

## HER SHOCKING DECISION

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Delaware News Journal

April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008

This interesting movie could hardly have been made by a more interesting guy.

When Muhammad Ali Hasan presents his 23-minute movie, "Rabia," a well-acted meditation on what might inspire a Palestinian woman to become a suicide bomber that he both wrote and directed, he'll be bringing more than the baggage he has lugged from the plane.

The movie will show Sunday at the Third Annual Hearts and Minds Film Festival in Dover.

Only 27, the Colorado native is a state legislative candidate in a mountainous district that covers three counties around Vail, where he lives with his parents, Pakistani immigrants, in their multimillion dollar mansion. His father, Malik Hasan, a neurologist, founded QualMed in Pueblo, Colo., in 1985, and by the end of the 1990s had made tens of millions of dollars by acquiring other HMOs, going public and then merging with a California company.

"I grew up in a household where we had a framed picture of Arabic calligraphy that said 'Allah,' and near that a picture of Ronald Reagan," said Hasan.

The picture was autographed by Reagan to his mother, Seeme Gull Hasan, who has contributed nearly a million dollars to Republican causes and candidates over the years.

The film, which already has won several film festival awards -- from the Show Off Your Short Film Festival of Hollywood, the Gone With the Film Festival and the Sunscreen Film Festival, among others -- is giving him second thoughts about his nascent but troubled political career, which he has dreamed about for a long time.

"I didn't think 'Rabia' would do so well," he said.

The movie stars the excellent Iranian actress Hanieh Jodat as a Palestinian woman driven to despair after she is rejected by lovers, is childless and divorced by her husband.

Hasan said it is loosely based on the life of Wafa Idris, who detonated a 22-pound bomb in the center of Jerusalem in January 2002 and became the first female suicide bomber.

Like a well-wrought short story, the film wastes nothing, revealing in quick, sharp

strokes the conditions that created Rabia. It is sympathetic, nonjudgmental and rushes toward a literally explosive climax.

"To me, 'Rabia' is not a film that supports terrorism," Hasan said. "My motivation is to open a dialog, and I think in our efforts in the war on terror, it will be better to know where they're coming from, and not just dismiss them all as evil."

Unlike most politics, the movie is ambiguous and open about Rabia's life and the conditions of both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

"Movies aren't meant to explain what's happening, they're just meant to show," Hasan said. "As long as we understand the roots of her depression, that's the goal. I don't know if I can explain how someone would choose to kill herself."

He can't and he doesn't.

But he does offer an excruciating ending that shows a formerly denigrated and abused woman making choices that are both self-destructive and life-affirming.

"People ask me if there was an intention that she was not going to blow herself up, and I said no," Hasan said. "There's a point of no return; once they make a decision, they never go back."

The real question, Hasan said, was whether she would choose to kill other people besides herself.

A revelatory moment occurs in the middle of the film, when Rabia convinces a terrorist that a woman can be a suicide bomber.

"She's not even Muslim at that point," Hasan said. "She's pandering to him."

He tells her that he doesn't care about Allah, that he only wants to kill as many Israelis as possible.

This is the moment where Jodat, the actress who plays Rabia, earns her bones. With large, liquid eyes, she looks at the man and nods.

"I just found someone who understands me," Hasan said Rabia is feeling at this moment. "When she takes off the veil, she can finally be herself."

It's a self that has been conditioned by oppression and rejection, which flowers into something beyond resentment.

Although choosing to become the ultimate servant to a soulless ideology that demands even more than submission, her determination directs itself inward, leaving the viewer to ponder her choice's implications.

Hasan's movie's success may help to ameliorate the pain of a recent breakup with his former publicist and girlfriend, Alison Miller, who has publicly bashed Hasan, got a restraining order against him, but has since dropped her suit.

His candidacy and the breakup have been big news in Colorado this spring.

He is continuing his campaign, Hasan said.

His dyed-in-the wool conservatism, inherited from his parents, thrived in a hothouse of TV appearances after 9/11.

Hasan founded "Muslims for Bush," which fought for the 2004 re-election of George W. Bush. After the election, he founded a think tank, "Muslims for America."

While attending Occidental College in California, he became a regular guest on Bill Maher's old show, "Politically Incorrect," and now is a Fox News commentator.

"I was successful as a political commentator, was vetted by the Republican Party, and thought my destiny was to be in politics."

It still may be.

If it doesn't work out, he's got another talent he could develop.