

## **HOMELANDS**

*a film by Tom Zubrycki*

### SYNOPSIS

Some refugees live with a constant longing for the world they left behind. Others adjust rapidly to their new country of adoption and make quick headway. When these differences occur within one family you've got the possible makings of domestic conflict. *HOMELANDS* is a story about what happens to a family caught in the dilemma of deciding *where* they really belong and ultimately *who* they really are.

In El Salvador a brutal Civil War has raged for 5 years. Carlos and Maria Robles work in the popular resistance movement. Their lives are in danger from the government-run death squads. They have no option but to flee the country with their four young daughters. They find refuge in Melbourne, Australia.

Seven years go by. Maria adjusts quickly and fashions a professional career for herself. However, Carlos, a former teacher, can only find work as a cleaner. Suddenly, peace arrives in El Salvador. The civil war is over. The Robles family - and thousands like them, have to choose between two different homelands: - the new one they've adopted, or the old one they've left behind.

Carlos opts immediately to go back. Maria, however, chooses to stay in Melbourne with the 4 girls. Her fear for the girls safety, plus a brutalising experience of being tortured by government soldiers caused her to flee the country in the first place. She's not sure whether she can cope with those memories again.

Six months pass, and there are still no indications when Carlos will return. Suddenly, Maria decides to re-visit El Salvador - to find Carlos and also to confront her own past. But when she gets there she discovers the tables have turned. In Australia *he'd* felt depressed while *she'd* grown in confidence. Now in El Salvador *he* feels comfortable, and *she* feels out of place.

How much physical separation can a relationship endure before it begins to break-down? During the filming, events happen which test Carlos and Maria's marriage to the limit. Are their strong political bonds and commitment to their children enough to overcome the crisis? Do they return to Australia together? Is the family irrevocably changed in the process?

The film shows that what happens to many migrant families can't be explained through easy stereotypes of multiculturalism. There exist many younger women like Maria who succeed in re-shaping their identity, while their husbands are left behind. Similarly, some older people choose to live apart from their families and often relish their newly-discovered independent life. Emma is a Salvadorian woman in her early 70's whom Maria befriends in the course of her work. Emma, an expert at dancing the Tango, forms a liaison with Dario, a Chilean man, who moves into the flat next door.

Emma and Dario's relationship counterpoints that of Maria and Carlos. The older couple joke about their various illnesses trying-out various alcoholic tonics. They want to make the most out of life *here*. Yet in the end, they still express the desire of going *backthere* to die (however unrealistic that may be).

The film implies that "HOMELAND" is neither *here* nor *there*.. Instead, it takes-on different meanings for different people. Many learn to live with the contradictions. Others are unable to. Some families stay together, while others slowly drift apart.