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And Breathe Normally

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And Breathe Normally

Abstract

This is a film review of *And Breathe Normally* (2018), directed by Isold Uggadottir.

Keywords

Immigration, Refugees, Iceland

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



And Breathe Normally (2017), dir. Ísöld Uggadóttir

Lara is a single mother who has trouble holding a job, paying her rent, or even buying food. When she gets a job checking passports of people who enter Iceland, she thinks she may have a chance for a better life for herself and her son Eldar. She detects the fake passport of Adja, who is posing as French but actually is a refugee from Guinea-Bissau, which causes Adja to be sent to prison and then to a holding center while she pleads her case for political asylum. Lara may feel guilty about this, but she was doing her job. Things change, however, when events bring Adja and Lara together.

Adja finds Lara's son when he is lost, so that now Lara is somewhat beholden to her. When Adja finds Lara and her son living in Lara's car, she then takes them in to live with her, and looks after Eldar while Lara works. Adja doesn't seem to resent any of this, even though she has been separated from her own daughter due to Lara's actions. Lara becomes increasingly involved in Adja's life as she fears Adja may try to escape the country illegally; they now care about each other, in spite of a system that has pitted them against each other. In the end, Lara is challenged

to act humanely rather than bureaucratically, and the most beautiful thing about the film is how it depicts the growth of this connection organically.

As we live in a world in which refugees are routinely dismissed as criminals or a burden, this film challenges those stereotypes not with the details of Adja's story but with the mere fact of a human connection of two women whose lives would normally never intersect. The story is totally believable: if more such encounters could occur, maybe we would see more humane policies enacted for those who flee oppression for a better life. There is no real politics in this story, but it would be nice to live in a world in which politics was more influenced by the simple desire to help people be united with their families and live free and happy lives.