

TEMPLE OF DREAMS -----Questions & Answers

Q: What was the inspiration behind this documentary? And/or how did it come about

It all started after the London bombings. Muslims were coming increasingly under the microscope, and young people in general. It was the issue of our times, and it begged a documentary. Nothing had made with any degree of depth about the community in Australia – and this was an ideal opportunity.

I found the main subject Fadi Rahman through the Sunday tabloids. I saw a photograph of a young man whom I thought was a community worker sitting with some young teenage kids on the steps of building, which turned out to be an old Masonic Temple. I drove out to Lidcombe and tracked down Fadi and went out to visit the Youth Centre. A week later the Cronulla Riot occurred. Fadi was all over the media. People were looking to him for answers. Suddenly he was in the public eye. Suddenly the idea of making a film about a young Muslim leader and the youth centre - the 'Temple of Dreams' he'd established was to me the obvious film to make.

Q: What do you like/find challenging about making documentaries?

I call this documentary an "observational narrative". They are the hardest documentaries to make because you cannot miss recording the events that are critical to the story. You also need to have 'access' - the ability to observe and be able to tell a story from 'the inside'. Fadi gave me access – the ability to hang out with him and others at the Centre over a long period of time. He's the one who smoothed the way for me with the women.

Q: Did you encounter any *particular* challenges in making this documentary and, if so, how did you overcome them

My biggest challenge was my relationship with people at the Centre – in particular Fadi.

The young Lebanese guys working out at the gym weren't totally cool with me first up – rather a bit suspicious, reticent. This was totally understandable given the way the media usually portrays Muslims. However it wasn't long though before I felt accepted. I even started working out in the fitness centre myself, and every now and then I would do a bit of filming.

Fadi was hard to pin down. He worked every day at the car repair yard which he managed, and would only pop into the Youth Centre briefly every few

days. It was hard catching him. Yet I felt that if I spent enough time pursuing him, then I would eventually find 'the film'.... or, more to the point, 'the film' would eventually end up finding me.

What appealed to me about Fadi was that he was really 'out there'. He wanted to make a mark not only in the Sydney Islamic community, but also in the wider society. He had ambitions to achieve a lot over a short space of time – maybe too much! Perhaps there was a bit of recklessness about him as well, a kind of 'give it a go' attitude - unpredictability, if you like - that would give rise to the unexpected. Inevitably things would not go according to plan – there would be hiccups along the way and that would produce drama. I was dead right.

When did the women come into the picture?

The Cronulla Riot spurred Fadi to look at ways of raising the Centre's profile in the community. However he needed other volunteers to help him, and he was especially keen to have women get involved. It's at this point that Amna, Zouhour and Alyah joined the ICRA team. Immediately they set about decorating a room at the back of the Centre which was used for meetings, and which they wanted to transform into a chill-out space. That's when I really got to know them, and soon afterwards they became major characters in the film.

Q: How much filming did you do compared with just hanging out with the subjects?

Once the serious filming started I saw Fadi at least once a week for about a year, and the women about once every 2 weeks. Fadi was usually hard to pin down, so if I couldn't reach him by phone I would just go out to the Centre in the early evening. Fadi would often call by the Centre on his way from work, but not every day. When I did see him we would mostly just sit on the steps and chat. I wanted to know what was going on and he would usually tell me.

During the month of Ramadan (in the middle of the drama with the Council), I was frequently invited to the evening breaking of the fast. Ramadan is an excuse for socialising and there was a banquet in a different house every night! In the process I met Amna & Zouhour's parents and siblings and was subsequently invited back for the Eid festival banquet and got to know the family quite well. Every time I went to the house, I filmed a little, but for much of the time I put the camera away and chatted. (Sometimes as you see in the film, they insisted I put the camera away). The parents invited me to film Amna's engagement. I gave them a copy of the unedited tape. They liked it so much they pleaded with me to film the wedding, which I did – though it never ended up in the film. I've been invited back several times

and I feel very close to them.

Did your filming impact on the situation?

Not in terms of the overall outcome. I think the fact that Council knew I was filming meant that they might have been more cautious in the way they treated Fadi and the group. They may have extended a few deadlines, but it was inevitable what happened in the end. As the Council's general manager says in the film: "there are rules to be followed and every organization has to abide by them regardless of who they are."

Q: How does the documentary relate to your past work, if at all? Was this film a natural next step or a radical departure from your previous work in film, TV etc

Temple of Dreams is a logical progression from my most recent films. Over the last 25 years I've been mapped through my documentaries Australia's changing social and political landscape. Four years ago I made a film **Molly & Mobarak**, a story of a young refugee from Afghanistan who finds work in a small country town and falls in love with a local school-teacher. This was preceded by **The Diplomat** - a profile of freedom fighter Jose Ramos Horta in the final tumultuous year of his 24 year campaign to secure independence for East Timor. **Temple of Dreams** is made in a style of an observational narrative, just like **Molly & Mobarak** and earlier films like *Billal* (1996) and *Homelands* (1992). It's the way I feel most comfortable working - letting the film evolve slowly over time. The editor is usually involved at an early stage - cutting scenes already shot, while I'm continuing to film the remainder of the story. It helps me plot the story arc so I don't waste time filming extraneous scenes. The whole process from beginning to end takes about 18 months.

More information about my films, including articles and other resources can be obtained through my website www.tomzubrycki.com

What would your ideal viewer response to the doco be!

I think people would be pleasantly surprised to discover that the stereotypes associated with Muslims in Australia have been shattered in this film. I think people will be really drawn to the characters and pulled along by the story which at times becomes very gripping and dramatic.