebellion and thuggery among France's marginalized population (Mouflard, 2014, p. 12).

Migrants receive important support from their family and community, which helps protect them from the difficulties of living in a new land. According to Wiese, Van Dijk, and Seddik (2009), children are particularly vulnerable to outside pressure, as they are expected to live within two cultures—each with its own standards for interpersonal relationships, language, emotional control, and etiquette—simultaneously. This has a significant psychological impact on children.

According to Aptekar and Stöcklin (1997), such cultural pressures subject children to significant stress. Where children are unable to cope with the heavenly burden of their dual identity, they may experience Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). Others may seek cultural avenues for coping with their anger, as exposure to different values enables them to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of their surroundings and their own situations. Finally, owing to their different cultures, children may be subjected to stigma in their interpersonal interactions.

However, it is not only children's psychology that is affected by their dual identities. Adults, too, are subjected to significant pressures, needing to work twice as hard to overcome the challenges of their new lives. Adults may lose their confidence, feel as though they are struggling alone, without any support systems or networks, and pass this anxiety on to other family members (particularly children).

In migrant families, linguistic difficulties are an unavoidable fact of life. According to research by Kirszbaum, Brinbaum, and Simon (2009, p. 21), some 20% of immigrants in France exclusively use their native tongue when speaking with their children; this is particularly common amongst migrants from Morocco and Turkey. Conversely, 54%

of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa exclusively use French when communicating with their children. Almost all individuals born to immigrant couples understand their parents' native tongue(s), at least to some extent. Conversely, individuals born of mixed French–immigrant marriages may not understand the language used by immigrant communities. In such families, French is the main language spoken at home, and as such migrant parents have difficulty teaching their native tongue to their children.

In the first scene of *Fatima*, the director depicts everyday life of Muslim immigrants in France, particularly the effects of the prohibition against veiling in French universities. It depicts a middle-aged woman, draped in a hijab, who is helping her unveiled daughter and her daughter's two friends find an apartment. This scene directly depicts how failing to integrate into French society or to adhere to the prohibition against wearing religious symbols can cause conflict. Local residents are shown to be prejudiced against veiled migrants, and thus driven to reject migrants, as Fatima's daughter experiences when one landlord cancels her contract.

Fatima, age 44, is a woman from North Africa who is raising her two daughters in Lyon, France. The eldest, Nesrine (age 18), is a first-year medical student, while the youngest, Souad, is a cosmopolitan girl of fifteen. Souad is embarrassed that her mother works as a housekeeper and refers to her derogatively as *une ânesse* ('a stupid beast')**.** For the love of her daughter, Fatima never returns her daughter's insults, but remains polite in her speech. Fatima continues to adhere to the Islamic values that she learned as a youth, and these values remain an important part of her identity (Holden, 2016). Nevertheless, she feels disappointed that Souad insists on mimicking her peers, becoming a delinquent who refuses to do her homework, fails to wear modest clothing, neglects her fasting during Ramadan, and speaks harshly to her mother and to other adults (Chang, 2015).

Fatima's relationship with her eldest daughter, Nesrine, is quite different. Unlike her sister, Nesrine attempts to follow her mother's teaching. Citing her medical studies, she politely rejects the flirtations of a young man on a train. Indeed, believing that she must alleviate her mother's financial burdens, she dedicates herself to her studies. Nevertheless, these studies—as well as her social environment—subjects Nesrine to significant psychological pressure. She recognizes that her mother has paid for her studies by working as a housekeeper, and that many of their neighbors are jealous of Fatima's success raising her daughter (Turan, 2016). These neighbors claim that Nesrine is arrogant, unwilling to speak with her fellow immigrants (Chang, 2015), and so dedicated to her studies that she has ignored her community. Nesrine is even accused of exploiting her daughter, of enjoying the fruits of Fatima's labors (Hanafy, 2016), and—ironically—of prioritizing her own future over that of her family.

Fatima does not heed these accusations, instead feeling proud of her daughter's accomplishments. Fatima feels complete, as she conveys to Nesrine in the following scene:

00:06:32,327–00:06:44,959 (*Fatima,* 2016)

Fatima : "*Moi, si ma fille réussi, mon bonheur, il est… comblé*"
Nesrine : "*Complet.*"
Fatima : "*Quoi?*"
Nesrine : "*Ton bonheur, il sera complet, pas comblé. C'est toi qui seras comblée.*"
Fatima : "If my daughter is a success, then my happiness is… content."
Nesrine : "Complete."
Fatima : "What?"
Nesrine : "Your happiness, Mother, would be complete. Not content.
You're the one who would be satisfied."

Based on the quoted dialogue above, Fatima declares her happiness; her feeling of joy is only achieved by the success of her daughters. She does not give further attention to the accusations by her peers. According to her, as long as her daughters achieve their dreams, Fatima feels satisfied.

Linguistic Obstacles and Solutions

At home, Fatima speaks Arabic; her daughters reply in French (Ellison, 2015). Souad, her youngest, is presented as navigating between her mother's culture and the dominant culture of France. She considers the latter to be more interesting, and thus attempts to distance herself from her "embarrassing" family. Mimicking her peers, she speaks aggressively and provocatively to her mother in French (Taubin, 2015), using her language as an anger-coping strategy; as mentioned previously, such strategies are commonly used by migrant children to alleviate the pressure they experience (Aptekar & Stöcklin, 1997). Souad's use of French rather than her mother's native tongue suggests her difficulty embodying the cultural values of her country of origin. She must use another language to express herself, to communicate her shame. Unlike Souad, however, Fatima does not feel embarrassed by her job; so long as she works diligently and remains honest, any employment—no matter how low—is honorable.

Fatima can speak French (albeit only haltingly), but she can only write in Arabic. Fatima attempts to learn French, taking literacy classes and complementing them with home studies. However, distraught by her difficulties learning French, including the simple mistakes she makes every day, Fatima ultimately relies on her own native tongue to express herself, her views, and her feelings (Wilkinson, 2016). She seeks to maintain a loving relationship with her children but cannot readily communicate these feelings to them. Instead, she writes her thoughts in her journal and expresses her love for her daughters

in her poetry. She writes in Arabic, using her words to challenge her continued othering in French society. At the same time, she attempts to creatively channel her anger and frustration, thereby gaining the power to challenge (rather than simply accept) her situation (Aguilar, 2016).

Before directing *Fatima*, Phillippe Faucon used his film *La Désintégration* (2011) to explore how migrants' failure to live comfortably in France leads to violence (Summermatter, 2012). This film was made before the Toulouse shootings of March 2012, before the *Charlie Hebdo* incident of January 7, 2015, and before the Hyper Cacher attack of January 9, 2015. In an interview, Faucon explained that he had been inspired to make *La Désintégration* after recognizing that domestic conflicts had often been exacerbated by failed integration efforts (Donadio, 2016).

In *Fatima*, Faucon depicts the protagonist's emotional struggles and conflicts. Fatima is portrayed by Soria Zeroual, an Algerian immigrant who arrived in France in 2002. She is not a professional actor, but works for an agency that provides homecare services to refugees in Lyon (Aftab, 2015). This background was likely a major factor in her casting, as it enabled Soria to draw on her own background and everyday experiences as an immigrant. For her natural performance, Soria was nominated for Best Actress at the 41st *César Awards* (Sanchez, 2016).

Fatima depicts the loneliness experienced by immigrants who seek to improve their livelihoods by working multiple jobs, often in silence. Fatima is depicted as a woman of few words when she is not with her daughters, and she is often seen alone, underscoring her isolation within society and the distance between Fatima and those around her (Hanafy, 2016). Language barriers and cultural gaps hinder her efforts to express herself or to assert her own identity, and she must thus keep to herself. Unlike other parents, she is unable to speak to teachers and discuss her daughters' school activities during

parent–teacher conferences. She is a simple housekeeper, far different from the well-to-do parents of her daughters, and this embarrasses Souad (Wilkinson, 2016).

Ultimately, Fatima is only able to express her anxieties and her dreams in Arabic, using the language to write journal entries and poetry. At one point, she reads an entry to Nesrine:

01:09:43,125 --> 01:10:13,541 (*Fatima*, 2016)

> *La peur commence à reculer et je reprends confiance en moi.*
> *Je suis seule avec ma responsabilité et mes filles.*
> *Seule avec les âmes que j'ai fait naître pour qu'elles vivent leur enfance et leur jeunesse.*
> *Seule avec une génération bouillonnante d'énergie et d'intelligence, de vie et de défi.*
> *Seule avec mes filles, face à cette richesse, cette grande responsabilité.*
> *C'est cela mon intifada.*

> My fear begins to ebb, and I begin to regain my confidence
> I am alone with my responsibilities and my daughters
> Alone with those souls I'd birthed, so they can enjoy their childhoods and their youths
> Alone with a generation filled with energy and intelligence, life and defiance
> Alone with my daughters, facing this blessing, this great responsibility.
> This is my intifada.

In this poem, Fatima depicts the ongoing struggle of two generations of Muslim immigrants in France. Fatima, the mother, the first-generation migrant, is a courageous woman who strives to improve her daughters' lives and is even willing to take menial jobs to realize this goal. Fatima's vision of the future—one in which she and her daughters are happy—is her intifada (Miller, 2017). She thus works diligently to earn enough money to pay for her daughters' education, to improve their lot in life.

Nevertheless, they are separated by a generational and cultural gap, limiting their ability to understand each other's way of thinking. This is particularly evident in Fatima's arguments with her daughter, Souad. Fatima rarely has the opportunity to express herself, to make her daughters understand her reasoning. As such, communication between them is lacking, and they have difficulty finding solutions to their problems. However, despite speaking French only haltingly, Fatima is fluent in spoken and written Arabic and uses this language to express her personal thoughts and dreams; it is in this manner that audiences can gain a more intimate understanding of her character.

Over the course of their struggle, Fatima and her family are continuously belittled by their peers. Every mistake is highlighted. Particularly vulnerable to vicious rumors is Nesrine, a second-generation immigrant who must carry the burden of her family's hopes and dreams. She studies medicine diligently, continuously striving to improve herself and her knowledge, often with the support of her mother, boyfriend, and her roommates. It appears that, despite her family's economic circumstances, she will realize her goal of becoming a doctor (Ellison, 2015). However, other members of the immigrant community do not support her; rather, they spread vicious rumors rather than support her, other members of the community do not support Nesrine; rather, they spread vicious rumors about her. Initially belittled for being the daughter of a housekeeper, as Nesrine becomes a university student and improves her social standing, she is branded as arrogant, as seeking only to achieve her own goals, and as exploiting the sacrifices of her mother (Wilkinson, 2016).

Fatima's loneliness is again presented at the end of the film, when she visits the university

alone to read Nesrine's test results. There, where hours previously young men and women had jumped for joy and shed tears of sorrow, Fatima silently looks over her daughter's results and achievements (Hanafy, 2016). She sounds out the words announcing Nesrine's success, a validation of her years of struggle. Fatima receives the greatest gift a mother could ask for, and for the first time in the film a smile crosses her lips (Wilkinson, 2016).

Conclusion

It has long been argued that immigrants' failure to integrate into their new communities is driven primarily by issues of documentation and validation. This study, conversely, shows that immigrants are also hindered by their difficulty adapting to new languages as well as differences in their everyday lives, teachings, and interactions with their diaspora community, the local residents, and peers. The film presents immigrants as ordinary people, whose lives ebb and flow together with their fellow French and global citizens.

By dealing with the everyday issues of immigrants, the film *Fatima* greatly contributes to French cinematic discourse. It does not simply depict the racism experienced by immigrants, but rather it provides an intimate portrait of them and their struggles. It presents them not as an indefinite "other" but as ordinary people who lead ordinary lives. This message resonated with audiences, as evidenced by the positive reviews and awards *Fatima* received. This film may be seen as promoting integration, as cultivating an understanding of the difficult struggles experienced by immigrants as well as the achievements possible through perseverance. By learning about the culture of their host country, as well as by continuously learning about its society and culture, they can improve their lives in France and become French while still maintaining their original identities. *Fatima* shows that language barriers are not impenetrable walls, through

which individuals cannot express their emotions or their beliefs. Rather, by continuously navigating between their diverse cultures, immigrants can transform themselves.

This article has focused on the film *Fatima*, which was produced and screened after a series of violent incidents captured the attention of the French people. Rather than emphasizing this violence, the film highlights the everyday struggles of a mother and her daughters, as well as the language barriers and access gaps that limit their ability to fully integrate into their host country. Importantly, it is but one of many films that present their own ideas and their views of reality. This article thus recommends further study into these films and their portrayal of first- and second-generation immigrants.

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