

Reviews/Articles on Temple of Dreams

Muslim youth lose fighting chance

News and Features

Linda Morris Religious Affairs Writer

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First

4

English

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A RED carpet cinematic debut appears unlikely to save one of Sydney's few youth centres for Muslim youths from closure.

The Lidcombe youth centre, the subject of the Tom Zubrycki documentary Temple of Dreams, which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival last month, has been credited with turning around troubled Muslim youth.

But Auburn Council has deemed its use of a former Masonic hall as illegal. The centre's lease will expire at the end this month and it has nowhere else to go.

The centre was set up by Fadi Rahman, a youth leader who came to prominence after the Cronulla riots of 2005 with a message of racial tolerance and acceptance. He has seen many lives turned around but has been frustrated by the daily financial struggles and, now, the fruitless search for a new home.

"We need \$60,000 to \$70,000 to keep this centre running each year. That includes rent and all outgoings," he said.

"We can get the kids in, we can change them mentally and build their dreams, but we can't follow it through to the point they are placed in the workplace."

Downstairs is a gym, and the upstairs boxing ring is the nursery for several up-and-coming amateur boxers run by the former Olympian Hussein Hussein, ranked world No. 2 in the flyweight division, and preparing for a title fight later this year.

"We get the boys before they go down the wrong path," Hussein said. "When these boys train, they eat properly, they've got to be fit, they have to be dedicated and respectful and set their goals. You can't teach that sort of thing in schools.

"When they come here they talk to me; they let their frustrations out. I'm like a counsellor. If they don't have someone to lean on, then kaboom! and off they go.

"Sometimes Fadi and I look at each other and say this is all too hard, but then we look at the kids and see the changes in them.

"For us it's not about becoming a world champion or a world fighter, it's about becoming a good person and having something in life they can turn to."

Before moving into the Masonic hall, Mr Rahman's group, Independent Centre for Research Australia, consulted the council, which it said advised that a change-of-use application was all that was necessary - a matter the council disputes.

The council asked Mr Rahman to submit a development application and advised the youth centre the property lay in a residential zone and a gymnasium did not comply with zoning regulations. The centre decided to apply as a place of worship, only to be advised that parking had to be provided on the site.

The general manager of Auburn Council, John Burgess, said the council supported the group but had to apply town planning policy consistently. The Masonic hall had never been zoned for a gymnasium or a place of worship. The council had no other property to offer the youth centre but a meeting would be scheduled soon to discuss the youth centre's needs.

Document SMHH000020070708e3790000s

Aust film gives insight into young Muslims Aust film gives insight into young Muslims

Lindy Kerin

731 words

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation Transcripts

English

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MARK COLVIN: A new film that gives an insight into the lives of young Muslim Australians gets its premiere tomorrow. follows a group of Lebanese Australians who set up an Islamic youth centre in Western Sydney.

The documentary, to be shown at the Sydney Film Festival, follows the group's battle against the local council to keep the centre open, and their struggle to fit into the wider community.

Lindy Kerin reports. (Sound of music from)

LINDY KERIN: Veteran documentary maker Tom Zubrycki set out to make his film two years ago, motivated by what he saw as the unfair treatment of young Muslim Australians by the media, politicians and the wider community.

(Excerpt from)

TOM ZUBRYCKI: I suppose what I really wanted to do was make a film which gave a voice to young Muslims. I think there was a concern about the misrepresentation of young Muslim, particularly young Muslim Lebanese in the media, there was a sense that these people are disengaged from society, and I thought well, hang on, you know, who are these people?

LINDY KERIN: He started following Fadi Abdul Rahman, an ambitious young man who set up a youth centre in Sydney's west, with a gym and a place of prayer for young Muslims.

(sounds from gymnasium)

FADI ABDUL RAHMAN: It was an idea that was brought up by just a bunch of young people like me who said enough is enough, you know. We've seen a lot of our young kids are hanging out on the street now more, they're becoming more of, to drugs, to crime, and we didn't want that to happen, because we've gone through it ourselves, and the last thing we wanted is for our youngsters to be heading down that way.

So we decided to put some money together and open up a small place, which eventually, you know, evolved into a bigger place.

LINDY KERIN: The film follows the battle the centre has with the local council, over planning regulations, and how Fahdi Abdul Raman deals with the authorities' threat to close the centre.

FADI ABDUL RAHMAN: If they really wanted to help, they would've set the town planner out here to us and said listen guys, we know that you guys are struggling and we know that you guys are trying your best, how can we help you? What is there that we can help you? We can work together in order for us to be successful, therefore you know what the law is, you know what the procedure is, you know what ... But all they care about is, what, serving us with order and sending the sheriff here. Is that all they're good at? And then next time what are they going to do, send the police here so they can arrest us? Pathetic.

MAN: And they say there's no racism.

MAN 2: Yeah, my arse.

LINDY KERIN: The documentary also offers an insight into how young Muslims feel about their place in Australia.

VOX POP: Our community slip up just one tiny bit and then all of a sudden you just get mobbed.

VOX POP 2: It's always the 'Muslim bloke done drug', and that's what hurts. When it's an Anglo Saxon guy it's by his name and the general culture is never, ever mentioned.

VOX POP 3: You feel alone, you hate your life, you've got no one to talk to. Just probably some people will fall into committing suicide.

LINDY KERIN: The Youth Centre's future remains under threat. The council has condemned the building, but is helping to find an alternative location.

Tom Zubrycki says the film pays tribute to the young people involved in the centre and their commitment to helping their community.

TOM ZUBRYCKI: What they want to do is very much be embraced by the wider Australian society, they want to feel that they have a place in the society. They don't want to be marginalised, they don't want to be vilified, they don't want to be discriminated against in any way. They want to be accepted as what they are, Muslims and Australians at the same time.

MARK COLVIN: Tom Zubrycki ending Lindy Kerin's report.

Document ABCTRS0020070615e36f000bc

An older mufti, but one who could be the inspiration for young Muslims

Irfan Yusuf Irfan Yusuf is a Sydney lawyer and associate editor of AltMuslim.com.

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A highlight of this year's Sydney Film Festival is Tom Zubrycki's documentary about a western Sydney youth centre servicing a large and troubling group of young people who so many love to blame but few bother to assist.

Temple of Dreams features Fadi Rahman, a young Australian of Lebanese Muslim heritage who, with a group of dedicated volunteers, runs a youth centre and gymnasium. Rahman's centre is one of a number that have sprung up across western Sydney. Virtually all are self-funded, receiving little assistance from mosque governing bodies and other established Muslim institutions dominated by first-generation migrant males.

Young people such as Rahman are doing what 15 years ago was deemed impossible by Muslim youth. Then, the only resources were books, youth camps and a handful of imams who made time for us. Chief among them was Sheik Fehmi Naji el-Imam of Melbourne.

At 80 and still recovering from a stroke, Sheik Fehmi, as he is commonly known, is no longer the fit imam who played volleyball with young people at the 20 or so national Muslim youth camps where he served.

Over the weekend, he was elected to the position of mufti of Australia by the Australian National Imams Council for two years even though, in March, the council spokesman, Dr Mohamad Abdalla, told ABC's Radio National that the council intended abolishing the position of mufti. "I think the Australian National Imams Council wants to move forward and say instead of having a mufti we'll have a council of scholars, which will represent the various states and will discuss issues that relate to the Muslims as a minority community."

Now the council wants to have the best of both worlds, having a mufti and a council of scholars around him. Whether the purpose of the council of scholars is to assist the mufti or eventually render his position redundant remains to be seen.

Abdalla said that one problem with the mufti's role was its ambiguity. For Sheik Taj el-Din al Hilaly, the role involved speaking on political matters, even if he lacked the language skills and nous to avoid embarrassing his community. However, for his mainly

elderly Lebanese Muslim followers, Hilaly was performing a role typical of muftis in Lebanon.

Fehmi is the first mufti to have been elected by his peers. He faces enormous challenges, chief among them to define his role. Is he limited to interpreting Islamic sacred law to address novel situations? Is he to provide leadership just to imams? Or to Muslims in general?

Historically, the role of muftis has been to provide independent expert legal opinions to properly constituted sharia courts, especially in situations where the presiding qadi, or judge, lacked expertise in a particular area.

Australia has neither sharia courts nor qadis. Historical precedent provides as little guidance as modern realities of the Muslim world, where muftis play different roles in different countries. In some Middle Eastern countries, the mufti is seen as the government's rubber stamp. In Bosnia, the mufti is elected by worshippers at all mosques. Its mufti, Dr Mustafa Cerić, has been criticised for dabbling too much in party politics.

However, Cerić is also admired and respected for his broad education and his language ability. He has defended traditional Bosnian Islam from the attacks of puritanical salafists, many of whom came to Bosnia as volunteers during the war to help the beleaguered Bosnian army ward off partition of the country.

In these respects, Cerić and Fehmi have much in common. Fehmi encourages the development of a uniquely Australian Islam that is firmly anchored in moderate mainstream orthodoxy. He has warded off challenges from a small group of young salafist Muslims, many associated with the Melbourne cleric Sheik Mohammad Omran. Some among this group must surely be waiting in the wings, hoping Fehmi's new responsibilities will enable them to relaunch their coup. The mufti must watch his back.

Perhaps Fehmi's biggest challenge is to provide leadership and inspiration to a generation of young Muslims, many of whom find the mosque leadership alien and intimidating. More than half of Muslims are aged under 30. Fehmi must use his influence to ensure their views are heard in mainstream religious gatherings, and are not relegated to self-funded and vulnerable youth centres.

And he must do this in an environment of often media and political double standards, a time when some politicians and their media allies will accuse him of extremism even if he so much sneezes too loudly, while they overlook, if not praise, clerics who bully politicians or pastors who call for Hindu and Buddhist temples to be torn down.

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'I was incensed about the way young Muslims were treated like the devil'

News - Extra

Andrew Taylor

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TOM ZUBRYCKI

His work is both controversial and confronting. Andrew Taylor talks to a documentary maker with a passion for truth and social justice.

IN HIS new film *Temple Of Dreams*, Tom Zubrycki follows a group of young Muslim Australians who have established an Islamic youth centre and gym in western Sydney when he finds himself menaced by men in dark suits.

The incident in April 2006 took place at the funeral of a boxer who trained at the gym and was killed in a drive-by shooting.

The veteran documentary-maker's camera suddenly shifts from the mourners to an unmarked car containing a group of men, perhaps from the Australian Federal Police, taking photographs and notes.

After realising Zubrycki's lens is trained on them, one of the men demands to know who he is: "You tell me who you are or I can find out!"

Zubrycki says he was surprised they did not insist on taking away his camera.

"Such a scene reminds you that the community is under constant surveillance," he says. "As it turned out, that was not the only unmarked car there and I imagine every mourner would have been photographed."

Also at the funeral was the young, charismatic and articulate Fadi Rahman, who volunteered at the youth centre and had become a spokesman for young Muslims in the wake of the 2005 Cronulla riots.

Zubrycki had sought out Rahman after seeing a photograph of him with two teenagers on the steps of the former Masonic temple that housed the centre.

Rahman was not a social worker, nor was he affiliated with a mosque. "I wondered what made him tick," he says.

However, it was only after the funeral that Zubrycki realised his four months of following Rahman with a camera would not go to waste.

Temple Of Dreams, which screens this Saturday at the State Theatre as part of the Sydney Film Festival and later this year on SBS, shows Rahman and other young Lebanese Muslims in a very different light to that we've become accustomed to thanks to politicians, shock jocks and newspaper columnists.

"All of them were incredibly warm, gentle people," says Zubrycki. "They were very genuine in wanting to help people younger than themselves going through the same things they went through a few years ago."

Helped by a group of young Muslim women, Rahman flies out Napoleon, a former rapper from the United States, to preach a message of non-violence.

They also organise a conference to highlight the problems faced by young Muslims in Australia, while battling Auburn Council to keep the centre open.

Zubrycki says Rahman, now a father of three young boys and manager of a panel-beating business, had escaped a life of petty crime to become an advocate for his community.

"I picked up pretty quickly that Fadi was quite politically ambitious," Zubrycki says. "In fact, just in the past few weeks I gather he wants to stand for the next council elections."

The eldest son of Polish immigrants, Zubrycki is no stranger to the harsh realities faced by migrants, having come to Australia as a nine-year-old. His siblings share his creativity: younger brother John is a journalist and author, while his sister, Anna, is an actor in Poland. Those first years in a new country were tough, he recalls, and help to explain his interest in multiculturalism and the lives of new settlers.

Zubrycki had wanted to make a film about young Muslims, pointing out they were the newest minority to become society's scapegoat.

"I was very concerned ... well, more like incensed about the way in which Muslims were treated like the devil of the 21st century," he says. "It was refugees a few years back and now it's young Muslims."

In such a climate of suspicion, Zubrycki won the trust of Rahman and other volunteers at the centre. He was invited into their homes to join the breaking of the fast during Ramadan and was asked to film the wedding of one of the women in the film.

It helped that several people had seen Billal, a film Zubrycki had made a decade earlier about a Lebanese-Australian teenager seriously injured in a hit-and-run accident.

"They were incredibly cool about my presence and thought I could give them a voice," he says. "I don't think they realised how long I was prepared to stick it out to get a story."

Zubrycki shot 200 hours of footage in 18 months, which he and editor Ray Thomas whittled down to 90 minutes. He also spent another 200 hours "hanging around ... and I think in this film I do believe I've made friends for life".

It's easy to see why Zubrycki won over his subjects. The mild-mannered 60-year-old appears diffident, choosing his words with the care he says is necessary for his highly personal and emotive style of story-telling.

Zubrycki focuses on the minutiae of people's lives to reveal larger truths about society, and yet his award-winning documentaries have often drawn the ire of the powerful.

The ACTU tried to censor Zubrycki's 1990 documentary about the union movement, *Amongst Equals*, which it had partially funded, after he refused to edit the film according to its liking.

Even his account of a relationship between an Afghan refugee and an Australian girl, *Molly & Mobarak*, upset the Government, which tried to ban its screening in Federal Parliament.

However, Zubrycki says these controversies pale in comparison to filming moments of intimacy and anger between the people in his documentaries.

"You're filming things so raw that later you think, 'Do I dare to put that in my film?'," he says. Invariably, the answer is yes and so viewers watch as Molly and Mobarak's love affair eventually turns sour. In *Homelands*, the marriage between El Salvadorean migrants, Carlos and Maria, disintegrates before the camera, with Carlos becoming jealous of Zubrycki's relationship with Maria.

Zubrycki is also an active-participant in his documentaries, though he does not believe his presence alters the course of events. But, he adds, "it is fraught. You have to have a profound ethical responsibility as well. You've got to be very careful and sensitive about your advice."

Zubrycki says he hopes films such as *Temple Of Dreams* contribute to cultural understanding, an aspect of Australian life that he feels has been harmed in recent years.

"What makes filmmaking really important is the emotional connection you forge between the viewer and subject," he says. "In all my films, I want viewers to feel in touch with them (subjects) and dream their dreams."

MILESTONES

1956 Arrives in Canberra from Poland.

1968 Flees conservative Canberra for Sydney, getting involved in the anti-war movement and the Sydney Push.

1974 Shoots first documentary about traffic and pollution issues in Balmain.

Late 1970s Runs the Community Media Bus around Sydney, helping locals make videos using the bus as a mobile studio.

1981 Visits Poland with partner Julia Overton during the heady days of the Solidarity movement.

1985 Zubrycki's son Sam is born during the Sydney Film Festival.

1999 Arrives in East Timor with Jose Ramos-Horta during the filming of The Diplomat.

2001 Sees the second plane hit the World Trade Centre in New York.

2003 Molly & Mobarak is banned from Federal Parliament because "it promotes the theme of widespread resistance to government policy". The ban is subsequently overturned with the help of Sydney MP Tanya Plibersek.

2006 Experiences Ramadan during the filming of Temple Of Dreams

The Sydney Film Festival continues until June 24. See www.sydneyfilmfestival.org .

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Young Muslim Australians, up close and aspirational

Author: Sandy George

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Tom Zubrycki's intense observation of other people's lives reveals wider issues, Sandy George writes

ONE of Australia's best-known documentary-makers, Tom Zubrycki, found the subject for his latest film, *Temple of Dreams*, in a newspaper clipping. Fadi Rahman had established a community and fitness centre in western Sydney and since then had become a de facto spokesman for young Muslims. He came to prominence in the media in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots in 2005. Zubrycki knew there was a story to tell about Rahman, but he wasn't sure what it was.

"I felt if I spent enough time with him, then I would find the film or it would eventually end up finding me," Zubrycki says. "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, a give-it-a-go attitude, an unpredictability that would give rise to the unexpected."

Zubrycki's films -- recent ones include *Molly & Mobarak*, *The Diplomat* and *Billal* -- are distinctive for their observations of people's lives, which in turn tell a story about the big issues of the day.

Before *Temple*, he searched for some time for a subject, and began preliminary filming on other ideas. They included timber workers in Tasmania, a female Lebanese-Muslim soccer team and Sudanese refugees.

"Then, after the London bombings, it all became clear to me," Zubrycki says. "Muslim Lebanese, especially young people, were really going to suffer the fallout from this incident."

Temple of Dreams follows the lives of Rahman and three young women who do volunteer administrative work at the centre.

"I had a sense that there was a movement by young Muslims to overturn the older generation," Zubrycki says. "I felt inspired by their positiveness and also that they did not take themselves too seriously."

By following the day-to-day life of the centre, Zubrycki captured events that he could never have anticipated.

Rahman's bold response to a drive-by shooting -- in which a man who trained at the centre was killed -- was to bring to Australia from the US a former rapper, Napoleon, who encouraged young people to turn to religion. Problems arose with Auburn Council over the centre's use of a former Masonic temple, and Rahman had another bold idea: to hold a conference that would highlight the anxieties of young people.

“Bringing a former rapper who once performed with Tupac was ingenious: who would have thought that would happen and who would have thought that 2000 people would turn up to the [Sydney Olympic Park] Aquatic Centre to see him?” Zubrycki says.

Rahman, whose day job is manager of a panel-beating workshop, has ambitious ideas and a determination to put his people on the radar of decision-makers in the wider community. But Zubrycki was not sure he had a film until he got to know the three women Rahman recruited to help realise his dreams for the youth centre: Alyah, Amna and Zouhour. The women had seen Billal, which examined the aftermath of a hit-and-run car accident involving a young Lebanese-Australian teenager, and that helped them to trust Zubrycki.

“People are used to the media getting the story and going,” he says.

“With me they had to contend with someone in their face for a long time. They had to accommodate me and my filming within their own wider ambitions ... I am very good at merging into the background and just observing, but you have to show you are not observing critically but dispassionately.”

Zubrycki and long-time editor Ray Thomas have cut 210 hours of footage, filmed during 18 months, down to 90 minutes for Temple of Dreams. Zubrycki spent another 200 hours hanging around with the camera off. It was inevitable that friendships formed; he even shot a wedding video for one of the women.

“You can't help [but] get involved, but I do not think I have changed the course of events,” Zubrycki says. “You also can't help getting paranoid that you are not getting everything. I wake in fear that I have not been told something important.”

He says his Polish heritage -- he came to Australia aged nine -- draws him to stories of resettlement and cultural difference. He says he wants his documentaries to help strengthen the gains made by multicultural policies that he believes are being undone.

“What I think this film does is normalise young Muslims and make them just like you and me,” he says. “I can give people a voice who otherwise would not have one. I feel I have provided a new paradigm through which to look at young Muslims in Australia.”

Temple of Dreams screens at the Sydney Film Festival on June 16.

Muslim youth fighting for dreams

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EFFORTS by a group of young Muslims to keep open a youth centre in Sydney's south-west is the subject of a new film by widely respected documentary maker Tom Zubrycki. He's a film-maker with the inquiring mind of a journalist. Over the years he's been able to get inside significant stories as they unfold, whether it's the drama of an Afghan man in love with a woman in the NSW town of Young, or the final year of the campaign to secure independence for East Timor, or a strike in a Wollongong coalmine. The Sydney youth centre in Zubrycki's focus this time is in an old masonic temple that stands tall in the industrial suburb of Lidcombe. It's an old building that once heard the rituals of Freemasons and now hears the sounds of weightlifters, boxers and men working out. A group of young Sydney Muslims obtained a lease for the old temple and converted it into a youth centre that began operating early last year.

It has a boxing gym, where champions train alongside aspirants, and a fitness gym, to encourage young men to train, look after themselves and maintain a disciplined regimen. But Auburn Council deemed the use of the former masonic hall illegal and threatened it with closure. Zubrycki decided he would make the Lebanese Muslim community the subject of his next film when he met a community worker named Fadi Rahman and when tensions came to a head on a Sydney beachfront.

Zubrycki said that after the Cronulla riots "Fadi was all over the media." People were looking to him for answers after he'd played a prominent role as a peacebroker. During the Sydney Film Festival where Temple of Dreams premiered, I heard that Zubrycki hadn't found Rahman particularly open at first, understandably perhaps.

They "circled around each other a bit". Like another former documentary subject Jose Ramos-Horta, Rahman found it hard to be personal. The public persona sat more comfortably.

But what appealed to Zubrycki about Rahman was that he was really "out there". "Fadi had leadership skills and a strong mandate from a broad spectrum of people," he said. Zubrycki even began working out in the fitness centre "and every now and then [I] would do a bit of filming".

Moreover he had a "calling card", the film Billal, made in 1996, which documented the tragic aftermath of a hit-and-run accident which had left a young Lebanese Muslim seriously injured. Rahman had recruited some young female volunteers to help him realise his plans and when they appeared at the centre, Zubrycki was convinced about the direction of his new project. "They were really such fabulous characters.

They accepted me immediately, and once that happened I was away." The three young women in the film Zouhour, Alyah and Amna all in hijab, university- educated and professional, are a revelation. A trio of warm, assertive people who might be any group of young Australian women.

Without their voluntary help, it is hard to imagine how the Muslim youth conference Fadi Rahman organised could have been achieved. At one point in the film, tempers fray as the women argue over their tasks, while Rahman sits in silence as they trade angry accusations across the room until he snaps, and says, "Please, we need to work together as a team ... a goddamn team.

Isn't it enough that the whole world is against us?" Temple of Dreams is a generous and heartfelt film that yearns for goodwill between Muslims and the rest of the community. It is the work of a film-maker deeply committed to the multicultural ethic. When it premiered at the Sydney Film Festival, it earned an extra screening because of popular demand.

The session I attended included a Q&A with the film-maker and his main cast. Rahman in particular must have felt buoyed by the warmth of the audience response. There were a few searching questions too, touching on multiculturalism and the thoughts of Muslim youth in general.

I think the film invites other questions too: the gym is useful, but what about creating opportunities for trade, literacy, numeracy and IT skills-training for young Muslims? How is the strength and fitness developed at the centre expressed in society generally? In an encouraging development, the centre, which had been scheduled to close by the end of July, has been given new hope. Zubrycki says that Auburn Council has undertaken to find a property it owns which can be used as the youth centre. Zubrycki's Temple of Dreams will screen on SBS on December 6. A free screening will be held at Canberra's Australian Catholic University at 6.30pm, Monday, August 13.

Bookings are essential. RSVP by Tuesday to Anne-Marie Fonteyne on 62091172 or a.fonteyne@signadou.acu.edu.au

Headline: Muslim youth fighting for dreams
Author: By The Canberra Times

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Fadi Rahman is a young Muslim leader who rose to prominence after Sydney's...

222 words

14 June 2007

Federal Government Broadcast Alerts

English

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14/06/2007 17:41:23 3EA SBS Ethnic Radio Melbourne World View Caroline Davey

Fadi Rahman is a young Muslim leader who rose to prominence after Sydney's Cronulla riots. He is the subject of a new film by Tom Zubrycki called Temple of Dreams. Rahman runs the ICRA Youth Centre in Western Sydney. The film will screen at the Sydney Film Festival this Saturday at the State Theatre. Zubrycki says the film is about Rahman's attempts to establish the youth centre as a place where young people can come to. He says one of the people who used to attend the youth centre became the victim of a shooting. Zubrycki's film The Diplomat, about East Timorese freedom fighter Jose Ramos Horta won two AFI awards. Rahman talks about how he learned to trust Zubrycki. Zahour el Gould(*), who also features in the film says she was intimidated by the camera at first. The ICRA Youth Centre is designed to help young Muslim kids to deal with their frustrations. Zubrycki says the film gives a voice to young Muslim people and he talks about coming to Australia from Poland, and his interest in the migrant community.

Duration - 872 seconds.

Syndicatedstationcount - 0.

Interviewee - Zahour el Gould(*).

Document MMAGBA0020070615e36e0000u

The following articles are mentions rather than full reviews

Critic's picks

Garry Maddox | June 1, 2007

Brisbane Times

Sometimes the real gems at the Sydney Film Festival take some finding. Having scoured the catalogue and seen some films at other festivals, here are Metro's picks for 10 possible diamonds worth viewing.

Temple of Dreams

Over the years, documentary maker Tom Zubrycki has been responsible for many highlights at the Sydney Film Festival including The Diplomat, about East Timor's Jose Ramos Horta, and Molly and Mobarak, about a young Afghan refugee falling in love with a reluctant Australian teacher. Zubrycki's new film centres on the struggle to keep open an Islamic youth centre in Lidcombe. If it shares his usual heartfelt humanity and eye for a good story, it will be worth seeing.

Hear and Now

An audience award at the Sundance Film Festival is generally a stamp of quality. Director Irene Taylor Brodsky's documentary, which won one this year, is about her deaf parents getting cochlear implants to hear for the first time since birth. It sounds fascinating - imagine entering the world of sound after 65 years of silence - as well as moving. One American review suggests watching it with hankies handy.

The Paper Will Be Blue

This Romanian film traces the chaos and comic absurdity in Bucharest after the downfall of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989. Clare Stewart says its "combination of seriousness and playfulness and humour and tragedy is really well measured".

Still Life

There has never been a more unheralded winner at a major film festival than Still Life at Venice last year. Slipped late into the competition with a midnight screening, this heartfelt Chinese drama was seen by few people outside the jury but they loved it. Director Jia Zhang-Ke tells a slow and thoughtful story about a man tracking down his ex-wife in a town about to be submerged by the Three Gorges Dam project.

Black Sheep

The trailer looks very promising. This comic-horror film is about genetically altered sheep going on the rampage. A kind of Recently Shorn of the Dead. It's from New Zealand - where else? - with first-time director Jonathan King working with a no-name cast. Dubbed Violence of the Lambs, it sounds very early Peter Jackson. The special effects were done by Jackson's Weta Workshop - a good sign.

Academy

This one has "intriguing" all over it. Every film that has won best picture at the Oscars over 75 years, from Wings to Chicago, is compressed into a minute. "The way I compressed it wasn't to just skip around, but rather to take the entire film and average it down so it turns into this big blur, basically," says director R. Luke DuBois. "You can watch it and say, 'Oh, yeah, I remember that movie; I hated that movie! I loved that movie!' It's more about the people viewing it than the actual movies."

The Fibros and the Silvertails

Anyone who remembers the class warfare between Wests and Manly on the rugby league field in the 1970s will be interested in Paul Oliver's documentary. Coach Roy Masters - he kicked on! - fires up his Magpie team with taunts about the Manly silvertails. It was an era when sport was bloody, players such as Dallas Donnelly and Les Boyd were larger than life and chequebooks bought premierships. This is Sydney social history.

Shotgun Stories

Terrence Malick's Badlands remains an American classic. In the same tradition is this drama-thriller from first-time director Jeff Nichols, about a feud between two families who share a father, now dead, in a sleepy Arkansas town. In one of those phrases that

distributors love, Variety described it as "a point-blank buckshot blast of inarticulate American rage". The cotton fields, the back roads, the family bonds ... it sounds like a song from Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska come to life.

After The Wedding

When the other nominees included *The Lives of Others* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, there is no shame in this Danish film being pipped for best foreign-language film at the Oscars. Director Susanne Bier's (*Open Hearts*, *Brothers*) emotional story is about a man (Mads Mikkelsen) who runs an Indian orphanage travelling to meet a benefactor in Denmark. Events take an unexpected turn when he is invited to a wedding.

The Last Dining Table

Walkouts at the Sundance Film Festival suggest audiences will be divided about this South Korean film from director Roh Gyeong-Tae, which has little dialogue and virtually no camera movement. But Variety called it "a superbly composed tableau of forgotten and discarded people living on the outskirts of Seoul". Sydney Film Festival executive director Clare Stewart describes it as "a very beautiful and unexpected film ... completely whimsical".

Accent on otherness

Author: Pauline Webber

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Subtle but distinct threads link migrant filmmakers, writes Pauline Webber

THE point at which cultures and ethnicities intersect is fertile ground for the creative arts. Such hybridity has been a riff running through the history of international cinema from the moment Hollywood opened its arms to European Jews fleeing the Nazi onslaught. Globalisation and the convoluted patterns of migration shaping the post-war world have provided film industries everywhere with periodic injections of freshness and originality. Films are made by North Africans in France, Asians in the US, Armenians and Iranians in Canada, Indians and Pakistanis in Britain.

A surprisingly large number of Australian filmmakers are from migrant backgrounds. Just taking a selection from those who have a significant body of work makes a long list: Rolf de Heer, Ana Kokkinos, Tony Ayres, Paul Cox, Alex Proyas, Ray Lawrence, Khoa Do, Clara Law, Nadia Tass, Kriv Stenders, Tom Zubrycki, George Miller and many more.

The work of migrant filmmakers is so diverse that, at first sight, there seems no thread connecting them and nothing differentiating them from other Australian filmmakers. Nevertheless, while it is easy to romanticise the notion of otherness, it seems to me that the inherent contradictions in the migrant experience must manifest themselves in the creative work of the people involved. And we should recognise that there are different kinds of migrants. Kokkinos is the Australian-born child of Greek parents; de Heer came to this country from The Netherlands as an eight-year-old; and Law was already an established filmmaker when she arrived from Hong Kong in the mid-1990s. The interaction with, and relationship to, Australia varies dramatically for each of them.

Iranian-American academic Hamid Naficy describes the films of migrants living and working in the West as "an accented cinema". It's a handy metaphor that encompasses the diversity of migrant films while recognising that collectively they're different from those made by native-born filmmakers. And it recognises that everyone is speaking the same language, in this case the language of film, and operating within the same cultural milieu.

Naficy places accented films into three categories: exilic, diasporic and ethnic. It's a useful way of grappling with the difference between the films of Law, say, and those of Ayres, another Chinese-Australian filmmaker but one who came here as a child. "As storytellers, we are always looking for sites of conflict and drama," Ayres says. "And one of the greatest sources of conflict and drama is the dislocation of a life from one place and one culture to another place and another culture ... One of the deepest and most profound experiences is the experience of feeling other. Certainly in my own case this sympathy for otherness in my storytelling comes directly from my understanding and experience of it in my personal life."

But Ayres is also comfortable with his Australianness and is hesitant to make too much of the otherness argument. Stylistically, his films are more Western than Eastern, their perspective that of an Aussie insider as much as an outsider.

The first film Law made in Australia, *Floating Life* (1996), concerns a moderately well-off, professional Chinese family's efforts to adapt to Sydney suburban life after they make the jump from Hong Kong before the handover to China. The elderly couple find themselves isolated from their adult children, who have settled in Europe, Asia and Australia, and bewildered by what they see as a cultural and social desert.

Law is at home in otherness. Her exile from homeland has made her a part of the Chinese diaspora and much of her work revolves around these themes. Its mix of humour, melodrama, irony and understatement make *Floating Life* a film like no other made here.

Film scholar Stephen Teo sees Law's work as belonging to a "hyphenated East-West" cinema akin to the American films of Wayne Wang and Ang Lee, among others. For film academic Olivia Khoo, Lee and Law are better described as transnational: filmmakers who "go back and forth between Asia and the West", gravitating to areas in which the industry is at its most dynamic.

Lee's most recent film, the soon to be released *Lust, Caution*, is a Chinese story, a period piece set in Shanghai and spoken in Mandarin. Lee did not grow up in China and has spent most of his adult life in the US, but there is no mistaking the difference between his re-creation of World War II Shanghai and Japan in the same period as is re-created in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, with its dodgy casting and odd dramatic overemphasis: the first is informed by a sensibility beyond the scope of the other.

The migrant filmmaker is in the unique position of being at once intimate with and separate from his adopted country. He occupies a contested territory, but one that is also rich in diversity and complexity. The view from "there" is not quite the same as the view from "here". So too, the constraints of "there" are not the same as those of "here". It is perhaps this complexity of vision that creates the space for new ideas and innovative collaborations such as we've recently seen in *Ten Canoes*, a film made by de Heer and the people of Ramingining.

It's this insider-outsider status that enables strongly political filmmakers such as Zubrycki to avoid the trap of didacticism. Zubrycki's work during the past 20 years has increasingly concentrated on the personal as political. In films such as *Homelands*, *Billal* and *Molly and Mobarak*, he explores in intimate detail the issues that affect migrant families without resorting to the polemical.

As the son of Polish migrants, Zubrycki, like Ayres, feels his affinity with outsiders comes from his experience; but in the choice of subjects for his films, he doesn't set it above other equally strong motivators. Class politics and his father's work as a professor of sociology were as influential in his career direction.

Law's third Australian film, *Letters to Ali* (2004), made with her husband, Eddie Fong, is a documentary about the Silbersteins, a family from Victoria, and their relationship with Ali, a 15-year-old boy held in the detention centre at Port Hedland.

The filmmakers, who both appear in the film, make their first venture into the outback to visit Ali along with the family. While the Silbersteins travel through the Tanami Desert in a four-wheel-drive vehicle loaded with everything from Game Boys to a full medical emergency kit, Law and Fong appear to have nothing more than their camera and a vague fear of snakes. They remain alternately awestruck by and terrified of the immensity of the land stretching out around them. They approach it as if it were an exotic toy.

For Khoo, *Letters to Ali* and its predecessor, *The Goddess of 1967*, are indications of how Law has been influenced in her work by her association with Australia. Law's

perspective is that of the migrant who has embraced Australia and its way of life but who still identifies with the disenfranchised who, like so many in the Chinese diaspora, come from fractured families spread across the world.

Naficy describes accented films as having a "structure of feeling" that carries the weight of the filmmaker's formative experience. As Khoo observes, we routinely think of filmmakers such as de Heer and Cox as Australian, but it's worth remembering that these filmmakers bring something distinctive to our film industry.

Each speaks as one of us but with an accent that puts the emphasis in surprising places. Our cinema can only be the richer for the inclusion of such voices.

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MELBOURNE

Film: Popcorn Taxi presents AFI-winning documentary filmmaker Tom Zubrycki talking about his latest documentary, Temple of Dreams, along with documentary subjects Fadi, Amna and Zouhour. This is the Melbourne premiere of the film, which centres on Fadi Rahman, one of a new breed of young Australian Muslim leaders. Kino Dendy, July 23. Bookings: (03) 9650 2100.

PERTH

Theatre: Ross Mueller's AWGIE-nominated play Construction of the Human Heart is about a couple dealing with grief. Two characters, known only as Her and Him, read from a script in what becomes a desperate and moving attempt to heal themselves after the death of their child. With Renee McIntosh and Andrew Hale. Australian Opera Studio, Midland, July 24-28. Bookings: (08) 9250 4688.

SYDNEY

Theatre: Dorothy Hewett's The Man from Mukinupin is an amusing yet pointed musical set in a wheat-belt town during World War I, where star-crossed lovers endure feuds, secrets, lies and many sets of twins. Directed by Mary-Anne Gifford. New Theatre, Newtown, until August 18. Bookings: 1300 306 776.

Visual art: Photomedia artist Marilyn Fairskye's new show Aqua continues her long-running investigation into time and motion, perception and illusion. Artist's talk, July 28, 2pm. Stills Gallery, Paddington, until August 18.

Inquiries: (02) 9331 7775.

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AAP Newscentre pulled up the above articles from:

- The Australian
- Canberra Times
- Brisbane Times

Factiva resulted in:

- Sydney Morning Herald
- ABC Transcript
- Federal Govt Media Alert
- Sun Herald

Searching Variety online they are out of date. The last review they have for Tom Zubrycki was from 2006 for Vietnam Symphony.

Hollywood Reporter's last archived article was from 2001 re The Diplomat.

Encore and Urban Cinefile had no articles/reviews archived online.

Pro IMDB has the latest entry as A Fighting Chance, and for film, the last entry was The Prodigal Son. ie no listing for Temple of Dreams.

A Google search brings up additional blog entries but no further complete reviews.