



NEW RELEASES

Green Border (Zielona granica)

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Directed by: Agnieszka Holland

In collaboration with: Katarzyna Warzecha, Kamila Tarabura

A Metro Films production in association with Astute Films

Co-produced by: Maria Blicharska, Damien McDonald – Blick Production, Šárka Cimbalová – Marlene Film Production, Diana Elbaum, David Ragonig – Beluga Tree
In co-production with: CANAL+ Poland – Beata Ryczkowska, Małgorzata Seck, dFLIGHTS – Dominika Kulczyk, Czech Television, Mazovia Warsaw Film Fund

In participation of: Astute Films, Eurimages, Volapuk, ZDF/ARTE, Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, La Banque Postale, Image 17, Films Boutique, VOO-BE tv, TRT Sinema, Downey Ink., Saudade Film

With the Support of: Czech Film Fund, Aide aux cinémas du monde, CNC – Institut Français
World Sales: Films Boutique

Executive Producers: Mike Downey, Jeff Field, Emir Kūlal Haznevi, Daniel Bergmann

Produced by: Marcin Wierchoslawski, Fred Bernstein, Agnieszka Holland

Line Producer: Alicja Jagodzinska-Kalkus

Production Manager: Konrad Wróblewski

Location Manager: Jakub Mechowski

Post-production Supervisors: Łukasz Przeorski, Michal Kancierski

1st Assistant Director: Pavel Svaton

Script Supervisor: Maria Kujawska

Casting: Paulina Krajnik, Behi Djanati Atai, Kadija Leclère, Mary Melhem

Written by: Maciej Pisuk, Gabriela Łazarkiewicz-Sieczko, Agnieszka Holland
Script Consultants/Arabic Dialogues: Jalal Altawil, Nadim Suleiman

Director of Photography: Tomasz Naumiuk

Camera Operators: Jakub Burakiewicz, Tomasz Naumiuk

Special Effects: Maciej Bienkowski

Edited by: Pavel Hrdlička

Production Designer: Katarzyna Jedrzejczyk

Costume Designer: Katarzyna Lewińska

Hair and Make-up Designer: Aneta Brzozowska

Music: Frédéric Vercheval

Score Supervisor: Arthur Browns

Sound: Roman Dymny

Re-recording Mixer: Roman Dymny

Sound Editors: Roman Dymny, Boris Chapelle, Tom Diaz Romettino, Renaud Bajoux

Stunt Co-ordinator: Tomasz Krzemieniecki

Thanks: Kasia Adamik

Cast:

Jalal Altawil (Bashir)

Maja Ostaszewska (Julia)

Behi Djanati Atai (Leila)

Tomasz Włosok (Jan)

Al Rashid Mohamad (Grandpa)

Dalia Naous (Amina)

Jasmina Polak (Zuku)

Monika Frajczyk (Marta)

Maciej Stuhur (Bogdan)

Agata Kulesza (Basia)

Michael Zielinski (Sasha)

Aboubakar Bensaihi (Ahmad)

Joely Mbundu (African woman)

Malwina Buss (Kasia)

Piotr Stramowski (Maciek)

Marta Stalmierska (Ula)

On stage to collect a lifetime achievement award at the Polish Film Festival (FPFF) in Gdynia in 2021, Agnieszka Holland took the opportunity to highlight the dire situation occurring at the Poland-Belarus border. Lured by Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko's promise of easy passage into the EU, refugees fleeing war or persecution in Syria, Afghanistan and various African countries were being forced back and forth from one country to the other, trying to survive in the Białowieża Forest.

Holland's concern ultimately went far beyond a comment in her speech: within two years she'd completed a major fiction feature on the crisis. *Green Border* premiered at Venice in 2023, where it won the Special Jury Prize. Alongside such diverse, sometimes undersung projects as her Olga Tokarczuk adaptation *Spoor* (2017), *Mr. Jones* (2019), about the Glamorgan-born journalist who uncovered the story of the famine-genocide perpetrated by Stalin in Ukraine, and *Charlatan* (2020), an enigmatic portrait of Czech faith healer Jan Mikolášek, *Green Border* is part of what academic-critic Steve Vineberg called Holland's 'late-career renaissance'.

Encompassing work made in Poland, Germany, France, Czech Republic, the UK and the US, Holland's output has itself always been largely defined by border-crossing. But at the time of her FPFF speech, making a film about the current crisis was not on the writer-director's mind.

'The situation was still very fresh then,' Holland recalls, speaking by phone from Warsaw during a one-day break in the shooting of her new project, the Kafka biopic *Franz*. 'My first reaction was simply that of a citizen trying to raise awareness and spread the news that a humanitarian crisis was growing. And to point out that while Lukashenko and Putin were clearly trying to destabilise the EU, the Polish government's reaction was cruel and already stirring up a lot of hate.'

Holland's decision to make a film about the border crisis was motivated by the intensification of xenophobic rhetoric by the Law and Justice (PiS) government in which, she says, 'dehumanising people became the main tool'. The daughter of journalists, Holland was also particularly disturbed by the government's creation of an exclusion zone along the border, forbidding access not only to aid agencies but also to all media. 'It became clear to me that the government was doing something unacceptable and trying to leave no traces of it,' she says.

A particular remark by PiS party leader Jarosław Kaczyński crystallised this notion. 'He said that the reason America lost the Vietnam War was because they allowed the press to go there, meaning that the reports started to change US public opinion. From that comment, I understood that the government believes in the power of images. Since image-making is my vocation I thought, "OK, let's try to create the images they don't want us to see."'

Following an intensive process of researching and interviewing, Holland and her co-screenwriters Maciej Pisuk and Gabriela Łazarkiewicz-Sieczko had a script ready by the end of 2021. A distilled dramatisation of the events was originally discussed by the collaborators, but *Green Border* evolved into a multi-character portrait, expansive yet intimate, which encompasses the perspectives of various groups: Border Guard officers, activists and, of course, the asylum seekers themselves. While gaining funding for the international co-production took time, the shoot itself was swift, taking place over just 24 days in spring 2023. Holland convinced director of photography Tomasz Naumiuk, a collaborator since *Spoor*, to shoot in black and white this time, to establish simultaneously a documentary-like immediacy and a timelessness that evokes some of the situation's painful historical echoes. The forest takes on a primal, nightmarish quality in the film's haunting images, which convey the refugees' ordeal with visceral urgency.

Green Border pays close attention to the individual histories of those rendered, in the director's words, 'faceless and voiceless'. Behi Djanati Atai is particularly

Sandra Korzeniak (*doctor in hospital*)
Talia Aijan (*Ghalia*)
Magdalena Poplawska (*Bogdan's wife*)
Taim Aijan (*Nur*)
Poland-France-Czech Republic-Belgium 2023
152 mins
Digital

A Modern Films release

The screening on Fri 21 Jun 17:50 will be introduced by actor Behi Djanati Atai

NEW RELEASES

The Beast La Bête

From Fri 7 Jun

I Used to Be Funny

From Fri 14 Jun

Àma Gloria

From Fri 14 Jun

Green Border Zielona granica

From Fri 21 Jun

Bye Bye Tiberias Bye Bye Tiberiade

From Fri 28 Jun + Q&A on Fri 28 Jun 18:00

Sleep Jam

From Fri 12 Jul

About Dry Grasses Kuru Otlar Üstüne

From Fri 26 Jul

RE-RELEASES

Rome, Open City Roma città aperta

Continues from 17 May

The Matrix (25th anniversary)

From 7 June

The Small Back Room

From 7 June

Network

From Fri 28 Jun

The Conversation

From Fri 5 Jul

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moving as Leila, a teacher, who recalls her brother fighting alongside Polish troops in Afghanistan. Despite this, was Holland concerned about the knee-jerk scepticism in the current cultural climate, which has become critical of white Western filmmakers telling the stories of ethnic 'others'?

'No,' she replies firmly. 'Our main goal was to present the situation and the experience of the refugees in the most authentic way possible. Some of the Syrian actors we cast had been through similar experiences to the characters depicted. They shared stories with us which influenced the script. I believe in research but also in human empathy. And an extreme situation like being in the forest strips away differences of religion and skin colour, bringing out what we all share as human beings trying to survive.'

From Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea* (2015) to Matteo Garrone's *Io Capitano*, which premiered alongside Holland's film at Venice, over the last decade a growing number of filmmakers has explored issues of migration in Europe. 'This wave of films shows that [it] is perhaps the primary issue of our time,' says Holland. 'From a European perspective, it shapes our democracies and reveals so much about our fears, about who we are willing to accept.' Indeed, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the arrival in Poland of thousands fleeing the conflict occurred during *Green Border*'s pre-production, inspiring the film's pointed 'Epilogue'.

Holland naturally expected some controversy after the Polish premiere, but the intensity of the response to the film – from hysterical denunciations by government officials to targeted review-bombing of Polish website Filmweb – still proved shocking. 'It was very violent,' she reflects. 'I never personally experienced something like this: such brutal language coming from the highest authorities. It was deeply unpleasant – I had bodyguards during the Polish promotion – but on the other hand, the criticisms grew so extreme and absurd that people began to react in the opposite way, speaking out in the film's defence.'

Heralded by Adam Kruk in the film magazine *Kino* as 'perhaps the most important Polish film of recent years', *Green Border* was a huge box-office success in Poland. 'At Q&As the response was deeply emotional,' Holland says. 'I've made films on difficult topics before but never seen such a visceral audience reaction as this. It's continued as we've travelled with the film.'

Green Border was released in the weeks before the closely fought Polish general election, which saw PiS ousted by a pro-EU coalition led by Civic Platform's Donald Tusk, who was sworn in as prime minister last December. Acknowledging the film's role in raising awareness and empathy regarding the border crisis, Holland demurs when asked whether she thinks it had an impact on the election result. In any case, the issues at the border remain very far from resolved. Under Tusk, Polish border forces have continued the controversial practice of 'pushing back' many of those who cross illegally into Belarus. Moreover, it was recently announced that Poland would use 'all available means' to further fortify the border after reports that a Polish guard was seriously wounded by a migrant on the Belarus side.

Recognising the importance of protecting the border, Holland is nonetheless highly critical of Tusk's rhetoric, which she believes echoes that of the previous administration. 'There is already a depressing sense of history repeating,' she says. 'The controversies are coming back. I saw a speech from last year in which Tusk was saying the exact opposite of what he's saying now.'

Is the timing of the film's UK release meaningful for her, occurring as it does in the run-up to another election in which migration has been a deeply divisive issue? 'I hope the film can contribute to a nuanced debate there,' she says. 'I'm not interested in making political propaganda for any side. But as we all know, films can open hearts and minds. It's important to wake up people's consciences.'

Alex Ramon, *Sight and Sound*, July 2024