



FILM: **FLEE**

FDG RATING: 4.0

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Jonas Poher Rasmussen: *director/writer*
Amin Nawabi: *plays himself, present day voice*
Daniel Karimyar: *Amin (ages 9-11 voice)*

DATE: APRIL 17, 2022

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **FLEE**

Several discussion participants, who do not like animated films, were converts after seeing the sophisticated stylized realism of *Flee*. It's not your Disney doe-eyed animation. As one discussion participant noted, the more correct term is mixed media since the film also incorporates live footage and vintage televised broadcasts. Almost all of us enthusiastically praised the film.

Animation proves an ideal medium to both mask and reveal the identity of a gay man who escaped Afghanistan and reinvented himself. We watch Amin Nawabi (not the real name of the Afghan refugee), who now lives in Denmark with his partner, being interviewed by his close friend, Rasmussen, and for the first time, telling his heartbreaking story that he has kept secret for more than 20 years. One published critic described *Flee* as "an original artistic exploration of the way that trauma impacts one's sense of self. Its shifting and somewhat unreliable form intuitively reflects how its subject has hidden the truth of his past from others over the years, including his partner, Kasper, and his longtime friend, the director."

The film was nominated for a 2022 Oscar in three categories, documentary, animation, and international film. We actually selected it as deserving the Oscar for best international film while the Academy awarded the prize to *Drive My Car*.

We felt great empathy for Amin, realizing it must be terribly painful to deny your true self for so many years. Rasmussen met Amin in Denmark when they were teens but all he knows about him was that he had fled Afghanistan alone. He sees Amin as an accomplished academic in a loving relationship, looking to settle down with his partner but as Rasmussen delves into Amin's memories, we learn that this man has been living a life of lies in order to survive. After a relatively idyllic life as a child in Kabul, extremist militants launched an attack on Kabul and began killing "non-believers." To save their lives, Amin and his family fled to Moscow and then he walked, alone, across Pakistan. As we watch the truths be revealed, we sense the process is almost therapeutic, helping him process the guilt, shame and fear he carries. He has never felt fully accepted anywhere he's lived.

One discussion participant thought that had the story been presented as a traditional documentary, it might have gotten tedious, but the animation made it very engaging. Another commented on the subtle facial expressions that were expertly animated. We noted that the animation also underscored the fact that Amin felt more protected not showing his true self. Also, because he lied to gain entry to Denmark, it was important to keep his identity concealed. It was very effective showing archive footage of the war-scarred streets of Kabul and the unruly waves seen from a boat smuggling people across the Baltic on a small TV screen while the main story was animation. A critical resident reviewer praised the animation saying it was terrific but got tired of seeing one miserable experience after another. On the flip side, another discussion participant said the story was wonderfully rich as it developed step-by-step. We learned a lot about the granular details of daily life as a refugee. A few discussion participants felt the film was manipulative, designed to play on our sympathies. But one person in our discussion group who knows someone who fled Afghanistan and also walked across Pakistan, said the film was very realistic.

We gave *Flee* an honest and open 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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