

ЛИХА і МИЛОСЕРДЯ

Calamity & Mercy

DIRECTED BY Daniel Smith, Valentina Corrado, and Rodolfo Colombara

PRODUCED BY Daniel Smith

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Valentina Corrado & Rodolfo Colombara

EDITING: Valentina Corrado & Rodolfo Colombara

GENRE: Documentary 90-120 minutes

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: USA, shot in countries bordering Ukraine

A PRODUCTION OF VERITAS ART PICTURES LLC

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Logline: Calamity and Mercy is a feature-length documentary film detailing the stories of individual Ukrainian refugees submerged in the chaos of battle, fleeing war, and integrating into new cultures, along with the NGOs and efforts in place to help or harm the incoming migrants.

Synopsis: On February 24, 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine under orders from Vladimir Putin, thus beginning the most significant conflict in Europe since World War II, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and sparking the largest internal refugee crisis in almost a century. Calamity and Mercy is the story of the aftermath. The human voice of the conflict acting as a direct counterpoint to ethnic Nationalism and Russian propaganda used to dehumanize their victims and justify naked aggression.

Immigration into a new society is a complex endeavor, especially after fleeing a war zone. Calamity and Mercy examines the individual journeys of Ukrainian refugees in a three-part arc.

Part One: How are the various EU countries welcoming (or hindering) refugees? Interviewees detail why they left their homes in Ukraine versus staying behind to fight and documenting those they left behind. NGOs, refugee camps, and centers organizing to support the sudden influx of refugees are introduced. Part One ends with a brief overview of the issue's politics and law, including how the Dublin Treaty is or is not being implemented. (The regulation gives EU member states the right to transfer migrants to the first country of entry to the EU. It is based on the principle that the first Member State where fingerprints are stored or an asylum claim is lodged is responsible for a person's asylum claim.) Experts address how laws or policies have been adapted for helping to deter refugees, and conversations occur surrounding the political choice to use the word refugee or migrant. Finally, we highlight the rising influence of the extreme right concerning the difficulties supporting and integrating refugees.

Part Two: Ukrainian Refugees and Integration in EU. What does integration encompass? We investigate the differences between the various states and the dynamics of associations and institutions in the various countries. It is truly incredible how the reception machine is working – for example, at the border to Siret in Romania, the situation is highly organized. From there, people are welcomed and accompanied on buses and trains to be distributed in various European countries. Social workers, government officials, and academics outline the economic, social and cultural integration of refugees or their active exclusion – particularly the difference in experience between Africans and Middle Eastern migrants versus white Eastern European refugees. Refugees and activists detail the practice of inclusion or exclusion and the initiatives (good and bad) taken to support either.

Part Three: Case Study. Comparing the different models of integration and exclusion. Part Three offers three different real-world examples of integration and exclusion. First, a local business is highlighted. Second, local solutions for helping to alleviate the resource needs of refugees while welcoming them to the community, and finally, as a counterpoint, the damage done when citizens target refugees and migrants for exploitation and exclusion. Ultimately, however, Calamity and Mercy is a narrative of hope, an unfinished story of determination, courage, and the strength to survive.

Topic Summary: When Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on February 24, he used the language of dehumanization to vilify the leaders of Ukraine, and now subsequently, the citizens who are fighting back. Dehumanization is a simple psychological process wherein a person views another person as less human. When a group is sufficiently stigmatized as intellectually and morally inferior, it becomes socially acceptable to persecute them, leading to a measurable increase in hatred, alienation, violence, and death. While the world watched in horror, the Ukrainian people promptly upended his expectation of easy victory. While many stayed to fight, millions of Ukrainians fled for safety, creating the largest and fastest flood of refugees into Western Europe since WWII, currently standing over three million since the beginning of the conflict.

As viewers, it is far too easy to see the victims as nameless and faceless, a mass casualty event removed from our everyday existence. *Calamity and Mercy* uses the extraordinary power of storytelling to slip away the mask of anonymity and document the historic event happening in real-time, preserving truth for now and future generations.

Additionally, although *Calamity and Mercy* details the Ukrainian refugees fleeing for their lives, the effects continue to ripple outward, threatening to engulf us all. The world is actively engaged in ending this crisis as the social and economic consequences grow ever more dire.

Finally, we have a unique opportunity based on previous documentary experience to examine and address the stark disparity in the response to European Ukrainian refugees versus the 1.8 million refugees fleeing from violence, persecution, poverty, war, and starvation who have entered Europe since the peak of the previous refugee crisis. While the flood of refugees has slowed somewhat in the last five years, the inflammatory, often inaccurate rhetoric surrounding the topic of immigration and refugees has spiked over the past few years, leading to a growing surge of anti-immigrant voices in both the US and Europe as well as an increase in violence toward refugees. The UNHCR believes the current system under the Dublin treaty fails in providing fair, efficient, and effective protection. Some refugees transferred under Dublin were not always able to access an asylum procedure, putting them at risk of being returned to persecution. Additionally, experts claim the Dublin regulation impedes the legal rights and personal welfare of asylum seekers, including the right to a fair examination of their asylum claim, adequate protection, and uneven distribution of asylum claims among the member states who recognized the treaty.

In contrast, while race, culture, and religion certainly play a role in the warm welcome fleeing Ukrainians have received, the rapid response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis demonstrates that the Dublin Treaty can be revised with a consequent downsizing of the migratory phenomenon.

I am uniquely positioned to tell this story because I have lived and served in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe from 2001 to 2014 and have previously produced three documentaries interviewing refugees, migrants, and social workers involved in the EU refugee crisis of the past decade. These projects, *Tempelhof* (Balkans and Germany), *Tahriib* (Italy), and *Roads of Exile* (Spain), detail the journey of refugees and migrants and their integration challenges as they resettle in Europe. *Calamity and Mercy* will be the fourth, with an added note on the difference in experience between Eastern Europeans and nonwhite immigrants. (The current documentary subjects hail from the Middle East, East Africa, North Africa, West Africa, and Central America.) The first two documentaries have had successful film fest runs and won awards. The third is in post-production. (See [Veritas Art Pictures web page link](#)).

Broader critical issues and themes include:

1. The physical and psychological damage incurred from the decision to leave, the journey, and its aftermath: Experiences among the refugee and migrant population due to exposure to the natural environment, war trauma, and post-migration living have left most with PTSD symptoms that include hypervigilance, flashbacks, avoidance, numbness, insomnia, and many physical ailments.
2. The multilayered hurdles of assimilating to a new culture:
 - Language: One of the most significant challenges of integration is learning a new language to communicate, get an education, and seek employment.
 - Concern for loved ones left behind: With the war still raging, displaced Ukrainians must grapple with the prospect of assimilation with little to no information on the fate of family members left behind, particularly with the rise in targeting citizens and the cities besieged by Russian troops.
 - Lack of funds: Migrant and refugee families spend thousands of dollars to reach the West. Often, family members who remained behind fund their undertaking. Theft, kidnapping, enslavement, sickness, and changes in smuggling fees result in unexpected costs and additional trauma.
 - Cultural conservatism: Within both refugee and host nation communities, the battle is between retaining their cultural heritage, accepting change, and tolerating differences. For many older refugees, the only thing left is their way of life. With family lost, houses gone, and cities destroyed, culture is the last remnant of home.
3. Political: The uneven application of the Dublin Treaty, the social, political, and economic impact of this new wave of refugees, and the disparate treatment of non-Ukrainian asylum seekers.

Artistic Approach: Calamity and Mercy is a series of intimate portraits, conversations that could happen over kitchen tables with subjects bathed in natural light. Conversations that become almost reverent in their contrast between the humanity of the subject and the stark tragedy they've endured. Much like Vittorio De Sica's "Two Women," my goal is to underscore the devastating impact of war, creating empathy and a shared experience. And yet, even as the narratives in Calamity and Mercy are a collection of grim refugee road trips, the viewer is left with a sense of hope that these horrific events can be endured and overcome.

We film using a clear emphasis on the interviewees' facial features, inspired by the cinematography of Carl Dreyer's film, "The Passion of Joan of Arc." Dreyer filmed the actors in close-up and was quoted as saying, "There were questions, there were answers- very short, very crisp... Each question, each answer, quite naturally called for a close-up ... In addition, the result of the close-ups was that the spectator was as shocked as Joan was, receiving the questions, tortured by them." In Calamity and Mercy, I focus on the migrants as they tell their stories using medium range and close shots of the speaker to simulate a conversation between two people.

We use photographs to highlight the refugee and migrant stories, along with video clips from news broadcasts, maps, graphics, and B-roll footage related to their experiences. Media from these sources will be used to contrast and compare with earlier refugee and migrant historical events.

Project Stage and Timeline: I have two experienced film teams I've collaborated with on prior projects. One will be working from Berlin and traveling to the Polish and Ukraine border. A second team is working from Torino, Italy traveling to the Ukraine, Romanian and Hungarian borders. In terms of timing, given travel restrictions, we plan to start interviews in May. Both teams will have multilingual translators and I will split time between the teams. It may be necessary the teams operate independently. All film will be shot in 4k, and we will scrape as much personal B-roll footage we can from interviewees and others present during the invasion.

Timeline:

- May 2022 - July 2022: Initial Production filming in EU.
- August 2022 - November 2022 Complete development of teaser and initial editing. The objective is to finish visual preparation of the film for the composer to add a score.
- December 2022 - February 2023: Edit fine cut to picture lock and add music. Finalize selection of festivals interested in asylum, migration, humanitarian, and social issues to enter and schedule.
- March-April 2023: Conduct Seed and Spark crowdfunding campaign for additional funds to cover Postproduction costs,
- May-September 2023: Begin festival submissions 27 September 2022 tentative release date. Refine Marketing and Distribution Plan activities.
- September-October 2023: Seek distribution license in the priority below after Festival run.
- November 2023: Theatrical release.

AUDIENCE AND DISTRIBUTION:

Distribution: Calamity and Mercy's initial audience will be developed using social media campaigns tailored to the demographic identified as the core audience. After the initial social media targeting, we have identified festivals appropriate to roll out the film.

1. Socially Relevant Film Festival New York
2. Global Migration Film Festival
3. Refugee and Migration Film Festival
4. Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
5. Migrant Film Festival aka The Incomers Film Festival
6. WNY Refugee Film Festival
7. London Migration Film Festival — Migration Collective
8. Refugee Stories: Migration, Displacement, Hope | 21st Arab Film

In addition to the festival roll-out, our team has identified a comprehensive list of local and national community organizations composed of our target audience. We are contacting each one to offer community-level screenings to increase our reach. (List available upon request).

Intended Audience: Current polling shows 89% of U.S. voters are following the situation in Ukraine very or somewhat closely. The same percentage also finds Americans overwhelmingly saying Russia's actions are not justified, according to Monmouth University. While the divide falls along party lines in approving the current administration's response, rarely is there such bipartisan support for an international issue. And, nearly seven-in-ten Americans (69%) favor admitting thousands of Ukrainian refugees into the U.S., including majorities of those in both parties. We have a unique opportunity to reach a broad, bipartisan adult audience of all ages and genders with a focus on college educated voters.

As a secondary audience, we are targeting female white and nonwhite voters, ages 18-49, with a college education as part of our attempt to parlay the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees into a humanitarian understanding of the plight of nonwhite refugees to Europe and the US. According to an April 2017 poll of US voters, 57% of registered US voters support accepting Syrian refugees into the country, while only 38% oppose allowing refugees from war-torn Middle Eastern nations. By gender the results were: Men back admitting Syrian refugees 52 percent to 43 percent. Female voters support accepting refugees by a 30-point margin: 62 percent to 32 percent. White college graduates back admitting refugees 64 percent to 31 percent. Women identified in this secondary audience overwhelmingly support a positive resolution to the refugee crisis. They also possess the funds to make a purchase, have the authority make decisions, and exist online in easily reachable platforms. We'll find this audience by using targeted social media ads aimed at our core audience, then expanding through activist groups, NGOs, and college campuses to share the story.

Audience Engagement and Social Impact: The desired overall impact of Calamity and Mercy is to highlight the truth of Russian atrocities inflicted during the current conflict, preserving history in real time; to understand the European response to the overwhelming wave of displaced persons, and determine if it can be used to produce a greater compassionate response for non-European refugees and migrants. Specifically, we want to reverse the 2016 trend in US public sentiment from humanitarian sympathy for refugees to national security anxiety over the refugee issue in both the US and EU and change the language of dehumanization surrounding refugees and migrants. Over the past decade, both the U.S. and European countries have struggled against a rise towards autocrat conservatism based on nativism, bigotry, selfishness, and isolationism. A worldview that deteriorates democracy because it undercuts empathy and concern for others. We must not allow autocrats to prevail.

We are working with contacts connected to NGOs in the countries bordering Ukraine that can assist us in this. A contact list is available upon request – it is a fluid document as we obtain permissions.

KEY CREATIVE PERSONNEL:

Producer and Screenwriter: Daniel W Smith (USA); Daniel grew up on Long Island, New York, and in Japan. After graduating from Marquette University, he volunteered for military service. After deploying to Bosnia, Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and Germany, he retired from US Army Special Forces in 2008. He then worked as a civilian operations planner at U.S. Africa Command and then at a US Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Squadron supporting U2 and drone operations. Daniel graduated from George Mason University with an MFA in Poetry and the

New York Film Academy with an MFA in Screenwriting and Producing. He has written seven screenplays and two documentary scripts. He has produced and completed three short films.

Assistant Director, Cinematography, Editor, and Digital Information Transfer: Rodolfo Colombara (Italy); Rodolfo is a filmmaking instructor and professional video producer. He directs, shoots and edits advertising videos, music videos, and documentaries for large international brands, national foundations, and local companies.

Cinematography, Editor, Production Assistant, Translation, and Digital Information Transfer: Valentina Corrado (Italy); Valentina collaborates closely with Rodolfo as an experienced professional filmmaker. She assists in co-directing, filming, and editing. She also creates advertising, music, and documentary projects, both for international brands, national foundations, and local companies), as well as creative projects in collaboration with independent filmmakers.

Cinematography, production: Matthias Coers (Germany); Matthias is an independent filmmaker and sociologist. As a freelance journalist and cameraman, he produces photographs, texts, and videos, for trade unions, tenant organizations, AIDS assistance, and newspapers. He is working on the subject of housing issues in Berlin, the history of antifascism in West Germany and housing in Europe.

Cinematography, sound, and translation: Grischa Dallmer (Germany); works as a freelance programmer. He is active in sound and film editing. Together with Matthias Coers, he has been involved in distributing and organizing events with the documentary film Mietrebelln in Germany and abroad. He is included in the Berlin tenant movement and organizes a series of events with the Berlin tenants' association on international housing issues and the development of the cities.

Production Assistant and Translation: Alice Gidone (Italy); Alice is a critical team member, coordinating travel arrangements and scheduling interviews. She also provided the humor and patience to keep all involved in high spirits.

FUNDRAISING STRATEGY AND GRANT IMPACT

Fundraising Strategy: The funding strategy for this project has three components.

- Crowd-funding Campaign: \$15,000 Seed & Spark
- Documentary Grants: \$100,000
- Corporate/Private Investors: \$166,000
- The total budget for this project is \$294,576

Funding to Date: Secured funds: \$14,000 personal funds. Crowdfunding goal: \$15,000. We are in the process of researching targeted grants and potential corporate sponsors, including Grammarly, a Ukrainian-based web company providing subscription services to writers and editors.

Amount Requested/Grant Impact: Any grant amount awarded less than the total will be used on Production Expenses and Travel (\$47,000 Lines 5000, 6000, and 8000) to deploy to Europe to

collect interviews of Ukrainian Refugees and Humanitarian Workers. An amount in excess of \$36,000 will be used to begin Post-Production and pay Producing Staff (Lines 7000 and 2000).

BUDGET: See attached.

WORK SAMPLES:

Director's Prior Work:

50/10: Saul Turteltaub is an award-winning short documentary tracing Saul's career in television comedy. He wrote and produced for Sheri Lewis, Candid Camera; That is the Week That Was, Carol Burnett, That Girl with Marlo Thomas, Sanford and Son, and What's Happening. The key relevance of this work to the current project is that both projects focus on the person interviewed and their story. The refugees and migrants are not entertainers, but their achievement in surviving their journeys is worthy to hear. This film is a departure because it focuses on common people immersed in extraordinary times.

Full Length Documentary Projects:

Tahriib

<https://vimeo.com/486836222>

Password: TAH

Tempelhof

<https://vimeo.com/463466470/bfe7b4febd>

No password.

Roads to Exile Work Sample

<https://vimeo.com/356787044>

No password.

CALAMITY & MERCY

A story of refugees, war, neighbors, and hope.



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