

An interview with Tom Zubrycki, director of *Molly & Mobarak*

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Tom Zubrycki, director of Molly & Mobarak, was interviewed at the Toronto film festival.

WSWS: Could you elaborate on the situation facing the Hazaras in Afghanistan?

Tom Zubrycki: They belong to the Shia minority in Afghanistan. They are from all over the country and are essentially farmers and small business people—they're often referred to as the "Jews of Afghanistan." They also get blamed for things that might go wrong in the country. Now the Americans have come in and life is getting worse and worse. There is also a resurgence of the Taliban.

I was interested in the plight of these people in Australia. It is very unjust. There's a sentence hanging over their heads. Here would be people let into the community, who get assimilated, who convince authorities through their actions that they would make good citizens, and yet in the end would probably not be allowed to stay. The whole idea of a temporary visa is tied in with border protection. It's more than just legislation, it's a kind of ideology maintained by [Australian prime minister John] Howard. However, a significant minority believe that Australia should open its borders and become more accepting of people in need and adopt a much more humanitarian attitude, particularly to these people who could not possibly have gone through the normal channels to come to Australia.

WSWS: Could you explain the film's origins?

TZ: I went to Young, a country town, where there were 100 Hazaras working in the abattoir [slaughterhouse]. I thought, people like that can't simply live in a town and go unnoticed. There's got to be some kind of reaction. And I was expecting a small group of supporters. In fact, there was a very strong group of supporters who were organizing a whole range of activities, such as English lessons. There was a racist

response too, but I didn't go into that in the film too much. I happened on Mobarak because I met a lot of people quickly, then worked out who were the most influential—people like Lyn. At that time, Molly was taking Mobarak for driving lessons. What attracted me to them was that I knew in the back of my mind that he wanted more from the relationship than she was prepared to give. Following that story, I was able to look over things that were happening in the community.

WSWS: What has happened to Mobarak?

TZ: Mobarak is in Sydney waiting to be interviewed by immigration. Some of his friends have already been interviewed and have received letters saying that they have been rejected. They don't have to give grounds for the rejection. The nature of a temporary visa is that you have to continue to prove that you would be persecuted if you returned. One of the conditions under the United Nations charter is that to qualify as a refugee, you have to prove persecution. The Howard government is saying that all Afghans are equally badly off—there is no reason why these people are more badly off than anyone else!

The next stage is the refugee review tribunal. They have 28 days to get another hearing, at which point they get legal advice. There is a large group of pro bono lawyers who are prepared to help them at this point.

But what's going to happen to them? Are they going to be re-detained, allowed to stay on with bridging visas? How long will the situation go on for? The degree of uncertainty is enormous. It's not only Mobarak, but I fear for the others who have families. A bridging visa is a transitional visa that can expire at any time. So technically, they can be removed at any time. The government was prepared to give \$2,000 to anyone who returned on a voluntary basis. I think maybe five or six out of the 3,500 took up that offer. In the only instance I know of refugees returning to Afghanistan,

they were not able to stay in their village for fear of being robbed and killed. So they were forced to cross the border into Pakistan. And now they are essentially nomads.

Mobarak and many other young people have gone through an identity transformation. They are quite different people to what they were before. That's going to make it very hard for them, particularly renouncing Islam. Like Mobarak, who was saying that he is now prepared to accept that all religions are equal and that there is only one god. That's quite a radical step for somebody to take.

WSWS: The film pays a great attention to detail—following something through to the end in a precise and historical fashion. Which is ultimately why it is so moving. The picture is really built up over a period of time and through various dramatic moments. Especially for an immigrant, love does not come out of the blue—there are real reasons for it: loneliness, desperation, a friendly face and possibly a degree of transference of feelings.

TZ: I think Mobarak confuses love for Molly for wanting to be part of the family. It's all mixed together. I think he really thinks about where he comes from and what he's had to do to become a refugee, really. He had to leave people who were close to him. He had to try and start from the beginning, a completely new life. In the beginning, the dynamics are completely different—he's with other Hazaras of the same sex. There's a community and identity, but it's nothing like being part of a family, being around women. This goes on for years, and then suddenly, it all happens and he's got to grow up quickly.

Mobarak, like many other Afghans, grew up and was trained to fight and live in the mountains. He was not allowed to have an adolescence. His relations beyond those with his sisters were limited. I don't think he was allowed to develop any other kinds of relationships, essentially. And suddenly he falls in love for the first time. What is so interesting is that he has a sense of incredible maturity in realizing that it's probably not good if he stays in the same town as Molly. Suddenly, he has this sense of incredible self-realization.

WSWS: Given the difficult circumstances, they all act with incredible grace. It is an extremely difficult and tense situation—all the emotions that must obviously be raging! How would you characterize the

Australian government's policy?

TZ: Howard's policy is inhuman. It's unjust. He shows a lack of humanity to people in desperate need. That coldness, that aloofness, is what really angers me, it shocks me. Not only him, but also the minister of immigration [Philip Ruddock] has those same qualities. Australia has blindly followed America into a war against Iraq. The Australian government has this unfortunate need to let America know that it will support them in whatever action they take, just in case their support is needed in the future. The alliance with America has been problematic in a whole range of areas. And in relation to the war, the media in Australia have all been mouthpieces for the government.



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