

'Young Ahmed': Cannes prize winner offers a harsh look at radicalization



- The boy gets radicalized by a militant Imam who gets close to him
- Ahmad starts mistreating his mum cause of her alcohol use

DUBAI: Belgian brothers' Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's "Young Ahmed," which won the best director trophy at Cannes on Saturday night, is characteristically dark. Winner of two earlier Palm d'Ors for their 1999 "Rosetta" about a 17-year-old girl's travails dealing with unemployment and an alcoholic mother, as well as for "The Child" in 2005 in which a young husband sells his baby, the directors this time step into religious radicalism. "Young Ahmed" is a painful look at how the young and the vulnerable are brainwashed into a violent ideology. While the Dardenne's earlier films like "The Son," "The Kid with a Bike" and even "The Child" have a streak of optimism running through them, "Young Ahmed" has no such comfort.

(Supplied)

Ahmed (played with disarming natural ease by Idir Ben Addi) gets dangerously close to a militant imam (Othmane Moumen), who indoctrinates the boy with his own radicalized ideology — while absolving himself of blame. Ahmed begins to hate behavior he used to find normal. At school, he refuses to shake hands with his teacher, Ines (Myriem Akheddiou), because she is a woman. And at home, he abuses his mother for drinking alcohol. He is so obsessed with his own religious purity that when a girl wants to be friends with him, he asks her to convert.



(Supplied)

Some may see the movie as harsh, even far-fetched. Certainly, it is very different from the brothers' earlier works, which shed some light at the end of a dark tunnel. But "Young Ahmed" confronts us with dangerous dilemmas — the boy is already in the deathly grip of the imam, despite his teacher's desperate efforts, and ends up being caught in a painful tug-of-war.