



INTERVIEW
Danny Hakim and Udi Kalinsky
co-producers for *Shadya*

Danny Hakim migrated to Israel from Australia in 2001. He is both the film's producer and Shadya's karate coach. He has taught karate for over 25 years and has studied extensively in Japan.

Udi Kalinsky is Israeli and has been producing documentaries for over 10 years. His films include "Total Eclipse" about the Batsheva Dance Company, "Judah and Mohammad," and "Two States of Mind."

Washington, D.C.'s ITVS Regional Outreach Coordinator **Michon Boston** interviews co-producers Danny Hakim and Udi Kalinsky about SHADYA, the documentary and working with the young karate champion and her family.

It's rare that we see stories about Arabs who live in Israel. Tell me more about Israel's Arab communities and how you worked with the Israeli Arab community to make this film. How does this Arab family cope as citizens of Israel?



Danny Hakim: I was able to gain respect in the Israeli Arab community as an international karate instructor and as an Anglo foreigner. Shadya's family was open to me as I was able to prove to her father that I could take care of her and coach her to be a world champion.

As you can see in the film each member of the family has a different way of coping as an Arab Israeli citizen. The father is happy to be an Israeli as he is able to provide a good living for his family with all the benefits as an Israeli, i.e. education, social welfare, good health facilities etc. In terms of material benefits, they are much better off than their Palestinian cousins and they are free to live according to their own Arab Muslim customs.

Udi Kalinsky: There is a lot of sensitivity between the Jews and the Arabs in Israel. This was dramatically enhanced after the Palestinian uprising in 2000 (the intifada) and again after the last war in Lebanon. The problem is a problem of loyalty some Arabs living in Israel feel towards their country (Israel) vs. their nationality (Arab). The fact that some Arabs citizens of Israel identify with Israel's worst enemies, is causing distrust towards them among the Jewish population. Imagine the USA at war with Central American states and the immigrants from those countries identifying with their former countries. How would the Americans feel about that?

On the other hand, many of the Israeli-Arabs are good citizens and know how to avoid conflicts of this kind. They really want to live a peaceful life and even admit they would prefer living in the Israeli democracy than in any other Arab state.

Formally there is equality and the Arabs deserve the same rights as the Jews. But in some cases the Arabs suffer from deprivation. This is much enhanced by the very developed sense of self-criticism of the Israeli democracy. One can read, hear and watch claims of deprivation on a daily basis. No doubt Israel's free, open democratic spirit exposes this very often and gives other mechanisms of justice in the state-- the court, the *knesset* (parliament) and others-- the opportunity to deal with these problems.

UK: We had to take all this into consideration while working with this Arab family during the two years. We had to be very sensitive to their fears, hesitations, confusions etc. We had to make the

differentiations between the careful talking of the adults to the more open, less-afraid talking of the young daughters. We had to move carefully with our need to expose the reality, to show real life as they are behind the curtains, the strict tradition of the Arabs that deals a lot with respect and keeping the women "well secured behind the curtain." No doubt without the braveness of Shadya and her father--both very outstanding persons-- to allow us to enter their world, this film would not be possible.

One of the most suspenseful moments in the film is when the Israeli karate team meets the Palestinian karate team in South Africa. Competitive sports can't avoid politics or can they transcend? What was happening as you were filming that moment? What happened that we didn't see?

DH: Competitive sports can transcend politics if you have the basis and will to respect the other person. The original script of the film was to film Israeli and Palestinian children doing karate together using the virtues of Karate-do i.e. respect, self-control and harmony. This was actually agreed upon by myself (the Israeli coach) and Khalil (the Palestinian coach). However the Palestinian coach changed his mind, and when Shadya was upset by the way the Palestinians did not want to accept her, the direction of the film changed to documenting Shadya.

There was one incident where Shadya had such an identity crisis (re: being Israeli and Palestinian) that she sat with the Japanese team.

Tell me about your background and your journey in making this film. Why did you make this film?

DH: I originally made the film to show how children from areas in conflict can become friends through a sport and philosophy as karate.

I was born in Australia and lived most of my life there. My parents are Jewish and were born in Egypt. My father's families are from Safed a small spiritual town in Israel and my mother's family originally from Odessa. Being educated in multi-cultural Australia I made many friends from different nationalities and religions and I represented Australia in many karate competitions with many migrant Australians. This enabled me to believe in the possibility of people living in harmony and led me to go to Israel to make the film.

UK: I am a film producer who deals with social and politics issues through documentaries. My main concern is to tell stories that the average viewer can't get any access to. These stories should provoke the viewer to think about reality, about life, about the world he/she is living in. I think TV today is shallow, and encourages escapism, values of selfishness and materialism. I'm not having any delusions that I can beat the majority of regular programming. But I hope that if the viewer for once in a while can be exposed to a good eye-opening documentary--it can have some good effect on him and on society.

I'm investing many efforts on the film's form, style, the script, the music--everything that can make the film attractive. I can't tolerate "important boring films." TV today is very competitive. Even the documentary should be attractive for viewing. I believe merging all those principles has helped me successfully survive in this tough and demanding zone of documentary production for more than 10 years.

How did you meet Shadya?

DH: In 2002 I attended classes at Tel Aviv University to receive a national certificate for Karate teaching in Israel. This is a certificate that all Israeli karate teachers must have. And I had to do it ...even though I had taught Karate for over 25 years in many countries...and lived in Japan for many years....Anyway, in this class I met Shadya and as my Hebrew language skills were poor at the time, Shadya helped me with my Hebrew and in exchange I coached her in karate.

UK: Danny is Shadya's karate coach. He introduced me to her and the opportunity to make a documentary about her.

Shadya

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What does Shadya think of the film? What does her family think of the film (especially her brother who paid for the wedding)?

DH: At first she did not like the film as she did not want her village to see that there were problems in her family. However she did want to show the world what type of woman she is. Both times when Shadya was interviewed for TV she made a stirring speech encouraging all women to pursue their dreams. The film has helped her make a statement. Her father loves the film. Her husband likes the film because he loves to see Shadya. Her brothers do not like the film but also don't mind it because they make their statement on how they see things too.

UK: I don't believe the film is more important than the people it portrays. Thanks to this attitude, we successfully avoided serious conflicts with the film's heroes. Ninety-nine (99%) percent of the scenes survived the screening by Shadya and her family. The only scene that we changed was at the request of her father who thought it might contradict some religious rule and hurt Shadya. He didn't ask to delete [the scene], just shorten it a little; and so we did.

How popular is karate in Israel, among young women and young Muslim women specifically? Did Shadya and her teammates inspire more young women to take up karate as a serious sport?

DH: Karate is very popular among young women and particularly Muslim girls. They do not have many other hopes to choose from and karate is a cheap sport with little equipment. "Shadya" has not yet inspired many women to take up the sport as it has not been show on TV in Israel yet.

Karate is considered a form of self-defense. How do the principles of karate translate in a region surrounded by violent conflict?

DH: You should look at the Budo for Peace website. This is an association that uses traditional martial arts as a tool to stop conflict in this region. Shadya is a member and soon will be a teacher of a Budo for Peace club. www.budoforpeace.org.



Some viewers may see Shadya's marriage as a threat to her dreams and goals? Is that a fair assessment? Can she "have it all?" What does "having it all" look like in Shadya's community?

DH: The film does show this and with most Muslim women this is the case. However, in reality, Shadya has proven to be a stronger character than her husband. She is training again and hoping to represent Israel again. Can she have it all? We will see. It is very difficult, if not impossible to have it all, in Shadya's community. It is hard enough in our society too.

UK: She can have it all. After having her baby Shadya returned to Karate and according to her coach she is even better then before! Regarding fair assessment—getting married is Shadya's decision. The film is not aiming to judge her or her decisions. Shadya is brave and wise enough to make her decisions and we—the filmmakers or the viewers—have no reason to criticize her or to feel sorry for her decisions. Maybe she is wrong but one does not have to be a 17-year-old Muslim girl to be wrong.

What do you believe is the most important message of this film? When viewers watch SHADYA on PBS, what do you want them to know?

DH: I believe the film is about a woman's conflict between tradition and ambition. This is a universal theme. Women must learn to fight to "have it all."

I would like viewers to know that Israel does accept Arabs in their society even to the extent when they can represent them. Viewers should understand that the Israeli/Arab conflict is very complex.

Also, it is very difficult for a person who has exposure to freedom from a modern western society on one level to follow their ambition when they come from a powerful traditional community with a history of repressing women's freedom.

UK: This is not in our hands where and when we are born. The fact that you were born a Muslim girl in the minority Arabic community in the ever-present-war land of Israel puts you in a very bad position in contrast to the one who had the luck to be born a US citizen. Although, this is not a recipe for happiness or misery, it is a question of who you are and what you are doing with your life with the world you are living in.

Despite the harsh conditions, Shadya is paving her own way in life, reaching achievements. How many of us have achieved a world-record? She serves as a model to many other Arab youngsters. Above all Shadya is happy with her life. This is the message of the film.

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