

Diasporas of Australian Cinema

Edited by Catherine Simpson

Renata Murawska

Anthony Lambert

Diasporas of Australian Cinema is the first volume to focus exclusively on diasporic hybridity and cultural diversity in Australian film-making over the past century. Topics include post-war documentaries and migration, Asian-Australian subjectivity, cross-cultural romance, 'wogsploitation' comedy, and post-ethnic cinema. This collection also provides a useful reference text for scholars of Australian film and cultural studies, with material on contemporary film-making and pre-World War II cinema. Containing previously unpublished articles by some of the most recognised experts on Australian cinema, the book is a vital contribution to the burgeoning international interest in diasporic cinemas.

'Bold and innovative... The essays in this book illustrate how the struggle for the redefinition and redeployment of these ideas, ideals and realities plays out on screen in a white-settler colony under erasure through difference.'

Professor Toby Miller, Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside.

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followed by surprised looks from her detractors. These small acts of defiance make room for multi-layered internalization of (at least) two cultures (Smolicz and Harris 1984: 21–22), a condition necessary for construction of integrational (rather than assimilationist) diasporic hybridity. If, in either of the two situations described here – one in a country pub and in a country hospital – Nina were to give into the rules set out exclusively by Anglo-Australians, her character's only choice would be between assimilation and exilic despair. While the latter outcome is utterly undesirable, assimilation is practically impossible – it is unlikely that Nina, or any other adult migrant, would be able to replace her Polish self entirely with a new Anglo-Australian one. Standing her ground when lacking acceptance, she subscribes to an identity hybridity that includes, rather than denies, her diasporic status. For all the notable migrant characters in *Silver City*, regardless of their attitude to being Australian, ethnicization becomes a strategy for their Australianization.

Conclusion

Silver City is a significant film in the history of Australian cinema and Australia's migration history, and one rarely taken up for closer analysis. Its lack of popularity with academic writers could have to do with the very reasons for its seminality: a neglected aspect of Australian history and a focus on the under-represented Polish-Australian population. Unlike the Greek, Italian or Chinese input, the Polish contribution to Australian cinema is rather meagre. However, the visibility of the film at the time of its release, the comments it attracted and its reading as a co-orientation point for Polish and European migrants should not have allowed for such neglect. The migrant experience portrayed in *Silver City* resonates with the veracity that extends beyond Polish-Australians and their offspring.

Dealing with the undercurrents of anti-Europeanism and anti-Australianness, which both reject a less understood culture (cf. McFarlane 1987: 60), however unintentionally, *Silver City* aids in overcoming these undercurrents and gestures towards reconciling the multi-systemic composure of contemporary Australia. It recognizes that, rather than denying the long-standing existence of these two sentiments, film can point to the malleability and unpredictability of migrant trajectories – with Nina's, Julian's and Wiktor's lives evolving differently to the prescriptive possibilities implied by their pre-immigration and pre-war status, as well as their initial attitudes to Australia and Australianization. The demythologizing tendencies of the film, its unwitting insistence on the simultaneous ethnicization and integration, and – at last – its focus on the spaces of migrant/non-migrant interaction, rather than confinement to only one of these spheres, all constitute *Silver City*'s importance to cultural and critical discussions concerning the shape of post-multicultural Australia.

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LEBANESE MUSLIMS SPEAK BACK: TWO FILMS BY TOM ZUBRYCKI

Susie Khamis

It's probably wrong calling it a Lebanese diaspora, that's too generous and not a very useful term. This is a mixture, Australian Lebanese, Islamic – it's a particular community and a particular expression in Australia. The expression has as much to do with the prevailing political climate as anything else. (Zubrycki 2008)

Since his early association with advocacy films in the 1970s, Tom Zubrycki has looked at various permutations of power, influence and accountability (Colbert 1987: 31). Through films like *Friends and Enemies* (1987), *Amongst Equals* (1991), *The Diplomat* (2000) and *Molly and Mobarak* (2003), Zubrycki's storytelling style enlivens over-arching themes like unionism and independence with close and personal accounts. *Billal* (1996) and *Temple of Dreams* (2007), the two films explored in this chapter, are similarly driven, with their focus on young Lebanese Muslims in the suburbs of southwest Sydney, subjects whose identities are split between a war-torn homeland and contemporary Australia. What they underline is the complexity of this community, and its expression in Australia which, as Zubrycki claims above, cannot be adequately described in terms of diaspora. Both films show the slipperiness and subtlety of hybrid identities and the ultimate insufficiency of a sole determining framework. The Lebanese migrants that fled the horror of Civil War (1976–91) share language and heritage, so it is tempting to describe these films in terms of diaspora. However, the unifying starting point for Zubrycki in these films is not the 'old country' but his subjects' experiences of discrimination in the 'new country'. This unfolds in unexpected and often confronting ways, and therefore does not fit within any given template.