



Film Selected for the 64th Venice Film Festival – World Premiere

COFFEE & ALLAH



PRESS KIT

WHEN A CUP OF COFFEE IS A GIFT FROM ALLAH

I N T E R N A T I O N A L S A L E S

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NEW ZEALAND FILM

Coffee & Allah

Director: Sima Urale
Writer: Shuchi Kothari
Producer: Shuchi Kothari
Executive Producers: Sarina Pearson and Shuchi Kothari
Technical Information: I:1.85, Colour, 35mm, 14 Minutes
Country of Production: New Zealand
Date of Completion: July 2007
Language: English/Oromo
Subtitles: English
Responsible for Sales: Juliette Veber, New Zealand Film Commission,
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Tag line

When a cup of coffee is a gift from Allah.

Synopsis (Various Word Lengths)

(120 words)

Coffee & Allah is a film about a young Muslim woman's appetite for coffee, Islam and a good game of badminton. When Oromo Ethiopian Abeba Mohammed moves to suburban Mt Albert to unite with her sister under the refugee family reunion quota, she has nothing but her faith in Allah, a taste for Ethiopian coffee, and a zest for life to sustain her. From behind her purdah, and no knowledge of English, Abeba struggles to make a connection with the people of her new homeland. Nonu, a Samoan barrista at the local coffee shop takes a shine to her. But, the cultural chasm separating them seems unbridgeable until one afternoon, a spontaneous game of badminton with an unknown neighbour ultimately leads Abeba to accept Nonu's gift of friendship.

(90 words)

Coffee & Allah is a film about an Ethiopian Muslim woman's appetite for coffee, Islam and a good game of badminton. Abeba Mohammed a recent refugee in New Zealand has her faith in Allah, a taste for Ethiopian coffee, and a zest for life to sustain her. Despite her purdah, Nonu, a Samoan barrista at the local coffee shop takes a shine to her. The cultural chasm separating them seems unbridgeable until one afternoon, when a spontaneous game of badminton ultimately leads Abeba to accept Nonu's gift of friendship.

(65 words)

Coffee & Allah is a film about Abeba Mohammed's appetite for coffee, Islam and a good game of badminton. As a recent refugee in New Zealand with no English and a veil to cloak her difference, she has little chance of connecting with others around her. Until one day when a spontaneous game of badminton leads Abeba to accept a gift of friendship.

(20 words)

Coffee & Allah is a film about an Ethiopian Muslim woman's appetite for coffee, Islam and a good game of badminton.

Festivals/Awards

2007 64th Venice Film Festival, Italy
2007 52nd Valladolid International Film Festival, Spain
2008 51st San Francisco International Film Festival, USA
2008 30th International Women Directors Film Festival, Creteil, France
2008 16th IFF Artfilm Trenčianske Teplice /Trenčín, Slovakia
2008 24th Festroia International Film Festival, Portugal
2008 Slow Food on Film, Bologna, Italy
2008 Festroia Film Festival, Portugal
2008 Seattle International Film Festival, USA
2008 IFF ArtFilm, Slovakia
2008 New Zealand International Film Festivals, NZ
2008 Palm Springs International Short Film Festival/Market, California, USA
2008 Vladivostok International Film Festival, Russia
2008 Winner *Dior Style Evocation* – Vladivostok International Film Festival, Russia
2008 I Reel Film Festival, Seattle, USA
2008 International Festival of Muslim Cinema, 'Golden Minbar', Russia
2008 Winner *Best Short Film*- International Festival of Muslim Cinema, 'Golden Minbar', Russia
2008 Prague Short Film Festival, Czech Republic
2008 imagineNative + Media Arts Festival, Canada
2008 28th Louis Vuitton Hawaii International Film Festival, Hawaii, USA
2008 Winner of *Best Short Film*- 28th Louis Vuitton Hawaii International Film Festival
2008 Hofer Filmtage, Germany
2008 53rd Corona Cork Film Festival, Ireland
2008 African Verona Film Festival, Italy
2009 Karachi International Film Festival, Pakistan
2009 International Female Film Festival Malmö, Sweden
2009 Palm Springs Festival of Native Film and Culture, USA
2009 Magma Short Film Festival, NZ
2011 CFC Worldwide Film Festival, Canada

Director's Bio – Sima Urale

Born in Savaii, Samoa, Sima and her family immigrated to Aotearoa in 1974. In 1988, she attended Toi Whakaari (New Zealand Drama School). After graduating in 1989, she went on to perform in various theatre productions throughout New Zealand, working with Directors such as Colin McColl, Jim Moriarty, Rena Owen, Murray Lynch, Nathaniel Lees, and Hori Ahipene.

After two years of stage performance, Sima applied and was accepted into the Victorian College of the Arts Film and Television School (formerly Swinburne) in Melbourne, Australia. In 1993 she won the VCA Encouragement Student Award, and in 1994 she graduated with a Bachelor of film and Television, and immediately returned to Wellington where she wrote and directed her first short film with Producer Kara Paewai.

Her short film 'O Tamaiti', about a family of Samoan children is a subtle and powerful visual narrative on the treatment of children. 'O Tamaiti' went on to win seven international awards, including Best Short Film in Venice, Asia-Pacific, Chicago, Aspen, New Port Beach and the New Zealand Film Awards.

In 1995, she performed in the award winning play 'Think of a Garden' directed by Nathaniel Lees, which won her Best Actor in a Supporting Role at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards.

In 1997, she directed her first documentary 'Velvet Dreams' for TVNZ Work of Art series. Richly ironic and playful, 'Velvet Dreams' explores the sensuous and stereotypical images of the bare breasted South Seas maidens painted on velvet. It went on to screen at the NZ Film Festival, as well as Hawaii, Jerusalem, and won Best Documentary Award at the Yorkton International Film Festival in Canada.

In 1998, she made a brief return to theatre for the play 'Frangipani Perfume', directed by Hori Ahipene & written/produced by sister Makerita Urale. It was heralded as the Listener's top ten favourite plays of the decade and voted Best Outside Production in the Herald.

Her first music video 'Sub-cranium Feeling', filmed underwater for her brother King Kapisi, won Best Music Video at the BFM, Mai Time, and Flying Fish Awards, and in 2004 was awarded a NZ On Air 1000 Music Video Celebration's Award.

In 2001 she wrote and directed 'Still Life', produced by Ana Rasmussen, a short film about an elderly couple that hints at the sensitive and controversial issue of euthanasia. It won Best Short Film at the Montreal Film Festival 2001, Special Mention Award at the Larcarno Film Festival in Switzerland, as well as Best Director, Best Art Department and Best Script at the Drifting Clouds International Film Festival 2002, as well as screenings at Telluride and Sundance.

In 2004, she was the first to be awarded the Fulbright Creative NZ 3 month Pacific writers residency in Hawaii. In 2006 she also received the Innovative Artist Award at the Pasifika Awards, while attending the six month Mauritz Binger Script development programme in Amsterdam where she focussed on her current feature project 'Moana' with the support of the NZ Film Commission.

On her return to New Zealand in 2007, she directed short film 'Coffee & Allah', written by Shuchi Khotari, and produced by Shuchi and Sarina Pearson. 'Coffee & Allah' had it's world premiere at the Venice Film Festival, and in 2008 is due to screen at the San Francisco Film Festival.

Sima then directed feature film 'Apron Strings' with Producer Rachel Gardner and co-Producer Shuchi Kothari, Shuchi Kothari is also the co-writer with Dianne Taylor. The film explores two families, Indian and Pakeha, and the sometimes destructive bonds between mother and child. The film is currently in post-production and is due for release in 2008.

Sima has directed television productions in documentary and drama, corporate videos, music videos, short films, and in the last ten years, commercials for production companies Film Construction and Thick as Thieves.

She has filmed various projects in London, Edinburgh, New York, Guam, Tahiti, Seattle, Malaysia, Niue, and Samoa, and for work related business, she has also travelled to Amsterdam, Saipan, Pago, Hawaii, Italy, Singapore, Bali, and Switzerland.

Sima is currently finishing off post-production on 'Apron Strings' and is in script development stage with her second feature film.

Filmography

O Tamaiti	Short Film	1996
Velvet Dreams	TVNZ Work of Art Series	1997
Still Life	Short Film	2001
King Kapsi - Subcranium Feeling	Music Video	2004
Coffee & Allah	Short Film	2007
Apron Strings	Feature Film	2008

Director's Statement: Sima Urale

On reading *Coffee & Allah*, I was immediately attracted to the main character Abeba, a Muslim Ethiopian woman, and her journey in a strange new land. Being an immigrant myself, I could easily relate to the story. It was truly exciting to receive this script by Shuchi, because here was a story that was fresh, original, and focused on a new and growing ethnic minority in New Zealand.

The beauty of this script is that it begins with isolation and alienation, but as it progresses, subtle connections are slowly but surely made with Abeba and her new surroundings. For me, this is a gentle film with a strong message about acceptance. The challenge for me was how to visually convey a sense of disconnection without overstating the obvious. This inspired me to isolate the main character Abeba in many of her shots, and distance her with the use of wide lenses. In contrast, when we see her in her home environment with her daily ritual of making coffee and prayer, the shots are close and intimate.

It's that contrast and change of perspective that I really want audiences to experience— to remind us of just how judgemental we can all be, and then suddenly be surprised by a personal view of a very human, sometimes funny, and very likeable character.

Writer's Statement: Shuchi Kothari

I wrote *Coffee & Allah* in July 2005 after leaving London just one day before the bombings of 7/7. In the global climate of Islamophobia and the more recent attacks on Muslims in New Zealand (mosques in Auckland, and hijabi women in Christchurch), I felt the need to tell a story of a young Muslim woman who yearns to make a human connection in her new homeland; a Muslim woman who is devout, full of life, and driven by the same fears and desires as the next person. I chose an Ethiopian rather than a Middle Eastern woman not only to decentre perceptions of both Africans and Muslims, but also to draw upon the epicurean commonalities (a love for coffee) between Ethiopians and urban New Zealanders.

The irony of the hijab/purdah in the western world is inescapable. In a Muslim country, the hijab helps a woman gain anonymity. In a non-muslim country a hijabi woman is most visible. And yet despite this physical visibility, the veil effectively renders them inaccessible to most New Zealanders and they remain invisible in our media and in our stories. I also wanted to show that while the hijab/purdah may be considered an oppressive practice, not all women in hijab/purdah feel oppressed. The human connection that Abeba yearns for in the script is a universal desire, even if cloaked in difference.

Producer's Statement: Sarina Pearson & Shuchi Kothari

Coffee & Allah tells us the story of an Ethiopian refugee as she begins to settle in New Zealand. As a veiled Muslim woman this poses many challenges. Without physically unveiling her, we want the audience to see past the purdah and recognize Abeba for the person she is. Her love for coffee, her faith in Allah, her skill at badminton, her spark for life, make her a three-dimensional character –not someone to be easily written off as oppressed or backward. *Coffee & Allah* is as universal as it is particular. Producing *Coffee & Allah* posed a unique set of challenges. Casting this film meant relying on the generosity and the courage of a number of women who were willing to audition despite the fact that many of them had little or no acting experience and didn't know quite what to expect. We were lucky to find

Zahara Abbawaajji, an Oromo Ethiopian, who stood up to the challenges of a steep learning curve, a set full of relative strangers, and a very small baby. She prevailed in so many ways and brought Abeba to life. For *Coffee & Allah* we approached one of New Zealand's most talented directors – Sima Urale. Her own sensibility as a Samoan immigrant along with a bold vision that marks her previous short films, Sima brought a very sophisticated and nuanced interpretation to the film.

Producing short films is always a matter of having champagne tastes on a beer budget. This film has benefited from many people who put their time and energy into this project. They have helped to expand the range of stories told in New Zealand. At a time when there is less tolerance for difference in many quarters of this world, *Coffee & Allah* reminds us of our similarities and appreciates our difference.

This film was funded by the New Zealand Film Commission's short film fund. Additional funding was provided by The National Geographic All Roads Foundation in Washington D.C. and the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Cast & Crew

Abeba	Zahara Abbawaaaji
Nonu	Joe Folau
Roger	John Mellor
Mr. Indian	Shailesh Prajapati
Mrs. Indian	Sapna Samant
Café Manager	Jared Turner
Waitress	Kristy Robertson
Director	Sima Urale
Writer	Shuchi Kothari
Producers	Sarina Pearson & Shuchi Kothari
Executive Producers	Ainsley Gardiner & Cliff Curtis, of Whenua Films
DOP	Rewa Harre
Editor	Eric De Beus
Art Director	Andy McLaren
Production Manager	Rebekah de Beer-Lamont
Production Manager Consultant	Rebekah Kelly
Production Runners	Alex Twentyman
	Jack Woon
	Tom Markham
First Assistant Director	Jennifer Butcher
Continuity	Aria Harrison
Second Assistant Directors	Emma Wolf
	Katie Hutchinson
Set Production Assistants	Claire Campbell
	Bryan Hudkins
	Michael Bonner
Casting Director	Stu Turner
Focus Puller	Steve Allanson
Clapper Loader	Richard Elworthy
Video Split	Gabriel McArtney
Gaffers	Merlin Wilford
	Thad Lawrence
Best Boy	Sam Jellie
Lighting Assist	Beau Addison
Key Grip	Carl Venimore

Crane Operator Grip Assist	Russell Lloyd Stacey DeMont Rob Aberdeen
Wind Machine	Nick Mathews
Sound Recordist Boom Operator Standby Props Buyer/Dresser Art Department Assist Coffee Stylist Espresso Technician Makeup & Wardrobe	Mark Storey Matt Good Pierce Clarke Daniel Birt Jane Cormack Charlie Self Cassady O'Neill Louise Harris Margo Regan Lauren Steward
Wardrobe Supervisor Wardrobe Assist Wardrobe Buyers	Victoria Ingram Petra Verweij Sapna Samant Victoria Ingram
Makeup Assists	Alexandra Clark Dominique Birley
Stills Photographer	Greg Semu
Location Manager	James Little
Unit Managers	Lauren Shaw Ronnie Hape
Unit Assist Catering	Tom Markham Mash Catering
Safety Plan Safety Officer Traffic Control	Dean Lucas, Thunderbird Safety Shikane Champagne Andrew Seaville, Action Traffic Management
Childcare	Amy Skip
Lighting Equipment Grip Gear Crane	Fat Lighting Quick Grips The Dolly Shop
Assistant Editor Negative Cutter	Roseanne Liang Upper Deck Film Services Limited Reiner Schoenbrunn & Sarah King

Titles & Credits
Rostrum Camera
Opticals
Colour Grade
Post Production Producer
Post Production Coordinator

Wynter Blathway
Reiner Schoenbrunn
Brian Scadden
Lynne Reed
Wendy Cuthbert
Peter Amies

Sound Design
Dialogue Editor
ADR
Sound Mixer
Sound Mix Assistant

Tim Prebble
Chris Todd
Tom Miskin
John Boswell
David Vranken

Film Stock
Film Processing
Transfers
Camera Equipment
Off-Line Editing Facility
Legals
Insurance Martin,
Ethiopian Friends

Kodak
Atlab
Images Post
Metro Film
Images Post
Tim Riley, Dominion Law
Trendall & Jack Insurance
Fatima Ali
Sara Abbawaaji
Zeenat Mohammad

Mother with Pram
Frustrated Driver
Passersby

Angela Da Silva
Jochen Fitzherbert
Amy Friedman
Zelda Ladefoged
Sunil Narshai

Café Patrons

Sarah Allerby
Aaron Beard
Paul Belli
Dominique Birley
Star Blue
Lewis Bostock
Kristin Carlson
Dione Chard
Alexandra Clark
Louise Connell
Nick Fitzherbert
James Gates
James Hanline
Lana Hughes
Jade Irons
Melissa Kent
Paula Lipscombe
Lara Monzon
Adam Puttick
Maia Rata
Rebecca Russell
Zuza Scherer
Kate Stevenson
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