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# The invisibles

**Pickings may be slim, but even stories of the invisibles among us have made it on film**

By **AMY DE KANTER**

**L**IKE books and the media in general, we count on movies to widen our understanding of the world outside our own experience.

Through films we live briefly in times of war, through natural disasters and landmark historical events.

We step into the shoes of orphans, serial killers, someone who has survived torture, a blind person, someone who belongs to a very dysfunctional family, someone much older, someone of a different race or sex. We share the day of an insider in other countries, religion and culture.

A few weeks ago, I attended several of the events at *Seksualiti Merdeka*. There is nothing like a few days of high visibility to remind us of those we keep in the shadows.

We waste way too much film on cookie cutter movies, where stories differ only in the lame jokes, special effects or the way that the boy gets, loses and gets the girl.

Here is a list of films with rarer topics told in a sensitive, intelligent and informed way. Filmmakers, take note: Another thing these films have in common is the critical acclaim and piles of awards they have accumulated.

## **Boys Don't Cry**

Based on the true story of Brandon Teena (transgendered teen formerly known as Tina Brandon), this film got Hilary Swank her first academy award. Brandon Teena wants only to be a boy and to love the girl who loves him back.

Anyone watching this film will be struck by the harmlessness of Brandon's lifestyle compared to the vicious behaviour of the bigots who surround him.

## **Beautiful Boxer and My Life In Pink**

The gorgeous Thai film, *Beautiful Boxer*, is also based on a true story. Parinaya wants so much to free herself from her male body that she takes up kickboxing to earn money for a sex-change operation.

In *My Life In Pink*, little Ludovic knows what no one else sees; that she is a girl. Ludovic has a child's absolute faith that any moment now God will send down the X chromosome that was intended for her, but which somehow got misplaced at birth.

## **Juno**

This film was groundbreaking. Juno, the title teenager gets pregnant. She takes responsibility for her error in judgment and not for a minute does she feel sorry for herself, nor does she allow anyone else to feel sorry for her.

Unashamed of her mistake, she is determined to fix things. Although her parents, friends and the father of her child are all supportive, she is the one who makes the adult decision that ends up being the best choice for her, for the baby and for a childless stranger.

## **Erin Brockovich**

Single mothers are still, unfortunately, treated like pariahs so the smart and sexy mother-of-three was a treat to the silver screen.

But what I loved most about this film was that although many of us are used to the idea of men leaving their own families, we are a lot less used to seeing men who stay, even to raise someone else's kids.

Erin's boyfriend in the film is affectionate, sweet and absolutely dependable. While she is out saving the world, he stays home with her kids. Fact or fiction, it was lovely to watch.

## **Forest Gump**

Jenny, Forest's first friend, is also the love of his life. Although she appears and disappears over the years, she is always on his mind.

Adored and beautiful, Jenny has absolutely no self-esteem; she performs nude in clubs and dates a series of abusive men. It all goes back to a childhood in which her father raped and beat her.

Similarly, in the film *Sleepers*, a group of boys are repeatedly raped by

the guards at a detention centre. As adults, one asks another whether he still sleeps with the lights on.

These two films tell us something we need to know: abuse inflicted in childhood can damage that person for a lifetime.

## **What's Love Got To Do With It?**

The brilliant film based on the life of Tina Turner shows that domestic violence is not always noticed by friends, family or even millions of fans.

It shows that even the strongest, most successful women among us, with the most genial husbands, may

be living in a secret hell – a lesson I have had to learn over and over. Another must-watch on this topic is New Zealand's *Once Were Warriors*.

## **The Kite Runner**

This was an extraordinarily painful lesson in power over the powerless as well as in sexual slavery.

All children are vulnerable to perverted monsters, but none as much as children who have no one looking out for them, such as war orphans or the very poor.

The only certain way to make sure this does not happen to our children is to join the cause of preventing it from happening to any child.

## **Jeffrey**

*Jeffrey* was one of the first movies about love in the time of AIDS. In the film, Patrick Stewart (better known as Professor Xavier in the *X-men* trilogy) played a flaming gay man.

Many of his fans were shocked. Could he play a gay man without being a gay? Stewart seemed baffled by the question. After all, he had played many roles before, including that of a murderer without being asked if he was a murderer in real life. That answer shut everyone up and cemented my adoration for the man.

## **Intimates**

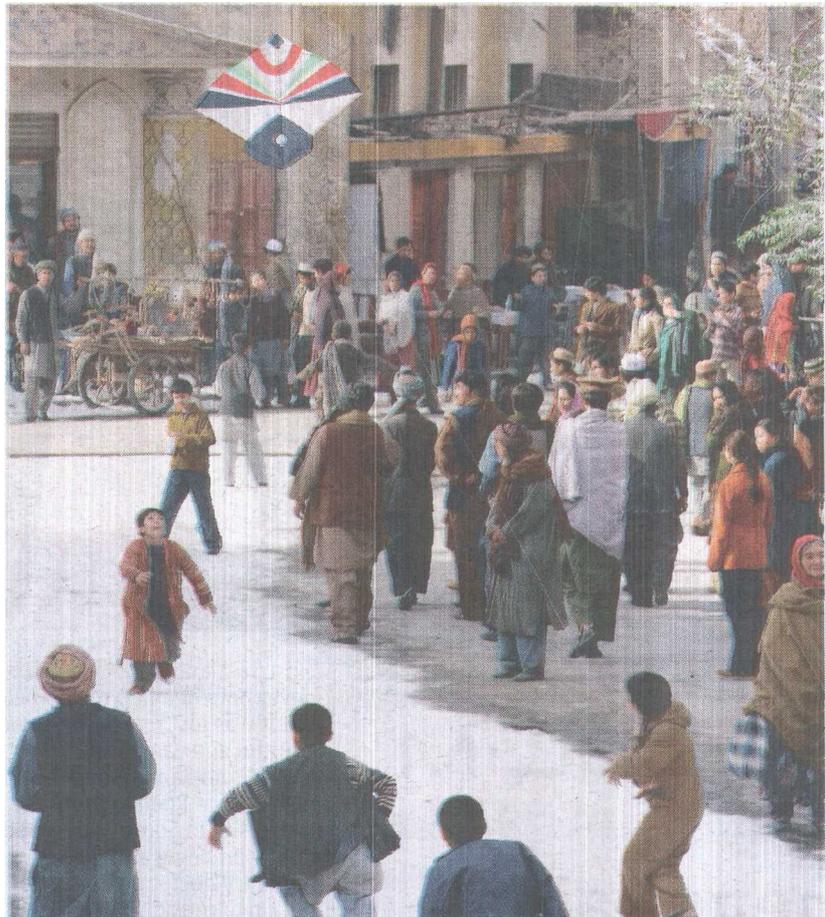
This Hong Kong film had its faults. There were problems with continuity and some hilariously bad subtitles. It was also a tender love story between two women during World War II.

Anyone who truly believes homosexuality is the result of Western influence (don't laugh, they still exist!) should watch this and *Fire*.

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I can't believe I've run out of space without even touching on interracial relationships, human trafficking, foreign workers, refugees, poverty ... there are so many invisibles out there. Perhaps you will be so kind as to add to the list yourselves.



**Way up high:** *The Kite Runner* is a painful lesson in power over the powerless.