

# 2021

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## WEICHOLZ GLOBAL FILM SERIES



### WRITTEN PRE-SERIES LECTURE BY DR. JOHN PFEIFER

### SERIES THEME: "MIGRATION STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD"

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In my search of films for this year's Weicholz Global Film Series, I was lucky enough to see early, pre-release screenings of two outstanding films. *Minari*, written and directed by Lee Isaac Chung and based on his own childhood, is a remarkable film about a family of Korean immigrants who migrate to rural Arkansas in the 1980s. *I Carry You with Me* is a Mexican drama, directed by award-winning documentary film maker Heidi Ewing. This "docudrama" spans more than three decades and tells the real-life story of two gay men who would rather live together illegally in New York City than live apart in their native homeland. Regardless of their immigration status, these refugees experience similar hardships in adapting to their new homeland, leaving their friends and families behind, struggling with a foreign language and strange new culture, facing discrimination and anti-immigrant bias, and finding work in order to survive in the United States. If you haven't seen either of these films, they both deserve a spot on your must-watch list.

We had originally planned to open the festival with *Minari* and close it with *I Carry You with Me*. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure the screening rights to these two films, but the immigration theme seemed particularly relevant to me in this day and time. For that reason, I began to search for films about human migration from around the world. The need to escape harsh conditions and the quest to find a better life in a strange land is a universal theme that impacts people from almost every country on the planet. Unfortunately, immigration is often viewed more as a political issue rather than a humanitarian crisis.

Simply put, human migration is about the movement of people from place to place. There are both push and pull factors at work in someone's decision to move. Push factors are the reasons people leave their homeland. Some examples of push factors include: high crime and lack of safety; crop failure due to drought or flooding due to climate change; poverty and lack of basic human services like health care, education and sanitation. Push factors can also include forced migration, such as people who are forced to leave because of war and ethnic cleansing. Pull factors are reasons people move to a particular area. They usually include the solutions to the push factors, such as better employment opportunities, political stability, less crime, better services, more fertile land and good climate.

Migration usually happens as a result of a combination of these push and pull factors. Refugees do not usually make the decision to leave their homelands lightly. They do not carry with them many possessions, and they often do not have a clear idea of where they may finally settle.

Human nature is such that citizens often resent refugees that they perceive are coming to their country with pull motives rather than empathize with those who are reacting to push factors. We, as global citizens, should recognize that country borders and national sovereignty are constructs that are man-made and not observed by climate, nature, or religion.

In a mass celebrated in St Peter's Square on the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis quoted a verse from Hebrews 13:2 — "Do not neglect hospitality, for some unknowingly-welcomed angels." In other words, the migrants and refugees that you welcome and treat with hospitality may be angels sent from God. And those you turn away may also be angels sent from God.

Pope Francis also said, "Loving our neighbor as ourselves means being firmly committed to building a more just world, in which everyone has access to the goods of the earth, in which all can develop as individuals and as families, and in which fundamental rights and dignity are guaranteed to all."

Furthermore, Pope Francis explained, "loving our neighbor means feeling compassion for the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, drawing close to them, touching their sores and sharing their stories, and thus manifesting concretely God's tender love for them. This means we should act as neighbors to all, especially to those who are mistreated and abandoned on the streets of our world, soothing their wounds and bringing them to the nearest shelter, where their needs can be met."

This year's films highlight human migration stories from around the world, including: the 1995 forced migration of Bosnian Muslims from their homeland by Orthodox Serbian forces in Srebrenica; the illegal immigration of two Myanmar refugees seeking a better life in Thailand; the plight of Filipino migrant workers serving as health care workers, housekeepers and construction laborers in Israel and their Israeli born children; and the portrayal of a young Chinese man who assumes a false identity in order to stay in Japan and to apprentice under a kind, elderly soba chef. I hope you will appreciate each film for its ability to help us all see refugees and immigration policy with more humanity and empathy.

"We cannot remain insensitive, our hearts deadened, before the misery of so many innocent people. We must not fail to weep. We must not fail to respond." (Pope Francis, Sept. 29, 2019)