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LEBANESE MUSLIMS SPEAK BACK: TWO FILMS BY TOM ZUBRYCKI

Susie Khamis

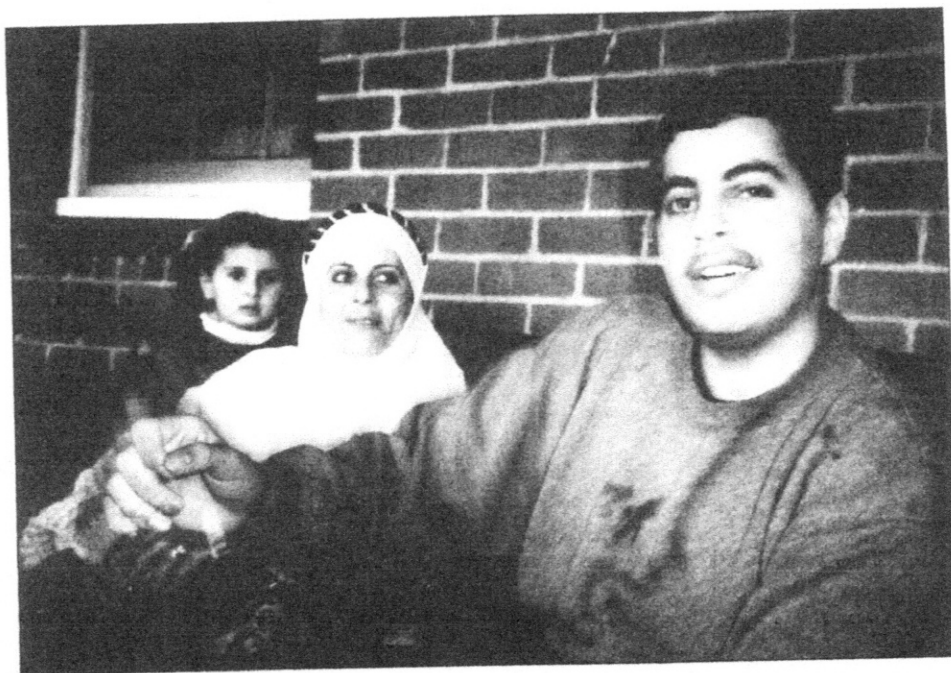
It's probably wrong calling it a Lebanese diaspora, that's too generous and not a very useful term. This is a mixture, Australian Lebanese, Islamic – it's a particular community and a particular expression in Australia. The expression has as much to do with the prevailing political climate as anything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

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Billal (Tom Zubrycki, 1996). Image courtesy of Tom Zubrycki.

An engaged style

Although commentators have likened his style to 'narrative vérité' (Higson 2004: 16; Molitorisz 2004: 3; Armstrong 2005: 96), this term does not adequately describe Zubrycki's approach in these films. The term is in reference to the ambitious (and notoriously contentious) truth-claims of observational documentaries. For the most part, the aesthetics of both *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams* hint at this genre, as the hand-held camera captures events 'on the go' and records a seemingly organic sequence. However, this is the extent of their 'observational' status. In Bill Nichols' classic taxonomy, observational films eschew directorial interventions (like narration, supplementary music, interviews and re-enactments) for an impartial purity that seemingly transcends the film-maker's presence and interests, or at least in ways not possible in more expository, argumentative modes (Nichols 1991: 38). Of course, every attempt to capture a second-order reality stumbles on what Michael Renov calls 'issues of selection' (Renov 1993: 26), as decisions to do with angles, takes and camera stock will frame filming one way and not another. That said, the term 'narrative vérité' is not queried here for this reason. Rather, in both *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams*, Zubrycki's presence might be discreet, but it is far from invisible or inconsequential. There are several ways that Zubrycki cues these narratives. Both films feature voiceover commentary, interviews, inter-titles, soundtrack, archival material and numerous instances where Zubrycki is acknowledged and involved by the subjects as a familiar and trusted friend. These inclusions orient the audience to certain reference points, and structure

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the narrative within specific parameters. This is not considered here as regrettable interference either, as though there were 'truer' ways these stories could have been told. As Stella Bruzzi (2006) points out, 'the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary - not the utopian vision of what might have transpired if only the camera had not been there' (2006: 10). This 'collision' renders Zubrycki's style more akin to what Nichols termed the 'participatory' mode, where the dynamics of interaction position the film-maker within the 'same historical arena as the film's subjects' (Nichols 2001: 116). In the case of *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams*, and for reasons to be explained, this interaction opens up space for Zubrycki's subjects to speak back to the mainstream, and articulate their hybrid, complex identities. These films therefore prove a powerful counterpoint to a wider cultural tendency: to see Australia's Lebanese Muslims through a narrow and detrimental prism.

The Lebanese Muslim presence

As portals into one of Australia's most maligned communities, *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams* belong to a growing list of Australian documentaries that deal with the complexity of 'Middle Eastern' identities. Films like *A Wedding in Ramallah* (Sherine Salama 2002), *I Remember 1948* (Fadia Abboud 2004) and *Forbidden Lie\$* (Anna Broinowski 2007) cover very different terrain - from romantic love amid bullets and bomb blasts in contemporary Palestine to the heartache of displacement after the first Arab-Israeli War, to the psychology of a transnational scammer across Australia, Jordan, and the United States. As varied as they seem, film-makers Salama, Abboud and Broinowski provide some alternatives to an image of Islam that has taken shape elsewhere, and show the poverty of populist assumptions. *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams* are similarly informed. They spotlight the irreducible variety of the migrant experience, as personal paths divide and fragment in unique and often unpredictable ways.

Zubrycki's focus on the Lebanese Muslim community, particularly its young men, highlights one of the most publicly discussed migrant groups in recent Australian history. Lebanese migrants have been coming to Australia for over a hundred years, yet it is the most recent arrivals, the third wave, whose settlement has caused the most consternation. It is this group (and their children) who feature in both *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams*. For the first and second waves, the move from Lebanon to Australia was relatively smooth (Batrouney 2006c: 32). The first wave that arrived between the 1880s and 1920s primarily comprised hawkers, shopkeepers and textile workers, while the second wave that came during the manufacturing boom after World War II found work relatively easily. In the wake of the Lebanese Civil War, though, and with regard to the third and most recent wave, the Lebanese presence in Australia became larger (doubling between 1976 and 1996) and more varied. Whereas the first two waves mostly consisted of Christians, this third wave has been mostly Muslim. While earlier migrants found economic opportunities quite easily, and could access the support and knowledge of their pioneering (and often familial) antecedents, the more recent arrivals faced not only the trauma of post-war dislocation, but also fewer jobs that required minimal English skills (for example, factory work) (Betts and Healy 2006: 28). Consequently, and from the start, this group was materially disadvantaged, and tended to concentrate in the suburban fringes of Sydney and Melbourne - more so in southwest Sydney, particularly the Canterbury-Bankstown region and

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suburbs like Lakemba, Punchbowl and Auburn. As many 'clustered with kin who struggled to accommodate them' (Brearley 2002: 12), this third wave soon established a distinct cultural precinct in Sydney's southwest, marked by language (Arabic), religion (Islam) and national background (Lebanese) (ABS 2006).

The timing of this concentration had unfortunate implications. First, since the first Gulf War (1990–91), this group has suffered the most from hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Australia (Batrouney 2006c: 33). Second, since Pauline Hanson's electoral success in 1996 and the subsequent attacks on Australian multiculturalism, this group's commitment to Australian culture has repeatedly been questioned (Batrouney 2006b: 11). Even though, as Batrouney points out, '96 per cent of eligible Lebanese take up Australian citizenship – one of the highest of any immigrant group' (Batrouney 2006a: 28), they have been singled out for an apparent inability to integrate successfully. Since the early 1990s, anti-discrimination boards have logged numerous cases, including racial slurs, sexualized insults, and the violent removal of women's hijabs (Poynting 2002: 45). *Billal and Temple of Dreams* track this period of third-wave turmoil, and therefore span a pivotal period in this group's history. Coincidentally, Zubrycki's professional interest in Lebanese migrants actually emerged in the 1980s, with an idea of profiling the family of his friend and colleague Stan Corrie. Corrie's parents migrated to Australia from Lebanon in the 1920s, as part of the first wave. Although this project was eventually aborted, it helped Zubrycki to appreciate how much harder settlement had become for subsequent waves of Lebanese migrants. This was brought to Zubrycki's attention in the early 1990s:

Stan said – 'Listen, I've just been out to Macquarie Fields, researching a story about a group of Lebanese that had settled in the area, and it's a totally different experience to what I went through. It's like a completely different Lebanese community to mine. It's like another world. These people are stuck there on the fringes of society and I think they're experiencing a lot of difficulties settling in, there's a lot of friction, a lack of social cohesion.' I thought that sounded like an interesting film territory to explore.

Billal: A case study of strength and survival

Billal is the story of 16-year-old Billal Eter and his slow, partial rehabilitation from a racially motivated hit-and-run accident. The film begins four days after the incident, with Billal in a coma and his family struggling to comprehend the extent of his injuries. From the outset, Zubrycki plots this story from this event, and his commentary and interviews throughout revolve around its effects on Billal and his family. Billal's injury is a shocking climax to what have become ongoing, race-based confrontations in his housing estate. His attacker, Linc Beswick, is just one of the boys from the area, Macquarie Fields in Sydney's southwest, who had been swept into nightly rounds of provocation and violence. It becomes apparent that Billal has suffered serious brain damage, causing permanent changes to his appearance and persona. With this realization, the film becomes a study of adjustment. It is punctuated with 'fly-on-the-wall' glimpses into an otherwise ordinary life (with subjects making coffee, cooking dinner, shopping and smoking), but the chronology (marked by inter-titles) and conversations (with doctors, relatives, and those who took part in the fray) signal Billal's injury as this family's primary concern and constraint.

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This family's story could have been about one type of displacement: as refugees from war, the Eters are far removed from their homeland. Billal's father Abdul took part in the third-wave exodus out of Lebanon and into Australia. In the film's only reference to their homeland, and with photos of his young family, Abdul reminisces: 'We came to this country as labourers and we want better for our children.' Sepia toned footage of bustling factories shows that the Eters have travelled far from the wistful longings of a generic, post-war dream. Years of unemployment forced Abdul on to welfare – hence his family's uneasy settlement in Macquarie Fields. In the wake of Billal's injury, though, the family's displacement is not just a question of politics, geography or money – and this is where Billal's story serves something other than a diasporic model. The audience sees home videos filmed before Billal's injury, of the Eters enjoying an otherwise 'normal' birthday party, and this suggests that their suffering now stems from a trauma far more specific than exodus or unemployment. The details of that fateful night are conveyed by Billal's brother (Ahmed), cousin (Walid) and friend (Sawez), who talk and walk Zubrycki through their accounts. An interview with Beswick gives him a chance to explain his actions ('self-defence') but, when Zubrycki scopes Beswick's empathy for the Eters, it is clear how the audience's sympathies have been mobilized.

Billal's injury sees his family call on a range of coping strategies, with varying degrees of success. His brothers Ahmed and Omar, and their mostly male cousins, rely on the machismo and bravado they forge by way of survival. On the outskirts of Australia's most multicultural city, these teenagers take comfort in a camaraderie born of difference. They are both materially disadvantaged and culturally marginalized – their arrival signalled the estate's first encounter with Lebanese Muslims. In them, Zubrycki finds what Poynting, Noble and Tabar (1998) have shown to be a sustained problem in Sydney's southwest: a profound sense of alienation felt by young men, especially Lebanese Muslims (1998: 88). Due to a perceived lack of respect across their social spectrum – in schools, on the street, from the police and in the media – they create an oppositional culture as a form of defence. With their friends and cousins, the Eter boys contrive, like the Anglo-Celtic men of many 1990s feature films, a kind of 'protest' or excessive and violent amplification of masculinity (Butters 1998; Connell 1995). This 'revved-up' masculinity, in spirit and style, owes something to the street gangs of New York and Los Angeles:

How they felt generally about Australia, their suburb and the people around them was typical of what virtually every Lebanese family felt at the time. With the Eters it went to the extreme, I think the fact they had teenage sons, these kids hung out together, a certain sense of pride and machismo involved – that could be threatening to the Anglo boys. It was sort of pre-gang formation, pre-gang behaviour, with two groups that wanted to claim their turf, tribal and territorial. You couldn't talk about social cohesion in Macquarie Fields; there were little enclaves and people acted in a tribal behaviour.

In the wake of Billal's tragedy, it becomes clear just how much the Eter boys' 'tribal behaviour' springs from feelings of isolation and disconnection. As Zubrycki follows the whirlwind of hospital visits and specialist advice, and as doctors and surgeons talk through Billal's injury, the Eters come undone. Abdul, unemployed and melancholic, withdraws from his family and

friends; Billal's brothers vacillate between vengeance and regret; and his mother Amal struggles to comprehend and keep pace with the experts' reports. In her desperation, she relies more and more on Alissar Gazal, whose role in the film begins as Zubrycki's liaison and interpreter, but grows as the family's needs become more urgent. Gazal soon becomes Amal's advocate, confidante and *de facto* counsellor. She deals with the hospital staff on behalf of the family and, as their living arrangements become increasingly strained (especially as hospital visits become more frequent), she lobbies what seems an especially slow Housing Commission.

That Gazal's involvement becomes a matter of moral necessity as well as logistical expedience conveys the family's acute vulnerability, and shows explicitly how some events unfold because of the film. Billal's rehabilitation is slow and only slight, and his father and brothers retreat once his behaviour and appearance prove too unsettling. It is left to Amal to at least appear stoic and strong. With Gazal's support, it is a minor miracle that she does.

The Eters' situation is so personalized and specific that *Billal* exceeds any definition of diaspora. The family's suffering has something to do with difficulties experienced by many of Lebanon's war refugees, but their crisis is also (if not more so) due to an extremely atypical event. Although their biography contains elements that are common to the third-wave scenario – war, exodus, unemployment and welfare – this is not 'just' a story of third-wave adjustment because it has not been standardized by these points of commonality. This counters a mainstream tendency to submit such distinct communities to certain parameters, and perceive some link between a given chronology and a subsequent cliché.

That is not to suggest that to view something as diasporic would necessarily produce a hackneyed or tired picture. Rather, it is to broaden the usefulness of this concept to accommodate more than just a one-way or finite journey. This wide-lens approach would be especially edifying in the case of Australia's Lebanese Muslim community. Over the last few years, and at least in Australia, their representation in most media has hardened around several highly unflattering ideas, the most prominent of these to be considered shortly. As it appears in *Billal* (and *Temple of Dreams*, also discussed below), this group's diversity not only disrupts the tidy narratives of mainstream discourse; it also requires analysis that goes beyond the framework of diaspora: the hybridity of a diaspora must be acknowledged and accounted for. In terms of representation, such latitude demands a kind of imagistic generosity – the sort that was seen in *Billal* but was conspicuously absent in the decade or so after its release. In the years between the release of *Billal* (1996) and then *Temple of Dreams* (2007), Australia's Lebanese Muslims were widely discussed in the media, but often in terms of suspicion, fear and dislike. The implications of this, especially for *Temple of Dreams*, deserve closer consideration.

How Sydney's southwest was branded

From the mid-to-late 1990s, the lesson of *Billal* – that migrants' lives are too richly textured to abide assumptions and expectations – was lost on much of the commercial media. Especially in the daily tabloids and on talkback radio, the issue of Lebanese Muslims in Sydney's southwest was framed primarily as a problem, in that this community differed too drastically from the

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cultural norm and thus strained any hope for integration. Much of this discussion focused particularly on young men in this community, and their supposed drift into gang activities. This idea gained currency and momentum when the state's (then) premier, Bob Carr, featured it in his 'law and order' agenda of the late 1990s, a strategy backed by police commissioner Peter Ryan. This turned a suburban pressure-point into an electoral, policing and media hotspot, a convergence that was hugely influential in structuring public discourse (Poynting, Noble and Tabar 2001: 67-69, 71-74).

Over the next few years, the impression that Sydney's southwest was replete with race-based gangs became a culturally consonant one (Manning 2003: 59). To understand this resonance, it pays to consider a few of the news stories that, due to the tone of their coverage, galvanized public sentiment against Lebanese Muslims. One of the most high-profile news items in Australia in 2000 and 2001 centred squarely on young Lebanese Muslims in Sydney's southwest. Two young Anglo women in the Bankstown region had been gang-raped, and their aggressors - mostly Lebanese Muslim - had made racist insults during the attacks. Columnists and shock jocks saw this as proof of both flagrant chauvinism and migrant backwardness. These editorials were so inflammatory that even the state's Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research was moved enough to comment and tell Australians that, on the issue of sex crimes in the Bankstown region, and on the cultural identity of the perpetrators, the sensationalist rhetoric was wildly exaggerated. Still, it was too late: an image of violence and misogyny took hold. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the Australian media were quick to accommodate a 'signification spiral' (Dreher 2003: 122-23) - that is, the link between Muslims and crime was further normalized. This marked a politically opportunistic time to rethink Australian multiculturalism. The more that Muslims were associated with disloyalty and disorder, the more prepared many were to redefine Australia's 'imagined community' accordingly (Turner 2003: 414). A line was drawn between 'good' migrants and 'bad' migrants - a demarcation based largely on how willing migrants were to exchange old practices for arbitrarily determined new ones (Humphrey 2007: 12).

After September 11, and with Canberra committed to the United States-led 'War on Terror', Sydney's southwest became an even bigger focal point for politicians, intelligence bureaux and journalists. After the Bali bombings of October 2002, in which 88 Australians died at the hands of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), fears grew that terrorists abroad had Australian empathizers. This prompted a dramatic shift in police protocol: houses were raided, goods confiscated and community leaders questioned, often in the presence of media crews (Poynting and Mason 2006: 378-79). Civil libertarians and members of the judiciary attacked what they saw as a dangerous slide in citizens' rights, but there appeared to be little protest from the Labor opposition (Mason 2004: 235-38). If anything, after the terrorist bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and London in July 2005, both connected to Al Qaeda cells, there was even more fear and distrust. Many worried that, not unlike Spain and the United Kingdom, Australia harboured its own corps of home-grown terrorists. Media reports increasingly assumed a 'dog whistle' quality, with stories coded to concur with a public primed for anxiety and panic (Poynting and Noble 2003: 44). News of halal burgers at Bankstown McDonalds, or

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women's-only swimming lessons at Auburn Pool, for instance, was explained more in terms of religious intransigence than cultural diversity. By this (unspoken) logic, Sydney's southwest had become a hotbed of religious extremism, a beacon for terrorists and the logical refuge for disaffected youth. A day-long riot in December 2005 on Cronulla Beach became widely symbolic of a hopeless cultural chasm, as locals lashed out against the apparent affront of weekend 'tourists' – specifically, young Lebanese Muslim men who took the short train trip from Sydney's southwest suburbs to the popular beach (Haddad 2005: 24; Nader 2005: 25; Tsavdaridis 2006: 5; Poynting 2007: 2).

Temple of Dreams: Contesting stereotypes

After *Billal*, and in light of September 11, gang rape hysteria and the Cronulla riots, the 'problem' of Lebanese Muslims loomed much larger in the Australian imagination. After a decade, Zubrycki found not just a single family in crisis mode, but an entire community. In September 2006, *The Australian* newspaper covered a sermon given at Lakemba mosque by Mufti Sheikh Taj ad-Din al-Hilal, in which the controversial cleric likened scantily clad women to 'uncovered meat', a comparison which, according to outraged detractors, forgave men sexual deviance if faced with such temptation. In the subsequent furor, other Muslim leaders felt compelled to speak out, to distance themselves from al-Hilal and to argue that Islam accommodated a spectrum of principles and practices, one that could easily complement Australian values (Henderson 2007: 9). It was obvious that, in media predisposed to scandal and stereotype, the likes of al-Hilal would overshadow other, more moderate leaders. One of these would-be leaders was a 30-year-old Lebanese man, Fadi Rahman. His attempts to inspire and mentor young Muslims in Sydney's southwest, and contest an overwhelmingly negative and largely misinformed image of Islam, are seen in *Temple of Dreams*. Although the film is not a profile of Fadi, his appearance completely inverts the image of young Lebanese Muslim men in much Australian media. With energy, drive and diplomatic nous, Fadi is a world away from tabloid caricatures – or, for that matter, any of the Eter boys. Even though Fadi's journey to Australia belongs to a larger story of third-wave diaspora, like *Billal* his individual path diverges too far from this starting point to be his only or even dominant reference. *Temple of Dreams* is the story of a fight – mostly against bureaucracy, but also against prejudice and pigeonholing. The film's opening inter-titles leave little doubt about this:

The war on terror has meant that Muslims are under the microscope all over the world.
The Australian government has done little to dispel a deep anxiety in the wider community.
Young Muslim Lebanese feel themselves especially targeted.

The first scenes pose a provocative juxtaposition: the busy streets of Sydney's southwest set to a soundtrack of hostile talkback diatribe. Zubrycki thus pivots this story around the prevailing political mood, something underscored throughout with references (by both Zubrycki and his subjects) to the London bombings and (more so) the Cronulla riots. In a disused Masonic hall in Lidcombe, Fadi establishes the headquarters for the Independent Centre of Research Australia (ICRA), a youth organization that caters to young Muslims in Sydney's southwest and teaches what one of its volunteers calls 'the Australian version of Islam'. This is one of only a few such

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organizations in Sydney. In the period after the London bombings and the Cronulla riots, Fadi's mission becomes much harder. First, he has to persuade young Muslims that, contrary to popular opinion, their Muslim identity need not inhibit their Australian identity – despite media attempts to dichotomize the two; second, he has to convince Auburn Council that ICRA's use of the building is legitimate, despite the council's claims that it contravenes the lease's conditions and violates zoning regulations. Against the seemingly bellicose al-Hilal, Fadi appears a virtual master of public relations. He also speaks from experience. Having once been involved in organized crime, Fadi credits his turnaround to a religious awakening. In Islam, Fadi finds clarity, conviction and discipline, and this became ICRA's premise. As in *Billal*, this film treats the journey from Lebanon as an important but by no means dominant consideration. It is mentioned only briefly: with photographs of an infant Fadi, and a soundtrack of Arabic *oud* music, Zubrycki notes how the family fled civil war when Fadi was just six. For Fadi (and therefore the film), there is a bigger story of cross-cultural friction, and how his need to reconcile his parents' values with life 'outside' his home proved 'a heavy load for a teenager'.

Inevitably, *Temple of Dreams* draws on and responds to contemporary misconceptions about Islam. For example, one of the most obvious ways that ICRA confounds expectations is through its three main volunteers, Zouhour El-Ghoul, Amna El-Ghoul and Aliyah Assad. In their ambition and assertiveness, these women are not only crucial to ICRA's success, administering events and processing paperwork with disarming efficiency, but they actively refute any notion that young Muslim women lack status or agency, or are somehow less visible by virtue of their *hijab*. They brainstorm ideas to help boost ICRA's profile, scout recruits at festivals and conventions, battle the bureaucracy of Auburn Council, and table proposals for ministers and commissioners – all voluntarily. They share Fadi's conviction and piety but, by his own admission, are far more adept at executing ICRA's plans. Importantly for Zubrycki though, and before filming began, these women were also familiar with his style of film-making and, at a time when Sydney's Muslim communities were wary of most 'Anglo' media, these women trusted Zubrycki to approach ICRA, and therefore their roles, differently. For Zubrycki, this trust is easily explained:

Making *Billal* made me accepted in the community. The girls in *Temple of Dreams* had seen *Billal*... I was right in [the community] from the start pretty much... The women accepted me immediately and much more easily than the men did, and they were much savvier with what I was trying to do.

The implications here are twofold. First, that these women knew of Zubrycki's style means that their involvement in the film is charged with an implicit knowingness, a readiness to contribute due to some perceived affinity with the film-maker. Second, Zubrycki admits to the contrivance that is necessary of all film-making, documentary or otherwise. That he was 'trying to do' something (anything) suggests that the spaces opened up at Zubrycki's discretion are neither haphazard nor accidental, but linked to a larger project, agenda or philosophy. Given the contemporary political mood, this is seen here as a progressive exercise, as Zubrycki's interventions effectively extend storytelling devices to a group that has been widely represented in Australian media, but rarely on its own terms. Finally able to 'speak back' to the mainstream,

these subjects appear so finely graded that any clichés that audiences might expect inevitably crack and crumble.

Conclusion

In *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams*, Zubrycki finds two very difficult examples of third-wave adjustment. There are, of course, some common denominators. The subjects of both films came to Australia as war refugees, or are children of war refugees, and so suffered an inevitable degree of upheaval in their settlement – emotional, material and psychological. Also in both films, there is the backdrop of discrimination: the Eters struggle with anti-Arab sentiment after the first Gulf War, and ICRA's volunteers struggle with the escalation of this sentiment over the last decade or so. After that, there is an obvious and inevitable splintering. The Eters barely cope with the magnitude of their problems, something which is made heartbreakingly clear in the midst of Billal's tragedy. Already disadvantaged by unemployment, inadequate housing and poor (English) language skills, Billal's brain damage seems the cruellest cap to the family's suffering. In their despair and dysfunction, the Eters are so removed from community support that the film crew ultimately takes some responsibility for their welfare.

Temple of Dreams follows a group of Lebanese Muslims who are determined to assume some discursive autonomy. With the benefit of hindsight, self-belief and charisma, Fadi is well placed to make ICRA matter, and ICRA is well placed to get Muslims heard. With their Australian upbringing, ICRA's bilingual volunteers connect with troubled teens in a way that is relevant and empathetic. An ICRA youth conference – undoubtedly the group's most ambitious project (logistically and politically) – is organized around modules specific to the fears and hopes ICRA has identified within their community, issues like police discrimination, media stereotypes and cross-generational conflicts. When the conference proceedings are tabled and presented to an audience that includes members of parliament, police representatives and various community leaders, Fadi claims a significant victory in the recognition of ICRA's work, and in the knowledge that the views of young Muslims in Sydney's southwest have been aired and acknowledged. Fadi effectively plays the politics of recognition.

In this way, and as proof of media's democratic potential, personal stories of suffering and injustice help dissolve reductionist stereotypes of the collective 'other' (Cottle 2007: 42). In their focus on third-wave Lebanese migrants, it is easy to see *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams* as reflective of a Lebanese diaspora. However, as complex portraits of a complex community, they actually highlight just how problematic the concept of diaspora is. All the subjects' journeys include the trauma of civil war; in some way it is a part of each speaker's personal narrative. Thereafter, however, their paths are so fragmented that it is difficult to locate the diasporic content with too much precision or consistency.

The issues at stake in *Billal* and *Temple of Dreams* concern much more than just being Lebanese in Australia, something about which Zubrycki is particularly mindful. As such, these stories might best be viewed in terms of hybridity rather than diaspora – that is, to understand the Eters and ICRA, a prism more elastic than that of diaspora is required. Whereas a diasporic model

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privileges ancestry and heritage, and largely views identity and experience in terms of 'what has been', the hybrid model is more useful for understanding the here and now, since it is more amenable to inflection, adaptation and therefore 'what has become'.

A major source of ICRA's effectiveness, for instance, is its bilingualism. This suggests that successful integration requires a modicum of assimilation, something that the diasporic template tends to underplay or ignore (Ang 2001b: 19). The diasporic identity rests on closure and sameness; the hybrid one unsettles boundaries – but does not necessarily erase them (Ang 2003: 149). It accommodates the hyphenated and the interstitial, and thus recognizes people 'for whom home is found at the intersection of the global, the diaspora, and the local' (Butcher 2003: 187). This allows all the subjects discussed so far to assert their specific experiences above (or even against) some totalizing historical narrative. As a consequence, this narration might well challenge the diasporic identity (Smaill 2005, 2006: 274). Instead of fixed coordinates and standard markers, there are uneven chronologies and countless variables. At the very least, these stories suggest that there is no such thing as a diasporic endpoint; Australia is not the last stop in these lifelines. These films thus claim for their subjects some autonomous space in what had become a national milieu primed for fear and distrust. They also show lifestyles fashioned from the traditional and the contemporary in ways that defy straightforward categorization.