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By Gautaman Bhaskaran  
South Asia Editor



"The Other Side of Hope"

The ongoing first edition of the El Gouna Film Festival on Egypt's Red Sea Coast threw up some interesting works. A work that was riveting was Finnish auteur Aki Kaurismaki's *The Other Side of Hope*. The cinema of Kaurismaki despite its deadpan imagery has always sparkled. It may not have a joy-di-vivre, but has a soul that is magically captivating. And, yes, so addictive. But Kaurismaki's latest, a Berlin Competition title, *The Other Side of Hope*, goes beyond this. Here in this work, he focuses on refugees – still an uneasy subject for a movie plot and an even greater discomfort for politicians.

Kaurismaki plots his narrative with his usual candid absurdity, but this in no way undermines the humungous seriousness of the problem of the all those millions displaced from their homes. And he takes us through the tale with disarming simplicity and unbelievable ease.

The film is basically about two men: a travelling salesman, Wikström, from Finland who quarrels with his wife and walks out of home. And he decides to make a clean cut of his life by throwing away his job and taking up gambling. With the money he earns at poker, he buys a dowdy restaurant – where a Syrian refugee, Khaled, who has made his way into Finland as a stowaway in a coal ship, is hired. He is searching for his sister, and in what seems like a wonderful camaraderie, the men at the restaurant come together to help Khaled. Set in Helsinki, Kaurismaki paints the gloom of the times all right, but lifts the movie out of the morose with a dash of hope and positiveness. In fact, this writer found this to be one of the director's most humorous, most breezy titles.

A French drama, *After the War* comes from Annarita Zambrano. In her debut feature, she gives a smart,

affecting account of how a former Italian terrorist stripped of his safe haven status in France, plans to escape Europe with his school-going teenage daughter. The film is a powerful look at how the violence of political resistance takes a toll on the lives of men and their families.

In 2002, France did away with the Mitterrand policy of allowing convicted terrorists from Italy to remain in France without the fear of extradition. That year, a Bologna jurist, Marco Biagi, was assassinated by a group calling itself the New Red Brigade. Zambrano uses these two incidents to weave a fictional story of Marco Lamberti – who had been a member of the Armed Formation for the Revolution and who had fled from Italy to France in 1981 after killing a judge.

Afraid that he would be deported, now that the Mitterrand doctrine is gone, Lamberti and his daughter, Viola, seek the help of an old friend for passports which will help them travel to Nicaragua. In the meantime, Biagi's murder prompts the Italian police to reopen its case against Lamberti, and the cops and journalists go calling on his mother and sister – opening up wounds of a painful past which the two women had hoped was buried for good.

Zambrano's sympathies lie not with Lamberti, and she skilfully states that such terror crimes, whatever be their motivation, insidiously affect and even harm the present. Viola is upset that she has been dragged out of a great life at school and is going to be taken to Central America. But she gets even more angry and confused when she sees a newspaper heading on her father, "Intellectual or Criminal?" And we begun to understand that Lamberti's arguments – which he spells out in an interview with a journalist – are a fundamentally flawed rationale.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is now covering the first edition of the El Gouna Film Festival)

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