



FILM: **GREEN BORDER**

FDG RATING: 4.2 😊😊😊😊😊

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

Agnieszka Holland: *director*
Holland, Gabriela Łazarkiewicz-Sieczko and Maciej Pisu: *writers*
Mohamad Al Rashi: *actor, Grandpa*
Behi Djanati Atai: *actress, Leila (teacher from Afghanistan)*

DATE: November 17, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **GREEN BORDER**

Green Border is a powerful, harrowing drama about the 2021 border/refugee crisis between Poland and Belarus. Holland made the decision to begin work on the film in September 2021 with two fellow screenwriters. They researched/documentated the border crisis in detail as they wrote the screenplay, spending hundreds of hours in document analysis, interviews with refugees, borderland residents, activists and collected testimony from anonymous Polish Border Guard officers. It was filmed in an amazing 23 days with unanticipated final scenes filmed when Poland began accepting Ukrainian refugees in February 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The drama follows a family of Syrian/Muslim refugees, an English teacher fleeing Afghanistan, and a Polish border guard so that three different perspectives are captured. Most of us were completely, emotionally invested in the plight of the Muslim family: the crusty patriarch Grandpa, his young grandson Nur, the mother, father, another child and a baby. You think everything will fine; a promising new beginning for the family who has sacrificed everything to leave their war-torn homeland and head to Sweden where a waiting relative has made arrangements for their safe passage. The family is on a Turkish airliner that will land in Belarus where they will cross the border into Poland, anticipating the full protections of the 1951 Geneva Convention. A flight attendant passes out roses to the women passengers. "It was my pleasure to have you all on board," the captain croons as the plane descends.

The landing marks the moment when hope is mangled in a horrible geopolitical crisis triggered by Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko who, in an attempt to provoke Europe, has offered free passports and flights to the EU for refugees. Once on the ground in Minsk, bribes are still needed to get to the border, and getting there is treacherous, crossing swampy forests that make up the so-called 'green border' between Belarus and Poland. The Polish border guards will not allow the refugees to cross, pointing rifles at them, forcing them back across barbed wire. As the family is shuttled back and forth across the barbed-wire fence separating 'Western Europe' from Belarus, they're subjected to cruel and abusive treatment by guards on both sides. A Polish officer proclaims that refugees "aren't people; they are weapons of Putin and Lukashenko," bullets aimed at the heart of white Europe.

We agreed that the film felt very authentic especially with the jerky hand-held camera. The emotional impact was so intense that some viewers couldn't watch parts, underscoring the story-telling power of film. Actual filming of what was transpiring was impossible so the dramatization is vital to having a record of this tragic crisis. One of the most intense scenes was in the dense bog when the Afghan woman was trying to help the young boy escape with her and he is struggling to keep from being sucked deep into the bog.

A young Polish border guard is emotionally conflicted about what he is doing especially since his wife is pregnant and he witnesses the brutal mistreatment of pregnant refugees.

We also see the efforts of young Polish activists who try to help the refugees by treating their injuries, providing food, water and legal support; however, even filling out asylum applications is no guarantee of anything more than a long wait in a refugee camp that will likely end in denial and repatriation. The film does, in the end, provide some relief.

The cinematography was exceptional with terrifying forest scenes and capturing the searing emotions in each person's face. Holland made a conscious decision to film in black and white. The music was perfectly restrained, mostly absent and then just the soft sounds of a cello, noted a discussion participant.

As expected, Green Border was condemned by the Polish government (who only permitted the film to be screened if a government 'prebutter' was also shown). Green Border was also denied an Oscar nomination because Poland's nominating committee likely feared budgetary retribution from the government arts council.

Definitely hard to watch because it was so well done, but an important record of this crisis, as well as an acknowledgement that the tragedy of migrants and refugees seeking to escape terrors in their homeland, is a universal challenge.



Green Border received a resounding 4.2 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

See you at the movies! Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net www.filmdiscussiongroup.com