

A YERA KHEIRI FILM

SAHAR

[\[Instagram\]](#) [\[Letterboxd\]](#) [\[Trailer\]](#)

Full EPKs & Visual Assets can be accessed [here](#)

#nzfilm #immigration #humanrights #afghan #feminism

DURATION

14 minutes 35 seconds

LOGLINE

A young Afghan woman, promised a new life in New Zealand through an arranged marriage, is forced to confront both the expectations of her culture and her own yearning for independence.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Sahar follows a 21-year-old Afghan woman who arrives in Auckland hoping for love, freedom, and opportunity through an arranged marriage. But her husband is absent, her mother-in-law is cold, and she is denied basic access to the outside world.

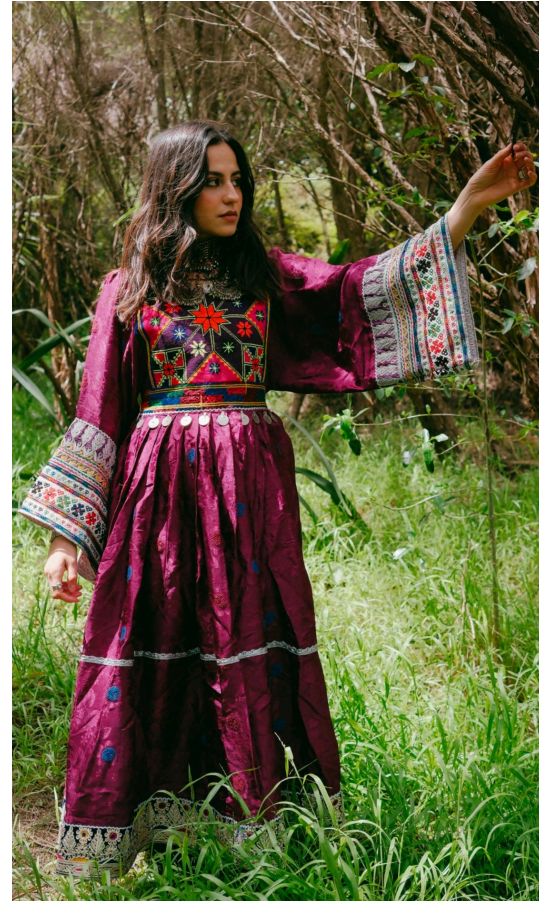
Isolated and frustrated, Sahar leaves the house to get a SIM card, nearly hit by a passing stranger who notices her bruised face and shows concern. When her husband and mother-in-law confront her, truths are revealed, and Sahar must navigate betrayal, cultural expectation, and her own desire for autonomy. A story of identity, resilience, and the cost of freedom for women caught between two worlds.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Sahar tells the story of a 21-year-old Afghan woman who arrives in Auckland full of cautious hope. Married to Kamran through a culturally arranged process, she views this move as a chance for love, freedom, and a new life. Raised in a traditional household, she carries both excitement and fear as she steps into the unknown.

Her hopes quickly unravel. Kamran is nowhere to be seen, and her mother-in-law, Amina, greets her with cold distance rather than support. Sahar is denied access to a SIM card, the internet, or the outside world, leaving her isolated and cut off from her family. When Amina responds harshly to her complaints, Sahar ventures out on her own to buy a SIM card, nearly getting hit by a car. The woman who almost strikes her, Talia, shows unexpected concern, noticing the bruised Afghan woman roaming the streets.

Confronted later by Kamran and Amina, Sahar learns the full truth: Kamran has a Kiwi girlfriend and does not want the marriage. Despite the betrayal, Amina advises Sahar to stay, acknowledging the pressures of family, cultural expectation, and practical realities. The three navigate these tensions, ultimately remaining together, revealing the compromises and complexities that shape their lives.



WRITER/DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Yera Kheiri

I was born in Iran and moved to New Zealand at eleven, growing up closely connected with Afghan families through language, culture, religion, and community. *Sahar* was inspired by Afghan women I know, who arrive in New Zealand through arranged marriages, often into tightly controlled lives. I wanted to tell this story with empathy and nuance, avoiding stereotypes, showing the complex reasons marriages happen, from cultural expectation to family loyalty, while keeping *Sahar's* perspective central.

Visually, the film is grounded in realism, using naturalistic lighting, framing, and pacing to reflect *Sahar's* isolation and disorientation. Wide shots, repeated compositions, and shifts between New Zealand and Afghanistan highlight her emotional journey and the contrast between her roots and her new life. Collaboration with Afghan women on wardrobe, performance, and design ensures cultural authenticity, while the story's structure and pacing convey the pressures, contradictions, and compromises that shape family and cultural life.

Ultimately, my goal as a director is to create a cinematic experience that allows audiences to empathise with *Sahar* and the people around her, while reflecting on the pressures, contradictions, and compromises that shape family and cultural life. Through *Sahar*, I hope to present a story that is emotionally compelling, socially resonant, and authentic to experiences rarely represented on screen in Aotearoa.

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Lee Li

As an asylum seeker from China, my life has been shaped by navigating visas and migration systems, where safety and freedom are often tied to privilege. These experiences made me drawn to *Sahar's* story, where arranged marriage becomes a pathway to security, reflecting the failures and inequities of immigration systems. The story resonated because it highlights how migration, family duty, and systemic bias intersect to limit human freedom.

Supporting Yera's vision allows me to amplify these voices and open a conversation about diaspora struggles and resilience. Through *Sahar*, we aim to present a truthful, humanitarian perspective on the lives of women navigating cultural pressures, migration challenges, and the pursuit of dignity and freedom, encouraging audiences to reflect on experiences often unseen in Aotearoa cinema.

YERA KHEIRI

WRITER / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER



Yera Kheiri is a New Zealand–based Iranian filmmaker and independent journalist passionate about telling real stories about real people. She is drawn to stories that explore identity and human connection. With a BA in Politics & International Relations and Media, Film & TV, and a Master’s in Screen Production from the University of Auckland, she makes work that is both socially conscious and deeply personal.

LEE LI

PRODUCER



Lee Li is an award-winning filmmaker and journalist based in Aotearoa New Zealand. With a background in Media and Communication, Li’s full body of works spans across the screen, publishing and advertising industries. Drawing on her lived experience as a Chinese diaspora and transgender asylum seeker, her works amplify the voice of the voiceless. Her Day One–funded directorial debut, *Fearlessli*, has been released on RNZ and Māori+. As a producer, Li has collaborated with local and international partners, including Auckland Airport, Gong Cha, Screen Auckland, and Rainbow Youth, delivering tightly budgeted, audience-facing productions. She is a former writer for ScreenFit, Editor of Craccum Magazine, and a recipient of NZYFF and Day One awards. “For many of my subjects and characters, their voice is not one of the millions but the voice of millions.” Li says.

FUN FACTS

- Our lead supporting actor, Moe Essop (Karman), doesn't understand Farsi—yet somehow nailed his lines in perfect sync with his scene partner.
- Our *very expensive* screenwriting software refused to support Farsi... so we went old school—handwriting translations first, then sneaking them into a free program to make it work. Indie filmmaking at its finest.
- Sahar (Farangees Seddiqi) and the Mother-In-Law, Amina (Seema Seddiqi), aren't just convincing on screen—they're actually mother and daughter in real life.



CREW LIST

WRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CASTING, PRODUCTION DESIGNER, ART DIRECTOR & SET DRESSING, EDITOR, LOCATION SCOUT – Yera Kheiri

PRODUCER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CREDITS COMPILED/WRITTEN, PRODUCTION MANAGER, SOCIAL MEDIA & MARKETING, LOCATION MANAGER – Lee Li

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER – Hero Modarres

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, TRANSCRIPT TRANSLATED, CULTURAL ADVISOR – Farahnaz Khosravi

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER – Farhad Kheiri

CASTING, 1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, 2ND CAMERA ASSISTANT, ART DIRECTOR & SET DRESSING, 1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, LOCATION SCOUT – Cléophee Oms

CASTING, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY, LOCATION SCOUT – Han Guo

CASTING, SOUND RECORDIST & BOOM OPERATOR – Lav Malhotra

3RD ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, WARDROBE ASSISTANT – Wayne Lang

1ST CAMERA ASSISTANT, GAFFER, COLOURIST, VFX, POST PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER – Dave Cao

2ND CAMERA ASSISTANT, GRIP – Joey Leung

2ND CAMERA ASSISTANT, GRIP – Maggie Yao

COSTUME DESIGNER – Najma Sultan Hussain

SFX MAKEUP ARTIST – Yuliana Romas

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR / CONTINUITY – Di Chen

POST PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER – Emma Mansell

COMPOSER – Tomm Matthews

CULTURAL ADVISOR – Maliha Kamali

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR – Brendan Donovan

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT – Sam Bremner

BTS/STILL PHOTOGRAPHY – Justin Mitchell

SAFETY OFFICER, TRANSPORTATION, STUNT DRIVER – Ethan Reed



AWARDS

The Garth Maxwell Creative Project Prize

Screenplay

University of Auckland, 2025

Media Inquiry:

Lee Li (she/her)

Producer

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Filmmakers (Yera Kheiri & Lee Li) are both available for press and media interviews.

Selected key cast members are also available for interviews upon request.