

## Human Flow

In recent years, over 65 million people around the world have been forced from their homes to escape famine, climate change, and war in the greatest human displacement since World War II. A sense of that mass migration is depicted in *Human Flow*, a film epic created by the internationally renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei that gives powerful visual expression to this massive human migration. (*The film is available on Amazon.com, who produced the original documentary.*)

The documentary does not focus on individual stories of the heartbreak and bleakness of immigration. Rather, it confronts the viewer with the colossal scale and span of this human crisis. Opening with serene blue waters, it doesn't take long for it to thrust us into the waters in the Mediterranean where African boat people struggle to enter Southern Europe. That is matched by sequences showing the flood of refugees from the Middle East Wars and those fleeing from Central African mayhem. Other refugee stories are depicted in sequences shot in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Greece, Germany, Iraq, Israel, Italy, and Turkey. Ai himself is an occasional presence, as when he and his team are questioned by a US Border patrolman at the Mexican border, or when he tries to comfort a displaced refugee family in the Middle East.

What *Human Flow* does is give laymen a sense of ***the spread and scope*** of this century's most consistent and poignant human catastrophe: the forced displacement of millions across borders. This is done principally through the stunning use of photographic drones that give us hawk's-eye views of the myriad world refugee camps and immigration routes. These sweeping pans, often over the most desolate, barren landscapes, are calculated to make you marvel and moan about what we humans are doing to each other.

Since the film never preaches but rather presents (there is no over voice narration), some of the photography could also be assessed aesthetically, as visions in almost abstract form of a tragic tapestry. Ai and his team of cinematic teams filmed over more than a year in 23 countries to capture the magnitude of the dilemma. It brings home to us in the comfortable West the utterly hapless plight of so many, torn from family and culture, from livelihood and education. Throughout the film, grim statistics about the refugee challenge (typically from UN sources) appear on the screen, the better to help one comprehend the size of the problem.

In a sense, *Human Flow* is hard to look at. It will be, for many, plainly dispiriting to view this massive misplacement of souls without a direct means to help them (and the film is long, well over two hours). Pity is a logical result of viewing *Human Flow*, but that needn't be a cheap emotion in this case, but rather one that will lead to understanding one of the great political human rights questions of our time. The question for many will be what can we possibly do to mitigate it. (*The documentary runs 140 minutes and is rated PG-13*)

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