



DIRECTOR PROFILE

Elle Flanders

The Israeli-Canadian director tells NATALIE GRAVENOR about her film about 'mixed' gay couples in Israel and Palestine

Zero Degrees Of Separation is a good title for Elle Flanders' debut feature, an essay film meditating on the nature of identity and prejudice.

The director's interest was piqued by a magazine article about Ezra, the Israeli half of a gay "mixed" couple — his partner is Palestinian. She sought him out and realised that by coincidence Ezra had been her grandparents' gardener 50 years earlier. She found their home movies from a 1948 trip they had taken through what was then Palestine and they now form one of the threads of *Zero Degrees*, interwoven with the story of Ezra and his partner, and a lesbian 'mixed' couple.

"There are zero degrees of separation between Ezra and me, between the two couples, between people living only three kilometres apart," Flanders notes, referring latterly to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. "But the separation is vast in

terms of culture and politics."

Flanders grew up between Canada and Israel in a "Zionist, but not rabidly so" background. When she came out as a lesbian, she also "shifted the lens" in terms of positioning herself on the fringes of society. She says it gave her a much better understanding of other marginalised groups.

"I met and interacted with Palestinians as fellow peace activists, rather than as the people who clean Israelis' houses," the film-maker explains.

Flanders hopes her film will contribute to the discourse on the Middle East conflict and more general issues of identity and prejudice. Her emphasis is not only on story, but also the way it is told. "You can tell stories beautifully, I'm not anti-aesthetics," she says. "That's why it's interesting to have the film in the Forum, as it's not so much about documentary or feature, but film as cinema."

FORUM: FILM OF THE DAY



ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

A heterosexual love affair between a Palestinian and an Israeli is already highly charged; a gay relationship pours sexual oil onto the political fire. Elle Flanders' documentary interweaves interviews with two "mixed" couples, one gay and one lesbian, and home movie footage of Flanders' grandparents over 50 years into a personal view of Israeli history.