

News and Reviews

Vol. 3, No. 1
Spring 2000

One Thing Leads to Another: The Making of Miyah: The Life of a Javanese Woman

>> by Cynthia Close

In the world of documentary and *cinema verité* you don't always wind up where you thought you would be when you started. My friend, Laurie

essay

Rothstein (shown on this page with Miyah's mother), was a trained anthropologist with extensive fieldwork

experience in Indonesia, but instead of pursuing an academic career she applied her culinary talents and business acumen to founding a catering and culinary research company called Cooking Culture. Several years ago, Documentary Educational Resources (DER), Earthwatch, Cultural Survival, and Cooking Culture began collaborating on a monthly film/dinner/lecture series called "Film, Food, and the Future." It was a wonderful way to pool the best resources of each organization—DER's films, Earthwatch's field researchers,

Cultural Survival's concern for indigenous peoples, and Laurie's cooking—to create memorable evenings for local audiences here in the Boston/Cambridge, Massachusetts, area. The evenings were very popular, drawing an average of 100–150 people hungry for more than casual conversation.

Perhaps it was a seed planted during one these interesting evenings, or maybe it was an idea that had taken root during Laurie's field research on women's work in Jakarta and Bali, but at some point she confessed to me that she wanted to make a film. One of my responsibilities as executive director of DER is to encourage young filmmakers to follow their inclinations and to help them reach their goals. On a personal level, as well, Laurie's film concept excited me. Originally, food and the preparation of food was to play a prominent role



in a film which would focus on one middle-aged woman who spent most of her life as a primary cook and housekeeper in a well-to-do household in Jakarta. We

thought the situation would allow us to explore the complex relationship between servants and their wealthy employers and how Javanese village women try to escape poverty through domestic work in the cities of Indonesia. I also envisioned beautiful shots of exotic dishes being prepared following colorful trips to the local marketplace.

While we could rely to some extent on our own resources to help Laurie make her film, money had to be raised. Money—and lack thereof—is most often the major stumbling block to the completion of any independently produced film project. DER offered the guaranty of a talented cameraman/editor, Sandeep Ray, to work on the project, which would be shot with a digi-

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COURTESY OF FIRST RUN/ICARUS FILMS

Daniel Schmid's *The Written Face* includes excerpts of *onnagata* actor Bando Tamasaburō's performances in Kabuki theatre productions. For review, see page 11.

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audio-visual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published twice a year, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

AEMS is made possible by generous support from The Freeman Foundation and The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

For more information, contact:

AEMS, Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
230 International Studies Building, MC-483
910 South Fifth Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Telephone: 1-888-828-AEMS (1-888-828-2367)
or 217-265-0642
Fax: 217-265-0641
E-mail: aems@uiuc.edu
Web: <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu>

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DESIGN: EVELYN C. SHAPIRO

What's New?

Late last January, intrepid members of the AEMS Advisory Board braved snow and ice to come to Urbana-Champaign for our Annual Meeting. The idea was to assess what AEMS had done over the past year and, more importantly, to discuss where it should go in the future.

We are fortunate to have on our board a wonderful variety and combination of people. We have educators who produce films, producers who run businesses, technicians who educate. All, of course, have an abiding belief in the importance of education about Asia and tremendous enthusiasm for using media to further that education.

The Board members generated all kinds of ideas on improving the Web site, expanding our readership, and creating new and better sources of information for teachers and students. One theme emerged over and over again, however:

We need to know what you need.

In order to maximize AEMS' effectiveness, we need to hear from you, the readers of our newsletter and the users of our Web site, the people who use media in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

In hopes of getting specific feed back, we have included a short survey in this issue of *AEMS News and Reviews*. Simply fill it out, adding whatever comments you like, and send it back to us. If you would like to add longer, more detailed comments,

please e-mail us at aems@uiuc.edu. What can we offer you that we currently do not? How can we improve the services that we already have? How can we help you combine media and Asia in the most effective and positive way?

In other words, Dear Readers, "What's New" will be up to you.



DARRELL WHEATON

AEMS Board members and staff at lunch (L to R): Roberta Gumpert, Caroline Bailey, David Plath, Marianna McJimsey, George T. Yu, Burnill Clark, Sharon Wheaton, Sarah Barbour, Diana Marston Wood.

The Making of Miyah

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tal video camera and edited on one of our in-house AVID systems. There were still the issues of plane tickets for the film team to go to Indonesia, salaries, living expenses, translations, tape stock, et cetera. Grants had to be researched and applied for and money raised.

In the summer of 1997 we quickly put together a concept for an evening fund raising event based on the successful formula of Film, Food, and the Future. We invited a sympathetic group of people with interests in Indonesia, served them a delicious meal of jasmine rice, *gado-gado* with lemongrass peanut sauce, *kecap*-glazed chicken breast, *urap*-style corn and tomato salad with shrimp-cassava *krupuk* crisps and *sambal oelek* chili paste on the side. We plied them with drink, engaged their minds with an exciting multimedia presentation of the project, and then wouldn't let them out the door unless they wrote us a check. Most of them did, which gave us just about enough

money to cover the initial costs of the project.

Once in Indonesia, the project team had to engage the confidence of the subjects of the film, not only Miyah herself (although she had known Laurie for nine years, being filmed is another matter), but also the family for whom she worked. While Miyah was not mistreated by Indonesian standards, she was in debt to her employers. The subtleties of class, the attitude of her employers towards her, and their power over her would be revealed in the act of documenting daily interactions in the home. Unfortunately, when it became apparent to Miyah's employers that they would not be able to control the outcome, they declined to be filmed. Miyah continued to cooperate. She was such an open, appealing person that the direction of the project took a turn, out of the Jakarta household and back to Miyah's impoverished village in Central Java.

Although an early divorce left her with two infants to raise, Miyah still wished to return to the village as a food vendor, to care for her elderly infirm father and tubercular mother. As the shoot-

Asia Video Reports: Japan

AEMS and the Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC) have collaborated to produce four 15-minute videos on Japan with corresponding Teacher's Guides. Each video contains several shorter segments that can be used individually or together. Each teacher's guide contains background essays for the teacher, transcripts and discussion guides, two complete lesson plans, and lists of relevant Web resources.

The following titles are available. To order, please contact SSEC (see the Guide to Distributors).

- *Japanese Arts and Crafts* (#397-7, \$25)
- *Japanese Food* (#398-5, \$25)
- *Japanese Holidays and Festivals* (#399-3, \$25)
- *Japanese Housing* (#400-0, \$25)
- All four titles (404-3, \$90)

AEMS' Image of the Month

<http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/photopage.las>

This February we added a new page to the Web site: AEMS' Image of the Month. Every month, we will add an image from Asia—a snapshot, a drawing, or a map, for example—along with explanatory text. The images and the text are downloadable and free for educational purposes. Images from previous months will remain available in a Web site archive. This is the first in what we hope will be a much larger collection of images. We hope you find it interesting and useful!



DAVID W. PLATH



COURTESY OF FIRST RUIN/ICARUS FILMS

That's Why I'm Working

>> Directed by Maarten Schmidt and Thomas Doebele. Distributed by First Run/Icarus Films. 1999. 53 minutes.

That's *Why I'm Working* illuminates multifaceted and often contradictory views by correctly depicting the broad dimensions of the child labor issue in context. It portrays children on an average day in Bangladesh, showing them at work, at a special school, taking care of siblings, and helping with housework. The video relies entirely on interviews with children and their parents and teacher. Two key elements in this film are the children's opinions on the issue and the elaboration of these views in the context of socio-cultural, economic, planning, and policy-related issues in Bangladesh.

Poverty is the primary reason that children work as rag pickers, domestic help, machine operators, and painters. They are also engaged in preparing incense sticks and rolling *bidis* (cigarettes made from opium leaves). All the children in the film came to Dacca with their parents when a flood washed away their homes. The children themselves state that “poor people have to work hard in order to live. And their children, too.” What are their dreams? They want to earn lots of money—\$100–\$150 a month—have a big house, and take care of their families. With regard to

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ing of *Miyah* progressed and later, back at DER, as the editing began, it became apparent that beyond the issues surrounding servant labor in Indonesia, Miyah's life revealed many universally recognized difficulties. These universal tensions are mirrored in the lives of single, working mothers who are the primary breadwinners for their entire families with children on one side of the generational divide and aging parents on the other.

Many ideas we had initially about *Miyah* had to be scrapped along the way. Food plays a far less significant role than we originally envisioned. An unanticipated event shot during a return visit gave us a more up-beat ending than we could have imagined. It was purely circumstantial, a matter of luck and good timing. It was also a matter of being able to invest the time to let the natural drama of life unfold.

Meanwhile, while working on the final *Miyah* shoot, Sandeep Ray found himself engaged with a human rights story involving the Dyak people of Kalimantan (Borneo), multinational corporations, burning rainforests, civil disobedience, and the

remnants of a village society that is teetering at the edge of obsolescence. While one story ends, another begins, with fundraising (the menu was different), travel, expectations, and dealing with the unexpected. Unpredictable, risky perhaps, but if you prefer to have a career where the boundaries between work and life are very fuzzy, where intuition and flexibility are prized, consider becoming a documentary filmmaker! ♦

[illegible]

Cynthia Close took over the position of Executive Director of Documentary Educational Resources in 1993 following a career as a visual artist (painter) and former Dean of Admissions at the Art Institute of Boston. As Executive Director, she works to produce and promote documentary films about people and cultures from around the world.

For more information, see Karl Heider's review of Miyah: The Life of a Javanese Woman, also in this issue (page 6).

>> Produced and directed by Ann Kaneko. Distributed by Ann Kaneko Films. 1999. 74 minutes.

...poignant and
insightful interviews,
beautiful photography,
and a great soundtrack.

streets, and inside workplaces. Mujahid (one of the Pakistanis) has been working in the same small electronics parts factory the entire six and a half years he has been in Japan. His Japanese boss, Yamaguchi Toshi, notes the similarity between the earlier migration of Japanese from the countryside to the city and the current migration of Pakistanis and other foreigners to Japan. Mujahid's roommate, Ashraf, also has a sympathetic boss,

These managers appear more than just sympathetic to their foreign workers. They respect them for their seriousness of purpose that they lament is missing among younger Japanese. Yamaguchi comments that younger Japanese have grown up in affluence and do not know what it means to suffer. However, one has to question the extent to which these managers' relationships with their Pakistani workers are conditioned by their undocumented status. Since the immigration law was revised in 1989, penalties for employers of foreigners without proper work visas have become much stiffer, and fewer employers are willing to risk hiring them. The willingness of these foreign workers to stay at a given job is in part the result of their lack of options.

While the Filipina and Japanese Peruvian women consider Japan a temporary destination where they can accumulate money to save and bring home with them, the Pakistanis and Iranian seem to be in the process of building new lives for themselves in Japan. This experience, however, is conditioned by thoughts of their symbolic homelands elsewhere. If they leave Japan, they will have trouble getting back in unless they are willing to pay exorbitant fees for a broker who can procure them false documents. By the end of the film, one of them marries his Japanese girlfriend and envisions eventually becoming Japanese himself. We can only speculate about the far-reaching impact of distance and the inability to travel for the wife and two children, still in Pakistan, of another Pakistani when he eventually moves in with his Japanese girlfriend.

In addition to the poignant and insightful interviews, beautiful photography and a great soundtrack make *Overstay* a welcome contribution to both secondary and university curricula on Japan and transnationalism. ♦

Joshua H. Roth teaches anthropology, Asian, and Asian American studies at Mount Holyoke College. He has conducted research on Japanese Brazilian migrants to Japan and Japanese migrants to Brazil.

Overstay is available from Ann Kaneko Films. Price is \$225 for purchase and \$275 for rental.



>> A film by Lina Fruzzetti, Alfred Guzzetti, Ned Johnson, and Akos Ostor.
Distributed by Filmmakers Library. 1994. 36 minutes.

Because of its realistic and detailed vignettes, the film offers many opportunities for class discus-

the film
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sion. First, the gods are
ever present and always in
mind, and the worship of
gods and goddesses appro-
priate to each activity is an
integral and natural part
of daily life. Worship takes
many forms—bowing be-
fore idols, lighting incense,
drawing intricate designs
on the ground before the
deity, and making offerings of food and flowers. Second, the film is candid and realistic about what
villagers actually do and includes sequences in
which young men play cards, kids play soccer,
and the entire village spends an evening watching
a Hindi movie. Third, the film records conversa-
tions—and a great deal of joking—between
friends, among groups, and between a husband
and wife. It suggests the levels of intimacy on
which people relate, their problems and concerns,
and the function of humor in village culture. In
one interesting conversation, two women discuss
the shortfalls of government, though prosperity of
the village bears out the general conception that
West Bengal is among the better-governed states

Visually, the film is superb, as much a work of art as a classroom film. One especially fine photographic sequence shows the village being battered by torrential rains and winds of the monsoon. The film's only defect is that one of the two anthropologist/narrators is difficult to understand, speaks in a monotone, and often can barely be heard above the din of the recorded village noises and conversations. On the whole, however, this is an outstanding film and a superb introduction to Indian village life, highly recommended for high school and college classes. ♦

Seed and Earth is available from Filmmakers Library. Price is \$295 for purchase and \$55 for rental.

>> A film by Laurie Rothstein in collaboration with Sandeep Ray. Distributed by Documentary Educational Resources. 1999. 30 minutes.

19 years. Her two children, now married and with their own children, share the house that she bought with her husband before they were divorced. Most of the film was shot in 1997, but in a short epilogue in 1999 she has somehow scraped together the money to get the rice fields out of hock. She tries unsuccessfully to explain to her querulous mother that she cannot yet afford to leave Jakarta.

serious and even unsettling discussion, for it has rubbed our noses in poverty, albeit in a most delicate, Javanese way. It is especially appropriate for area courses (Indonesia, Southeast Asia, Asia); and generally for a wide range of women's studies courses, courses on family, economics, and the like. I cannot think of another film that represents

There seems to be no accompanying written material to *Miyah*, and there is no hint about where the filmmaker positions this film on the continuum between scripted fiction and straight documentary. Yet the film rings true and it speaks so strongly to the various issues that instructors should have no trouble using it in a wide range of courses at different levels. The most attentive students, however, are sure to ask questions for which the answers are not apparent: how could Miyah provide 120,000 rupiahs a month for her mother's medicine if her salary was only 140,000 rupiahs a month? And if she was so deeply in debt in 1997, how could she have raised over a million rupiahs to redeem her rice fields two years later?

This film is about the entrapment of hard-working villagers in a cycle of poverty, but it also has strong subthemes: how people manage to keep close ties to their villages even after years of living in the city, how four generations interact, and what one determined person can accomplish. Even though this film shows people in perilous poverty, in the end it is actually upbeat. The old couple have had a good life and are being cared for by their daughter and one feels that in 2000 or 2001 Miyah will somehow come home and open her stall in the market. ♦

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Karl G. Heider is Professor of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina. His research is focused on Indonesia. He is author of *Ethnographic Film* (1976), *Grand Valley Dani: Peaceful Warriors* (1997, third edition), and *Seeing Anthropology: Cultural Anthropology Through Film* (1997) and co-editor of *Films for Anthropological Teaching* (1995).

Miyah: The Life of a Javanese Woman is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is \$145 for purchase and \$40 for rental.

Notice of Broadcast: *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, a documentary by Dai-Sil Kim-Gibson and winner of the Asian American Media Arts Award, will be broadcast nationally by PBS on May 18 at 10 PM, E.S.T. Local dates and times may vary, so please check with your local PBS station.



Left: Sun-Hee Park as Hyahng-Sook (L) and Shelly Hong as Grace (R) in *Translating Grace*, directed by Anita Lee.



Translating Grace

>> Directed by Anita Lee. Distributed by Third World Newsreel. 1996. 20 minutes.

Translating Grace eschews conventional narrative structure; it meanders in and about gender and immigration as revealed in glimpses of Korean Canadian women. The work is neither traditionally documentary nor wholly autobiographical; rather, it presents a series of richly evocative mini-narratives (without beginning or ending) that, taken together, explore issues of gender and immigration. “Translating,” in *Translating Grace*, can be taken to refer both to the work of a seemingly second-generation Korean Canadian woman named Grace who will serve as the translator for a recently immigrated (illegally, it appears) woman who will testify to husband abuse; “translating” can also allude to the cultural translation implicit in the border crossings of Grace’s own life. The film playfully posits Grace as a translator and also a student who studies East Asian literature in translation.

In one interesting scene, Grace turns her back on the woman as she fingers her collection of translated works on a top shelf of her bookcase; meanwhile the woman thinks aloud about the problems of translating the Korean word *chông*—a word referring to heart and emotion and attachment, widely considered quintessentially Korean and, by extension, untranslatable. The woman muses that her having stayed with an abusive

husband (a narrative later subverted) has been misunderstood by Canadian authorities because they cannot comprehend *chông*. Grace, the “translator” fumbling through her collection of others’ translations, hardly pays attention as the woman struggles over how to translate her own story; at one point Grace matter-of-factly interrupts, “Your English is pretty good”—the discussion goes no further.

The woman for whom Grace will translate in court has, it turns out, manufactured the story of abuse in order to remain in Canada; when Grace insists that she cannot participate in this deception, the woman retorts, "Just translate... this is my life, my story."

It is never entirely clear whose stories are being portrayed. One of the film's narrative streams is a poetry contest between a Korean *kisaeng* (traditional entertainer) and her client. This historical "drama" is staged—in full historical regalia—in the film in all kinds of interesting ways; several times we glimpse a white man, hands on an abacus orchestrating the scene, screaming—as the *kisaeng* begins to recite in English—"No English, please!" The classical poetry itself offers yet another narrative thread.

Each narrative, in its own maverick manner,

provokes the question of translation. And each thread plays with the cultural and historical imagination as it transgresses boundaries. Finally, each stream touches on women's lives and gendered norms. The film's pastiche presentation and dream-like transitions are such that K-12 audiences would likely find it difficult to parse. For college students considering gender and immigration generally, or more specifically gender and Korean immigration, the film would spark interesting dialogue from a humanistic perspective and students will probably enjoy discussing their own (likely quite diverse) takes on this open and elusive text. ♦

Nancy Abelmann is an Associate Professor of Anthropology, East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is author of *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (1996) and co-author of *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (1995, with John Lie). She has also published on women and social mobility in South Korea, and is currently conducting research on Korean Americans (and their parents) in public higher education in Illinois.

Translating Grace is available from Third World Newsreel. Price is \$200 for purchase and \$50 for rental.

continued from page 3

This film links these crucial questions with sociocultural, economic, and sociopolitical aspects from a multidimensional perspective. For example, environmental protection issues are linked to the issue of rag picking. Sociocultural norms, such as young girls marrying, are connected to the worries of girls aged 8 to 12 about the dowries their parents should provide. Economic factors, like the low cost of child labor (25 cents a day for a child compared to \$1 a day to an adult) are linked to the fact that employers hire children. The importance of gaining knowledge about family and reproductive health is connected to having a “small” family.

continued on next page

>> Produced by Lucy Ostrander, Elizabeth Clark, and KCTS/9. Distributed by Filmmakers Library. 1989. 58 minutes.

While the film provides a good overview of Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest, it is now a bit out of date.

which prohibited aliens from owning land, the early Japanese there leased land from the Yakima Indians, a relationship which proved beneficial to both parties. The most interesting part of this section is how the Japanese in this area fared during the Second World War. It is generally assumed that all of the Japanese Americans in Washington were sent to concentration camps (either Heart Mountain, Wyoming, or Minidoka, Idaho), but this film reveals the little-known fact that those Japanese Americans living east of the Columbia River were not evacuated.

This, however, did little to prevent the dismantling of the Japanese American community of the region.

Staying in the Yakima Valley, the film covers the history of Filipinos in Washington. The narrator points out that the Philippines was America's first colony, after the Philippine-American War which claimed 200,000 Filipino lives in

two and a half years. Once in the Yakima Valley, Filipinos became an important part of the agricultural industry. In fact, they became the primary force behind the unionization of the agricultural and cannery workers in the area.

provides a good overview of the history of Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest, it is now a bit out of date. The film was completed before the Civil Liberties Act was passed in 1988 which provided for an apology from the President to Japanese Americans for their wartime incarceration as well as for monetary compensation. Also, in trying to cover the history of three immigrant groups in less than an hour, many important historical details and interpretations are left out. Despite these shortcomings, however, it is still a worthwhile film to view for classroom use. ♦

K. Scott Wong is an Associate Professor of History at Williams College where he teaches courses on Asian American history, comparative immigration history, the history of the American West, American Studies, and theories of race and ethnicity. He is the co-editor of *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*. He is currently writing a book on the impact of the Second World War on Chinese Americans.

Home from the Eastern Sea is available from Filmmakers Library. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$75 for rental.

The broadness of the content may inhibit some viewers from fully comprehending the impact of the contextual factors on the primary issue. This complex issue—child labor from a multifaceted perspective—is introduced too quickly in this 53-minute video. This video should be accompanied by supplementary materials on the country's culture, gender-specific issues, and sociocultural norms related to family and community. Otherwise, any single issue in the film—environmental pollution, social justice, access to the health care system, and natural disasters—can overwhelm the viewers.

Accompanied by background information, this film would be useful for college and high school-level courses on Asian society. Critical questions raised by the children and their parents may provide directions to policymakers on developing strategies for changing the situation. A young girl saying, "I don't know what you can do about it" haunts viewers after the film is over. It reminds us that something *can* be done, and that it should be done soon. ♦

That's Why I'm Working is available from First Run/Icarus Films. Price is \$390 for purchase and \$75 for rental.



COURTESY OF FIRST RUN/ICARUS FILMS

>> Directed by Gary Kildea. Distributed by First Run/Icarus Films. 1992. 108 minutes.

Gary Kildea has filmed a group of ordinary people in the village of Mindanao Island in the Philippines. Filmed during the dramatic period of the mid-1980s when President Marcos campaigned against challenger Corazon Aquino, the villagers are shown at work in the fields, attending campaign rallies, and informally talking about their daily lives. One fascinating vignette occurs when Imelda Marcos speaks to the village about why her husband should be elected president. Her outrageous statements, made with seemingly great sincerity, are both hilarious and frightening.

Half of the film is in black and white, and half is in color. A surprising amount of the dialogue will lack interest to any but the Philippines specialist. For non-specialists, the film will only occasionally captivate them. There is insufficient context for understanding the dialogue. There is no way of knowing whether or not the central characters, Rogel and Aidos Gonzales, reflect the ideas of their fellow villagers, or if their views are of a minority or even aberrant.

The film would be far more effective if it were edited down from 108 minutes to about 40 minutes. The short length would rid the film of irrele-

vant material and would better fit into a classroom period at both the high school and college level. Even edited, however, the film will not be of great interest to students, unless they have traveled to

are shown at the fields, campaign rallies, and finally talking

Toward the end of the film, there is an important discussion

of voting, freedom of the press, oppression of corrupt leaders, and the role of the people to overthrow illegitimate regimes. This part of the film could be used in civics courses to remind students about their responsibilities as informed citizens. ♦

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Clark Neher is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. He has written extensively on the politics of Southeast Asia. His most recent book, with Ross Marlay, is *Patriots and Tyrants: Ten Asian Leaders*.

Valencia Diary is available from First Run/Icarus Films. Price is \$440 for purchase and \$100 for rental.

Villagers are shown at work in the fields, attending campaign rallies, and informally talking about their daily lives.

>> Produced by Susi Arnott for Yorkshire Television. Distributed by Films for Humanities and Sciences. 1996. 20 minutes.

**INDONESIA:
URBAN
DEVELOPMENT
IN JAKARTA**

A World Bank Publication

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in a candy factory from 8 PM to 6 AM, taking care of her two young children and running the household during the day, attending to her small store in the early afternoon, and after a couple hours of napping in the late afternoon, repeating the work cycle again in the evening. Her husband, Salman, like so many males in Jakarta's underclass, works on construction projects throughout the city (owing to the business boom) but is often kept away from home because of the time and financial commuting. Hamida's modest goal is for her husband to come home each night.

Zaini, Hamida, and Salman not only exemplify the struggle of the urban poor to survive but also how critical the “informal employment sector” is for the majority of the city’s 10 million inhabitants in their struggle to survive. Zaini and Hamida’s grandmother brought the family to Jakarta two decades ago to escape rural poverty. What they found in Jakarta was a different sort of poverty but also, as the narrative suggests, opportunities that offer the chance for a more prosperous life. The fact that Zaini earns enough selling on the street to cover school fees is an opportunity he might not have had in the family’s rural village. But the family, like so many in rapidly developing Jakarta, has been a victim of displacement. To make room for an office building, they moved

The film also briefly touches upon the environmental impacts of growth, including the proliferation of automobiles and the creation of vast toll roads to carry this continuously increasing traffic, and the emergence of a fast-paced "sporting life" centered around transnational investments. But even in its attempt to depict the broader sweep of Jakarta's recent development, the film retains its focus on how the urban poor adapt to circumstances over which they exert so little influence.

Indonesia: Urban Development in Jakarta offers a remarkably accurate and succinct portrayal of everyday life for the urban masses both through its crisp footage and a thoughtful narration. Having personally passed through Kuningan junction almost daily from 1995 to 1997, I can attest that the film neither exaggerates the misery nor sugar-coats the struggle. Several times I saw Zaini's *kampung* under three feet of water from the annual flooding and it was continuously wrapped in a haze from the car exhaust. I often wondered how these residents cope with the continuous assaults of city life on their community. Now I know that one of the boys I saw in the afternoon marching up and down the lines of cars at the traffic light selling their wares was Zaini earning his school fees.

Beyond confirming the accuracy of some of the impressions that one can glean from casual daily observations like mine, this film demonstrates that the adaptation of Jakarta's urban poor to a rapidly changing and highly competitive urban world is one of the most compelling victories of the human spirit. It is the real and enduring truth of the Asian miracle. ♦

>> Produced and directed by Ellen Bruno. Distributed by Film Library. 1999. 50 minutes.

of note

which do little to contribute to our understanding of the issues and lengthen the film considerably.

The interviews, excerpted and shown to students who are familiar with some of the cultural and historical issues at hand, can serve to personalize what might otherwise be considered a distant tragedy. The film would probably work best in college-level women's studies and anthropology classes and might also be of interest to mature high schoolers. ♦

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Sacrifice: The Story of Child Prostitutes from Burma
is available from Film Library. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$45 for rental.

Christopher Silver is Professor and Head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a former Fulbright Senior Lecturer in Indonesia. He served as urban development consultant to the Indonesian National Development Planning Board, 1995–1997, and is principal investigator of a USAID-funded project with the Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia.

Indonesia: Urban Development in Jakarta
is available from Films for the Humanities and
Sciences. Price is \$99 for purchase and \$75
for rental.

>> Directed by Daniel Schmid. First Run/Icarus Films. 1995. 89 minutes.

The Written Face introduces the most celebrated *onnagata* active today, Bando Tamasaburō (b. 1950). Tamasaburō (who is always referred to by his given name, which he received in 1964 as the fifth in a renowned line of succession) is showcased in a variety of representative roles linked loosely together in a pseudo-documentary style. Scenes of Tamasaburō at work are interspersed with interviews with the actor himself and with a group of aging “legends,” including the modern theater actress Sugimura Haruko (age 88), the geisha Han Takehara (age 92), and the Butoh icon Ohno Kazuo (age 88), who dances but does not speak. The upshot is that Tamasaburō is part of a continuing tradition who achieves his art not

Some of the simplest and most effective scenes in *The Written Face* show Tamasaburō applying his makeup and transforming himself into an *onnagata*. Elsewhere in the film we encounter the actor sitting in a hotel room speaking English, French, and Italian, and in a limousine with rock music blaring in the background. The transformation of this approachable and eminently modern individual into the incarnation of Kabuki tradition is a prime focus of the film and provides its title. At one point, Tamasaburō asserts, “I am not a Kabuki professor.” He has nothing to say outside of his performances, he explains. This film takes him at his word; it offers no analysis, no narration, no

At 89 minutes, *The Written Face* is neither an educational film suitable for use in most classrooms, nor is it a feature with an articulate narrative line. It is an idiosyncratic and impressionistic work that attempts to communicate the *onnagata*'s art and the atmosphere of Kabuki instead of ideas about them. While I found it rather self-indulgent, with few real insights into the dynamics of gender and performance, the film nonetheless achieves its aim of giving viewers a tangible sense of how *onnagata* have been able to epitomize ideals of feminine beauty for more than three hundred years. For pedagogical purposes, showing excerpts from *The Written Face* might be the best way to use this flawed but nevertheless worthwhile film in the classroom. College and adult audiences will get the most out of it, but judicious selections could also be shown to mature younger groups. ♦

The Written Face is available from First Run/Icarus Films. Price is \$440 for purchase and \$100 for rental.



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Guide to Distributors

>> A list of distributors mentioned in this issue of *AEMS News and Reviews*

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Documentary Educational Resources, 101 Morse Street, Watertown, MA 02172. Tel: 800-569-6621. Fax: 617-926-9519. E-mail: docued@der.org. Web site: <http://der.org/docued>.

Film Library, 22-D Hollywood Avenue, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423. Tel: 800-343-5540. Fax: 201-652-1973.

Filmakers Library, 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY 10016. Tel: 212-808-4980. Fax: 212-808-4983. E-mail: info@filmakers.com. Web site: <http://www.filmakers.com>.

Films for the Humanities and Sciences, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08543-2053. Tel: 800-257-5126 or 609-275-1400. Fax: 609-275-3767. E-mail: custserv@films.com. Web site: <http://www.films.com>.

First Run/Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, Sixth Floor, New York, NY 10014. Tel: 800-876-1710 or 212-727-1711. Fax: 212-989-7649. E-mail: infor@frif.com. Web site: <http://www.echonyc.com/~frif>.

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