



FILM REVIEW: UNDER THE BOMBS

By **VINCE SICARI**

It is often the innocent who die in war. It is the children whose lives are blighted by it. In July 2006, when Israel invaded Lebanon, it was the 20-year-old Israeli soldier, Uri Grossman who died in a war that should never have happened. Not many people would remember Uri, except that his father, Israeli author David Grossman, was such a vocal anti-war campaigner.

The 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war polarised world opinion. In the eyes of many, the war was a disproportional response by Israel to the Hezbollah's attacks. As a result of a border skirmish with Hezbollah, thousands of lives were lost or diminished. Over a million Lebanese civilians and well over half a million Israelis were displaced by this futile conflict. It is estimated that up to 22 percent of Lebanon's GDP was lost in the damage to the infrastructure that resulted from the bombing. Many roads, bridges, port facilities, Beirut airport and a major power station were damaged during the war. An unknown number of houses and other buildings were also destroyed or damaged.

The film *Under the Bombs* is not only about that war. It is more than that. It is about a love story. It is the story about the way people's lives are disrupted by the tragedy of human conflict. But in dealing with this love story, director Philip Aractingi presents us with so many other tragic lives. What is different about this movie is that many of the actors are not actors at all. They are real people caught in real situations. Aractingi skilfully stitches their plights into the fictional story of love.

The story is real enough. Many were the women who searched for lost children or relatives. The film is about Zeina, played beautifully by Nada Obou Farhat, who we see searching for her lost, beloved son. It is the apparently cynical, taxi driver, Tony, played by Georges Kabbaz, who takes her, and us, on her tragic journey of discovery. On this journey we meet the real people who were caught in a real war. We meet those who paid the price of a war declared by politicians bent on enhancing their positions with their electors. These are the people we saw in the snippets of news during that terrible July. These are the mothers without sons, fathers without daughters; these are the children without parents.

For me, it was the initial real-life footage of the bombing of a Lebanese village that brought to life the monster that is war. The modern technology used in war was brutally apparent in the pictures of a village dwarfed by the massive explosions, caused by modern military hardware. We are next presented by footage of the chaos that follows such explosions: elderly men, women and children running in fear, but not knowing where to hide,

children in panic crying and parents with hollow eyes screaming.

Zeina is not one of these fleeing, terrified people. The viewpoint she presents us with is one that is all too common in war. It is one that we can easily identify with. She is a well-off, well-dressed modern woman. She lands in Beirut from Abu Dhabi. She is looking for her son that was left in the care of sister. We accompany her in her terrifying journey through war-torn southern Lebanon. Tony, the taxi driver who takes her on this journey, initially appears to be a hardened campaigner, but slowly we start to see the humanity in him. He is also a casualty of war.

The landscapes they journey through are horrific reminders of the destructive power of modern weaponry: roads and bridges collapsed by the pin-pointed accuracy of guided missiles; housing complexes turned into heaps of smouldering rubble. For Zeina this is both, a physical journey and an inner journey. Who is this woman who lands in Lebanon from Abu Dhabi? In her case too we see how the horror of what she is presented with slowly changes her.

Aractingi, subtly reflects her inner change with her changing appearance. Zeina goes from a well-dressed, modern woman to a tormented, even tortured, soul, dressed in black to reflect the suffering of the world she finds herself in.

In many ways this war will be remembered as the war that should never have happened and that could not be stopped. It seemed to me that everyone was crying out for a halt in hostilities. Diplomats travelled to Israel and Lebanon. Important meetings were held, all to no avail. Something or someone wanted the conflict to continue regardless of the suffering. Some sinister purpose seemed to be served. Some more human sacrifice was needed by the greedy monster of war.

In the end, the casualties were counted in their thousands, Lebanese and Israeli alike. But we are victims too. I grieved at the loss of so many lives; we grieved at so much wanton destruction. The children of Lebanon are my children too. In a way it was my son who died when Uri died.