



BUDDHA COLLAPSED OUT OF SHAME

Directed by Hana Makhmalbaf
Starring Nikbakht Noruz, Abbas Alijome, Abdolali Hosenali

Quite apart from the cultural impact on Afghanistan by the fundamentalist Taliban regime, one enduring and sadly irreversible sign of their former stranglehold on the nation is the wanton destruction, in 2001, of a pair of centuries-old giant Buddha statues carved out of the mountainside in the valley of Bamyan.

Hana Makhmalbaf's scathing indictment of the Taliban's legacy in the war torn country begins with the actual footage of the massive blasts that destroyed the Buddhas. Apparently the Taliban were very pleased with themselves and recorded the events for posterity.

Essentially though, the film is a child's eye view of Afghanistan, and centres around a day in the life of a six-year old girl whose family is one of many that live amongst the rubble at this very location. Baktay (*Noruz*) is deeply envious of her neighbour and young friend Abbas (*Alijome*), as he reads loudly from his school notebook. She desperately wants to go to school as well, but without a notebook and pen of her own she knows there is no point going – even if she did know where the school actually was.

Determined and resourceful, Baktay takes some eggs to the market to either sell or perhaps exchange for her notebook. After an exhaustive search for a buyer or trader, she finally sets off in Abbas' footsteps, clutching her precious

notebook. But a seemingly simple journey is beset by one pitfall after another, as Baktay finds herself held hostage by a particularly nasty group of young boys all happily playing 'Taliban' and each carrying a stick in lieu of the standard Kalashnikov assault rifle.

The 'game', such as it is, also involves the stoning of young girls for any number of religious infractions. It's just plain gut-wrenching to see it all played out before us, by children who are clearly just copying the behaviour of adult role models. Audiences have good reason to fear for Baktay's safety, because it's very unclear at which point the boys will progress to without actually doing any violence to little Baktay or any of several other young girls they have corralled in a dusty cave.

Director Makhmalbaf points out that unlike children in other parts of the world, who are exposed to excessive violence chiefly by way of films and television programs, the children of Afghanistan have witnessed a great many unspeakable acts of violence first hand. Also somewhat disturbing is the way that the boys are equally at home playing American soldiers as well, and that the violence in their games remains just as intense regardless of their allegiances. This is indeed a very tough film to watch, but the little girl Baktay's innocence and resilience are its main saving graces.

TIM STEWART

***Buddha Collapsed Out Of Shame* screens at UWA's Somerville Auditorium from Monday, March 2, until Sunday, March 8, (preceded by a screening of the WA short film, *Legacy*) as part of the *Lotterywest Festival Films* season.**