

# REVIEWS



## FILM

### NEW MUSLIM COOL Review by Mohammed Elshimi

New Muslim Cool is a beautiful and entertaining documentary about the power of music and culture to create social change. Directed by Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, this riveting documentary follows the life of Hamza Perez, his family, and nascent community of Muslims post 9-11 in Pittsburgh, America. Jokingly described as "America's worst nightmare", Hamza is a Puerto-Rican, Hip-Hop artist, and ex-gangbanger striving to do good works as a convert to Islam, "The Prophet as a model teaches me the kind of man I want to be." We follow the journey of Hamza's life through the challenges of conversion, his marriage and family life, the streets, as well as his work

as a community activist, and struggle to regain his job as an interfaith jail counsellor. However, the story transcends the struggles of one man. Ultimately, New Muslim Cool is about the challenges Muslims face trying to harmonise and reconcile a world that never stops changing with their Islamic identity. In fact, it captures the distinctive Western and Urban Islamic culture that is organically developing and being forged, and which is learning to be comfortable in its own skin. This colourful cultural synthesis expresses itself in the way Muslims are reshaping and redefining language and food; we see Hamza, for example, cooking "Boricua Halal" (Puerto-Rican) food, rapping about Islamic issues with a hip-hop vibe, switching between Arabic and Spanish

phrases, and his artistic venture with a Jewish woman to collaboratively compile poetry from their respective communities.

Although touching political and religious issues, this is not a political or religious film. Rather, it's a human story about trying to reach out and connect

with others across the colourful human kaleidoscope - a search for a common ground in our increasingly inter-connected and diverse world. It is a fast-paced, insightful, and inspiring documentary that stunningly depicts the reality of being Muslim in America.



## BOOK

### THE WHITE TIGER REVIEW BY TAM HUSSAIN

It is a mark of a talented writer that he is able to portray a world which is not fully his. Arvind Adiga seems to be able to do just that. The Indian born Australian, an Oxonian and a former journalist for The Financial Times to boot, is able to reveal the underbelly of his home of Delhi, India in a convincing manner without artifice or contrivance.

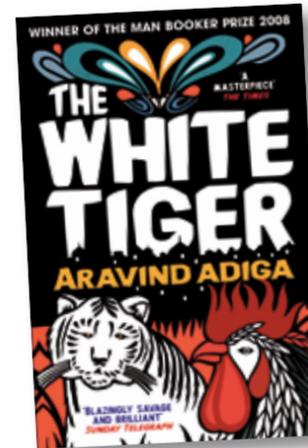
The White Tiger is a rags to riches story of Balram Halwai, a millionaire in India's equivalent of Silicone Valley, Bangalore. But be warned, anyone expecting a slum dog millionaire plot will be seriously disappointed, for the only thing Danny Boyle and Adiga have in common are the unsavoury characters that people their stories. But even so Adiga's characters are far more vivid as they are grotesque.

Balram has to grapple with rapacious land lords with gross feet, of rickshaw drivers who come to their ominous deaths in state hospitals, weak masters educated in America, rich socialists buying up the votes of an illiterate underclass, and the gibes of fellow servants. This is a world where the boy does not get the girl, instead the rich get Ukrainian blondes and the Balrams of this world get poor Indian prostitutes who dye their hair with peroxide. This is the world that the gregarious and yet tragic protagonist crawls out of. Adiga's first person narrative is a tale of a low caste Hindu who dares to dream and makes it out of his poverty but sadly, it is at the cost of his soul and family.

Surprisingly, Balram is unrepentant at the price that he has paid. He is realistic- to suc-

ceed in India you have to lie, bribe and murder. What Adiga suggests then, is that India's tragedy is that it can produce survivors and entrepreneurs like Balram, who become good employers, but are unable to break the cycle of corruption and instead, just like their former employers, grease the pole and enjoy their wealth in the full awareness that their souls are empty and lost.

This novel will make you laugh at the village buffoonery of Balram, his fashion sense, his



idiosyncrasies, his craftiness. But despite all this, you get the sense that Adiga is not exaggerating. As you laugh at Balram, your heart breaks at the sheer injustice of his condition. You recognise that he did not have a choice in what he did and it becomes hard to condemn him for the murder of his employer because you recognise his misery. This story is a witness to India's meteoric rise but is also a warning: that India's towers are cemented on the millions of knotted backs and thin calves that earn less than a dollar a day and may one day come crashing down. Adiga has written a savagely acerbic novel and perhaps without realising it, given voice to the downtrodden- superb.

## RESTAURANT

### THE MANGO TREE REVIEW BY MARYA AHMED AND FARKHANDA MOHIYUDDIN

Mango Tree, seated in the heart of Belgravia square, is far from your average Thai restaurant. Having competed on the widely acclaimed Gordan Ramsay's best local restaurant, it is clear the diners like what they eat. An adventurous fusion of flavours, ingredients and tastes, combined with a dimly lit, noisy and intimate setting instantly takes you away from the dreary, cold and grey evening that we are more accustomed too.

The staff were all smiles and very friendly; a bit over zealous at times, as by the end of the evening we had been served by over seven waiting staff but pleasant, nonetheless. While our table had been cleaned on more than one occasion, we had a lingering wait in between courses, as all seven had thought the other had dealt with us. But this was only a minor setback to an evening that was nothing short of a grand feast.

The tone was set with our uber fashionable non-alcoholic cocktails, a blend of

fresh fruits and herbs, which instantly puts you in the mood for some fine dining. One could not help but notice the overbearing conversations that were flowing from the tables around you, and at times there was a struggle to hear the person across the table.

Where to start on the food? Every dish that arrived on the table was something exquisite that was devoured promptly. The signature dish created for us, a duck and cherry tomato salad with a honey, coriander and lime glaze was packed full of flavour. Mains consisted of a combination of the chef's specials and a round up of the crème de la crème of the menu. Needless to say, it was hard to pick a favourite; from the Thai green curry, to the stir fried noodles, each dish was its own triumph. The proof, however, was surely in the pudding. I recommend the guay ob ma prow sod and crème brulee, which ended the evening on a sweet note. A definite must-go for those wanting to experience a culinary delight.

### The Mango Tree

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**EXHIBITION**  
**THE SHAPE OF THINGS**  
 Review by  
 Khadija Gulamhusein

With the rise of far right parties and anti-immigration sentiments across Europe, from the recent and unexpected outcome of the Swedish elections to the long-established presence of the FN in France, multiculturalism is seen as a botched ideology. Angela Merkel's and Cameron's damning verdict that German and British multiculturalism has 'utterly failed' is the latest in a frightening trend towards monolithicism.

That's why it was so refreshing to visit 'The Shape of Things' exhibition at the Flow Gallery. The exhibition has brought together the work of nine British artists, in a celebration of the unique contribution that national identity presents to the multicultural fabric of British society. From Seiko Kinoshita's use of Japanese textile to explore the British fascination with weather, to Pakistani-born, Halima Cassell's use of ceramics to combine North African and Islamic artistic influences to speak through the

common medium of geometry, pattern, and number, the exhibition is an inspiring showcase of diversity and the richness of British culture. I would have to say that Alinah Azadeh's installations were my favourite. Her ability to transform mundane objects into cultural masterpieces through the use of colour and poetry was inimitable.

Although the exhibition has now been replaced by a newer one, interested viewers can examine tasters of the featured artists' work online.  
**Flow Gallery, 1-5 Needham Road London, W11 2RP**



**BOOK**  
**BUILDING SOCIAL BUSINESS**  
 BY MUHAMMAD YUNUS  
 Review by Munir Quddus

Muhammad Yunus' new book, *Building Social Business: The New Kind of Capitalism that Serves Humanity's Most Pressing Needs*, is a manifesto for those who care deeply about solving the society's "wicked" problems – poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and global warming. It is a treasure trove of creative ideas, exciting business models, and plans on how to create sustainable solutions for the betterment of the world's poor, and slowly chip away at global poverty.

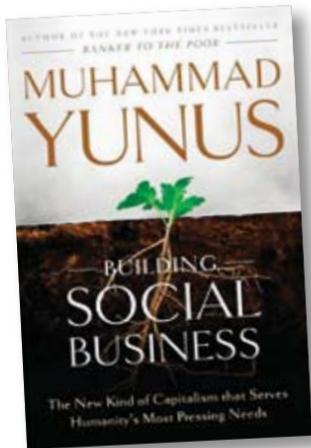
Yunus builds up the case that hundreds of social businesses would be a powerful addition to the available anti-poverty weapons, including the much-celebrated micro-finance. Yunus shares stories of his experiments with creating and running newly designed companies to solve specific problems related to extreme poverty – malnourished children, disease from lack of wearing shoes, unemployment among girls. Yunus has been busy crafting prototypes of the new business model in partnerships with some of the most dynamic global companies - Intel, Addidas, Viola, and Danone.

The overall message is hopeful. Yunus sensibly points out that if profit and greed were the sole driving force in modern society, "There would be no churches or mosques or synagogues, no schools, no art museums, no public parks or health clinics or community centres... there would be no charities, foundations, or non profit organisations."

Yunus is brimming with ideas on how thousands of

social businesses can be set up in every possible sector across the world. There is a "how to" chapter where he discusses the steps one must take to start a successful social business. To pick one idea, preferably in field of expertise, take baby steps to gain experience and confidence, learn from mistakes in a pilot project, and make the necessary adjustments to be successful on a small yet significant scale.

In a chapter titled, "The End of Poverty: The Time is here," he recommends bold action to conquer global poverty. As the US economy slowly recovers from the Great Recession the



message in this book is timely. The author's call to use business and entrepreneurship to solve societal problems, not to create personal fortunes, is pregnant with possibilities. He would like not just corporations, but more ordinary citizens to start businesses to solve problems.

The author believes that if we chose to dream big (a world free of poverty) and use all the tools at our disposal in a free market economy, including micro-credit and social business, by leveraging the power of science and communication technologies, we can finally send off poverty to museums.



**FILM**  
**WEST IS WEST**  
 Review by  
 Mohammad Mirbashiri

More than 10 years after *East is East* first hit the silver screen, this year finally heralds the release of *West is West*, the long-awaited sequel to the successful comedy-drama film about a British-Asian family living in 70s North England.

*West is West* follows the Khan family on a journey from their home in Salford, England to Pakistan in 1976. The film begins focussed on the troubled life of the adolescent son, Sajid (Aqib Khan) but as the film develops, his story becomes over-shadowed by the complex and sorrowful story of George (Om Puri), his Pakistani father. Sajid persistently skips school in a bid to avoid the racist

bullies who pick on him everyday for being of Pakistani origin. After being caught shop-lifting one day, he has an argument with George and Ella (Linda Bassett), his English mum. George, distressed that his youngest child, Sajid is following in his elder children's footsteps in leading a western-lifestyle and fearful he will too eventually become estranged from him, takes the brash decision to take him on a trip to Pakistan to learn a lesson about obedience and Pakistani heritage.

The film explores the multifaceted dilemmas faced by the British-Asian community, how they are perceived and also how they wish to be perceived by others. George, who is known as Jahangir to his Pakistani family, sets out in his trip to resolve the discon-

nect that exists between him and his son, but upon returning to his homeland, he soon realises a greater disconnect with his Pakistani wife, Basheera (Ila Arun) and two daughters whom he had left behind many years before. George's situation is exacerbated when Ella, his English wife joins them. The actors are convincing, in particular Pir Naseem (Nadim Sawalha), who plays a wise Sufi sage from the village who mentors George's son, Sajid.

*West is West* is a packed film, with some tense, emotional scenes and an array of cliché jokes about culture and being lost in translation. The serious issues faced by the British-Asian community are sad and moving, but nonetheless witty screenwriting catches the hilarity of subtle nuances of both English and

Pakistani culture. This, along the visual backdrop of lush landscapes results in a film which is just as rich in story as it is in bright cinematography of rural Pakistani village life (though it was actually filmed in India).

On the one hand, the film makes a point of highlighting the stark differences between English and Pakistani culture. It falls short of addressing contemporary issues pertaining to Islamophobia faced by the British-Asian community but on the other hand, *West is West* points to more intimate questions of identity and belonging of the Khan family and whilst seeking to resolve the gulf between the different cultures, makes us realise we are after all perhaps not as dissimilar to one another as we think.