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2008

KABULI KID

A FILM BY **BARMAK AKRAM**

65  MOSTRA
INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE
CINEMATOGRAFICA
VENEZIA 2008

 23. INTERNATIONAL
FILM CRITICS WEEK



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FIDÉLITÉ FILMS PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH **WILD BUNCH**

KABULI KID

A FILM BY **BARMAK AKRAM**

CO-PRODUCTION
4 A 4 PRODUCTIONS
AUTEURS ASSOCIÉS
AFGHAN FILM

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF **CANAL+**

FRANCE / AFGHANISTAN • 94' • 35MM • 1:85 • DOLBY SR / DTS • COLOUR • 2008

WORLD SALES: **wild bunch**

Vincent Maraval | TEL +33 6 11 91 23 93 | vmaraval@wildbunch.eu

Gaël Nouaille | TEL +33 6 21 23 04 72 | gnouaille@wildbunch.eu

Laurent Baudens / Carole Baraton | TEL +33 6 70 79 05 17 | lbaudens@wildbunch.eu

Silvia Simonutti | TEL +33 6 20 74 95 08 | ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

TORONTO SALES OFFICE: Sutton Place Hotel - Apt 606 - 955 Bay Street

PARIS OFFICE: 99 Rue de la Verrerie - 75004 Paris - France | TEL +33 1 53 01 50 30 | FAX +33 1 53 01 50 49

VENICE PRESS: **UNIFRANCE**

Caroline Aymar | TEL +33 6 85 42 87 26 | caroline.aymar@unifrance.org

TORONTO PRESS: **GALVEZ + ASSOCIATES for UNIFRANCE FILM**

Kim McKenzie Galvez | TEL (416) 359 0380 | CELL (416) 702-0901 | kgalvez@sympatico.ca

100 Seaton Street - Toronto, ON Canada - M5A 2T3

PLEASE NOTE: High definition images can be downloaded from the 'press' section of <http://www.wildbunch.biz>

SYNOPSIS

Kabul - a city struggling to recover from 25 years of warfare. Taxi driver Khaled picks up a woman and baby. Her face is hidden behind a blue burqa. They settle on a price, she pays him and they drive off. The taxi arrives at its destination. The woman gets out and a new passenger climbs in... to find the baby still in the backseat. Khaled leaps out after the woman but she's vanished.

Khaled's left holding the baby - a 6-month-old boy. Who is the mother? How can he find her? He asks friends and strangers in the street. He returns to where he picked her up. Nothing. Fate has handed him a young life for which he feels more and more responsible.

An eventful, chaotic, often highly comic journey through a city which is itself simply trying to survive. Poignant, rich, vibrant, Barmak Akram's debut feature is a remarkable portrait of one man's emotional awakening in a city returning to crazy life after 25 years of violent conflict.

CAST

<i>Khaled</i>	Hadji Gul
<i>Mathieu</i>	Valery Shatz
<i>Marie</i>	Amélie Glenn
<i>Baba</i>	Mohammad Chafi Sahel
<i>Khaled's Wife</i>	Helena Alam
<i>Baby</i>	Messi Gul

CREW

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Barmak Akram
SCREENPLAY CONSULTANTS	Jean-Claude Carriere Isabelle Broue Agnès De Sacy
MUSIC	Barmak Akram
DP	Laurent Fleutot
EDITORS	Hervé De Luze Pierre Haberer Elise Fievet
SET DESIGNER	Mohamad Yousef Ghouchan
SOUND EDITOR	Pascal Villard
COSTUME DESIGNER	Mohammed Ayoub Omar
PRODUCERS	Olivier Delbosc Marc Missonnier
CO-PRODUCERS	Mani Mortazzavi David Mathieu-Mahias Philippe Gautier
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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

25 years of war have thrown more than 50,000 children - orphans or with poverty-stricken families - onto the streets of Kabul. So many children confronted daily with hunger, disease, violence, drugs, prostitution and slavery. Gatherers of paper and tin cans, sellers of eggs and toilet paper, water carriers, cart pullers, shoe shiners, these children - often without parents or schooling - grow up on the streets.

This is the subject of my film - the street kids of contemporary Kabul. Taxi driver Khaled discovers a baby boy abandoned by a veiled woman in the back of his cab. How will he find the woman again? How will he rid himself of this packet of trouble? And what if he were to keep the tiny boy, he who has fathered only daughters?

This extremely simple story of an abandoned baby gives the script its impetus and provides the film with an efficient framework: as Khaled searches for somewhere to place the child, we discover Kabul in his wake, as in a picaresque story. Immersed in a rich, pregnant reality, we find ourselves straight away in the company of people whose daily life, so full of adventures, could provide ideal material for a thousand screenplays.

Making my protagonist a taxi driver allowed me, as it were, to make a report on the damage wrought by war. The characters are drawn very precisely - the fruit of long and close observation during the filming of my documentaries. We never see the woman's face. Throughout the film, each character has his or her own interpretation of what would make a mother abandon her child. The work of these street kids, proud of supporting their families by providing their daily bread, gave me the idea of the sequences with the toilet paper seller and the car washer who extorts money from Khaled. The different male characters represent different facets of our hero.

The city is a very powerful presence: the chaos of traffic around the station, the demolished alleyways (demolished, as we learn, as a result of US bombing), shops of every sort. To be in Kabul is to be in the

midst of a vast pandemonium where each must find a way of surviving, where colourful characters can be found on every street corner, and where the possibility of true neo-realism is always in reach.

Khaled acts as our guide and truly introduces us to the city and its secret passages. Jean-Claude Carrière and I spent 10 days honing the structure and the layout of situations, repositioning them in the various locations with the aim of establishing an efficient narrative, a 'documentary' accuracy leading to a very realistic discovery of the city, its organization, its disorganization and its inhabitants.

The people of Afghanistan laugh in even the worst of situations. Humour allows them distance. Without being an outright comedy, my film has a pretty comic tone. Not exactly a comedy, but a film that casts a coolly amused, benevolent and always very humane eye over its subjects.

I'd like to mention Chaplin's THE KID here. The comparison doesn't stop with the subject matter: the two films really have something in common in the way they view their material: funny scenes, as when Khaled accosts the bearded commando with the plastic sandals who guards the police station; absurd scenes, such as the one at the radio station when five women pretend to be the baby's mother. All in all, these are the tragi-comic adventures of a sort of anti-hero. We follow the action, we understand and sympathize with Khaled's dilemma, and at the same time discover with a real pleasure the various institutions we visit: the orphanage or the French NGO whose director considers taking care of the child in order to seduce his colleague.

At the beginning of the film, the direction is very rhythmic, very agitated, to shake the audience and awaken them to the dangers of a city in which tanks are everywhere; then realist, more low key, once we get to the house in the suburbs. Energy prevails. Hand-held camera creates a real dynamism. Using a telephoto lens allowed me to shoot certain scenes from a distance in order to make the crew disappear from the shoot. The use of natural light

gives the film a documentary realism, while the oil lamps with their sometimes violently contrasting light imparts a chiaroscuro style to the image.

Abbas Kiarostami told me, "A film is a question. It's up to the audience to find the answer." Why has she abandoned her child? At the end we find the woman again, but she remains veiled, and does not speak. We see only the tears falling, from eyes veiled by her tchadri, onto the cheek of her child. Thus, by the choice I made with Jean-Claude Carrière, the main female character is faceless, and Khaled's wife nameless. In Afghanistan, a woman's identity is relative: she's always someone's wife. Khaled's wife is afraid that he will leave her or take a second wife. She dreams of adopting the baby, and breast-feeds him in secret. The film addresses the place of women in Afghan society. As in China, giving birth to a daughter is a matter of shame. There's also the suffering imposed by society on Khaled, who has fathered only daughters.

In the face of everything that happens, Khaled is transformed from the beginning to the end of the film, between vanity and compassion. Fate places a young life in his hands, a young life which at first he wishes to get rid of but for which he feels increasingly responsible.

The film recounts a linear narrative that unfolds over 36 hours. An eventful, chaotic and often comic journey, in a city 1,800 metres above sea level, beneath the dazzling summer sun.