



Afghanistan Sandra Schäfer

There is still no public film funding in Afghanistan and few filmmakers succeed in finding international co-producers. On both a domestic and international level, there is a lack of an all-encompassing policy for film funds and education. Hence, in 2009, only short films were produced, either self-financed or through the support of local production companies or international aid agencies. Not surprisingly, the poor production conditions had an obvious effect on the quality of films.

Nassir Alqas, now living in Germany, self-funded his short, **Voice** (Seda), the first film he has made in Kabul since 1990. Shot on digital, it opens with the painful cry of a woman, convincingly performed by actress Sabera Mehraban, whose face we never actually see. In the neighbourhood, which is kept awake by the cries, it is finally a young boy who has the courage to call a doctor. Angered and outraged by the medics' appearance, the husband waves an axe at them, even though they have come to help the woman. Her death underpins the director's concerns about the patriarchal structure that still exists in the country.

Mirwais Rekab's experimental short **1+1=1** is also dedicated to the women who live in this patriarchal societal structure. Rekab's impressive film uses no dialogue and relies on a story whose chronology has been reversed. Hence, we see a woman selling a whip to a merchant, which in the next scene is used by her husband to beat her. A teacher in a classroom writes the formula $1+1=1$ on the blackboard. The students, men and women, giggle. To decipher the film's plot, one has to understand the provocative meaning of the

formula, with which the teacher determines the equality of men and women.

In Rada Akbar's poetic short, **Shattered Hopes**, her role as a media officer for GTZ foregrounds the fight for survival experienced by refugees in a camp in Kabul. In addition to interviews, Rada Akbar employs a lyrical voiceover to highlight the plight and living conditions of these refugees.



Sayed Jalil Hussaini's **The Angels of Earth**

Director Sayed Jalil Hussaini made two shorts in 2009: **Devious** (Birahe) and **The Angels of Earth** (Freshta Ahee Roy Zameen). In **Devious**, a man strolls along the streets of Kabul. A hand-held camera follows him, while piano music accompanies the scenes, which are inter-cut with sequences from the past: a motorbike accident at night and the man's unsuccessful attempt to profit from a failed robbery he witnessed. In **Angels of Earth**, Kabul is depicted as a place where everyone's sole thought is of survival. A boy who dreams of flying to visit his deceased mother in heaven, walks with arms spread like a bird through the park. But the angels in this film can also be found on Earth. In the midst of poverty, an economic condition that can degrade the individual, there is a character who maintains

respect for others. His actions prove to have a profound impact on those around him.

Noor Hussainian's **Wall** (Diwar) is an amateurishly filmed short about a hopeless situation. An illiterate boy earning his money as a car washer finds his way to school blocked by an insurmountable brick wall.

Internationally produced documentaries dominated festivals around the world. Ian Olds' impressive, award-winning **Fixer** sketches a complex picture of the work of journalist Ajmal Naqshbandi, who was murdered following his kidnapping, unlike his Italian colleague, who was released. Olds opens with the murder so that he can detail the difficult negotiations that took place between foreign journalists, radical Taliban groups and the local authorities in the months leading up to Naqshbandi's death. The court case, staged for western journalists and based on a democratic model, mirrors the complicated relationship between western reconstruction aid and the stubbornness of local systems. Through uncovering the reasons for Naqshbandi's murder, the film reveals how he became a victim of the power struggle that existed between the Taliban and the Karzai government.



Ian Olds' **Fixer**

British director Havana Marking's **Afghan Star** focuses on a popular and seemingly harmless topic. She portrays the selection of singers who are chosen for the popular televised amateur singing competition, 'Afghan Star'. Amidst thousands of contestants are three women. This portrait makes clear the different personal approaches to music, ethnic conflict and the extreme moral pressures that weigh on the female contestants.



Havana Marking's **Afghan Star**

Helga Reidemeister's documentary **War and Love in Kabul** (Mein Herz sieht die Welt schwarz, eine Liebe in Kabul) is about a relationship in Kabul that continued, despite forced marriage, the injuries of war and years of separation. In long, quiet shots, filmed on 16mm, cameraman Lars Barthel captures the fraught familial relations, as well as the brief encounters between the two lovers. The participants criticise the patriarchal, egotistical behaviour of the head of the family to the camera, but soon change their tone when he is present.

Dina Saqeb's documentary about the participation of the only Afghan sportswoman at the Beijing Olympics is currently in the final stages of production, as is a feature about the famous Persian poet Maulana, by Latif Ahmadi. The award winning director of Osama, Siddiq Barmak, is also in pre-production on his new film.

The year's best films

1+1=1 (Mirwais Rekab)

The Angels of Earth (Sayed Jalil Hussaini)

Voice (Nassir Alqas)

Fixer (Ian Olds)

Afghan Star (Havana Marking)

Quotes of the year

'If we keep quiet today, our whole society will be affected tomorrow.' DIANA SAQEB.

'They are like extras for our films, but extras that can come out of their houses to make demonstrations for the benefit of some political parties or some political figures.' SIDDIQ BARMAK, *talking about the counter-demonstrators during the protests against the Shiite Personal Status Law in Kabul in spring 2009.*

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+93)

Afghan-Film, Grand Masood Ave 2, Kabul.
Tel: 20 210279.

Azim-Film, Kabul. Tel: 70 282097.

Barmak-Film, Kabul. sbf@barmakfilm.com.
www.barmakfilm.com.

BASA-Afghan Cinema Club. Tel: 75 2028910.
basa@inbox.com. www.basafilm.com.

Basa-Film, District 6, Street 1, House No: 38, Karte Se Kabul. Tel: 799 345962, 700 083908. cacakabul@gmail.com. www.afghanistancinemaclub.com.

Cinema Magazine, Afghan Film, Grand Masood Ave 2, Kabul. Tel: 79 314303. cinema_mag@yahoo.com.

Filmmakers Union, Kabul. Tel: 79 375530.
cinemaf@hotmail.com.

Kabul Film festival, www.kabulfilmfestival.org.

Second Take Gender and Society in Cinema,
www.mazefilm.de. www.basafilm.com.

Roya Cinematic House Production, Herat.
Tel: 40 441437.

Saba Film, Kabul. Tel: 70 246827.

Star Group, Kabul. Tel: 799 533292.

SANDRA SCHÄFER is a filmmaker, curator and writer. She has worked on projects in cooperation with filmmakers and activists in Kabul and Berlin since 2002, including the film festivals Second Take, Splice In and Kabul/Teheran 1979ff. Her book Stagings: Kabul, Film & Production of Representation was published in 2009.



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