

Like father, like son: The immigrant experience

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In Paris on Dec. 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a history-making document drafted mainly by a Canadian, John Peters Humphrey, a jurist at McGill University.

Humphrey's high-minded principles of "life, liberty and security" are still very much alive, evoked by entities as diverse as Amnesty International and, for months now, Quebec's reasonable-accommodation commission.

Of the many rights the Charter enshrines, two make for good cinema: the right to freedom of movement (to travel inside your country and to immigrate), and the special rights of children (to be cared for, educated, given hope of a future).

These five feature films set in Europe look at immigration and how children experience it with their parents or guardians – specifically, boys and their fathers.

Pelle the Conqueror (*Denmark/Sweden, 1987*) It's the turn of the 20th century, and poor old Lasse (Max von Sydow) decides to take his young son, Pelle (Pelle Hvenegaard) away from their home in Sweden to look for work across the water in Denmark. They end up on a rich man's farm, and get treated horribly. Bleak but beautiful, this epic won the 1989 Oscar for best foreign-language film. On DVD from Fox or Anchor Bay.



Journey of Hope (*Switzerland, 1990*) A boy and his parents leave their hardscrabble life in rural Turkey, and with the "help" of unscrupulous smugglers, wind up in the Alps, where they brave the snow to cross into Switzerland on foot. Unsentimental and unflinching (and based on a true story), the film deals in dreams and the price people will pay to hold on to them. On DVD (with subtitles) only in Switzerland; buy it at www.swissmade.com.

The Promise (*Belgium/ France/Luxembourg, 1996*) In Liège, 15-year-old Igor helps his dad run a rooming house for clandestine immigrants and put them to work on a construction site. When a West African worker is injured and lays dying, Igor promises to look after his wife and baby. Can he keep his vow? The

two-disc British DVD from Artificial Eye features **Rosetta**, another teen drama from writer/director brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne.

Kolya (*Czech Republic, 1996*) Kolya is only 5 when his Russian mother abandons him to the care of a new acquaintance in communist Czechoslovakia. Grumpy old Louka doesn't take to the kid at first; Kolya speaks the wrong language and gets in the way of the bachelor musician's amorous lifestyle. Jan Sverák directed his father, Zdenek (who wrote the script) in this 1997 Oscar-winning film. An Alliance Atlantis DVD.

Wondrous Oblivion (*Britain/ Germany, 2003*) A coming-of-age movie about a British boy's obsession with cricket, set in a middle-class London suburb in 1960. The twist is that the boy is the child of Holocaust survivors from Germany, and the new neighbour teaching him the imperial game of bats and balls and wickets is a black immigrant from Jamaica. Great cast, great ska soundtrack, suitable for the whole family. A new Palm Pictures DVD.

*And when the DVD comes out, get it: **Mirush** (Norway, 2007)* I went to see this at Montreal's World Film Festival because I'd heard it had something to do with Kosovo, a place I got to know after the 1999 war there. It's a stunning film – true-to-life, beautifully shot, tough yet tender-hearted – about Mirush, a 15-year-old Kosovar who travels illegally to Norway to find his long-lost father and winds up trying to save him from the clutches of the local Albanian mafia.