

# Molly and Mobararak



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## INTRODUCING MOLLY AND MOBARAK

Produced, directed and written by Tom Zubrycki, 2003.

**M**olly and Mobarak focuses on the situation of Mobarak Tahiri, a young Hazara refugee, who is living in the town of Young, in rural NSW. Categorized as an illegal immigrant by the Australian government, Mobarak was initially detained in the Curtin Detention Centre near Derby, WA, before being granted a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) that allowed him to live and work in the general Australian community.

At the start of the documentary, Mobarak and a small group of other Hazaras are working at the Burrangong abattoirs. They are paid slightly above award wages and their English skills are improving rapidly—largely due to the efforts of volunteer English teachers organized by Ann Bell, an instructor at the local TAFE.

Despite several racist incidents, Mobarak has begun to feel a part of the local community and has become especially close to Lyn Rule and her daughter Molly. Like a number of other

local people, they have befriended the Hazara refugees and offered them support.

Mobarak's life becomes even more complicated when he falls in love with Molly, a teacher at the local high school. However Molly insists that she has a boyfriend in another town and Lyn tells Mobarak that he and Molly cannot be together. The documentary creates a delicate tension as the hopes and uncertainty of the relationship between Molly and Mobarak run parallel to the hopes and uncertainties Mobarak feels as he waits to know whether he will be allowed to stay permanently in Australia.

With themes of human rights, refugees, racism and rural communities, *Molly and Mobarak* is a compassionate and thought-provoking film that will engage viewers in important issues facing contemporary Australia.

## USING MOLLY AND MOBARAK IN THE CLASSROOM

While evoking strong sympathy for the plight of refugees on Temporary Protection Visas, *Molly and Mobarak* deals with the confronting issue of racism in Australia. Teachers should

therefore be aware of the potential for heated classroom debate and develop some advance strategies. One suggestion is to concentrate on the positive themes of love and acceptance that are evident in the documentary at many levels. The issue of justice is also a useful focus, particularly if students are asked to weigh the dangers the Hazaras face in Afghanistan against the significant contributions they have made to the town of Young.

Feelings of loss and separation infuse *Molly and Mobarak* and these may distress some students from refugee backgrounds. The documentary contains some medium-level bad language so previewing is recommended. The documentary is of specific interest and relevance to teachers and students of:

- Studies of Society & Environment (SOSE/HSIE)
- English
- Politics
- History
- Media Studies

## Learning outcomes

- Critically compare representations of people, events and issues.
- Explain how causes, motives and



ABOVE: HEWSON WITH AFGHANI PEOPLE



consequences may be related.

- Analyse the core values of groups and societies.
- Describe and explain the responses of various cultural groups to issues of human rights.
- Consider the context in which the text was created and how this is reflected in the text.
- Draw on a repertoire of strategies to maintain understanding through a dense or extended text.

### Before watching the documentary

- Read and discuss the Glossary of key terms.
- Draw a map of south-eastern Australia that includes NSW, SA and Victoria. Mark on the map the cities and towns mentioned in the documentary: Canberra, Sydney, Adelaide, Young, Murray Bridge and Shepparton.
- Write brief individual (or group) research reports about the 1860 Lambing Flat Riots, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Islamic faith.

### Glossary of key terms

An understanding of some of these

terms prior to viewing will assist overall comprehension of the documentary:

- abattoir—a meatworks where animals are slaughtered and prepared for market.
- assimilation—a policy that encourages immigrants to adopt the language, values and customs of their new country of residence.
- multiculturalism—the notion that several different cultures (rather than one national culture) can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a single country.
- Permanent Residence—the legal authority to stay permanently in Australia.
- racism—hatred of other races; belief in the superiority of some races over others.
- Ramadan—the Muslim holy month of prayer and daytime fasting.
- refugee—a person who flees their own country (esp. to escape political or religious persecution) to seek safety in another.
- Taliban—a group of Islamic fundamentalists who led the former government of Afghanistan, persecuting or killing opponents of their regime.
- Temporary Protection Visa—a visa that provides short-term protection for refugees and requires them to

return home once the visa expires.

### WHO ARE THE HAZARAS?

The Hazaras are an ethnic and culturally distinct people who live mainly in central Afghanistan and in some parts of Iran and Pakistan. The Hazaras of Afghanistan speak a dialect known as Dari but refer to their language as ‘Hazargi’. It contains elements of Turkish, Mongol and Persian, probably due to the influence of invaders from different parts of Asia over many centuries.

The Hazaras physical features have led some observers to conclude that the Hazaras are descendants of the Mongol warlord Genghis Khan’s (Changez Khan’s) army after he invaded Afghanistan in the thirteenth century. However the historical records are either unclear or incomplete, so there is continuing dispute about the origins of the Hazara people, their language and culture.

Most Hazaras belong to the Shia sect of Islam but many others belong to the Ismaili sect and the Hanafi sect (one of the biggest sects among Sunni Muslims) of Islam. A thoughtful summary of Hazara identity concludes: ‘It is very hard to separate the Hazara culture from its religion. Among themselves they are all





Hazaras regardless of any belief system, or the land that they belong to'.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the Hazaras are farmers who grow grain and raise sheep and goats on the 'green land' of Afghanistan. However, for hundreds of years they were persecuted and killed by the Pushtun rulers of Afghanistan and dispossessed of their traditional lands. More recently, the extremist Muslim Taliban regime continued to attack and kill the Hazaras due to religious differences. Many Hazaras, like Mobarak Tahiri and his compatriots in Young, were driven into exile in neighbouring countries or risked their lives to escape Afghanistan as refugees.

### YOUNG—CHERRY CAPITAL OF AUSTRALIA

*I like Young because good people in Young and I like. Because I like work. I have good working here. It good place, not too rushed like Sydney. Everything is right in here.*

Mobarak's opinion of Young comes very early in the documentary. Despite his fractured English, he communicates very clearly his reasons for liking life in this NSW country town. The three reasons he gives provide us with

a kind of measure against which we assess other scenes in the film. Are the people in Young really good? Is it really a good place to work? Is the pace of life always pleasant and unhurried?

Young has an expanding economy based on agriculture and livestock production. Burrangong Meat Processors where Mobarak and other Hazaras work is a major industry and employs workers from many different ethnic groups. Most famously, Young grows cherries and holds a National Cherry Festival in late November every year.

Unlike many other country towns that are suffering declining economies, loss of services and diminishing work opportunities, Young is doing comparatively well. An economic study finds that the Hazaras have already brought many positive benefits to the area. It estimates that the Hazaras spend approximately 60-75 per cent of their income locally and 'for every additional person employed in the local economy, another half a job is generated indirectly'.<sup>2</sup> The study also suggests that accepting the Afghan refugees would create a more cosmopolitan atmosphere that would attract more professional people to the area.

We learn a lot about Young and its residents from *Molly and Mobarak*. The anti-Chinese riots of the 1860s, when Young was known as Lambing Flat, provide a backdrop to more recent incidents of racism and discrimination in the town. There is a clear suggestion that some Australians have not altered their hateful attitudes in more than 140 years. Yet there is also understanding and acceptance in Young. Many townspeople reach out to the Hazaras and their friendship is reciprocated. A number of scenes show genuine affection and warmth between the two groups.

*Molly and Mobarak* places most emphasis on the people of good will, who strive to help the Hazaras and want to keep them in their town. Among them are Tony Hewson, the Human Resources Manager who is determinedly supporting Hazara employees at the meatworks; Ann Bell who is enthusiastically organizing English lessons; a soccer team and a vegetable garden; and John Walker, Mayor of Young, who agrees to support an economic study of the Hazaras' contribution to the town.

### Activity—Life in Young

In groups of three or four people, discuss the three reasons Mobarak gives



L-R: HEWSON ; MOBARAK FEELING LONELY; MOBARAK DRIVING



for liking Young.

- Does the documentary support Mobarak's personal assessment of the town?
- What aspects of life in Young does Mobarak not talk about?
- At a personal level, why do you like (or dislike) the place where you now live?
- If you had a choice of living somewhere else, where would it be? Why would you choose to change?

### LOSS AND SEPARATION

Loss and separation are strong themes in *Molly and Mobarak*. Clearly, Mobarak and the other Hazaras in Young are painfully separated from their families and country of birth. Mobarak tries to make light of the situation when he talks about spending fifty dollars on a telephone call and has to listen to his mother crying, but his own sadness is also evident.

There are lots of goodbyes in *Molly and Mobarak*. Loss and separation are sub-themes at many other levels: Molly departs for an overseas holiday; Mobarak travels to several other states; and Tony Hewson leaves Young to start a new relationship. We are also

aware of the feelings of Ann Bell and a friend as they discuss the implications of the Hazaras leaving:

*I'll just be heartbroken really ... thinking of them having to go back.*

*Gee if they have to go, it's going to make a big hole in my life.*

However with the idea of departure there are also thoughts of arrival. Molly returns from abroad, Mobarak finds a new girlfriend and there is hope that the Hazaras will be able to achieve their wish of staying permanently in Young. The documentary leaves the story unfinished and engrosses viewers in the future possibilities.

Activity—Imagining and remembering

- What do you think is going through Mobarak's mind as he watches the Cherry Festival procession and later wanders through the fair-ground sideshows? Draw a series of cartoons and talk bubbles to show Mobarak's private thoughts.
- At some stage of our lives we all suffer loss of or separation from people or places that we love. In groups of three or four, exchange

memories about your own experiences of loss and separation. Develop a series of mind maps to show your thoughts and feelings.

### RACISM

In watching *Molly and Mobarak* we learn that there were once ninety Hazara refugees in Young. However by the conclusion of the documentary, their number has dropped to about thirty-three. Young has about 9000 residents so, even at their most numerous, Hazaras represented only one per cent of the total town population. Why then did some people oppose them so vehemently? Tony Hewson, Human Resources Manager at the Burrangong abattoir, has an answer:

*We used them as spokespeople and the publicity made them visible in the community. I think that's the problem. When they go to Sydney or Melbourne they just meld in with multicultural Australia and no-one notices them, whereas in Young they stand out. People know who they are.*

Being conspicuous in the community is not the full answer though. During the filming of *Molly and Mobarak*, Young is targeted by racist groups who oppose





Australia's acceptance of migrants and refugees. They try to whip up hatred and even criticize Tony Hewson (a former Mayor of Young) for establishing an attractive Chinese garden in the town. We see Lyn Rule reading one of the racist pamphlets that are put on car windscreens; we witness a jeering group in a car shouting abuse at Mobarak; and see a confrontation in the pub between Tony Hewson and a local worker.

Activity—Fear and ignorance?

Watch the episode where Tony Hewson debates the worker in a local pub.

- What arguments does the man give for opposing the Hazaras in Young?
- How reasonable do these arguments seem in the light of what we learned about the Hazaras earlier in the documentary?
- As a class, discuss Tony Hewson's comment that the man's attitude is due to '... ignorance and fear ... fear of the unknown'.

**ASSIMILATION**

- Assimilation is a policy that encourages immigrants to adopt the

language, values and customs of their new country of residence. There have been many problems with this idea. For a start, people do not find it easy to abandon their culture and immediately accept new ways. Doing so would cut them off from other members of their families and communities and it is impractical to expect people to do this.

- People also have pride in their cultural heritage and do not want to simply discard their identity. Many believe it is unnecessary in any case. For most first generation migrants, old and new cultures often exist side by side.
- In a democratic country like Australia, we do not outlaw the speaking of non-English languages or the practice of non-Christian religions, and we do not ban cultural practices unless they are harmful and contradict Australian law. This raises the question of whether assimilation should be imposed or whether it will gradually happen anyway as part of a voluntary and natural process. Mobarak sums up this idea in an important statement he makes in conversation with Lyn Rule:

*I can't go back in Afghanistan because I change everything in Australia. Actually like that. I change, I really change everything. Me not like before.*

Activity—'Me not like before'

While you are watching the documentary, make a list of the changes you notice in Mobarak. Your list might include changes in his appearance, attitudes and general behaviour. The various conversations Mobarak has with Molly and Lyn Rule, and the discussion he has with his immigration lawyer in Sydney, also provide some useful clues.

- What changes in Mobarak's character and appearance did you notice?
- In what ways has he altered his attitudes towards Hazara culture and religion?
- Do you agree with Mobarak's comment 'I really change everything'? Are there some aspects of his life that have not really changed? Explain how and why this may be so.
- In what ways does Mobarak's life seem different to the lives of the other Hazara refugees in Young?

**MULTICULTURALISM**

SCENE	EMOTION(S)
Tom Hewson (Human Resources Manager at Burrangong Meat Processors) reading an anonymous racist email.	
Lyn Rule explaining to Mobarak why he cannot be Molly's boyfriend.	
Mobarak Tahiri farewelling Molly before her overseas trip.	
Molly Rule thinking about Mobarak's phone call on Christmas Day, 2002.	
Ann Bell (TAFE English tutor) welcoming Hazara refugees to English classes in the local library.	
John Walker (Mayor of Young) listening to the economic arguments in favour of refugees.	

TABLE 01

## SCENES WITH MOBARAK, MOLLY AND LYN



The Commonwealth Department of Immigration & Multiculturalism & Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) provides the following definition of multiculturalism in an Australian context:

*Australian multiculturalism recognizes and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity.*

*It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy.*<sup>3</sup>

The Commonwealth government also says:

*Australian multiculturalism ... embraces the heritage of Indigenous Australians, early European settlement, our Australian-grown customs and those of the diverse range of migrants now coming to this country.*<sup>4</sup>

As you watch *Molly and Mobarak*, make a note of the scenes where Australians are shown accepting, respecting or celebrating cultural diversity.

Activity—Islamic New Year

As a whole class, watch the segment of *Molly and Mobarak* where the Hazara refugees host a celebration to thank the people of Young. It is Islamic New Year, an occasion for rejoicing.

Take careful note of the various multicultural influences in this section of the film (you may have to watch it more than once) then discuss the following questions:

- What multicultural influences are evident in the food, drink and music at the event?
- What evidence is there that people are participating in new experiences—things they might not find within their own culture?
- What feelings describe the way people of different cultural backgrounds are interacting with and relating to one another?

### THE DOCUMENTARY'S TECHNIQUES

Shot on a video digital mini camera, *Molly and Mobarak* runs for eighty-five minutes and was cut from 150 hours of raw footage. These simple statistics alert us to the fact that producers always have to make careful choices about what they keep and what they

reject in their films. How do they go about their selection processes? Why do they retain some footage and discard the rest?

We can usually find some interesting clues to the answers of these questions by studying what producers themselves say about their intentions and purposes. Tom Zubrycki, who wrote, directed and produced *Molly and Mobarak*, says that he had many



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motives for making the film.<sup>5</sup>

They include:

- Wanting 'to highlight the plight of refugees on temporary visas'.
- Putting 'a human face on the refugee situation in Australia'.
- Demonstrating 'how generous, out-going and compassionate Australians can be when they find a stranger in their midst'.
- Projecting 'the possibility of a "future Australia" that's built on the idea of hope and caring, rather than fear'.

In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald, Zubrycki considered *Molly and Mobarak* his best film so far and said: 'It's very raw. There are stronger emotions than in any other film I've directed'.<sup>6</sup>

However it is not only the emotions captured by the documentary that create its sense of honesty, directness and intimacy. Most of the film is shot in close-up or middle distance and many scenes take place within the personal spaces of domestic homes. Another influence is the role of the director himself. Although Tom Zubrycki is an unseen character, we are at all times conscious of his presence in the

film. We sense him observing events through the camera lens and hear his voice narrating, commenting and conversing with Lyn, Molly and Mobarak at various points. The combined effect of these techniques is to make us feel part of the film-making and to involve us in the private thoughts and decisions of the characters.

You should also take note of the effective strategies Tom Zubrycki uses to connect widely separate events, provide background to complex issues and to handle non-English dialogue. Screens of printed information, historical footage (of a refugee ship and a detention camp for example) and subtitles help guide viewers through the film.

#### Activity—Feelings and emotions

Think about the way *Molly and Mobarak* records the emotions of various characters. In most cases you will understand what people are feeling by simply listening to what they say. However emotions might also be expressed in 'body language' and facial expressions.

In your workbooks, draw a table like the one overpage. Meet in groups of two or three to discuss the feelings and emotions that are evident in the

following scenes. Try to identify the emotions the characters are feeling then record your observations in the right hand column of the table. (see *table 01*)

### THE WORLD'S REFUGEES

The recent arrival of refugees from Afghanistan is only one chapter in Australia's long immigration history. Since the first British settlement in Sydney in 1788, Australia has welcomed immigrants from many different parts of the world. War and persecution have often brought new waves of arrivals, for example European migrants after the Second World War and south-east Asian refugee settlers after the Vietnam War.

Refugees form a special group of migrants. Australia is one of 141 signatory countries to the United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and as a result has international obligations to assist people who have fled their home countries under duress.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as a person who:

*owing to a well-founded fear of be-*





ing persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...<sup>7</sup>

The UNHCR estimates that as at 1 January 2003, there were over twenty million 'persons of concern who fall under the mandate of the UNHCR'.<sup>8</sup> Some of these are 'internally displaced people', who were refugees in their own countries and unable to return to their usual place of residence.

### Activity

Use the Internet to discover more about the plight of the world's refugees. Two good places to start are the UNHCR web site ([www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)) and the web site of the Department of Immigration & Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs DIMIA (<http://www.immi.gov.au>). There are many others. Make a poster display on the theme of refugees for your classroom or school library. Include the web sites you have found on your bibliography.

### Web sites

**Hazara Net:** <http://www.hazara.net/>

[hazara/haz-summary/haz-summary.html](http://www.hazara.net/haz-summary/haz-summary.html)

**United Nations High Commission for Refugees:** [www.unhcr.ch/](http://www.unhcr.ch/)

**Welcome to Young:** <http://www.young.nsw.gov.au/>

**Refugees Working – Afghans in Young, NSW** (a report by Frank Stilwell and Ann Grealis): <http://www.young.nsw.gov.au/images/Afghans%20in%20Young.pdf>.

**Definition of Australian multiculturalism** from Department of Immigration & Multiculturalism & Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA): <http://www.immi.gov.au/multicultural/australian/definition.htm>

**Temporary Protection Visas – DIMIA Fact Sheet 64:** <http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/64protection.htm>

**Rural Launch of Anti-Racism Project:** <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/12/10/1039379839871.html>

**Advance Australia Fairly** – see Postcards and Media releases links: <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb/aaf.nsf/pages/index>

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hazara Net <http://www.hazara.net/hazara/haz-summary/haz-summary.html>

<sup>2</sup> Refugees Working – Afghans in Young, NSW (a report by Frank Stilwell and Ann Grealis) <http://www.young.nsw.gov.au/images/Afghans%20in%20Young.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> DIMIA <http://www.immi.gov.au/multicultural/australian/definition.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/multicultural/australian/>

<sup>5</sup> Tom Zubrycki, *The Film – Motivations and Outcomes* (Background notes for *Molly and Mobarak*)

<sup>6</sup> Garry Maddox, 'An Afghan and a teacher in Young – unrequited love in meaty doco' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR Basic Facts: Who is a refugee? [www.unhcr.ch/](http://www.unhcr.ch/)

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Statistics [www.unhcr.ch/](http://www.unhcr.ch/)

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