

Afghanistan Unveiled



52 minutes, Color, Documentary

*A film by Brigitte Brault &
the Aina Women's Filming Group*

"A moving, insightful and powerful testament to the use of film.

The training in photojournalism of a group of young women in Afghanistan, and the resulting film allow us to witness the beginnings of the re-enfranchisement of Afghani women and the reinstatement of their voices."

-- Zoe Elton, *Director of Programming, Mill Valley Film Festival*



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Afghanistan Unveiled

Synopsis

The culmination of a unique training program for Afghan women journalists, this rare and uncompromising film explores the effects of the repressive Taliban regime and U.S. military campaign on the lives of Afghan women and their families. Fourteen young women, several still in their teens, were trained as camera operators and video journalists at the AINA Afghan Media and Culture Center in Kabul, the first female journalists to be trained in that country for more than a decade. None of the trainees had ever before traveled outside Kabul, and except for one, none had been able to study or pursue careers while the Taliban controlled their country.

Traveling to rural regions outside of Kabul, the filmmakers capture heartbreaking footage of Hazara women and children who have been forced to live in caves with little food and no water or electricity, left to fend for themselves as the rest of the country rebuilds. Despite the widespread suffering they encounter, the journalists also manage to find moving examples of hope for Afghanistan's future, and emerge from the experience committed to revealing these stories of suffering and hope to the world. A poetic journey of self-discovery, ***Afghanistan Unveiled*** is a profound reminder of independent media's power to bear witness.



Background Information

Fourteen women were trained as camera operators and video journalists at AINA, Afghan Media and Culture Center. Co-founded by acclaimed photojournalist Reza Deghati and several French journalists, the AINA program was developed to support democracy in Afghanistan through the development of media and cultural expression. The one-year course commenced in July 2002 and ended in August 2003.

To date, the students have completed several news reports for French, German and Finnish television and two one hour documentary films 'Afghanistan Unveiled' and 'Shadows'. They are currently working on their third documentary film about Afghan Women, featuring women in politics, and an extensive film about the whole electoral process in Afghanistan currently taking place. Six of the women have received yearlong, paid contracts to produce films and news segments for AINA.

AINA is being established as a production company for some of the camerawomen to continue their work and host new training and produce regular programs such as news report, documentaries and short fictions for the Afghan mobile cinema.



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Festivals and Awards

Berlin Film Festival

Tampere International Film Festival

Mill Valley Film Festival

Festival International de Films De Femmes de Creteil

Femme Totale International Film Festival

Copenhagen International Documentary Festival



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Credits

78 minutes, Color, Video, Documentary

Director
Brigitte Brault

Producer
Florent Milesi

Script
Brigitte Brault

Editor
Michele Hickinson

Cinematography
Brigitte Brault
Gul Makai Ranjba
Halima Hussiani
Shakiba Adill
Mehria Azizi
Marie Ayub
Jamila Emaml
Nassima Mustafa
Habib Samin

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High-resolution photos are available to download at
www.wmm.com



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About Filmmakers

(A selected list)

Brigitte Brault (Director and Writer) is the Media Project Manager for the French Foreign Ministry, a writer and video journalist for France Television, and an author of documentary films and reports. She is also a volunteer video journalist for “Etats d’Urgence”, a production company of the French NGO, “Medecins sans Frontières”.

Shekeba Adill (Cinematography) is 19 years old and has always lived in Kabul. She was a high school student and also worked part time at Kabul TV in children’s programming when she started filming ‘Afghanistan Unveiled’. Shekeba participated in the camerawomen’s first one-hour documentary film, traveling to Badakhshan and Herat. She toured in France and Germany for festivals and is now full time working in Aina as video journalist.

Marie Ayub (Cinematography) is 26 years old and has also always lived in Kabul. She traveled to Herat and Bamyán for the first documentary film and has just completed co-directing ‘Shadows’, the second Aina documentary about women’s rights in Afghanistan.

Mehria Aziz (Cinematography) is 20 years old and has always lived in Kabul. She worked as a high school teacher and also at Kabul TV. Mehria traveled to Badakhshan and Jalalabad for the first film and also toured Europe to promote the documentary and is now working full time in Aina as a video journalist.

Jamila Emami (Cinematography/Editing) is 19 years old and completed her high school education in Pakistan. She returned to Kabul with her family in early 2002. Jamila produced her first news report in September 2002 for French TV and traveled to Herat, Jalalabad and Bamyán for the first film. She went to US to promote Afghanistan Unveiled and is now working full time in Aina as editor/camerawoman.

Halima Hussiani (Cinematography) is 26 years old and returned from Iran without her family in early 2002, in order to study journalism at Kabul University. She produced her first news reports for French TV in September 2002 and traveled to Bamyán and Herat for the first film. She represented ‘Afghanistan Unveiled’ at Copenhagen cph:dox documentary film festival. She is now working full time in Aina as video journalist.

Nasima Mustafa (Cinematography) is in her mid 30s and works as a kindergarten teacher. She produced her first news report for French TV in September 2002 and participated in the first film, traveling to Jalalabad. She is now happily married and recently moved to Pakistan to follow her husband.

Gul Makai Ranjba is 22 years old and has always lived in Kabul. She is currently a university student. She traveled to Badakhshan for the first film and participated in the art project for a New York gallery. She is now working full time in Aina as video journalist.



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Quotes from Women of the Aina Women's Filming Group

Marie, Assistant Director

My mother has asked me to do medical studies. But I want to be a journalist to show the life of the poorest of us. I am brave. During all these years of war, we stayed in Kabul, my two brothers and my father died. I know what pain is.



Gul Makai, Journalist Camerawoman

During the war against Taliban I received a bullet in my foot. Now I limp but I continue working to feed my family. When I take the camera, I feel confident.

Mehria, Journalist Camerawoman

When I travel to film my Afghan sisters, I think about my mother. She was killed by the mujahedines in 1992, I was a little girl and I had to take care of my little brother. Today it's me who works to provide for my family.



Jamila, Assistant Editor

I would never imagine I could participate in this adventure; travel alone and free across my country! My father is a Mollah but he trusts me. He has encouraged me to become a good camerawoman since the beginning of the training. I would like to do this work to show how my people live to my government.



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Afghanistan Unveiled

DW-WORLD.DE
DEUTSCHE WELLE



"Afghanistan: Film, Freedom, Future" was the panel's topic.

Afghan Film Makers at the Berlinale Talent Campus

11.02.2004

DW-TV and the International Film Festival invited three young female documentary film makers to Berlin to participate in workshops with accomplished colleagues.

It took six long weeks of wrestling with the Afghan authorities to get visas and exit permits for the three film makers. Gul Makai Ranjbar, Halima Hussiani and Shakeba Adill had a hard time getting to Germany and the Berlinale Talent Campus.

Although they had the support of international television broadcaster DW-TV and the German foreign ministry, it became increasingly doubtful whether they would be able to make the journey at all. To cap it all off, the weather almost put an end to their plans. The Bundeswehr plane that was to bring the three young women safely to Germany had to leave a day earlier than planned.

From the airport in Berlin, Gul Makai, Halima and Shakeba had to go straight to the "Afghanistan: Film, Freedom, Future" event at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* the House of World Cultures, which took place last Sunday.

After finally arriving, they told the young audience at the Talent Campus about their work and lives in one of the poorest and most crisis-ridden countries in the world. They also presented excerpts from two of their films.

Dressed in jeans, sweaters and leather jackets, only their heads covered with the traditional hijab or headscarf, the women sat on the podium while talking about their work to Iranian writer, documentary film maker and Afghanistan expert, Siba Shakib, who hosted the discussion and acted as their interpreter.

Siba Shakib presented the AĪNA media center in her introduction. Independent from the government, AĪNA is an Afghan-French project that has been running for two years and has built up a network of independent journalists and media in Afghanistan. Gul Makai, Halima and Shakeba were trained through AĪNA and are now, with the aid of the organisation, producing their own films.

DW World Article Page 1 of 2

"Afghanistan Unveiled"



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Afghanistan Unveiled

Gul Makai, who is 22-years-old, said that she had never known a life without war. Her father and brothers are dead, and even as a young girl she had to work to feed the family, despite having an injured leg.

Hard as this life may seem, it's all too common in Afghanistan. Apart from depicting the years of war against the Russians, the three film makers concentrated on the reign of terror carried out by the radical Islamic Taliban. The six years of their dictatorship were known to have been especially cruel for Afghanistan's female population.

The film makers travelled to the Afghan countryside to make their documentary film "Afghanistan Unveiled". It was probably the first time that women had travelled into the rural provinces alone. They talked to women about their life and their experiences under the Taliban. Whether they were female nomads with machine guns in their tents, or cave dwellers in the Bamian valley, where the Taliban destroyed the giant statues of Buddha, their stories are very similar. They deal with murder, rape and destruction, with unimaginable violence and contempt for the people, especially the women.

The young film makers found filming an intense and disturbing experience. During their courageous work, they learned much about their own country and its inhabitants. Afghanistan is a country full of cultural variety, they said. The desolate countryside and harsh climate make basic living conditions very difficult for its people.

Critiquing the new Afghanistan

Another important subject is the period since the end of the Taliban regime. Life in Afghanistan is still far from any kind of normality. A critical view of the situation is presented in the women's second film, "Shadows", the sequel to "Afghanistan Unveiled". While Kabul University prefers to enroll students with money and the right contacts, in the provinces, women and girls are still being abducted and raped. There is a considerable amount of work left before there is real freedom of expression and the press.

All the same, Gul Makai, Halima and Shakeba say that there have been great improvements in the direction of freedom. What people in Afghanistan need most for social change after such a long period of destructive chaos is time. The presence of ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, and the Americans is necessary at the moment to ensure relative calm in the country. In the long term, the Afghans would like to develop their future identity free from external influences.

Gul Makai, Halima and Shakeba are sure that their informative films will contribute to bringing about change in Afghanistan. The strength and intelligence, the involvement and self-confidence of these three young women provides hope for the future of their country.

At the end of the discussion, Günter Knabe, Deutsche Welle's Afghanistan expert, spoke about "Afghanistan: Film, Freedom, Future" as a representative of the international broadcaster and organiser of the event. He introduced the audience to DW-TV's Afghan program which broadcasts daily in Dari and Pashtu, and the donation campaign: "100 Classrooms for Afghanistan" which was sponsored by the aid organisation Cap Anamur and Deutsche Welle. DW-TV's culture department is sponsoring the Afghan film makers visit to Berlin. - *Stefanie Zobl*



Afghanistan Unveiled

From Unesco.org

^Afghanistan Unveiled^ Screened at UNESCO - Updated: 13-05-2003 9:54 am

04-04-2003 3:00 pm Since a few months, a group of Afghan women has been seen in the streets of Kabul and in other towns of Afghanistan with their cameras and professional television equipment. By 1 April, the work has been completed and the first documentary film ever on Afghan women done by Afghan women was recently screened at UNESCO.

'Afghanistan Unveiled' is a 52 minutes story showing the adventures of the first Afghan camerawomen and, through them, the lives of the ordinary women they have met and filmed. This road movie is an invitation to see and hear Afghan women far from clichés and with no barriers, going from darkness to light. The film reveals a striking contrast between young modern women and their sisters respecting all the codes of their ancestral culture never seen before.

Over a two-month period, Jamila, Marie, Shekeba, Mehria, Halima and Gul Markai traveled throughout Afghanistan and discovered a daily life. In Herat, they met a young woman who lost her husband during the American bombing. In the North-east of Afghanistan, after days of walking and horse riding in the mountains, they met a woman from Badakshan who told them of her fight to improve health conditions in her community. The film provides "from inside" portraits of four Afghan women met in four regions of Afghanistan.

The camerawomen's first trips outside Kabul enabled them to discover themselves, their limitations and brought them a taste of travel and freedom. This unprecedented film is like a diary of their first steps in the discovery of their country and of their taste of freedom.

In UNESCO, before the screening of the film earlier this week; the audience was welcomed by Mohammad Zahir Aziz, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Afghanistan to UNESCO, and Abdul Waheed Khan, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information. The screening was followed by questions from the audience and discussion with the filmmakers including two Afghan camerawomen. The film was produced under the supervision of two French journalists, Brigitte Brault and Florent Milesi.

UNESCO supported the film in cooperation with the French NGO AÏNA. Apart from UNESCO, the other funding partners are the Asia Foundation and the International Organization for Migration.

The topics for the next film will be Women and human rights as well as Women and politics. The production team hopes that the films will be bought and broadcast by international Television stations. There has already been some interest from channels in Europe to show the film.

From www.trilliuminvest.com



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Afghanistan Unveiled

"Afghanistan Unveiled" (A)

A serious and sad story about the women in Afghanistan who have been devastated by the Taliban era and then virtually forgotten since the U.S. invasion.

October 2003

By Joan Bavaria

I grew up in a small town, where everyone knew everyone and women were definitely "in the home" except when they were in sanctioned activities like cooking for baked bean suppers at the Grange Hall or teaching sewing at 4-H meetings. My father was cursed with four daughters - forced to adapt to having no sons to carry his name, toss a baseball or go fishing. His response was to buy baseball mitts and fishing poles anyway. By the time we were adults, my sisters and I had fuzzed the social difference between boys and girls so badly that we didn't understand that we were supposed to screech at the sight of a wriggling worm and aspire to dusting trinkets in ruffled aprons. We're obviously different from each other, the four of us, but one thing is very clear and a source of some irritation for my father. We are all "too independent for girls".

We've all subsequently complained about the male-dominated world we still live in. But our universal answer has been to change the playing field by starting a company, a studio, a mental health practice and two non-profit organizations. We know how lucky we are that my father cared much more about fishing partners than coming out parties. We also know that we are lucky to live in a place where women have been deemed to be equal to men, at least officially. Even if the social environment is not always supportive of women as equals, the law provides the foundation on which we can strive to succeed.

The other night my husband and I attended a first-time screening at the Mill Valley (California) Film Festival. What better way to forget about The Terminator-turned-governor than go to the movies? The movie was "Afghanistan Unveiled", a documentary by and about Afghan women. This is a serious and sad story by and about the women in Afghanistan who have been devastated by the Taliban era and then virtually forgotten since the U.S. invasion. The audience cried with the interviewees as they talked to Hazaras women living in caves with no food except lentils, no money, no fuel, and almost no water. The victims of the Taliban's ethnic cleansing, all their male relatives except the youngest boys had been murdered, often in front of them. Security is not good enough to begin to build small businesses, though the women said if they could be given looms they could support themselves and their families, which often included many adopted orphans. In another part of the movie, a woman risked her life to tell about running away from a forced marriage; "honor" killing is rampant in this country.

For several years, Shelley Alpern has led an effort by Trillium Asset Management to find ways for socially responsible investors to have a positive impact on abused women throughout the world. Afghanistan has been a special case because of the courting of Taliban by Unocal and the extreme and overt abuse of women by that regime. Under intense pressure, Unocal and other U.S. companies eventually stopped dealing with the Taliban. After the attack on the World Trade Center, the United States threw them out of power, but not out of the country. The problems for women, especially away from the cities, have often been exacerbated. The United States has failed to deliver promised aid, so horrible poverty combines with a devastated economy and a nonexistent infrastructure to render their lives hopeless.

There are few ways investors can directly impact the fate of these women except by donating money to the relief organizations who are trying to help. In the future, Afghanistan would be a perfect place for micro-lending to women like Accion International does in Central and South America or Grameen Bank does in Bangladesh, but now there is no security for aid workers in this country. We are, however, entering the time of year when many people think about gifting either cash or appreciated stock. Some of the non-profits in Afghanistan include the Asia Foundation, which produced the film "Afghanistan Unveiled" with The Afghan Media and Culture Center, the U.S. Department of State and USAID. The Asia Foundation is trying to rebuild a large girls' school in Kabul. National Geographic has established a fund to assist Afghan women and girls unable to attend school under the Taliban. There are those working on the issue of self-sufficiency in food, such as the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas.

It was good for me to see this movie at the same time that California elected an "action hero" and Mr. Universe as governor. It put things in perspective.



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