

moister and more febrile with every upsetting revelation. "What kind of person would travel the world in search of these places?" A lot of unkind answers spring to mind.

His mood brightens as he wanders the archeological wonders of Angkor Wat ("There's no place like this"). You begin to wonder if he knows how this stupendous place actually came into being? After a lesson in Cambodian land-mine detection, Ripper shifts focus to Bosnia where he visits a married couple who are artists and who kept right on making art through the worst days of the siege of Sarajevo (the sacred in the scared, see?), and then returns to London, buys a car, and "begins racing around Europe, a day in Auschwitz, a

half-day in Flanders fields... a quick miracle at Lourdes..." until his video camera is stolen, after which his car too is stolen. Which is perhaps nothing more than divine retribution for his having made human suffering the stuff of dilettantism.

Ripper is not without self-knowledge. He does pause at this point, to declare himself a "tourist of darkness." I do wish he didn't sound quite so proud of it. Anyway, he then studies Sufism in Turkey, Tibetan Buddhism in India (he has his shoes stolen), skitters through Hiroshima, learns to "breathe in the suffering of the world's victims in the form of a dark cloud" and, contrariwise, to "breathe out compassion." This helps him withstand the beauty and bravery of

a visit with the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (where, by the way, he becomes elaborately fearful of being shot), the anguish of 9/11 back in North America, the deprivations of an Afghan refugee camp in Palestine, and a really heart-searching, uplifting sojourn with gentle and fiercely intelligent Christian Palestinian parents in Bethlehem whose children have been killed by Israeli car bombs ("Your genes change; what are you going to do with the rest of your life?").

"I've seen with stark clarity," says Ripper, "the pain that is everywhere..." The pain serves an ameliorative purpose, though. It allows him "to see each face as my own." Which is a lot, I suppose.

Gary Michael Dault

WHAT REMAINS OF US

2004 77m *prod* Nomadik Films, NFB, *p* Yves Bisailon, François Prévost, *d/sc/ph* François Prévost, Hugo Latulippe, *ed* Annie Jean, *s* François B. Senneville, *mus* Kalsang Dolma, Tenzin Gonpo, Jamyang, Yungchen Lhamo, René Lussier, Techung; *with* Kalsang Dolma (narrator), Dalai Lama (as himself).

Two firsts, or two new potential beginnings, open *What Remains of Us*. Kalsang Dolma, a Tibetan-born woman living in Montreal, prepares to return to the native land she has not seen since early childhood. But her imminent journey is more than one of rediscovery and self-exploration. She has procured a videotaped message of hope from the Dalai Lama—Tibet's spiritual and political leader who went into exile in India in 1959 after China's invasion of his country in 1950—and aims to show it to the Tibetan people the only way she can—covertly.

During the 40 years plus the Tibetan people have not seen their Dalai Lama, Dolma narrates, over 1.2 million Tibetans have been executed by Chinese authorities, who laid claim to the mountain-nestled "Rooftop of the World" not only by physical force but by the sheer power of numbers—more Chinese than Tibetans now comprise a population of 2.7 million. Dolma's mission, and by proxy that of Hugo Latulippe and François Prévost, the film's directors, is multifold: to re-expose the people

to their leader; to observe, through their reactions to the recorded message, to what extent the Dalai Lama still figures in their lives; and to provide a context for what they observe in Tibet.

The context was perhaps the filmmakers' easiest choice for inclusion and also the easiest to absorb, if only because Tibet has received international attention for decades. Archival images of the 1988 riots and monks burning themselves in protest are iconic; making Tibet a symbol for human rights atrocities proliferating around the globe. Accompanying this chronicle of abuse and repression is the inaction on the part of international organizations. Dolma finds and reads a letter the Dalai Lama wrote to the UN on November 24, 1950, pleading in vain for help on behalf of his people.

With the plight of Tibetans embedded in the topography of popular and mass culture in the West, the filmmakers faced an interesting challenge—how to humanize a struggle that is abstractly understood, and for most of us watching the film, so far away? Or, inversely, how to delve into the larger issues suggested by the people and scenes captured on film? After all, the presentation of ideas and concepts is not a natural but an extrapolated capacity of cinema. NFB founder John Grierson began an illustrious tradition of documentary in this country on the premise that film can and should—by the use of voice-over—educate, inform and provide an ideological guide. At the other end of the spectrum are the observational documentaries—a technique also initiated by the NFB with lightweight cameras and portable synch-sound



Kalsang Dolma

Photos by François Prévost, courtesy of the NFB



freedom; and villagers in traditional Tibetan garb are contrasted with urban youth dressed in Western clothing, who, when asked, offer the year 2000 as the year Tibet lost its freedom. Dolma alludes to the tenets of Buddhism itself (in which presence and absence, suffering and illusion figure prominently) when she wonders if Buddhism's passivity and gentility contributed to the Tibetan oppression.

Quiet and understated in tone, *What Remains of Us* is most startling for what it is not. More sketch than portrait, the film eschews emotional manipulation to offer an impressionist landscape—both geographical and social—in which despair and faith commingle with everyday life. Speaking of the Dalai Lama, but no doubt echoing Dolma's own position as stranger/native (who has all but willed herself out of the film and into the role of the viewer), a young man says that his leader is far away in body but near in spirit. The film does not ask, but rather invites us to wonder how long this will be the case. To capture a moment in time is also to mark its inevitable passing. *What Remains of Us* is to be savoured as a visceral contemporary document, an imminent relic and a call to contemplate the space between the two.

Tammy Stone

equipment—to which *What Remains of Us* can trace its lineage.

What Remains of Us does make use of Griersonian voice-over; however, the voice belongs not to an authoritative, omniscient being but to Dolma, who (ambiguously) places herself in the action. Curiously, we hardly see Dolma throughout the film. She is off-camera as her message from the Dalai Lama is shown to various groups of Tibetans, from multi-generation nomadic families living in near isolation in the Himalayan mountainside, to monks and young people living in Lhasa, Tibet's capital. Indeed, a binary structure of presence/absence manifests itself both formally and thematically throughout the film. Early on, Dolma is on a plane to Tibet, but we don't see her; instead, the camera focuses on a fragment of the plane's wing and the open sky. This simultaneous presence/absence, made more powerful by Dolma's disembodied voice, effectively presages a journey in which being and not being there rises to the surface.

Those confronted by Dolma and her message from the Dalai Lama watch the screen in wide-eyed wonder, never

having seen a video-playback machine. Some express feeling more hopeful after seeing and hearing the message (a presence also rendered less there by being broken down and shown in fragments throughout the film), using language that conflates the image of the Dalai Lama with the leader himself; monks mention Buddhist temples that have been destroyed—ruinous, palpable reminders of the absence of

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