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Identities in Migrant Cinema: The Aesthetics of European Integration

Jalene Betts

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.¹

Stuart Hall, 1996

I. Introduction

Although much progress was made in Europe over the last half century with regard to the integration of markets and the near-vaporization of national borders, recent years show that, contrary to the illusion of an “enlightened” continent free from the racism of the past, ethnicity continues to play a role in European culture. As demonstrated by disputes in the Balkan region over Kosovo’s independence, debates on the acceptance of new member states into the European Union (in particular Turkey’s application for admittance), and growing concerns over immigration in the Netherlands and France, ethnicity seems to prove itself as a thing of the present, not the past. Media coverage of the “problems” of Islam—unemployed “Arab” youths roaming the streets, young girls forced to wear head-coverings by their “sexist” relatives—is a reality, whether or not the claims made by such representations are valid.

In recent years, many scholars have debated about the effects of globalization on the so-called “European identity.” These debates are not limited to academia; everyone seems to have an opinion. While some academics such as Ulrich Beck promote a more benevolent, cosmopolitan vision of Europe, there has also been the development of right-wing nationalist movements arguing against the admission of foreigners into their countries. Right-wing nationalist movements in both France, under Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the Netherlands, under Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders, have targeted North African immigration

as a major cause of many problems in their respective countries. It is in some ways surprising that these sentiments have arisen in these two countries, as the Netherlands was until recently known for its highly tolerant nature while France is famous for the ideals of the French Revolution, *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*, and consequently as a *terre d'accueil*, or "land of welcome."

In both France and the Netherlands, the film industry is involved in the representation of ethnic identities from the North African diaspora. *Post-migrant*² is the description I use to represent films of this genre, meaning films focusing on the lives of first- and second-generation North African immigrants in Europe. They are sometimes, but not always, written or directed by people of the corresponding heritage. In France, the *beur cinéma* movement has gained force since its debut in the 1980s in both the number of films focusing on the lives of people of North African extraction in France and in the number of directors of North African origin producing the films. In the Netherlands, political and social leaders like Geert Wilders and Theo van Gogh have used film to promote their views on immigration, while other directors contribute to the new *moero movie* movement. The notion of a European identity and the surrounding debate are thus important not only in terms of cohesion between different European nation-states and between the European Union and its neighbors, but also within the different member nations themselves. The definition of European identity is a contested, important issue.

Why has this dialogue concerning European identities erupted with more vigor in recent years? Why have both political leaders and immigrants chosen film as a medium of expression for their opinions? What identities are being represented and by whom? This essay is the culmination of my research while studying at the University of Paris-Saint Denis during the autumn of 2007 in France and Maastricht University in the Netherlands during spring of 2008. It will thus explore the following two research questions: In this age of multiculturalism, how are European national cinemas redefining our understanding of European national identities, and what common aspects transcend separate national cinemas to support a "European" identity in post-migrant cinema?

The essay is divided into three major parts. The first section focuses on research conducted during the fall semester in Paris, France. Here I introduce the universalistic notions in the French national identity, sketch the history of North African immigration to France, discuss

the rise of *beur* cinema, and explore notions of identity in these films. Part two gives attention to the research conducted during the spring semester in Maastricht, the Netherlands. It touches lightly upon the history of North African immigration to the Netherlands, underlines the importance of the current debate about the Dutch national identity, reveals the nuances of the recent rise of the *mocro* movie movement, and elaborates on certain notions of Dutch-Moroccan identity in *mocro* films. The conclusion then addresses these issues in relation to globalization.

II. Paris: The City of Lights, Camera, and Action

A. Universalistic Notions in French Identity

France is a country that proudly embraces its contributions to the ideals of the European Enlightenment. Since the French Revolution in the 18th century, "France has prided itself on being the land of equality, founded on an abstract concept of universal citizenship which renders ethnic, gendered, religious or class difference irrelevant."³ This notion of "universal citizenship" is related to that of global citizenship promoted by the Macalester College Institute for Global Citizenship in that both ideals are meant to be open to anyone and everyone. That is to say, neither concept presupposes who is able to be a citizen based upon racial, sexual, or cultural differences. However, while global citizenship advocates the idea of being a citizen of the world or cosmopolitan, the notion of universal citizenship advanced by the French Revolution was intended to promote the idea that anyone throughout the world who so desired could be a *French* citizen, as long as he⁴ adhered to the principles of the Republic.⁵

However, recent years increasingly put into question France's ability or even desire to uphold the principle of universal citizenship. This is demonstrated particularly during the last third of the 20th century in relation to Arab immigrants in France. The growth of racism and conflicting nationality laws in 1970s French society exacerbated ethnic tensions, increasing the hostile climate toward immigrants and their descendents.⁶ In the last few decades, French academics and the media have used the term *la deuxième génération*, or "second generation," to denote people of Maghrebi descent whose parents immigrated to France. More recently, use of *la troisième génération*, "third generation," continues to foster the notion that these people who, like their par-

ents before them, were born and raised in France, are still not French. Thus, even the terminology used by the French discourse on identity perpetuates the racial notion of French identity, rather than the more universalistic one that the Republic likes to think it supports.

In *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France*, Carrie Tarr contributes to this debate about multi-ethnicity in France and the consequent transformation of the French identity by exploring the role of filmmaking in the promotion of voices from marginalized communities. Essentially, she argues that through the fostering of identity voiced by the ethnic “Other,” *beur* films encourage the development of a counter-discourse that allows for new ways of conceptualizing difference.⁷ The end of this section of the essay will explore her work on *beur* cinema in France, while the next main section will discuss the case of *moero* cinema in the Netherlands.

B. A History of Non-Integration

France’s aforementioned “universalistic” notions of identity and its reputation as a land of welcome based on the principles of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* have significantly deteriorated in the last half century, undermined by the country’s treatment of North African immigrants following the Second World War.⁸ The history of immigration to France was generally one of integration, despite occasional tensions between immigrants and nationals over employment and housing.⁹ This was the case with the many Italian, Polish, and Spanish immigrants that entered the country in the latter half of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century.¹⁰ However, according to Benjamin Stora, these groups of immigrants succeeded while immigrants from the Maghreb did not—due in large part to the legacy of French colonialism in North Africa.¹¹

According to Karina Slimani-Direche, in neither French nor Algerian literature on immigration is there a distinction made between Arab and Berber immigrants.¹² Yet this distinction is important to make, as it explains the further augmentation of ethnic tensions between immigrants and French nationals. Historically, Berbers from the Kabyle region in Algeria, the Republic’s most important colony,¹³ were the first immigrants to enter France for temporary work in industrial factories. Overpopulation and an insufficient traditional economy in Kabyle meant that young, unemployed males were eager to leave the region and find work to support themselves and their families. Consequently,

these *travailleurs coloniaux* represented three-quarters of immigrants in 1934, and over half in 1950.¹⁴ Furthermore, Berbers throughout the Maghreb were an ethnic minority discriminated against in many ways. For example, in Algeria, Arabs were given certain rights that would, depending on the French government of the time, fluctuate between a near equality with white European settlers (considered French citizens) and lower levels of French tolerance, but the Berbers were nearly always persecuted and never considered citizens. This could only negatively impact their social standing in the context of the flood of immigrants to France.

As registered earlier, immigrants from the Maghreb initially came to France to perform manual labor on farms in the countryside and in industrial factories in urban areas. According to Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, in the period known as *Les Trente Glorieuses* or the “Thirty Glorious Years” of immigration (between 1945 and 1975), many hundreds of thousands of manual workers came from North Africa to France to earn a living for their families, whom they initially left at home in their countries of origin. At the outset, these workers were a welcome relief to the French economy and society, which had suffered severely during World War II. However, the oil embargo of 1973 and the consequent oil crisis had a major impact on the lives of both immigrants and nationals. Post-1974, France was overcome by a wave of xenophobia due to the pressures of unemployment and housing. Immigrants were viewed as a problem, and new policies prevented potential immigrants from legally entering the country. Also during this period *la regroupement familial*, or family reunification, began. Families of immigrants working in France were brought to the country and housed on the outskirts, or *banlieues*, of major cities. Furthermore, France’s colonial history in North Africa and the war over Algerian independence left a strain of deeply entrenched racism against “Arabs” among many French people.¹⁵

In recent media coverage of society and politics, the animus is demonstrated by the rise of the extreme right-wing Front National, set up in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen. According to a BBC profile report from 2002, Le Pen contends that the message about immigration that he promoted thirty years ago is still relevant today. He is quoted as saying, “Massive immigration has only just begun. It is the biggest problem facing France, Europe and probably the world. We risk being submerged.”¹⁶ More recent still is the never-ending series of *affaires de foulard*, in which Muslim girls insist on their right to wear Islamic

headscarves in France's schools. These well-publicized controversies have called into question the relationship between France's secular institutions and citizens' religious and cultural rights. Carrie Tarr notes further that, "The wearing of the *hijab* is seen as so threatening to the Republican principles of universalism and laicity, as well as to the freedom of women, that in February 2004 the national assembly voted to ban such symbols in school rather than encourage tolerance for signs of difference."¹⁷ Thus, at least in this case, France chose to hide signs of difference in an attempt to smother the potentially threatening identities that went along with them, rather than cultivate tolerance and promote the aspects of those identities that adhered to the principles of the Republic.

In *Mémoires d'Immigrés*, author and director Yamina Benguigui explores the mysterious phenomenon that characterized first-generation immigrants from North Africa throughout France: their absolute silence about their experiences, both in France and in the Maghreb. In particular, she emphasizes how the second generation, better educated and raised in France, is not only unwilling to perform the same manual labor as their parents, but also unwilling to continue their ritual silence.¹⁸ Tarr concludes that the repressive political and social climate after 1974 forced *beurs* to organize—to develop associations aimed at combating racism and intolerance.¹⁹ It was in this climate in the 1980s that *beur* filmmakers first began to produce films that dealt with the problems of integration in France.

C. The Rise of *Beur* Cinema

It is essential to first define and discuss the significance of two French terms in relation to this essay: *beur* and *banlieue*. The term *beur* comes from the Parisian inverse-slang (*verlan*) form of the word "Arab." It stereotypically refers to a young, usually unemployed, second-generation male (*beurette* for female) of North African descent who lives or grew up in the *banlieues* (suburban ghettos) surrounding Paris. It is important to note that, in contrast to suburbs in the United States, French suburbs did not develop as a refuge for middle or upper class citizens who wished to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life. Rather, they often began as *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns, originally built to house foreign migrant workers, effectively separating and isolating them from the French upper classes living in the city itself.²⁰ Thus began the tendency to marginalize immigrants by pushing them to the periphery—

not only of the city itself, but also of the minds of French nationals for whom the immigrants were insignificant manual laborers. During and after decolonization, *beurs* increasingly became the most stigmatized ethnic minority in France, due in large part to both their high visibility and the legacy of decolonization.²¹

Historically, the representation of characters of North African descent in French films followed one of two representational schemas: either they were the “bad guys” (the drug dealers, prostitutes, purse-snatchers), or they were victims peripheral to the central character. In either case, Carrie Tarr claims that in these films they, “are the objects of, and contained within, a white eurocentric gaze and discourse which...‘takes for granted and “normalizes” the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism, without necessarily even thematizing those issues directly [*sic*].”²² She argues further that French cinema gravitated toward the marginalization, if not outright silencing, of “troubling postcolonial others”²³ until the comparatively recent development of the *beur* cinema movement, begun in the early 1980s. During this time, *beur* directors and authors independently started producing small-scale works. These low-budget works, often autobiographically inspired, focused on the identity crises and socio-economic difficulties experienced by second-generation immigrants.²⁴

The first full-length feature film, widely recognized as the official beginning of the *beur* cinema movement, was *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, written and directed by Mehdi Charef. This 1985 film, based on Charef's book, follows the story of Madjid, the son of Algerian immigrants, and his *français de souche* (ethnic French) friend Pat as they roam the streets of Paris and its *banlieues*. Having just completed high school, they search for employment. However, there are an endless number of obstacles that stand in their way. One such barrier is the thinly veiled racism of employers, which results in Madjid's rejection most of the time. The French ideal of equal opportunity seems not to apply to him. Even when he does finally manage to find an employer who is willing to hire him, he runs into a second hurdle that he cannot find a way around: his Algerian nationality. Although raised in France his entire life, Madjid does not possess French citizenship papers. While the most obvious answer would seem to be for him to apply for French citizenship, he is prevented from doing so by his mother, who wants him to remain Algerian and not disgrace the family. Meanwhile, Madjid is pressured to find a way to make money because his father cannot work. Pat, on the other hand, fails at finding a job mostly due

to his own laziness and lack of effort. Thus, the two boys resort to various sorts of delinquency: trafficking prostitutes, pick-pocketing in the metro system, and stealing cars.

In his dreary and dismal depiction of the world of the Parisian *banlieues*, Charef seems to criticize French society for its indifference to the difficulty of people's lives on the margins of society. Yet at the same time, Charef does not allow his characters (neither *beur* nor French) to simply become victims of the society that they live in. All characters in the film face difficult situations that they choose to deal with in different ways. The problem seems to be that no matter what they choose, whether it be on the right side of the law or not, they cannot manage to escape the realities of *banlieue* life. The French ideal of freedom is an illusive dream that morphs slowly into a nightmare. Rather than having the freedom and ability to make the "right" choices and work upward out of despair, the characters are slowly sucked into a downward-spiraling free fall no matter what choices they make. They are set "free" by society, pushed to the edges, released and forgotten, abandoned and let drop to the bottom.

In the end, Madjid, Pat, and their friends steal a car and drive to the ocean in an attempt to escape from the inevitability of life in the *banlieues*. The police soon catch up with them, however. Unlike his friends who all flee (including Pat), Madjid seems to come to the conclusion that he is fighting a fruitless battle. He allows himself to be arrested. However, the last shot of the film shows Pat waiting at the side of the road for the police car, holding his thumb out like a hitchhiker and waiting for them to pick him up, too. He is unwilling to lose the sense of brotherhood he cultivated through his friendship with Madjid. It is more important than freedom, uniting them even in their despair and giving them a sense of hope.

Le thé au harem d'Archimède is a very good example of *beur* cinema²⁵ for many reasons. The fact that the screenplay was written and directed by a man of North African origin (specifically Algerian) demonstrates the first steps of self-representation taken by *beur* directors. The film incorporates the theme of problematic identity in *beur* culture, posing questions as to whether the nature of identity is inherently innate or something you choose. Other common themes in *beur* cinema are family, friendship, immigration, unemployment, and delinquency. Most importantly, this particular film incorporates the emergence of identity in *beur* cinema as not only problematic, but also *fluid*.²⁶ Charef challenges the one-dimensional French stereotypes of *beurs* as either

criminals or victims, allowing for the development of a deeper comprehension of the subject's identity. The complexity and mastery of the work is that it shows how a single subject's identity can be made up of multiple identities, held together despite their seemingly contradictory nature.

While the importance of *beur* filmmaking lies in its shift away from the specific gaze employed by the majority when looking at the situation of immigrants, and thus provides a new perspective from the immigrant's point of view, there is a major critique of *beur* filmmaking related to both this perspective and to identity. The fact that this new perspective is labeled as *beur* filmmaking itself threatens to lock these writers, directors, and performers into roles that produce a sort of typecasting and type-directing. In other words, rather than allowing for varied, constantly changing identities, these actors become entrenched in the discourse of films about socioeconomic difference and ethnicity.²⁷ This critique is voiced by director Karim Dridi expressing his concern about the attempt to enclose a certain cinematic genre within specific boundaries and rules, which he believes would be dangerous for cinema itself.²⁸ Indeed, his words allude to the threat of new cinematic territories where the work of directors and actors cannot cross borders freely—a reversion back to xenophobic restriction policies rather than freedom.

III. Maastricht: The Netherlands' Muse²⁹

A. North African Immigration to the Netherlands

As with France, decolonization played a major role in migration to the Netherlands. According to Dr. Marlou Schrover from the Universiteit Leiden, the circumstances favoring migration during the period between the 1950s and 1980s in the Netherlands were somewhat similar to those of France and its former colonies. Schrover highlights how in both Surinam and Indonesia factors including both Dutch citizenship and a Dutch education enabled immigrants from these former colonies to migrate easily to the Netherlands.³⁰ In addition, prior to its recognition of Indonesia's independence, the Netherlands went through a bloody military intervention in an attempt to preserve the country as a colony. In the end, this affected the opinions of the Dutch populace on migrants from Indonesia and immigration to the Netherlands in general. Furthermore, the long-term consequences of immigration to the

Netherlands included terrorist attacks committed by Moluccan youth in the mid-1970s as a reaction to their environment of isolation caused by the policies of the Dutch government at that time.³¹

Although many of the problems of decolonization experienced by the French were similar to those of the Dutch, the history of North African immigration to the Netherlands is not as prominent as that to France. This is because the Dutch did not colonize North Africa. Thus, North African immigration to the Netherlands was primarily economic and based on labor needs rather than an effect of decolonization.³² Jean-Claude Chesnais, head of the Social Economics Department at the Institute for Demographic Studies in Paris, estimates the number of foreign workers in the Netherlands originally from countries in the Maghreb in 1975 as follows (in thousands): Algeria: 0; Morocco: 28; Tunisia: 1; Maghreb: 9; and Turkey: 38. France had the following figures (in thousands): Algeria: 420; Morocco: 165; Tunisia: 90; Maghreb: 675; and Turkey: 35.³³ Here, it becomes obvious how many more immigrants from the Maghreb settled in France than in the Netherlands during the *Trente Glorieuses*, the thirty-year period after 1945 in which Europe, and especially France, received many foreign workers from North Africa.

More recently, Ayman Zohry cites Moroccans as the largest North African nationality among the migrants in Europe, represented at fifty-six percent. In addition, nearly fifty percent of these migrants are concentrated in France, while the rest are dispersed throughout Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, and Italy. As France's former colony and its most important partner in immigration, Algerians are the second largest North African population in Europe at thirty-one percent, ninety percent of whom are in France. Tunisians rank third at slightly over thirteen percent of the North African population in Europe, with seventy-five percent living in France and fifteen percent in Italy.³⁴

Like many other researchers, Zohry does not mention the Netherlands when describing migrant population figures in Europe. This is most likely due to the smaller number of North African migrants in the Netherlands when compared to countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain. However, this does not mean that North African immigration (and immigration in general) to the Netherlands did not have a significant impact on the country. A second factor may explain the traditional neglect of researchers to pay attention to North African immigration in the Netherlands. It is the fact that the immigra-

tion generally happened later, with migrants moving through other receiving countries first (such as France), before moving to the Netherlands, thus affecting the Dutch awareness and opinions of immigration later than in other countries.

Unlike France, where labor migration from Morocco and Tunisia was regulated in the early 1960s, labor migration from Morocco was not officially regulated by the Dutch government until 1969, with the regulation of Tunisia following in 1970.³⁵ Family reunification also happened later in the Netherlands than in France; families of guest workers were brought to the Netherlands in the 1980s. High youth unemployment was one of the major concerns of this time period. As mentioned above, internal migration of North African immigrants between European states was made easier by the Schengen agreement in 1985, in which France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Luxembourg dissolved migration restrictions within their interior borders.³⁶

According to Chavi Keeney Nana of the Migration Policy Institute, integration of immigrants into Dutch society did not become a major political issue until the rise of Pim Fortuyn's Lijst (LPF) party in 2002.³⁷ Originally immigration policies in the Netherlands followed a relatively multicultural approach, aiming to involve immigrants in Dutch society while at the same time recognizing and accepting their differences.³⁸ The notion of *verzuiling*, or "pillarization," that dominated Dutch society for a significant portion of the 20th century was intended to promote a multicultural society. Essentially, the idea was that each religious or social group would have its own political party, trade unions, schools, broadcasting stations, newspapers, and other associations, enabling plural societies to function independently in the same country without deep mixing. This appeared to work with the demographic make-up of the Netherlands that dominated during the previous time period,³⁹ which was a predominantly Christian society, with the separation of Protestants and Catholics, socialists and liberals. It was not as successful, however, when applied to the case of Muslim immigrants, both those from Indonesia and those from North Africa.

In response to the growing diversity in the Netherlands (made apparent not only by higher numbers of minority populations but also by media representations of the effects of globalization in the Netherlands and in other countries), Dutch concerns have multiplied over topics ranging from the economy and job markets, to education, to terrorism. This is shown markedly by the support Pim Fortuyn's party received for its policies on the suspension of new immigration

to the Netherlands and, in contrast to the previous pluralist notions of society, the integration of immigrants into “Dutch” society.⁴⁰ Following the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim extremist, the fear of Muslim minority youth radicalization in the Netherlands drove Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk to set up a roundtable discussion on minority participation in Dutch society, the Broad Initiative for Social Cohesion. According to Keeney Nana, “While the number of actual Islamic extremists is small...its support base is perceived to be large, fueled in part by the poor socio-economic standing of minority groups, discrimination, and their outsider status in the mainstream Dutch society.”⁴¹ In response to this initiative, a large number of social organizations expanded their efforts to involve minorities in Dutch society, focusing particularly on the development of youth leadership through education and employment. Two concepts in particular emphasized interaction and involvement between marginalized groups and the mainstream population: “bonding” and “citizenship.”⁴² This debate essentially centers on the notion of what constitutes Dutch identity.

B. The Recent Discovery of a “Dutch” National Identity

As the nation that legalized same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, and marijuana use, the Netherlands was traditionally viewed as a country that would tolerate almost anything. Over the years, the Dutch tendency for finding compromises between opponents through a seemingly endless form of negotiation has become known as the *poldermodel*. This propensity for compromise and agreeing to meet halfway manifested itself in the pluralistic tradition of socio-political pillarization that the Dutch cultivated from the late 1800s to the 1960s. As previously mentioned, society was divided by denominations: Catholics, Protestants, and to a lesser extent, Socialists and Liberals. According to Wiebe Nauta of Maastricht University, pillarization was aimed at combining group-based autonomy with consultation and compromise at the elite level.⁴³ Despite this intense segregation, these different segments of Dutch society coexisted peacefully for many years. While pillarization’s importance decreased with the country’s increasing secularization and individualization from the 1960s onward, the institutional legacies of this system are still seen in the Netherlands today.⁴⁴

In the context of globalization, the Netherlands is experiencing many societal changes similar to those in the rest of Western Europe. The flood of immigration from North Africa in the last few decades has put pressure on the society's ability to cope with racial, ethnic, and religious differences as people compete for educational and employment opportunities. Furthermore, columnist Molly Moore of the *Washington Post* conveys the notion that this situation is exacerbated by worries over terrorism, the infiltration of organized crime into the (legal) prostitution and drug trade, and Holland's image as "an international tourist destination for drugs and sexual debauchery."⁴⁵ She cites James Kennedy, Professor of Contemporary History at the Free University of Amsterdam, who contends that, "There is an uneasiness about globalization that the Dutch don't have control over their own country anymore."⁴⁶ Thus, globalization is pressuring the Netherlands in ways that compel its citizens to question their perceptions of Dutch identity in relation to external forces and opinions. In other words, the nation is struggling to redefine its core values.

As noted earlier, the current political discourse in the Netherlands has shifted from a multicultural stance on the integration of Muslims toward a tougher, more one-sided assimilatory approach.⁴⁷ The immense support for immigrant integration policies that do not tolerate different cultures or religions (particularly Islam) is evidenced in the rapid rise to political power of Pim Fortuyn, an anti-immigration, anti-Muslim politician who sharply criticized what he called "the Islamic dilution of Dutch values."⁴⁸ His murder just before the 2002 election by an Animal Rights activist, as well as that of the prominent film director Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-Moroccan fundamentalist two years later, have been cited repeatedly in debates on these topics. In *Murder in Amsterdam*, Ian Buruma explores the cases of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh in relation to these issues and comes to one conclusion that touches on the importance of youth and alludes to the identity crisis of second- and third-generation immigrants:

Tolerance, then, has its limits even for Dutch progressives. It is easy to be tolerant of those who are much like ourselves, whom we feel we can trust instinctively, whose jokes we understand, who share our sense of irony...It is much harder to extend the same principle to strangers in our midst, who find our ways as disturbing as we do theirs, *who watch fearfully as their own children, caught in between, slip from the paternal grasp into a new and bewildering world* [my emphasis].⁴⁹

In general, it is accepted that the increasing presence of Islam in Europe today is a result of immigration. However, views differ on the nature of Muslim identities in Europe and their relationship to “European” secular modes of thinking. The adherence to the “Clash of Civilizations” theory between Islam and Western Europe is the most basic point of divergence, with academics such as Jytte Klausen, Ian Buruma, and Amartya Sen on one side, and on the other the adherents favoring Pim Fortuyn’s anti-Muslim notions, namely, Rita Verdonk, Geert Wilders, and Jean-Marie Le Pen.

C. *Mocro* Movies: Bang or Bust?

Unlike *beur* cinema in France, *mocro* cinema only developed in the last decade in the Netherlands. The word “ *mocro*” is Dutch slang for “Moroccan” and appears to have been first used to refer to specific films in 2005. While the historical use of the term isn’t as developed and discussed as the French term *beur*, *mocro* would be the most accurate translation of the term into Dutch. Following the success of native Dutch director Albert ter Heerdt’s *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* (*Hush Hush Baby!*) in 2004, Karin Wolfs explored issues of *mocro* authorship in an article for the Dutch film magazine, *Film Krant*. Similar to the French film industry, Dutch films in the past represented North Africans in only minor roles, as either criminals or victims. According to Wolfs, ter Heerdt emphasized how, in the past, films about immigration were referred to as “box-office poison” by both directors and producers alike.⁵⁰ Like *beur* cinema, the development of *mocro* films seemed to somewhat coincide with the Dutch struggle over identity, perhaps as a reaction to growing tensions around immigration and xenophobia. This is evidenced by the fact that it closely followed the rise to power of nationalist parties such as Pim Fortuyn’s Lijst. However, there are two distinct differences between these two film genres.

First, unlike Mehdi Charef’s *Le thé au harem d’Archimède* and other more serious films realized nearly twenty years earlier, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* is a light-hearted comedy that plays on the stereotypes and idiosyncrasies of both the native Dutch and Moroccan immigrant families.⁵¹ A second significant difference concerns the question of *mocro* authorship. For the most part, the directors are all native Dutch whose families have lived in the Netherlands for generations. Even the most involved ethnically North African individuals in the Dutch film industry have not yet directed a film or written a screenplay without the

contribution of native Dutch directors and writers. This is the case even with Mimoun Oaïssa, who co-wrote *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* with Albert ter Heerdt, contributed additional dialogue to Martin Koolhoven's 2005 release *Het Schnitzelparadijs*, and performed lead roles in both of the previously mentioned films as well as ter Heerdt's 2007 release *Kicks*, but has not yet had the opportunity to write a screenplay or direct a film on his own.⁵² Despite these differences, both *beur* and *moacro* cinema tend to focus, on the one hand, on the stereotypes and "otherness" of North Africans in Europe, and on the other hand, on the problems and successes of integration.

After the success of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* demonstrated the profitability of comedies about Moroccan-Dutch relations, interest in making *moacro* films skyrocketed.⁵³ Yet there is still a distinct absence of Dutch-Moroccan or Dutch-Turkish directors, screenwriters, and producers in Dutch cinema. One straightforward answer to this puzzle might be the problem of scale. According to David Deprez of the Maastricht Lumière Cinema, there is a near-total lack of multicultural aspects in Dutch cinema because the production scene is so small. There is only one Film Commission giving funds to filmmakers. Fehd el Ouali believes this should not be a major cause for concern for the reason that a Moroccan screenwriter or director would be more familiar with Moroccan idiosyncrasies, gestures, or expressions.⁵⁴ However, Mimoun Oaïssa warns against such generalizations by claiming that there is no Moroccan community in the Netherlands, only the Dutch community.⁵⁵ Yet this might be beside the point. The emphasis here should be on the ability of Moroccan-Dutch individuals to develop identities that fit who they are, without being restricted to stereotypical subject positions created by the dominant discourse on Dutch identity. As seen in France, even *with* second-generation North African screenwriters and directors, it is still difficult for actors and writers to escape typecasting and essentialist labeling of film genres. With the lack of Moroccan directors, screenwriters, and producers in the Netherlands, it will be that much harder for Dutch-Moroccan immigrants to break out of the stereotypes.

Albert ter Heerdt's *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* demonstrates the continual and unfazed use of stereotypes in Dutch cinema. Mimoun Oaïssa plays the protagonist, Ap, who expresses his disgust at the idea of having to live in Morocco (filmed as a land of desert without cities or trees), and relief that his father and mother moved to the Netherlands. The plot revolves around the escapades of Ap's family, varying from his mother's comedic attempts to seek revenge on his father for mistreating her;

his sister Liela's continual rejections of marriage proposals and secret relationship with a native Dutch actor; his younger brother taking pictures of Muslim girls with their headscarves off at school and blackmailing them for money to not show their fathers; his older brother's affair with a fellow policewoman; and his friends' plans to rob a bank. Meanwhile, Ap himself struggles to search for a job—but not too hard. He falls asleep waiting for his interview, expresses ridiculous expectations at the local job center, believing that they will call Steven Spielberg to offer him a role in a film, and, when he finally does have the job he claims to have dreamed of, he arrives an hour late on his first day, having forgotten about daylight savings time. To top it off, Ap sneaks out of his own wedding after realizing the commitment it will take.

Mimoun's character in *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* differs significantly from Madjid in *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, particularly in the treatment of his unemployed status. Ap is not seen as victimized at all. Though he spends the entire film searching for a job, even when he gets one he is portrayed as completely incompetent and lazy, thus losing it again in the end. At most, the message the film manages to convey is that this kid just wants to hang out with his friends at the bar and play pool—and marry a lusty Moroccan virgin. In *Het Schnitzelparadijs*, the main character appears to have the same issue with laziness; he has a good education, is intelligent, and his father wants him to be a doctor, yet he chooses instead to wash dishes in the local hotel kitchen. Thus, these films emphasize that stereotypical Moroccan laziness is what prevents these Moroccan youths from finding good employment, rather than raising questions of racism or identity.

In regard to the production of *macro* films, Mimoun Oaïssa points to four states of improvement with regard to immigrants' image. In the first stage, no "foreigners" are seen onscreen. Foreigners are present in the second stage, but they are seen only by "white eyes" and given cliché roles. Stage three represents a deepening of those clichés as in *Shouf Shouf Habibi!*. In the final stage, immigrants are approached as people.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, this formula for the integration of immigrants into film culture in the Netherlands is oversimplified. While the first three stages seem relatively clear-cut and realistic, the jump between the third and fourth stages is not. Oaïssa does not go into detail about how a deepening of stereotypes in films leads to the ultimate rejection of those stereotypes. In fact, this seems to be the exact opposite of the *beur* cinema movement ideal of fluid identity, focusing rather on the fixing and deepening of identity stereotypes. The Dutch film industry

will have to come to terms with this issue if it wants to successfully promote the integration of immigrants into Dutch society.

IV. Conclusion

In studying migrant film in both France and the Netherlands, I learned several lessons related to culture, identity, and the phenomenon of globalization. First, at the base level, is the difficulty and importance of raising issues no one talks about. The *beur* cinema movement in France has received attention from critics since its *début* in the 1980s. *Mocro* movies, in comparison, have received very little academic attention either inside the Netherlands or outside the country. Although the Dutch cannot be blamed for this lack, given the relative youth of this kind of cinema in their country as compared to France, the point is that the current absence of any such research makes it very difficult to break ground and move forward with a concise analysis. Yet this should not deter researchers at any level from looking at these phenomena. It is important to get the discussion started. Expertise will mature as the fruits of research weather critique and ripen into knowledge.

This leads to the second point, namely, the importance of the immigration debate in Europe. Within the last half-century, all levels of society felt the impact of the dramatic increase in immigration from North Africa to Europe. Critics of immigration cite Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis when they claim that this immigration, originally dominated by Muslim *manoeuvres* (manual laborers) and their families, is detrimental to European society and values. Many Europeans feel threatened by Islamist extremism and socioeconomic worries about employment. However, the rising trend of nationalism and Islamophobia is matched by a reactionary "re-Islamization" of second-generation immigrants as well as a push for multicultural tolerance.

Thus, a third lesson shows how, in this climate of uncertainty, the metamorphosis of identity is a delicate issue in which film has several roles to play. The representation and portrayal of ethnic identity are important, but only to a certain extent. Individuals in both France and the Netherlands want to be recognized as talented actors and directors, not just spokespersons for their ethnic communities. Films enable directors to present their versions of reality, but in order to have the freedom to do this, they must not be tied down to specific "cultural" themes. Actress Maryam Hassouni puts her feelings plainly: "I am

Dutch. With Moroccan parents." Though she has a Moroccan heritage, she sees herself as Dutch and feels she shouldn't be limited by other peoples' perceptions of her. She expresses her pleasure at the potential of playing a Dutch girl. Even more radically, her dream role is to play a Ninja: "Fatima by day, Ninja by night."⁵⁷ For Hassouni, then, films provide an outlet for personal expression. For now, she is content to play Muslim roles, but she doesn't want to do it continuously.⁵⁸ Karim Dridi expresses similar sentiments when critiquing the French film industry notions of *beur*, *banlieue*, and *cinéma sociale*, refusing to have his work put in a box or analyzed from only one point of view.⁵⁹

Although some of these films make a more serious attempt to show the world "the way it is" and promote a certain view of identity, it is important to retain the ability to view these films with a critical eye from all angles. This is essential to our ability to constantly redefine our identities. According to Michael Featherstone, cultural representations facilitated by the film industry work to bridge public and private life, connecting people across time and space, and reshaping existing cultural signifiers to fit a new discourse of cultural identity.⁶⁰

Viewing the current climate of globalization as a confrontation between different religious and cultural divisions is a mistake. It ignores life's complexity, reducing human identity to a few, oversimplified adjectives, such as "Muslim" or "French," and disregarding the many other ways in which people perceive themselves. In *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen explores notions of identity, developing the idea that human beings can belong to various groups simultaneously without contradicting themselves.⁶¹ Through our ability to reason, we are able to discern within particular contexts the relative importance of these multifarious loyalties. Furthermore, in saying that "Nationalism does not simply 'express' a preexistent identity: it 'constitutes' a new one," Michael Ignatieff alludes to the power that discourse and context can have on the construction of identity.⁶²

In this light, do post-migrant film movements in Europe promote a new "alternative language" by which *all* Europeans can come to terms with their so-called "differences" and forge a new definition of European identity? This can only be so if identities are allowed to remain a process, rather than a fixed entity. Labeling specific subject positions as concrete identities only allows for the reproduction of stereotypes, not for the creation of new identities. Both French and Dutch films risk falling into the trap of reproducing cultural stereotypes. However, while the development of the *beur* cinema movement seems to work

toward expanding modes of representation, *macro* films seem only to reproduce these stereotypes. The key to the Dutch ability to change this trend may lie in the promotion of directors, producers, and screenwriters of North African origin who can free themselves from the current Dutch discourse on *macro* film that promotes the reproduction of stereotypes. Furthermore, a healthy public discourse on this subject is needed to sustain such a venture.

Stuart Hall, in the epigraph at the beginning of this essay, makes a very clear point that ties in well with this discussion. Identity is constructed, therefore it is a continual process constituted *within* representation, not outside it. Cinema should not be seen “as a mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are.”⁶³ Film allows for new forms of representation and the creation of new identities. Thus, films enable the expression of hybrid identities based on their fluidity more than on connections to ethnicity or nationality. Perhaps this is the most important lesson: In the era of globalization, identities are best constituted through the conscious effort of exposing them to new contexts and improving them through the process of critical adaptation,⁶⁴ which assesses and rewrites both old and new identities. Films at once allow exposure to new conceptions of identity and an outlet for the expression of individual identities. The growth of the global media industry has increased the availability of new forms of identity expression while connecting the adherents to specific identities throughout the world. ●

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Notes

1. S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, by Houston A. Baker, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 210.
2. I borrowed this name from the *Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe* International Research Network (www.migrantcinema.net).
3. C. Tarr, *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 1.
4. At that time, women were not considered equal to men (at least not in writing) and therefore were excluded from this understanding of citizenship.
5. Gérard Noiriel, *Population, immigration, et identité nationale en France XIX^e-XX^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1992).
6. Michel Cadé, *Magrébins de France: De 1960 à nos jours: la naissance d'une communauté* (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2004).
7. Tarr 2005, p. 2.
8. T. Ben Jalloun, *Hospitalité Français: Racisme et Immigration Maghrébine* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).
9. M.C. Blanc-Chaléard, *Histoire de l'Immigration* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001).
10. Ibid.
11. Benjamin Stora, L'immigration algérienne: dynamique sociale et installation dans les banlieues pendant la Guerre d'Algérie, in J. P. Brunet (dir.), *Immigration, vie politique, et populisme en banlieue parisienne (fin XIXe-XXe siècles)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).
12. K. Slimani-Direche, "Histoire de l'Emigration Kabyle en France an XXe Siècle: Réalités Culturelles et Politiques et réappropriations identitaires" (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).
13. Algeria was actually considered an overseas department of France, and people who were citizens of Algeria were considered citizens of France. Berbers, however, were not considered citizens of Algeria.
14. Slimani-Direche 2007, p. 7.
15. Blanc-Chaléard 2001.
16. BBC, "Profile: Jean-Marie Le Pen" (23 April 2002). Accessed online on 26 October 2007 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1943193.stm>.
17. Tarr 2005, pp. 1-2.
18. Here I reference her film, but she also emphasizes these arguments in her book. See Y. Benguigui, *Mémoires d'Immigrés: L'Héritage Maghrébin* (Paris: Canal+Éditions, 1997).
19. Tarr 2005, p. 28.
20. Stora 1995.
21. Tarr 2005, p. 3.
22. Ibid., p. 10.
23. Ibid., p. 3.
24. Ibid., p. 10.
25. See the Filmography section for a list of additional examples watched in preparation for this project.

26. Alec G. Hargreaves, "La representation cinématographique de l'ethnicité en France: stigmatization, reconnaissance et banalisation," *Questions de Communication*, 4 (2003): 135.
27. Tarr 2005, p. 13.
28. K. Dridi, "Des réalisateurs contre le ghetto du 'cinéma social,'" Rue89. Accessed online on 26 June 2008 at <http://www.rue89.com/le-making-of-de-karim-dridi/des-real-isateurs-contre-le-ghetto-du-cinema-social>.
29. "Maas" is Dutch for "muse."
30. M. Schrover, "Decolonization" and "Labor Migration" from the *History of International Migration*, Universiteit Leiden website (5 May 2008). Accessed online on 10 May 2008 at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/migration/chapter8.html>.
31. Schrover 2008.
32. Ibid.
33. J. C. Chesnais, *Les Migrations Internationales en Europe 1945–1991. Cahier 92* (Barcelona: Fondation Paulino Torras Domenech, 1992), p. 9.
34. A. Zohry, "Migration without borders: North Africa as a reserve of cheap labour for Europe" (19 January 2005). Draft Article of the Migration Without Borders Series: UNESCO, p.6.
35. Schrover 2008.
36. Zohry 2005, p. 11.
37. C. Keeney Nana, "With Strict Migration Policies in Place, Dutch Discourse on Integration Becomes More Inclusive," *Migration Information Source: Fresh Thought, Authoritative Data, Global Reach* (Migration Policy Institute, 19 April 2007), p. 1.
38. Ibid.
39. Some would argue that this society was not as "equal" as it appeared. Minorities were still neglected by the society.
40. Keeney Nana 2007, p. 1.
41. Ibid., p.4. According to Jytte Klausen, this perception is in reality inaccurate and unfounded. See her work, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (2005), for an examination of the presence of a growing contingent of Muslim immigrants in Europe. Through interviews with European Muslim elites, Klausen outlines the main debates over the requirements of social and political reform of European institutions, religious pluralism, and the value of multiculturalism stemming from the emergence of a "new" European Islam.
42. Keeney Nana 2007, p. 4.
43. W. Nauta, "Manifestations of Globalization in the Netherlands and Europe." Lecture notes, Macalester-Maastricht Globalization in Comparative Perspective Seminar, 7 January 2008.
44. M.P. Vink, "Dutch 'Multiculturalism' Beyond the Pillarisation Myth," *Political Studies Review*, 5 (2007): 342.
45. M. Moore, "Liberal Dutch Identity is Tested. 'Anything Goes' Policies Targeted," *The Boston Globe* (1 July 2007). Accessed online on 18 February 2008 at http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2007/07/01/liberal_dutch_identity_is_tested.
46. Ibid.

47. J. Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 69.
48. Ibid., p. 70.
49. I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2006), p. 128.
50. K. Wolfs, "Nieuwe Marokkaanse acteurs: Moco Movies Kraken Kas." *Film Krant*: September 2005, nr 269. Accessed online on 1 April 2008 at <http://www.filmkrant.nl/av/org/filmkran/archief/fk269/moco.html>.
51. Ibid.
52. Internet Movie Database (1990–2008), online at <http://www.imdb.com>.
53. Wolfs 2005.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Dridi 2008.
60. M. Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity," in *Identities: Race Class, Gender, and Nationality*, edited by L. Alcoff and E. Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 348.
61. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).
62. Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997).
63. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, by Houston A. Baker, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 210.
64. For an in-depth discussion of "critical adaptation," see "Beginning Again: From Refugee to Citizen," in *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, by Dr. Ahmed Samatar, Macalester College.

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Filmography

- Year Title. (Director: Nationality) Country
- 1985 *Le thé au harem d'Archimède* (Mehdi Charef: French from Algeria) France
- 1988 *De bruit et de fureur* (Jean-Claude Brisseau: French) France
- 1995 *Bye-bye* (Karim Dridi: French from Tunisia) France
La Haine (Mathieu Kassowitz: French) France
Pigalle (Karim Dridi: French from Tunisia) France
- 1997 *L'autre côté de la mer* (Dominique Cabrera: French from Algeria) France

- 1998 *Mémoires d'immigrés* (Yamina Benguigui: French from Algeria) France
- 2000 *Drôle de Félix* (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau: French) France
- 2001 *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui: French from Algeria) France
Samia (Philippe Faucon: French) France
- 2002 *Wesh wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe?* (Rabah Ameer-Zaïmèche: French from Algeria) France
- 2003 *L'esquive* (Abdellatif Kechiche: French from Tunisia) France
- 2004 *Shouf shouf habibi!* (Albert ter Heerdt: Dutch) the Netherlands
Submission: Part 1 (Theo van Gogh: Dutch) the Netherlands
Cool! (Theo van Gogh: Dutch) the Netherlands
- 2005 *Het schmitzelparadijs* (Martin Koolhoven: Dutch) the Netherlands
- 2006 *Ghetto Girls Documentary* (Lamia Abbassi, Samira Ahli, Chafina Ben Dahman and Mina Ouaoirst: all Dutch from Morocco) the Netherlands
- 2007 *La graine et le mulet* (Abdellatif Kechiche: French from Tunisia) France
Kicks (Albert ter Heerdt: Dutch) the Netherlands.