



ZERO

DEGREES OF SEPARATION

A Documentary Film
by Elle Flanders

*"Even George Orwell
could not imagine this."*

A CO-PRODUCTION OF GRAPHIC PICTURES AND THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA





ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Zero Degrees of Separation breaks away from the sensationalistic media coverage of the violence in the Middle East by examining the current conflict through the eyes of two mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay couples.

Courageous and outspoken, their relationships are as complex and volatile as the politically-charged world around them. Selim, a Palestinian, and Ezra, an Israeli, fight for the right to live together in Jerusalem. Already stigmatized for their socially taboo relationship, they live under constant threat of Selim's deportation, despite a family connection to the city. Edit and Samira, a lesbian couple, try to figure out how to bridge the divide between their cultures. Faced with modern injustices of work visas, checkpoints, harassment and family separation on a daily basis, they remain surprisingly hopeful and compassionate.

Their stories are skillfully interwoven with archival footage that depicts an idealized Israel of the 1950's. These rare, haunting images, taken by the filmmaker's own grandparents, depict a fledgling nation brimming with pioneering joyous youth, immigrants, refugees and endless open vistas of the Holy Land. Through modern eyes, these same images now evoke larger questions of humanity, conflict and nationalist aspiration.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Raised in Canada and Israel, **Elle Flanders** began documenting the effects of the Israeli state on Palestinian lives as an 18 year-old photographer. In 1989 she photographed women's resistance to the occupation during the first Intifada which was exhibited in North America as *Crossing Borders: Israel Palestine, A Photographer's Peace Initiative*. Flanders' film and photo work has focused primarily on alternative visions of Judaism and contemporary views on Israel. Her 1996 film *Surviving Memory*, collapses the historical events of the Holocaust, queer desire and gender examining how memory constructs history and her film *Once*, a look at Yiddish and the utopian desire for home, premiered at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival.

ABOUT THE PRODUCER

Peter Starr began his career with the NFB in 1975 and has produced such notable films as the Gemini Award nominated *East Side Showdown* and the Genie Award nominated *Spirits of Havana*. He co-produced the Oscar nominated short *Hardwood* and the international award-winning *Aftermath: The Remnants of War*.

Written And Directed By
Produced By

ELLE FLANDERS

ELLE FLANDERS

PETER STARR (NFB)

SILVA BASMAJIAN (NFB)

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Executive Producer
Associate Producers

Editor
Cinematographer
Art Direction
Composer
Sound Design

This work was made possible by the support of the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council's Chalmers Arts Fellowship, The City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, Banff Centre for the Arts, Frameline Finishing Fund, Jerome Foundation and the Wexner Centre for the Arts.

www.zerodegreesofseparation.com
www.nfb.ca

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du Canada

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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USA Distribution 1-800-542-2164

International Distribution 1-514-283-9450

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Praise for the film

Public Award for Best Feature Documentary

— Festival International de films de Femmes, Créteil, France
(March 2006)

The Silver Conch Award, Feature-Length Documentary

— Mumbai International Film Festival, Mumbai, India (February 2006)

Honourable Mention, International Documentary Competition

— International Women's Film Festival, Turin, Italy (October 2005)

Audience Award for Best Documentary

— International Women's Film Festival of Barcelona, Spain (June 2005)

Michael J. Berg Documentary Award

— Frameline Festival, San Francisco (June 2005)

Honourable Mention, Best Feature

— Inside Out: Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival
(May 2005)

Sharply Assembled...Strong meat that warrants attention

— *Variety*

3 out of 4 stars! "...Elle Flanders frames their struggles with a mournful eloquence [...] to strong effect. There is a political bias here — and it's not pro-Israel — but it's a basic humanism that resonates the strongest."

— *Eye Magazine*

"intricate, compelling and very personal" ... "Zero Degrees is not a historical document, rather, it is a very personal consideration that uses the current situation in Israel-Palestine to ask difficult and important political questions."

— *Xtra!*

"Flanders' film is bursting with concern about identities – sexual, national, political, generational, cultural, class, ethnic and more."

— *Haaretz*

"Flanders sensitively balances the personal and the political in an insightful documentary."

— *Toronto Star*

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Synopsis

“George Orwell, in his wildest dreams, could not imagine a place like this.”

EZRA, ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Described by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* as a film “bursting with concern about identities - sexual, national, political, generational, cultural, class, ethnic and more,” Elle Flanders’ feature-length documentary ***Zero Degrees of Separation*** breaks from the sensationalistic media coverage of violence in the Middle East by examining the current conflict through the eyes of two mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay couples.

Courageous and outspoken, their relationships are as complex and volatile as the politically charged world around them. Selim, a Palestinian, and Ezra, an Israeli, fight for the right to live together in Jerusalem. Already stigmatized for their socially taboo relationship, they live under constant threat of Selim’s deportation, despite his family’s connection to the city. Edit and Samira, a lesbian couple, work hard to try to bridge the divide between their cultures. Faced on a daily basis with the injustices of work visas, checkpoints, harassment and family separation, they remain surprisingly hopeful and compassionate.

Their stories are skilfully interwoven with archival footage that depicts an idealized Israel of the 1950s. These rare, haunting images, taken by the filmmaker’s own grandparents, depict a fledgling nation brimming with pioneering joyous youth, immigrants, refugees and endless open vistas of the Holy Land. Through modern eyes, these same images now evoke larger questions of humanity, conflict and nationalist aspiration. Elle Flanders’ uniquely human aesthetic makes ***Zero Degrees of Separation*** not just a film for *our* times but a film for *all* times.

Zero Degrees of Separation is directed, written and produced by Elle Flanders (Graphic Pictures) and produced by Elle Flanders and Peter Starr (NFB).

Short Synopsis

Ezra is against the occupation, yet he’s an Israeli. His partner, Selim, is a Palestinian whose protests against the occupation landed him in jail at age 15. Ezra is a simple plumber whose courage and cheek take on prophet-like proportions as he travels across the country risking his life to protest the walls, fences and military checkpoints that divide. Selim and Ezra are two of the people filmmaker Elle Flanders follows in ***Zero Degrees of Separation***, a feature-length documentary that uses archival footage from the director’s grandparents to contrast the ideals at the birth of the “holy land” with the reality of today’s Israel, a country mired in the rubble of occupation.

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Characters in the Film

Ezra

Ezra is a 50-something-year-old plumber born to Iraqi/Jewish parents. He lives and works in Jerusalem. Ezra is politically aware and active and comes across as a philosophical thinker. His insight into the rift between Palestinians and Israelis is not only informative, but also deeply personal. He is confronted with this struggle daily as he has not only chosen a Palestinian partner, Selim, but he is also a gay man who feels marginalized by his society. Ezra has a personal connection to filmmaker Elle Flanders. As they discovered in the course of the research, Ezra had long ago been a gardener for Flanders' grandparents in Israel.

Selim

Selim is a 27-year-old Muslim Palestinian who, as a youth, resisted the occupation during the first Intifada. He was arrested by the Israeli army at the age of 15 and spent seven years in jail. Ezra and Selim have been together for four years and struggle to live together in Jerusalem, where Selim cannot legally live and is in constant threat of being arrested. Selim is acutely aware of the personal danger and the risks he takes every day in order to live with Ezra as a gay man in a mostly Muslim society.

Edit

Edit is a young Israeli woman from Bat Yam, a working-class community in Tel Aviv. She was born to Jewish Argentinean parents who were targeted by the Argentinean military government in the 1960s. Edit considers Israel the country that saved her and her parents' lives. Edit is also a feminist who works at a rape crisis centre in Tel Aviv. She is critical of and active in trying to change Israel's policies towards Palestinians. While Edit and her girlfriend, Samira, are politically active together, they do not always see eye to eye.

Samira

Samira, a Muslim Palestinian from Haifa, is an ontological nurse in a highly specialized unit in one of Israel's largest hospitals. She became active in the Israeli anti-occupation group Black Laundry and finds herself often among Israelis. Samira is socially active and a regular on the Tel Aviv club scene. She and Edit were partners for just over a year.

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Selected Facts from the Film

In 1948, 600,000 Jews and 1,200,000 Palestinians lived in Palestine.

On May 14, 1948, Israel was declared an independent state. Over 750,000 Palestinians fled or were exiled. Two-thirds went to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, becoming refugees in their own land.

In 1967, after the Six Day War, Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Palestinians from East Jerusalem were issued identity cards marked "Permanent Resident of Israel." Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza were issued identity cards classifying them as residents of the occupied territories.

Palestinians are only allowed in Israel, including East Jerusalem, if they have special permits. Since 1987, most of these permits have been revoked.

Currently, there are about 400,000 Israeli settlers living in the occupied territories.

For one month, in June 2002, the Israeli army allocated \$25 million for the protection of settlements.

Since October 2000, the Israeli military police have interrogated approximately 28,000 Palestinians.

Since March 2002, violations of the Convention Against Torture have increased. More than 85% of Palestinian detainees are tortured during interrogations.

As of September 2004, 7,000 Palestinians are in prison for security matters. About 1,700 are being held without trial.

As of June 2002, there were 85 manned checkpoints, 58 ditches, 95 concrete blocks, 33 wall gates, and 464 mounds of earth blocking passage.

As of June 2002, the Israeli government began construction of a barrier separating Israel and the West Bank to prevent 'uncontrolled entry' of Palestinians into Israel. The barrier consists of concrete walls twice the height of the Berlin Wall, electric fences, layers of razor wire, and trenches.

Sources:

UN Reports
B'TSELEM – Israel Center for Human Rights
Israel Committee Against Torture

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Director's Statement

Zero Degrees of Separation is a film that began with the notion of history and images, vision and responsibility; my personal cultural anthropology in searching for meaning in representation. In 2002, I uncovered a treasure, at least a filmmaker's fortune: a large box of over fifty 16 mm films that had belonged to my grandparents. I discovered them in the bomb shelter of their old home in Jerusalem.

My grandparents had been British Jews active in the fight for a Jewish homeland, helping to create the State of Israel in 1948. They recorded their first impressions (some beginning in 1927) of Palestine and then Israel.

As I scoured these images for clues to the contemporary conflict, I was astonished at the unfolding of history before my eyes, at the inherent signs that reflected the conflict in Israel and Palestine today. I have always been fascinated by home movies or pedestrian recordings of the moment—the unintentionality of documenting. By connecting these documents to the current conflict, I hoped to extract a new story exposing that which their cameras gleaned but did not explicate.

Simultaneous to this discovery, a friend had sent me a story about a gay couple, one Israeli, one Palestinian fighting for the right to live together in Jerusalem. When I contacted the Israeli, a 50-something-year-old plumber, he repeated my name: "Flanders. Aren't you from Canada? Didn't you move here with your parents in the '70s? Aren't you related to...?" He had been my grandparents' gardener in Jerusalem and he had remembered me as a small child. And so, *Zero Degrees of Separation* was born, marrying my grandparents' road trip in Palestine and relating it to another journey, a similar road trip that I undertook with Ezra, the plumber and gardener, in 2002.

Zero Degrees of Separation is about the invisible lines that separate us and connect us. It is about two peoples, one land, its history and injustice as experienced by myself and those around me who live on the margins of the margins: gays and their struggles imbedded within struggles. It is not a film about what it is to be gay. It is not a film about gay life in Israel and Palestine. It is a film that weaves together my world and my grandparents', the present with the past, forcing viewers to ask themselves, What is our role in history and what is our role in this conflict? How do we take responsibility for our history, be you Jewish, German, Tamil, Sunni etc?

Zero Degrees of Separation is a continuation of my ongoing engagement with themes of exile, displacement and social justice. It is a quiet film in the midst of mayhem that connects passion, politics and personal histories to those who attempt to overcome their histories against all odds.

If gays could exist beyond the boundaries of the conflict, perhaps there is hope for others too.

Elle Flanders

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Producer's Statement

The NFB is always looking for new and innovative ways to tell stories. When Elle Flanders submitted the film at our Filmmakers Assistance program, we recognized that she was a talented director. She had a good story to tell and she was someone we wanted to work with at the NFB.

Elle has a unique and very personal take on the Middle East conflict – one which encourages intelligent debate and pushes the issues to the forefront. Elle's overtly cinematic and auteur-driven approach, combined with the extraordinary treasure of her archival material, has produced a film of tremendous aesthetic appeal.

Zero Degrees of Separation tells a universal human story – of dreams, home, belonging, alienation and our responsibility to deal with these complex issues. The multi-layering of these themes brings such richness to Elle's film, and it inspires dialogue. Her personal, historical connection – the fact and evidence that Elle's family, now in Canada, were among the original founders of the State of Israel – makes her story compassionate, compelling and thought provoking.

The film has domestic and international appeal.

Canada is a multicultural country, and NFB films reflect our rich and diverse heritage. Many Canadians have strong, personal connections to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and the complexities of ties to a homeland embroiled in conflict and embittered by political volatility are that much more relevant to countries around the world.

Elle, an emerging Canadian filmmaker, has mined family history to tell an international story in her own words. The NFB is widely known for its support of up-and-coming filmmakers and for its proven track record of telling international stories from a Canadian perspective.

The NFB serves as a model for fostering peaceful debate and dialogue on conflicts such as those in the Middle East. As Canada's public film producer, the NFB has a unique role to play in creating films that help to make this possible – elegant, beautiful films like *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

Silva Basmajian
Executive Producer

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Production Biographies

Elle Flanders - Director/Writer/Producer

Elle Flanders is a filmmaker and photographer based in Toronto and New York City. She was raised in Canada and Israel. She holds an MFA from Rutgers University, an MA in critical theory, and is an alumnus of the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum. She was executive director of the Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival in Toronto.

Flanders has been on the board of directors of the Images Festival of Independent Film and Video, and the Centre for Media and Culture in Education at the University of Toronto. She sits on the advisory committee of the Worldwide Short Film Festival, and the New Festival in New York. In 2001, she was the programmer and conference director of Persistent Vision, a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of Frameline - the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

At 18, she became a social activist and photographer and began to document the effects of the Israeli state on Palestinian lives. In 1989, she photographed women's resistance to the occupation during the first Intifada and exhibited this work in North America in the exhibition *Crossing Borders: Israel Palestine, A Photographer's Peace Initiative*. This first exhibition prompted Flanders to focus on alternative cultural production as a vehicle for her political positions.

Her 1996 film, *Surviving Memory*, is a 16mm collage that collapses the historical events of the Holocaust, queer desire and gender, examining how memory constructs history. Her recent film *Once*, an experimental documentary that looks at Yiddish and the utopian desire of belonging, premiered at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival. Her award-winning first feature documentary, *Zero Degrees of Separation*, investigates the Palestinian Israeli conflict from the point of view of gay Palestinian and Israeli mixed couples. It premiered at the 2005 Berlin International Film Festival. Flanders' most recent work, *Bird on a Wire*, is a film and video dual-projection with a live music performance. It premiered at this year's Berlin International Film Festival, and will travel to four other cities over the course of one year. She is currently developing a new groundbreaking feature documentary.

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Production Biographies

Peter Starr - Producer (NFB)

Peter Starr began his career with the NFB in 1975, working with such legendary filmmakers as Colin Low and Donald Brittain. Since then, the Academy Award-nominated producer has produced such notable films as the Gemini Award-nominated vérité *East Side Showdown*; the highly acclaimed *Spirits of Havana*, featuring sax player Jane Bunnett; *Speakers of the Dead*; *The Herd*; *A Country Doctor*; and *No Place Called Home*.

He was co-producer on the international award-winning films *Aftermath: The Remnants of War* with Storyline Entertainment Inc., and two other co-productions with them, notably *Shipbreakers*, winner of CIDA's (Canadian International Development Agency) 2004 Deborah Fletcher Award, and *A Whale of a Tale*, produced with Storyline Entertainment and Peter Lynch's Acqua Films. The latter premiered at the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival. The Oscar-nominated documentary short film *Hardwood*, which he co-produced with Hardwood Pictures as part of the OMDC Calling Card Program, has garnered many prizes. In addition to the Academy Award nomination for Best Short Documentary Film, it picked up the prize for Best Film Short at the 2004 Worldwide Short Film Festival and was in Official Selection at both the 2004 Hot Docs International Festival and toured as part of the IDA InFACT Film Series in LA.

Tamara Romanchuk – Associate Producer (Graphic Pictures)

Tamara Romanchuk has worked as a producer and communications and marketing coordinator for several cultural organizations, including Mixed Company Theatre (officially recognized as the Canadian Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed). Working with a wide variety of communities, she has developed and promoted productions that are issue-driven and interactive, dealing with such topics as at-risk youth, bullying, HIV/STD education, stalking, racism in the workplace and job accessibility for the physically disabled. With a focus on education and community-centred programming, Tamara strives to use the arts as a tool for social change. She has recently focused on media projects. Her producing credits include, for Design Union Productions, *Aerobia* (Bravo! Fact), and the ARC Festival interactive video *Faces, An Anti-Censorship Project*. Presently Tamara is working to create an at-risk youth theatre training program with funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. *Zero Degrees of Separation* is her first foray into feature documentary.

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Production Biographies

Chris Romeike - Cinematographer

Chris Romeike is an experienced cinematographer whose work has taken him around the globe, shooting a variety of documentaries on social and cultural issues. Chris has shot more than 16 documentary films and six documentary series for television. His recent credits include *Musicians in the War Zone-Iraq* for MuchMusic; CBC's Life and Times program about Olympic figure-skating champion Elizabeth Manley; *Sri Lanka-Notes* for War Child Canada; Brenda Longfellow's feature *Tina in Mexico* (Golden Sheaf Award for Cinematography at 2003 Yorkton Film Festival); and the Book TV documentary *Voices of Dissent* with Daniel Richler, exploring freedom of speech in Turkey.

Cathy Gulkin - Editor

Cathy Gulkin is one of Canada's foremost documentary film editors. Educated at the prestigious London International Film School in England, she has been working in Toronto since 1978. She has edited Genie-nominated and award-winning short and feature-length documentaries in the past ten years including: *Erotica*, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*, *Mum's the Word* and *Paul Strand: Under the Dark Cloth*. She also won a Gemini for Best Picture Editing in an Information/Documentary Program in 1996 for *Cry of the Ancestors*.

Tully Chen - Sound Recordist

Tully Chen is an accomplished musician and sound recordist whose credits include: *Or (Mon Tresor)* by Lisa Nesselson, *Forget Baghdad* by Samir, Nature channel's *Lost World of the Holy Land*, National Geographic's *Lost Ships of the Mediterranean*, and *The Settlers (haim re-tel rumeidah)* by Ronnie Scheib. Tully recently organized a retrospective of David Perlov's films at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque. Perlov, his father-in-law, was an acclaimed director who recently passed away.

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Production Biographies

David Wall - Composer

Dave Wall has scored and/or contributed compositions to such projects as: *The Take* (2003, Avi Lewis, director), *Ghosts of War* (2003, Michael Maclear, director), *Fig Trees* (2003, video installation/opera, John Greyson, director), *First and Last* (2003, CBC), *A Country Doctor* (2002, National Film Board of Canada), *Stress* (2002, large-scale video installation, commissioned by Bruce Mau Design for the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery), *The Struma* (2001, Simcha Jacobovici, director, HBO, Yorkshire Television), *A Child's Century of War* (2001, Shelly Saywell, director), *Roppongi Hills Project* (2001, large-scale Tokyo video installation, commissioned by Bruce Mau Design), *Out of the Fire* (1999, Shelly Saywell, director, The Woman's Network), *Jerry and Tom* (1998, Saul Rubinek, director, Lions Gate/Miramax), *Highway 61* (1992, Bruce Macdonald, director). His scheduled compositional projects for 2004 include scores for a feature-length documentary by Andrew Munger (*Campaign*, NFB) and a feature film by John Greyson (*Cut Throat*, BRAVO). In May 2000, he received the Toronto Arts Council Protege Award for music composition. In September 2000, he received a Gemini nomination for best musical score for a documentary. In April 2001, he received a Golden Sheaf Award for best musical score.

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Principal Credits

Directed and written by Elle Flanders

Editor: Cathy Gulkin

Director of Photography: Chris Romeike

Art Direction: Cynthia Madansky

Composer: Dave Wall

Location Sound: Tully Chen

Sound Design: Jane Tatersall, Kathy Choi, Jean Bot

Produced by Elle Flanders (Graphic Pictures), Peter Starr (NFB)

Executive Producer: Silva Basmajian (NFB)

Associate Producers: Tamara Romanchuk and Dara Gellman (Graphic Pictures)

Produced by Graphic Pictures Inc. in co-production with National Film Board of Canada

This work was made possible by the support of the Canada Council; the Ontario Arts Council's Chalmers Arts Fellowship; The City of Toronto, through the Toronto Arts Council; Banff Centre for the Arts; Frameline Finishing Fund; Jerome Foundation; and the Wexner Centre for the Arts.

WEB SITES:

www.zerodegreesofseparation.com

www.nfb.ca/zerodegreesofseparation

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Press Release

***Zero Degrees of Separation* wins Honourable Mention at International Women's Film Festival in Turin, Italy**

Toronto, Ontario (Oct. 18, 2005) — *Zero Degrees of Separation* continues its international success with an Honourable Mention in the International Documentary Competition at the 12th International Women's Film Festival in Turin (Oct. 7 to 13). The film, by director Elle Flanders, debuted at the Berlin International Film Festival and has won awards at Frameline 29 in San Francisco and the Barcelona International Women's Film Festival. Internationally it has shown at the prestigious International Documentary Film Festival in Sheffield, England; the Reykjavik Film Festival in Iceland; the Cork Film Festival in Ireland; and the Hamptons International Film Festival in East Hampton, USA.

Zero Degrees of Separation looks at the Middle East conflict through the eyes of mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay and lesbian couples. Interwoven with their stories is footage of Flanders' Zionist grandparents, who were intimately involved in the founding of the state of Israel. Through these home movies, the filmmaker artfully retraces her grandparents' travels as they tour a fledgling nation brimming with pioneering joyous youth, immigrants, refugees and endless open vistas of the Holy Land. *Zero Degrees of Separation* evokes larger questions of humanity, conflict and nationalist aspiration.

At its premiere in Berlin, the film received critical acclaim and was described by the Israeli paper *Haaretz* as "bursting with concern about identities - sexual, national, political, generational, cultural, class, ethnic and more." In June 2005, the film won the prestigious Michael J. Berg Documentary Award from Frameline 29 and was honoured with the Audience Choice for Best Documentary Film at the Barcelona International Women's Film Festival. In May, it garnered an Honourable Mention in the Best Feature category at the Inside Out: Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival.

Raised in Canada and Israel, Flanders began documenting the effects of the Israeli state on Palestinian lives as an 18-year-old photographer. In 1989, she photographed women's resistance to the occupation during the first Intifada, and exhibited her work in North America as *Crossing Borders: Israel Palestine, A Photographer's Peace Initiative*. Flanders' documentaries and photos have focused on alternative visions of Judaism and contemporary views on Israel. Her 1996 film, *Surviving Memory*, collapses the historical events of the Holocaust, queer desire and gender, examining how memory constructs history. Her film *Once*, a look at Yiddish and the utopian desire for home, premiered at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival.

Zero Degrees of Separation is a co-production of Graphic Pictures and the NFB. It is directed and written by Flanders (Graphic Pictures) and produced by Flanders and Peter Starr (NFB).

About the NFB

Founded in 1939, the National Film Board of Canada has produced more than 11,000 films and other audiovisual works and won more than 4,500 awards — including 11 Oscars®. As Canada's public film producer, the NFB produces and distributes distinctive, culturally diverse, challenging and relevant audiovisual works that provide Canada and the world with a unique Canadian perspective. To purchase NFB releases or for more information, visit <www.nfb.ca> or call 1-800-267-7710.

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High-resolution images of this film are downloadable at <www.nfb.ca/photogallery/zerodegreesofseparation>

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ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Press Release

***Zero Degrees of Separation* wins awards at international festivals**

Toronto, Ontario (July 7, 2005) — Honouring excellence in documentary filmmaking, Frameline 29 presented Elle Flanders' ***Zero Degrees of Separation*** with the coveted Michael J. Berg Documentary Award on June 26. The prestigious award comes with a cash prize of \$10,000 US. The critically acclaimed film also won the 2005 Audience Choice for Best Documentary Film at the Barcelona International Women's Film Festival (June 6 to 16, 2005)

Zero Degrees of Separation looks at the Middle East conflict through the eyes of mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay and lesbian couples. Interwoven with their stories is footage of Flanders' Zionist grandparents, who were intimately involved in the founding of the state of Israel. Through these home movies, the filmmaker artfully retraces her grandparents' travels as they tour a fledgling nation brimming with pioneering joyous youth, immigrants, refugees and endless open vistas of the Holy Land. ***Zero Degrees of Separation*** evokes larger questions of humanity, conflict and nationalist aspiration.

The film premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival (2005) to critical acclaim and was described by the Israeli paper *Haaretz* as a film "bursting with concern about identities - sexual, national, political, generational, cultural, class, ethnic and more."

Raised in Canada and Israel, Flanders began documenting the effects of the Israeli state on Palestinian lives as an 18-year-old photographer. In 1989, she photographed women's resistance to the occupation during the first Intifada and exhibited this work in North America as *Crossing Borders: Israel Palestine, A Photographer's Peace Initiative*. Flanders' film and photo work has focused primarily on alternative visions of Judaism and contemporary views on Israel. Her 1996 film, *Surviving Memory*, collapses the historical events of the Holocaust, queer desire and gender, examining how memory constructs history. Her film *Once*, a look at Yiddish and the utopian desire for home, premiered at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival.

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Frameline 29 is the San Francisco International LGBT film festival.

About the NFB

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High-resolution images of this film are downloadable at www.nfb.ca/photogallery/zerodegreesofseparation

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March 2006

ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

For release: immediate
April 26, 2005

Hot Docs Hosts North American Premiere of Elle Flanders'
Feature Doc **Zero Degrees of Separation**

Fresh from its successful world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival, Elle Flanders' feature-length documentary **Zero Degrees of Separation** makes its North American debut as part of the Canadian Spectrum series at the Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival on April 28 at 9:30 pm at the Bloor Cinema. Described by the Israeli paper *Haaretz* as a film "bursting with concern about identities - sexual, national, political, generational, cultural, class, ethnic and more," **Zero Degrees of Separation** combines the personal with the political. Breaking away from the sensationalistic media coverage of violence in the Middle East, **Zero Degrees of Separation** looks at the conflict through the eyes of two mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay couples.

Selim, a Palestinian, and Ezra, an Israeli, fight for the right to live together in Jerusalem. Already stigmatized for their gay relationship, they live under constant threat of Selim's deportation, despite his family's connection to the city. Edit and Samira, a lesbian couple, work hard to try to bridge the divide between their cultures. While they are politically active together, they do not always see eye to eye.

Interwoven with their stories is director Elle Flanders' own story of growing up with Zionist grandparents intimately involved in the founding of the state of Israel. Through home movies, the director artfully retraces her grandparents' travels as they tour a fledgling nation brimming with pioneering joyous youth, immigrants, refugees and endless open vistas of the Holy Land.

In contrast to this dreamlike, nostalgia-laden narrative are stark images of the Occupation, exposing the cracks in the country's foundation. Faced with endless barriers, the Palestinians in **Zero Degrees of Separation** constantly face checkpoints and detours around roads, their own homes, their lands and their lives. Although violence is a daily intrusion, perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to Palestinian daily life is the Israeli bulldozer, as it destroys homes, builds barriers, settlements, bypass roads, and tears up what little is left of the land.

Zero Degrees of Separation is directed, written and produced by Elle Flanders (Graphic Pictures) and produced by Elle Flanders and Peter Starr (NFB); Executive Producer for the NFB is Silva Basmajian.

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High-resolution images of this film are downloadable at
www.nfb.ca/photogallery/zerodegreesofseparation.

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