



Directed by Eunice Lau
2019, Color 82 min

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ABOUT THE FILM

LOGLINE

A father seeks to understand why his son is accused of terrorism, as they journey to repair their relationship after breaking each other's hearts.

SYNOPSIS

Twenty-five years after leaving Somalia as a refugee to begin his life anew in Minnesota, Yusuf Abdurahman's nineteen-year-old-son Zacharia is arrested in an FBI anti-terrorism sting operation. "Accept the Call" explores the struggles of Muslim youths growing up in contemporary America through the eyes of a father striving to understand why his son tried to leave home to join a terrorist organization in a foreign country, and their journey to find reconciliation after breaking each other's hearts.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In the decade following the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, DC, the U.S. and her allies have sought vengeance on the Islamic extremists and retreated into a world governed by policies of pre-emptive wars and massive retaliation. Fourteen years after the fall of the twin towers, seven Somali American teenagers were arrested on terrorism charges as they attempted to leave the country to join ISIS.

Accept the Call is a father-and-son story that takes an unconventional path in approaching the crises of America's systemic and institutional racism, the rise of radicalization, and ideological warfare that besiege us today. For three years, I followed the journey **Yusuf Abdurahman** took to understand what happened to his son **Zacharia**, and the impact on his family when he was arrested. Through their stories, viewers will experience the systemic racism and prejudices youths like Zacharia endured, while grappling with the religious nuance and theological battles within the community that put them between a rock and a hard place.

One of the anecdotal stories that struck me most about Zacharia is related to me by his friend and former inmate Shaker Masri whom he met shortly after being sentenced. Shaker recounted how he saw Zacharia making a Mother's Day card in secret, because he had missed his mother terribly but was forbidden by the strictures of the ideology he had subscribed to then to celebrate such festivals. The image of a boy, barely an adult, expressing his love for his mother, but conflicted by the ideological battle for his soul, wrenched my heart. In telling the story of Yusuf and his son, I hope the microscopic lens on them will rise above the dissonance and evoke a visceral response in audience of all political persuasions, and in so doing begin important dialogues.

We need to acknowledge the impact of the "War on Terror" on a generation of young Americans like Zacharia who grew up under the shadows of these punitive policies. At the same time, we need to realize how the first casualties of this conflict are often Muslims who do not subscribe to extreme ideology. In not acknowledging the influence of ultraconservative interpretations of the religion, or discerning between peaceful and progressive Muslims like Yusuf and the fundamentalists who carry out human rights abuses in the name of Islam, we have contributed to their vulnerability and marginalization.

We need to be inspired by Yusuf's fortitude to carry out honest conversations. Only then, can we push back and challenge the false and racist narratives propagated by right-wing factions of society that fan the mills of Islamophobia and anti-liberal modernity rhetoric, and give our audiences an honest perspective on our global crises without prejudice.

A DISCUSSION WITH EUNICE LAU

What motivated you to tell this story?

I was a young reporter when September 11 happened, and I witnessed how it forever altered the world I knew. Atrocities were committed in the name of righteousness; militarization fueled not just the rise of phobia against Muslims, but the support for right-wing governments and the appeal of terrorist organizations as Muslims who felt persecuted fled into the open arms of their propagandas. The world is once again divided, and deeply wounded. It seems unconscionable to me that this is happening less than 50 years after the Great Wars ended. I see a repeat of history, I see reactionary forces using the conflict to propagate their ideologies and inciting war. As a journalist and filmmaker, I feel it is my duty to pushback against these false narratives and persecutions of Muslims, and delve deeper into understanding why this is happening.

What makes you think you are the right person to tell this story?

I've been asked this question countless times, and I don't profess to be the most qualified person. I am born and raised in Singapore, a country consisting mostly of immigrants like America. So I do identify with Zacharia's confusion over his hyphenated identity, of being descendants of immigrants who were forced to leave their homes, and finding a place in this world that allows me to feel comfortable and cherished in my own skin. It certainly helps too that I made a short documentary in Somalia back in 2012, which was nominated for the AMPAS student academy awards the following year. Telling that story gave me the background I needed to understand Somalia's history and the diaspora before embarking on a complex story as "Accept the Call".

At the end of the day, as storytellers, you relate to people as human beings and draw on our commonality rather than our differences to empathize and understand the universal truths. As with every story I tell, I approach it with a willingness to listen and learn, and being mindful of the trust placed in me to tell it right. I was 13 years old when my political consciousness was ignited by the image of the lone man standing against the tanks rolling into Tiananmen Square. That photo by Jeffery Widener illuminated the power of the individual, and the personal responsibility we bear to stand up to evil by doing the right thing. Thirty years on, that symbol still resonates with me.

Why the focus on a father and son's journey?

We decided to structure this as a father-son story to show how radicalization can happen to any parent whose child has been brainwashed by a cult or extreme ideology. This is a story of reactionary forces manipulating vulnerable people through ideology. I hope after watching this film, parents will go home and hug their children and hold healthy discussions with them about the dissonance that confuse them. As Yusuf tells his son, "Everyone makes mistakes. [But] wise person learns from his mistakes."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Given her background as a former broadcast journalist, Eunice Lau has a propensity toward telling stories concerning social justice. Her film "Through the Fire" was nominated for best short documentary at AMPAS Student Academy in 2013. She won the Spike Lee Fellowship for her feature documentary "A-Town Boyz" while pursuing her MFA in film directing at New York University. With her training in narrative filmmaking, she seeks to bring a cinematic form to documentary films. As a Singaporean filmmaker based in New York City, Eunice's work is supported by Chicken & Egg Pictures, Tribeca Film Institute and ITVS. "Accept the Call" is a continuum of her exploration on the definition of the American hyphenated identity and capturing the journey of the immigrant.



FILM EDITOR/ CO-PRODUCER

Inspired by the cinema of John Cassavetes, John Woo, and Akira Kurosawa, **Yasu Inoue** came to New York City to study film making, and discovered editing through maestros Walter Murch and Fred Wiseman. Yasu has since produced and edited over 15 features including *Newman* which won best documentary in 2016, and *Man from Reno*, which won best Narrative Feature at LA Film Festival in 2014. His clients include Netflix, HBO, CNN Films and Showtime. One of his latest projects, *RAPTURE*, an anthology Hip-Hop documentary series, is released on Netflix.

CREDITS

Directed & Produced by

Eunice Lau

Editor

Yasu Inoue

Cinematographers

"Anonymous"
Hiroo Takaoka

Writers

Yasu Inoue & Eunice Lau

Line Producers

Christina Choe
Takayo Nagasawa

Associate Producer

Sheila Haya

Consulting Producer

Ben Selkow

Archive Producer

Sofia Santana

Gaffer

Atsushi Takaoka

Camera Assistant

Makoto Matsuo

Additional Camera

James Christenson
Eunice Lau

Website and Illustration by

The Jellyfish Firm

Original Music

Osei Essex

Supervising Sound & Re-recording Mixer

Matt Rocker

Additional Sound Editing

Giuseppe Cappello

HD Post Services, DI & DCP provided by

Cut + Measure

Sound Mix Facility

Underground Audio

Title Design

Red Circle, Inc

Digital Intermediate Colorist

Ranju & Sanjit Majumdar

Associate Editor

Nick Vivian

Production Assistants

Manuel Cuellar & Rommel Ojeda

Actors (Re-enactment)

Ibrahim Traore
Christian M'bagoyi
Frantzdy Alexandre
Gary Holman
Percy Brown

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IFP

CHARACTERS



YUSUF

Yusuf graduated from Somali National University with a degree in education and history just before the civil war broke out. The violence forced him to flee his hometown and he came to the U.S. as one of the first few Somali war refugees in 1992. He found work in a turkey-packing factory in Minnesota where he got married. Three years later, his first child Zacharia was born in Minneapolis. He now works in preschool education and has just published bilingual Somali children's book.



ZACHARIA

Prior to his arrest, Zacharia studied computer science at MCTC, a technical college, and volunteered for several charities including Habitat for Humanity. He worked on the night-shift as a guard for a women's charity so he could pay for college and his family. Zacharia pled guilty to conspiracy to providing material support to ISIL in 2016, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison with 20 years of supervised release.



IKRAAN

Third eldest in the family, Ikraan has passionately advocated on behalf of her brother and his friends after they were arrested. She is deeply affected by Zacharia's incarceration and misses him a lot. Ikraan is a poet, writer and a recent graduate of the Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis, where she was president of the Muslim Student Association.