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## Watchers of the Sky

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# Watchers of the Sky

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *Watchers of the Sky* (2014), directed by Edet Belzberg.

## **Author Notes**

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.

***Watchers of the Sky***  
(2014)  
directed by Edet Belzberg  
U.S. Documentary



*Watchers of the Sky* is a documentary about dedication to an idea, and humanity's ability to want to help the world while at the same time seeing humanity's capacity at

destroying the world through persecution and death. Director Edet Belzberg examines the concept of genocide, and takes us back to the founder of the term, Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959). Lemkin was a Polish Jew who experienced the pogroms in the First World War. Upon seeing the atrocities done by leaders in countries throughout the world against their fellow citizens, in the name of religion, race and ethnicity, Lemkin became interested in genocide specifically "because it happens so many times." He grew up understanding that there is a universal connection with victims and a universal capacity to carry out genocide. Lemkin decided that the only way to stop humanity from carrying out such atrocities was to construct a law to protect humans, and so he set out to build a "temple of law." In 1933 Lemkin tried to introduce barbarity as a crime against international law at the League of Nations, based on the mass killing of Armenians. Lemkin would see genocide first hand again, when he lost forty-seven

members of his own family in the holocaust. It was not until 1948 that the crime of genocide was accepted by the United Nations.

Belzberg then delves further into the horrors carried out by humanity when she includes the faces and lives of refugees who have suffered for just existing. It becomes clear that “being a refugee is a state of mind” when one realizes how much is lost through the act of genocide.

*Watchers of the Sky* is an emotional story of a monumental event – the creation of the concept of “geno” (Greek for tribe, race or family) “cide” (Latin for killing) by Lemkin, and his unending fight to bring to the light of day the millions of people being killed in the name of religion, nationality, race or ethnicity. We have seen the mass killings of Jews throughout history (not just in the last two world wars), the killings in Rwanda, Sudan and Darfur, the eradication of the Armenians, all done in the name of sovereignty. Lemkin tries to make us question why the killing of millions is less significant than the killing of an individual. We live in a world where the calculated murder of thousands continues to take place. In Rwanda, 10,000 people were slaughtered every day using only machetes. 200,000 Tutsis were killed in two months. They were exterminated, and the rest of the world stood by and called it sovereignty. Lemkin did not live to see the first charge of genocide; the international law was not enforced until the 1990s. Benjamin Ferencz carries on the legacy of Lemkin, being a watcher of the sky—trying to understand the meaning of the universe and

hopefully recording enough data that the next person who takes up the work to truly end genocide will save themselves years of preparation.

Interspersed with animation illustrating the raw images of persecution and the inspiring words of Lemkin, *Watchers of the Sky* truly has us wondering if “humanity, with its spiritual heritage, is at stake.”

— Ruby Ramji