



DOC & FILM
INTERNATIONAL
PRESENTS



SAVA

a film by
Partho Sen-Gupta

Adam Bakri

Rachael Blake

SCREENPLAY BY PARATHO SEN-GUPTA AND ADAM BAKRI. BASED ON THE BOOK BY RACHAEL BLAKE. DIRECTED BY PARATHO SEN-GUPTA. CASTING BY RACHAEL BLAKE. COSTUME DESIGNER: RACHAEL BLAKE. HAIR AND MAKEUP: RACHAEL BLAKE. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RACHAEL BLAKE. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: RACHAEL BLAKE, ADAM BAKRI, PARATHO SEN-GUPTA. PRODUCED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. CO-PRODUCED BY ADAM BAKRI. EDITED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. MUSIC BY RACHAEL BLAKE. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: RACHAEL BLAKE, ADAM BAKRI, PARATHO SEN-GUPTA. PRODUCED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. CO-PRODUCED BY ADAM BAKRI. EDITED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. MUSIC BY RACHAEL BLAKE. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: RACHAEL BLAKE, ADAM BAKRI, PARATHO SEN-GUPTA. PRODUCED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. CO-PRODUCED BY ADAM BAKRI. EDITED BY RACHAEL BLAKE. MUSIC BY RACHAEL BLAKE.



SLAM

SYNOPSIS

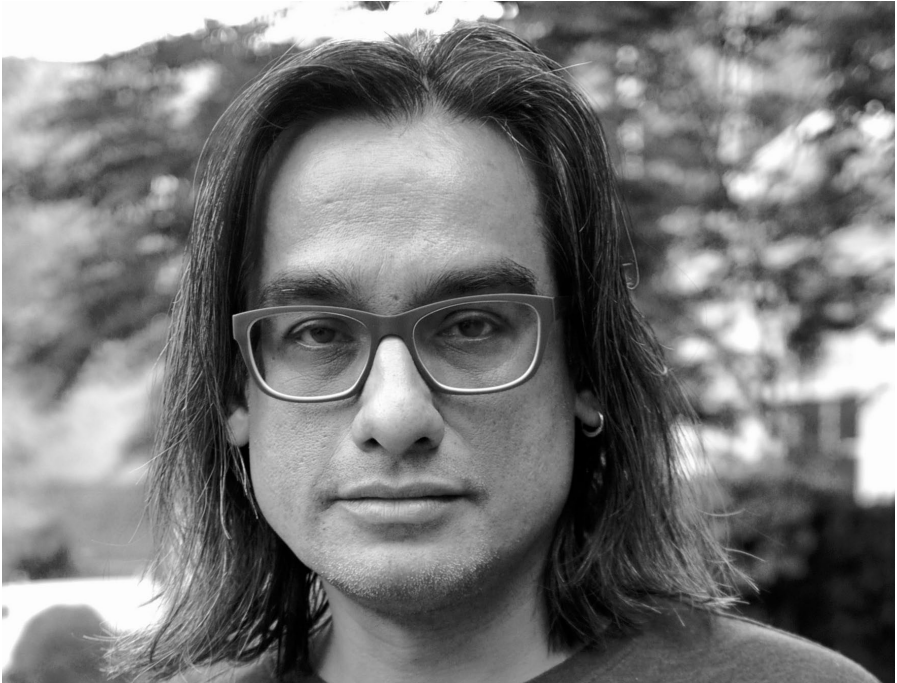
Ameena, a young hijab wearing Australian of Palestinian origin, disappears one night after featuring in a slam poetry gathering in the suburbs of Sydney.

An Australian air force fighter is shot down over Syria and the pilot is captured by the IS. The two unconnected events wreak hell in the quiet suburban life of Ricky (Tariq, Ameena's brother) who runs a small neighbourhood hipster café with his wife Sally. The case is handed to Police inspector, Joanne Hendricks, only weeks back at her job following a long convalescence after a nervous breakdown brought on by her son, Ryan's death a few years earlier in Afghanistan.

Despite all Joanne's efforts, Ameena cannot be found. In a climate of mistrust and xenophobia, it is suggested in the media that she is not a missing person but a 'home grown radical' who has gone to Syria to join the Islamic State. The pilot is cruelly assassinated and the video circulated. The state and the media put into force a performance of discipline and punishment. Despite his innocence, Ricky must atone for the sins of all those deemed responsible and, for the sake of his family, denounce his sister.

But, for Joanne, the only way to rid herself of her ghosts is to discover the truth behind Ameena's disappearance.





DIRECTOR'S BIO

PARTHO SEN-GUPTA was born in Mumbai, India in 1965. He worked as Art Director and Production Designer on feature films, TV series and commercials in India. He then studied Film direction at the FEMIS in Paris. His first feature film, 'Let the wind Blow' premiered at the Berlinale. His second feature film 'Sunrise' premiered at the Busan IFF and since screened at 2015 Tribeca, Munich, BFI London, Sitges, Sydney etc. and won awards. It was nominated at the Asia-Pacific Screen Academy Awards. After living in France for over a decade, he now lives and works in Sydney where he is currently developing his third feature 'Slam'.

FILMOGRAPHY

2014 **SUNRISE** (Arunoday) 85' Fiction
2006 **WAY OF BEAUTY** 60' Documentary
2004 **LET THE WIND BLOW** (Hava Aney Dey) 90' Fiction

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BACKGROUND

My first two feature films, *Let the Wind Blow* and *Sunrise* were both Indo-French co-productions. They screened at the Berlinale, Tribeca, BFI London, Rotterdam, Busan and numerous other international film festivals, winning several awards. *Sunrise* has been theatrically released in Germany, France, the USA and India. It was extremely well received critically with outstanding reviews in *Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, *LA times* and *Twitch (Screen Anarchy)* among many others. After briefly appearing on STAN, the film was acquired by Netflix for worldwide SVOD release. *SLAM* is my third feature film. While my previous two films were both set in Mumbai, the city of my birth, and where I lived until my mid twenties, this is the first film to be made in Sydney, where my family and I made our home in 2012. Before leaving to take up a scholarship at the premier French film school, La Femis in Paris, I had an established career as an Art Director. I started out as an apprentice in the art department in the studios of Bollywood, working my way up. Arriving in Australia, I was struck by the particularity of the Australian multicultural story. I grew up in the intensely diverse society of urban Mumbai, side-by-side with people from a multitude of ethnicities and faiths. At the time, being Muslim, as many of my friends and colleagues were, was just a fact of life. Today, in contrast, Muslims are the new pariah, be it in India, Australia, America or Europe. Living in Sydney and, in particular, interacting with people in the western suburbs, I couldn't avoid seeing the local impact of the aftermath of 9/11.



Slam unfolds in the specific context of the ten-year anniversary of the Cronulla riots, the terrorist attacks in Europe, the Syrian refugee crisis, the offshore internment of refugees and a time of renewed everyday racism and xenophobia. Muslim women are regularly harassed in public, the far-right in Australia – emboldened by ‘Global Trumpism’ – is gaining strength and respectability. Previously innocuous issues like Halal food or Mosque building are hitting the headlines. While a small minority of Muslims are being radicalised, the ordinary majority face daily suspicion, violence, in addition to longer standing problems of social exclusion.

THE FILM

We see a young woman of colour in a headscarf reciting potent political poetry. The image is powerful but her meaning is not immediately clear to us. Questions immediately arise as to who she is and what her motivations are. Understanding and empathising with her character is complicated for the spectator due to dominant messages about religious Muslims in our times, especially women who wear the headscarf. And as we are asking these questions, within the first few minutes of the film, the inciting incident occurs: Ameena’s mysterious disappearance.

The events play out against a 24 hour media-fuelled backing track of fear where every Muslim, or person assumed to be Muslim, is a potential threat to the Australian way of life. Ricky at first does not believe that his sister could have been radicalised. But with the rising pressure upon him from all sides, he is forced into believing the contrary. He becomes convinced that to save himself and his family, he must distance himself from Ameena. Having done so, his life can be reset before the birth of his second child. However, as the film reaches its climax, we are faced with the truth that Ricky has denounced Ameena in vain. Our certainties are shattered and Ricky is forced to reassess all his previous choices. The film has a linear structure but it is intercut with the psychological projections of the main characters’ histories and dreams. Each of them is followed by his or her demons, which manifest themselves in different ways. The film uses visual representations of these demons as they cohabit the characters’ intimate spaces.

Joanne ‘lives’ with her son, Ryan, who is seen in her house when she returns from work. Ryan is a constant presence for Joanne, who



does not want to give him up. Ricky is visited by increasingly terrifying dreams of his childhood escape from the Middle East and his father's death there. Ricky sees a young boy who follows him everywhere, especially in moments of internal conflict. The boy represents the memories of his lost childhood before the family had to flee to Australia. In both Joanne and Tariq's case, these are not flashbacks but the projections of their deepest desires and fears. To evoke this, a crucial element of the film is the visual and sound design.

STYLE

Slam is a pensive film in an expressionistic style. The lighting is inspired by chiaroscuro. The film travels into the characters' interior states of mind and there is a persuasive atmosphere of crisis that leads us to constantly question our interpretation. We are violently returned to the noise-filled 'real' world which creates an existential dissonance. Ghosts from their pasts visit the characters as images and sounds imploring them to remember them.

LOCATION

The film is set in the Southwestern suburbs of Sydney, home to over three hundred thousand people, of which more than half are foreign born. It is here that generations of migrants from Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, or Egypt have tried to reconstruct their lives. They live side-by-side with White Australians with whom they mainly rub along but between which dominant public opinion, the media and shock jocks constantly try to stir up tension. Western Sydney, where general elections are won and lost, is the epitome of the Australian multicultural reality in all of its banality and sensationalism. The protagonists of Slam are inspired by the real characters who inhabit this often spoken about, but rarely visible, part of the city. The film was mainly shot in the Bankstown-Canterbury Council suburbs of Bankstown and Panania and in the Inner-West Council suburb of Summer Hill.

TALENT

The film has a phenomenal cast of international and Australian talent. The role of 'Ricky (Tariq)' is played by Palestinian actor Adam Bakri, who played the lead in Oscar nominated and Cannes winner 'Omar'. 'Joanne' is played by award winning Australian film and stage actor



Rachael Blake (Sleeping Beauty, Lantana). French-Lebanese actor Darina Al Joundi and Australian veteran Russell Dykstra play strong supporting roles along with young Australian talent like Damian Hill, Abbey Aziz, Julian Maroun and Danielle Horvat. All supporting parts have been sourced with the help of Casting Director Leigh Pickford of Maura Fay Casting and the local community. The late Lebanese-Palestinian-Australian spoken word poet and performer, Candy Royalle, wrote the original poems for the film. Candy's work fuses storytelling, poetry and unique vocal rhythms with confronting, political content. She sadly passed away after a long illness towards the end of the post-production. The film is dedicated to her memory.

DEVELOPMENT

The screenplay was developed following our successful coproduction market selection meetings at the Berlinale Co-Production Market and Cinemart at the Rotterdam International Film Festival at the beginning of 2016. We held an extremely useful community consultation attended by top academics specialised in the study of Muslim communities and local Western

Sydney community organisers. The reading of the script precipitated a production discussion that contributed to a strengthening of the script based on the direct experiences of the participants.

There has been overwhelming support from the community for the film and a feeling expressed on several occasions that the way in which it deals with the subtleties and complexities of debates on multiculturalism, nationalism and 'extremism' is an exciting new departure.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Bonnie Elliott stylised work on Spear particularly inspired me to work with her on the look and feel for SLAM. We started working together at an early stage, looking at works of contemporary photographers for inspiration. My earlier work on Sunrise was an obvious point of departure for the look and feel of SLAM. Owing to the very tight budgetary restrictions we planned simple in-camera effects rather than expensive post-production techniques. For example, the use of a bold primary red tint for the nightmare scenes shot in-camera with a simple red gel filter covering the lens or the bodycam (Snorricam) were shot with an improvised rig using the movie setting on a Sony

DSLR camera. The film was shot in hand-held on an ARRIFLEX Alexa Mini with Cinemascope lenses.

EDITING

The editing began in November 2017 in Sydney with French Editor, Annick Raoul when we worked together on an assembly and rough cut during the shooting of the film. We started editing again in mid January 2018 in Paris. We locked the picture in May and I had discussions with Sound Designer Nicolas Becker and Sound Editor Nicolas Bourgeois. Nicolas and the sound team were very excited as it gave them a chance to work creatively, a far cry from the 'realistic' French films that they work on most of the time.

MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN

Composer, Eryck Abecassis developed the original score, which is more atmospheric than melodically or harmonically driven, evoking the oneiric mood that the film sets up. Eryck was the natural person to turn to as we have worked together since 2003 when he composed the music for my first feature film. I always wanted a modern and alternative score for this film. After a lot of discussions, Eryck composed a very unique score, using unconventional instruments to make unusual sounds. Music, for me, is one of the foreground elements in the narrative, on a par with the camerawork, the sound, and the acting instead of taking the conventional background position it does in most cinemas. I worked on the Sound Design with Nicolas Becker in his studio in Montreuil, just outside Paris. Nicolas suggested that we work with the metallic sound sculptures and experimental instruments created by the late Baschet Brothers. We recorded sounds at their old farmhouse studio outside Paris. Nicolas then reprogrammed the sounds to create an oneiric soundscape.

GRADING

The film was colour graded in Perth at THE SANDBOX with Colourist Brett Manson and DP Bonnie Elliott.

SOUND MIXING

The sound for SLAM in Paris at the KgB sound studio and was mixed by Ken Yasumoto (Climax, Love)



ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

MICHAEL WRENN has been in the film industry for 20+ years working in exhibition, distribution, production, sales and acquisitions in both the UK, France and Australasia. Since 2000 he has settled in Australia and New Zealand having run development for the New Zealand Film Commission, managed Australasian acquisitions for Celluloid Dreams and Maximum Films, created distribution outfit Curious Distribution and worked with Arclight Films on all aspects of development and production. Previously he was Head of Distribution for Momentum Films in the UK (now eOne) as well as holding senior roles with Alliance Atlantis, Kinowelt and Electric Pictures. Now he works as a producer across a range of projects, budgets and genres.

MARC IRMER is a french fiction and documentary film producer who has been working for 15 years developing both French and international coproductions. His company Dolce Vita Films and previously 1001 Productions has produced over 15 feature films which include Berlinale premiere HOTEL HARABATI by Brice Cauvin, DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE by Hubert Sauper, Toronto and Sundance participant UNWANTED WITNESS by Juan Lozano, Venice awarded LAS NINAS QUISPE by Sebastian Sepulveda and Karlowy Vary grand prize winner LE GRAND CAHIER by Janos Szasz. His last production is SUNRISE by Partho Sen Gupta, currently in worldwide release after Busan, Tribeca, Sitges and London premieres.

TENILLE KENNEDY is an Australian feature film producer with 13 years experience. She got her start as a producer's assistant and has worked across television, feature film and children's animations. Her recent credits include producing feature film *BAD GIRL* (Busan International Film Festival 2016); coproducing three chapters of the compendium feature film based on Tim Winton's best-selling novel, *THE TURNING* (Berlin Film Festival 2014); and as Associate Producer on ABC telemovie *AN ACCIDENTAL SOLDIER*.

CHARLES BILLEH grew up with a relentless passion for cinema and storytelling and has now been working in the Australian film and television industry for several years. He graduated with a Diploma in Screen Producing from the Australian Film Television Radio School (AFTRS) in 2013. His work has earned numerous accolades and has been screened at multiple festivals and exhibitions around the world.



CAST & CREW

CAST

ADAM BAKRI
RACHAEL BLAKE
REBECCA BREEDS
DARINA AL JOUNDI
DAMIAN HILL
ABBEY AZIZ

WRITER & DIRECTOR:

PARTHO SEN-GUPTA

PRODUCERS:

MICHAEL WRENN - INVISIBLE REPUBLIC, AU
MARC IRMER - DOLCE VITA, FR
TENILLE KENNEDY - THE KOOP, AU

CO-PRODUCER:

CHARLES BILLEH

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:

ALAA AL ASSAS - CMS
AYA AL BLOUCHI - SEAT 26
ALISSAR GAZAL - RED SEEDS
RÉMI PRÉCHAC - ADHESIVE PRODUCTIONS
NICOLAS BOURGEOIS - STUDIO KGB / WIDE OUT

CINEMATOGRAPHER:

BONNIE ELLIOT ACS

EDITOR:

ANNICK RAOUL

SOUND DESIGN:

NICOLAS BECKER

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BONSAI

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