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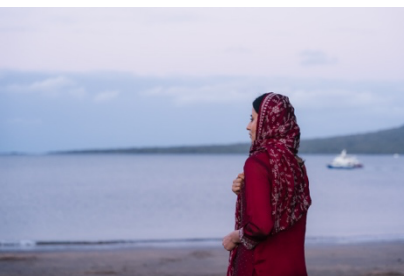


# NEW NZ SHORT 'SAHAR' BRINGS RARE DEPICTION OF MIGRANT ARRANGED MARRIAGE TO THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAKE A DECISION WHEN  
THE ALTERNATIVE IS UNTHINKABLE?



Developed from an award-winning screenplay recognised with the **Garth Maxwell Creative Project Prize** at the **University of Auckland**, the new short film *Sahar* is entering the major international festival circuit, centring on female agency within the constraints of a migrant arranged marriage ([source](#)).



STILLS BY  
JUSTIN  
MITCHELL

Written and directed by **Yera Kheiri** and produced by **Lee Li**, *Sahar* is shaped through the director's feminist lens, offering an intimate and nuanced portrayal of autonomy, power, and choice within culturally complex expectations.

The film follows a young Afghan woman, promised a new life in New Zealand through an arranged marriage, who must confront the

expectations placed upon her and her own yearning for independence (Watch Trailer [Here](#)).

Blending personal and political themes, the film explores the tension between individual **desire** and societal **duty**, bringing forward perspectives that remain underrepresented in New Zealand screen storytelling.

*“Sahar is about the nuanced ways of how we navigate the structural and cultural constraints between what we want and what we’re expected to be,” says Kheiri. “It’s a deeply personal story, but also one that reflects the complex interplay between desire, duty, and the structure that shapes human choices”, says Writer / Director Yera Kheiri.*



The film is based on an award-winning screenplay developed and produced as part of a **Master’s dissertation** at the University of Auckland. Produced independently, with initial seed funding from the **Welcome Academy Trust** and post-production support from crowdfunding, Sahar brings together a multicultural cast and crew, with both the producer and key cast members all from **refugee backgrounds**.

Drawing on their lived experiences as migrants and individuals who have faced difficult choices under extreme circumstances, the film is grounded in story truth, navigating multiple languages in its storytelling while reflecting on the challenges and creative ambition behind the project.

Behind every frame and every sound of Sahar is a grassroots movement, and we are thrilled to have Netflix award-nominated



composer **Tomm Matthews** join us to give voice to its emotional landscape. Additional local sponsorship support comes from **Palmers Bar, Gong Cha, and BBQ Duck Cafe.**

Now entering its festival run, Sahar is targeting international and Aotearoa-based film festivals, with a **World / New Zealand Premiere** anticipated as part of its upcoming circuit.

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**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** IS AN AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKER, JOURNALIST, AND WRITER BASED IN AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND. DRAWING ON HER LIVED EXPERIENCE AS A CHINESE DIASPORA AND TRANSGENDER ASYLUM SEEKER, HER WORK AMPLIFIES VOICES OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM THE SCREEN. "FOR MANY OF MY SUBJECTS AND CHARACTERS, THEIR VOICE IS NOT ONE OF THE MILLIONS BUT THE VOICE OF MILLIONS." LI SAYS, "FOR MANY OF MY SUBJECTS AND CHARACTERS, THEIR VOICE IS NOT ONE OF THE MILLIONS BUT THE VOICE OF MILLIONS." LEE LI IS CURRENTLY COMPLETING HER MASTER'S OF ARTS IN SCREEN PRODUCTION AT **THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**.

**THE GARTH MAXWELL CREATIVE PROJECT PRIZE** IS ESTABLISHED BY NEW ZEALAND FILMMAKER AND UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND ALUMNUS GARTH MAXWELL. THE PRIZE RECOGNISES EXCEPTIONAL AND INNOVATIVE WORK IN DRAMA, SCREEN PRODUCTION, AND CREATIVE WRITING, AND SUPPORTS COMPLETION AND MARKET PROMOTION.

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**MEDIA ENQUIRIES:**

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