

KABUL TRANSIT

a film by David Edwards, Gregory Whitmore & Maliha Zulfacar

85 Minutes, Color, 2006

www.kabultransit.net

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Spare, unsentimental and uncompromising...."Kabul Transit"... is a picture of a city in fragments, without intro, commentary or visual aid. Lenses under arduous conditions is superb, lending the pic a bigscreen presence. Robert Koehler - VARIETY

SYNOPSIS (135 WORDS)

In the broken cityscape of Kabul Afghanistan, amid the dust and rubble of war, Westerners and Afghans adjust to the uncertain possibilities of peace. *Kabul Transit* shuttles through the broken streets of the city, moving between public space and private, listening in on conversations, posing questions, probing the darker alleys mainstream media avoids. The result is a unique cinematic experience – a shifting mosaic of encounters and raconteurs, captured glances and telling gestures, all beautifully shot and woven together by the music and the found sounds of a city sluggishly coming to life. Rejecting the usual device of narration and portraiture, the film asks the viewer to experience Kabul as a newly arrived visitor would – with a freshness born of apprehension on finding oneself in a place that is at once hauntingly strange and altogether familiar.

THE FILMMAKERS

David Edwards lived in Kabul before the communist takeover in 1978. During the Soviet occupation, he spent several years conducting research along the Afghan-Pakistan border and spent time with mujahidin resistance parties in training camps and behind Soviet lines. These experiences became the basis of two books (*Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* and *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, both published by University of California Press). In early 2001, Edwards and Gregory Whitmore were asked to help preserve an archive of video and photographs shot by Afghan cameramen during the Soviet occupation. This work was featured in a photo and video exhibition at the Asia Society in New York City in the spring of 2002.

Following September 11, the Carnegie Corporation of New York awarded Edwards a grant which enabled him to return to Afghanistan to gather the material that would become *Kabul Transit*.

Maliha Zulfacar is an Afghan-American Sociology professor at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. She received her undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States. Zulfacar was a sociology professor at Kabul University before fleeing the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. In 1985 she settled in California to raise her two children, joined the Cal Poly Social Sciences Department in 1992, and completed her doctorate in sociology in Germany in the late-1990s. Since 2002, Zulfacar has divided her time between Cal Poly, where she teaches classes on gender, international immigration, and global ethnic conflict, and Kabul, where she teaches at Kabul University.

Since the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, she has been involved in the rebuilding of Afghanistan's higher education system to facilitate educational opportunities and, in specific, to support the return of women to schools. She is the co-founder of Kabul University Children Center; Director of the Afghan Educational Outreach project at Cal Poly; Founding member of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies; founder of Reach Out Afghanistan; and Liaison to Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education. She is co-director of an oral history project in Afghanistan, financed through a grant from the Open Society Institute.

"Kabul Transit" is her second documentary about Afghanistan. Her first, "Guftago: Dialog with an Afghan Village," was made in 2001, documenting her trip with an international delegation of women in 2000. She will spend 2007 on sabbatical, serving as Afghanistan's ambassador to Germany.

Gregory Whitmore is an independent photographer, cinematographer and editor. In the summer of 2001, Whitmore traveled to Peshawar, Pakistan with David Edwards to preserve video and photographs made during the 1980s by Afghan journalists from the Afghan Media Resource Center. Upon returning, he helped to prepare the archive for an exhibit at the Asia Society in NYC. In the years following, Whitmore co-produced a documentary about Biosphere 2, forthcoming in 2007, and shot and edited two short documentaries about contemporary American photographers. Entirely self taught in photography and filmmaking, Whitmore's only formal schooling in art was a class in color theory he took in high school and 8 months of rebus construction at his integrated deaf pre-school at the age of five.

CREDITS

FEATURING

(in order of appearance)

MULLA SAHEB

Pacha Saheb Shrine

BARIYALI FITRAT

Moneychanger & Student

SHAHMAHMOOD MIAKHEL

Deputy Minister of Interior, Afghanistan

MAJOR STEVEN WHALEN

Canadian Civil-Military
cooperation unit (CIMIC), Camp Julien

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

Faculty of Social Sciences, Kabul University

ALI AHMAD JALALI
Minister of Interior, Afghanistan

COMMANDER IKRAMUDDIN
4th Police District, Kabul

SERGEANT-MAJOR TERENCE MUGFORD
Camp Julien

ROY GLOVER
Public Affairs Officer
United States Embassy - Afghanistan

SGT. BRANTS
Camp Julien

HAKIM MINHAJUDDIN YUSUFZAI
Herbal Doctor

GENERAL SAFA MOHMAND
Police Officer

ARIANE and JACQUES HIRART

The CHILDREN of Le PELICAN CENTER

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Gregory Whitmore

EDITOR

Gregory Whitmore

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

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Eliza Segell

POST PRODUCTION SOUND SERVICES

Mercer Media – NYC

SOUND DESIGN

Sound Editor - Gregory Whitmore
Sound Mixer - Bill Seery

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Ruppert Bohle
Christine Kim

DVD PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Ethan Goldhammer

TRANSLATIONS

Nematullah Bizan
David Edwards
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Leyla Rouhi
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Zalmai Yawar
Maliha Zulfacar

MUSIC BY

Anouar Brahem
Dastan Ensemble
Nashenas
Akira Rabelais
Aleksandr Rosenbaum
Andres Segovia
Ahmed Zahir

FUNDING

The Carnegie Corporation of New York

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo
Williams College

Bullfrog Films Presents

AN AKBAR TAXIWAN PICTURES PRODUCTION
(C) 2006 Akbar Taxiwan Pictures, LLC
FILMED ENTIRELY IN KABUL, AFGHANISTAN in 2003

'Kabul Transit'

An Akbar Taxiwan Films presentation. Produced by David Edwards. Co-producers, Gregory Whitmore, Maliha Zulfacar. Directed by David Edwards, Gregory Whitmore Maliha Zulfacar.

By ROBERT KOEHLER

Docu 'Kabul Transit' nonjudgmentally offers a collection of fragmentary glimpses at Afghanistan's capital city.

Spare, unsentimental and uncompromising, David Edwards' and Gregory Whitmore's "Kabul Transit" trains a lens on a spectral range of inhabitants in Afghanistan's capital in 2003. Most comparable to the recent doc "Iraq in Fragments," and infinitely more successful, this is a picture of a city in fragments, without intro, commentary or visual aid. A tone of quiet despair hangs over the open-ended film, which should find strong support in sophisticated doc fests and even snare the odd network buyer or two. Chances of linking with more conservative U.S. broadcasters are nil.

Edwards, a tyro filmmaker, anthropologist and expert on Afghanistan at Williams College, and vet filmmaker/editor Whitmore, with Afghan-born producer Maliha Zulfacar, ventured to Kabul in 2003 with the idea of taking in various aspects of Kabul sans pre-set agenda. With Edwards' somewhat distanced, anthropological manner of filming akin to French doc pioneer Jean Rouch, Whitmore as editor opts to build the film by showing each part of the city, and seldom revisiting it, creating a sort of Cubist effect for the viewer.

Early scene of kite-flyers leaves the impression that this may be a light, human-interest pic, but darker aspects take shape. A NATO airbase is the setting for an officer whose duties become almost comically mundane. An elder insists on giving a young man an amulet as a way of warding off "the evil eye" and helping his car work. Moneychangers work amid dusty conditions in which stacks of bills tower around them, while their biggest concern is counterfeiters. Young women at Kabul U. complain female lib is a distant hope with the current Hamid Karzai government.

More slices of the city come into view, including a police officer who complains he's being punished for enforcing the law "too well"; a karaoke bar; Canadian troops helping to build a drainage system in a poor, hillside neighborhood; a dedicated French schoolteacher; and a local medicine man who discusses why Afghan men seldom live past 60.

Such an approach may seem downright revolutionary to some doc fans, but the pic's style is much in accord with the norm for current Euro and Asian documaking, where polemics takes a back seat if it has a place at all. Lensing under arduous conditions is superb, lending the pic a bigscreen presence.

Camera (color/B&W, DV), Whitmore; editor, Whitmore; sound, Whitmore. Reviewed at Los Angeles Film Festival (competing), June 27, 2006. (Also in Full Frame, Amsterdam Documentary festivals.) Running time: 88 MIN.
(Pashtu, Farsi, Russian, English, French dialogue)

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117931148?categoryid=31&cs=1>

Maliha Zulfacar, Afghanistan's Ambassador to Germany
"People in Afghanistan Need More Tangible Changes"

Maliha Zulfacar is one of two female Afghan ambassadors. In this interview with Martin Gerner, she talks about her unusual career, as well as about NATO's military strategy, and the reconstruction process in Afghanistan

Mrs Ambassador, Maliha Zulfacar, you have been an film-producer and a university professor before becoming a diplomat in Germany. That sounds like a big change. Was it difficult for you to adapt?

Maliha Zulfacar: It has been a big change. I think professionally I do consider myself a teacher, an academician. To be a diplomat is a new chapter in my life, something I have to learn as I go along. But this is not new in my life.

I did not go to school to become a filmmaker. It all happened when I visited Afghanistan in 2000, together with a French feminist group. The group stayed with late Ahmad Shah Massoud and we were his guests for two weeks. As I was there I started to go to villages and talk to people. It was a sensational time for me to be back to Afghanistan after almost 22 years.

When I returned back to the United States I spent about three semesters to finish my first film. In those days nobody was really interested in Afghanistan. I managed to edit the film right after September 11th and it became very popular.

Your new film "Kabul Transit" was shown in Amsterdam, at a major international film festival. In how far does the film show a different picture of Afghanistan than the one people are used to?

Zulfacar: One of the beauties of the film is that when we started to film in Kabul we did not have any agenda. We did not go there with a specific mission, topic or title. It is about daily life in Kabul, about all the changes that have taken place since 2001, about people's perspectives.

It is about a group of young women from Kabul university. They express how they feel about some of the gender-related projects and various other aspects. It is about a police officer who expresses how honestly he tries to deal with the issue of drugs and how much he is under threat.

You are one of the few female ambassadors of Afghanistan. What impulses do you want to give as a woman in this position?

Zulfacar: I don't consider myself to be any better or worse as a woman. I think it is more about capacity, to do what has to be done as an ambassador, regardless of gender. I am the second female Afghan ambassador. The first one is the ambassador in Bulgaria. It has been a very challenging position considering that we have close to 100,000 Afghan refugees residing in Germany. Germany has received the highest number of Afghan refugees in all of Europe.

The second aspect of the job has to do with Germany being a key country in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and how to utilize this position to expand and reactivate some of the economical, political, and cultural cooperation that historically exist with Germany. I am delighted to be here, because I have lived in Germany as a student, as a refugee and now as a diplomat.

It was often demanded by the Afghan government that it wants a bigger say in how the aid money is distributed across the country. The European Union and the United States have announced new financial commitments. Has the request of the Afghan government been satisfied do you think?

Zulfacar: That has in fact been a concern. Many Afghans hear that large sums of money have been designated for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. And when they don't see tangible changes for their everyday life, it becomes a question for them: what happens with the money?

One of the issues the Afghan government would like to express to the international community is that 5 % of the money for Afghanistan so far has really gone to the Afghan government, and that 20 % have been joint projects between the Afghan government and organizations from the international community.

That means you are still waiting for tangible results?

Zulfacar: I think across the country people would like to see more tangible changes. Many changes have taken place, however they are changes that do not reach the livelihood of ordinary Afghans. For example when you travel through Kabul you will fancy these very tall new buildings. However, many Afghans continue to lack energy. Only six % have access to electricity and to running water.

People want to see more access to power, to running water or more infrastructure, for example in terms of sanitation. In 1979, when I left the city, 500,000 people were living in Kabul. Today close to 4 million are living there. Obviously that has built up lots of pressure in the use of power.

I think there should be more major economic development projects throughout the country, farming projects and so on that would attract people to leave Kabul and get engaged in these projects. That would reduce the amount of power needed for Kabul. Until now, Kabul has been considered to be synonymous with Afghanistan, but it is only one city in Afghanistan.

In the south of Afghanistan NATO and American forces are still engaged in fierce battles with the Taliban and other insurgents, and the international forces say that the fighting must be continued until the military goals are reached. Do the Afghan government and the international forces agree on what these goals are and how they are to be achieved?

Zulfacar: I think NATO and American Forces would like to bring peace and security. And at the same time they would like to engage more in developmental projects in the south east of the country. But the stationing of the international military is an issue of NATO, and that is an internal affair of NATO.

Germany is about to dispatch Tornado spy jets to Afghanistan. Is Germany risking its reputation as a "peace-keeping" party in the conflict?

Zulfacar: The Tornados will not directly be involved in the war effort. Their purpose is the clarification of the movements of the insurgent groups, to provide more intelligence and information about movements of these groups in order to avoid further killings of civilians. If their location becomes more clear, maybe we can avoid some of the destruction and killings of civilians in the region. So I do consider the German role in this useful.

Interview: Martin Gerner

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