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Exil

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Exil

Abstract

This is a film review of *Exil* (2020), directed by Visar Morina.

Author Notes

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Exil (2020), dir. Visar Morina

Exil is a complicated film. It isn't complicated to watch, or to understand, but it deals with a complicated subject matter which people often struggle with. How do we understand ourselves and how do we understand how others understand us? This becomes further complicated when we are marginalized in some way. Being excluded, missing a joke, being the victim of a prank. Is it personal? Is it harassment? Is it racism? Or is it simply an oversight or a punishment for a reckless indiscretion? *Exil* addresses the stress of day to day life when there are complications; when a man undergoing what could be called a "mid-life crisis" is also a man who has been marginalized, suffers from PTSD, and when he experiences aggression from others.

Xhafer is from Kosovo, living in Germany with his German wife (who is completing her PhD) and their three children. He works in a pharmaceutical company. We don't see the atrocities that Xhafer was exposed to in Kosovo, but we do know he is terrified of rats. We don't know how he and his wife met, but it seems plausible that it was through work or university, as they seem to

be in similar fields. The film starts with him finding a dead rat at his house, which starts his hunt to find out who is persecuting him.

The director uses several tools to give us insight into the characters; the percussive film score emphasizes Xhafer's state of mind and creates an insight into his mood and thoughts as he reacts to those around him. This percussive score is mimicked at work after a particularly painful speech from his company's owner which begins in a seemingly innocuous and possibly positive way, but descends into some tokenism about Xhafer and results in a thunderous standing ovation from his colleagues which seems to greatly overwhelm him.

Xhafer's wife suffers with his stress and depression, and suggests, "Maybe it isn't because you are a foreigner, maybe they just don't like you as a person?" Xhafer responds: "You think I don't know that?" Experiencing the micro aggressions, and the confusion around interpretations, and the not knowing if someone is a friend or foe is an exquisitely painful place to reside in one's own thoughts, which the movie captures brilliantly.

Although possibly raised as a Sunni Muslim (although he does eat pork), Xhafer's religious upbringing is not mentioned in the film; however, there is one day when he comes to work when everyone else is given a day off (perhaps a religious holiday). He meets a cleaning lady at his work who has the same background as he does and needs help with her visa papers. She and her daughters do wear religious head coverings. Perhaps what is more challenging for Xhafer is that he has tried to become a part of German culture with his wife and children, and in attempts to befriend certain people at work. Yet in his approach to social relationships, he often misses the nuances. But as Xhafer becomes aware of the misery that others face, he seems to become more at peace with himself, perhaps realizing that while his situation is unique, others also struggle with

changing roles in the workplace, and with physical injuries from war. He seems to see his own role in creating negative responses from others.

A critique of this film, though, could be that it makes it too easy for us, the viewer, to get off the hook, to neglect our role to understand more about our colleagues and neighbors. Xhafer is the author of much of his discontent, but his is but one story of one “foreigner.”