



FILM: **FREMONT**

FDG RATING: 4.0 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Babak Jalali: *director*  
Anaita Wali Zada: *actress, Donya*  
Gregg Turkington: *actor, Dr. Anthony*  
Jeremy Allen White: *actor, Daniel*

DATE: November 19, 2023

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **FREMONT**

The 2023 small independent film, *FREMONT*, was of special interest to us since we live in Fremont or in one of the neighboring communities. Very sparse, minimalistic, both visually and in dialog, the black and white film reflects Donya's life situation. She is young, in her 20s, a lonely refugee from Afghanistan, who was a translator for the US Army in Afghanistan, ostracized by her family and friends who called her a traitor. She left her homeland and landed in Fremont California, (which has the largest Afghan population in the country). She lives in an apartment building filled with people from her homeland who also are withdrawn, and only two are somewhat friendly towards her: a young woman with a small child (the husband despises Donya for being a traitor) and a young man who can't sleep because he is suffering from the traumas he experienced. But during the day she takes BART to San Francisco to work in a Chinese fortune cookie factory where she has made a friend. Her co-worker, Joanna, is Caucasian, similar age, but the polar opposite personality, loquacious, playing the dating game trying to meet a nice guy. This is where some humorous and insightful scenes take place.

The fortune cookie factory is a perfect parable for what Donya is experiencing. She is in limbo, waiting to see what's in store for her in her new life in Fremont. As one discussion participant commented, "Life is filled with possibilities" is an underlying theme.

The Chinese family who have owned the business for generations are an example of successful assimilation while holding on to their culture. Donya's situation is very different. She left her family and has no one here. At the beginning of the film, as Donya is placing fortune cookies in their little cellophane bags, Joanna mentions some contest she saw on TV and asks what would they do if they won the million dollars. The old Chinese grandmother who writes the fortunes in the cookies, says she would build a community pool. This statement sets the film's theme about the need for community.

The grandmother dies quite suddenly, early in the film, and it's actually a comical scene as unexpectedly, her face plops forward into the stack of paper fortunes. The grandmother's kind son, Eddie, who runs the business with his not-so-kind wife, Lin, promotes Donya to "writer" for the fortune cookies. After following the amusing rules for writing a proper fortune, she does something completely out of character which sets in motion the rest of the story line.

Purposely slow paced for effect, the film deals with serious issues but is easy to watch with many humorous scenes. Donya came from a bleak background, escaped a horrible situation in her homeland, feels guilty about the people who are still there suffering, but holds all her emotions inside. Intentional humor provides welcome comic relief especially in the character of the somewhat wacky psychiatrist. We noted that despite her introverted personality, she is a very strong woman. She had been employed in a male dominated military environment, she had the strength to leave her homeland alone, and she exerts her quiet strength in another humorous scene, when she insists the psychiatrist meet with her to prescribe pills to help her sleep although the appointment was actually for her neighbor.

We had mixed reactions to the ending which seemed abrupt. We agreed it was hopeful as she relaxes her guarded persona and seems to like the lonely mechanic she meets on her way to Bakersfield. He obviously likes her, is polite and shows her respect which she hasn't had and needs. And we loved the bit of poetic justice as she gives the stag garden statue to him, which she had picked up at the ceramic warehouse at the request of Lin, who had deceitfully sent Donya a message seemingly from a guy interested in meeting her at the ceramic warehouse. Lin didn't want to pay delivery costs so tricked Donya into getting the statue for her.

Anaita Wali Zada's performance as Donya, is excellent as she completely relates to the character since she experienced the same emotions in her experience as a refugee from Afghanistan and she understands the cultural behavior to withhold emotions.

Delightful, thoughtful, understated, we enjoyed the quirky personalities of the characters and appreciated the insight into this very human experience of being an immigrant, needing to connect to an unfamiliar community and start a new life. We welcomed the film, *Fremont*, with a warm, inclusive 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!  
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