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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: Afghanistan seeing increase in imported movies

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

Newspapers around the world this week printed a photograph of crowds in Afghanistan scuffling to get into the first showing of a film in a real movie theater since the Taliban came into power five years ago. The film was not a US import. It's entitled "Ludg," or "Ascension," about the Afghan battle against the Russians, which first premiered in Kabul in December of 1995. The cultural revolution going on in Afghanistan is more than movies.

Martin Kaplan is associate dean at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (Associate Dean, Annenberg School of Communication): No, it's all forms of popular culture. Once they take their burqas off, they're buying DVDs and video games and satellite dishes and movies of all kinds are flying off the shelves. I don't know where the stock was during the period the Taliban was in control, but suddenly the streets of Afghanistan are full of people who are watching Jean-Claude Van Damme pictures and Arnold Schwarzenegger and apparently the genre of the moment is musicals from India.

BRANCACCIO: That's a large industry, the Indian musical industry.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes, indeed. And, in fact, Baliwood is one of the great centers of film production around the world: Hong Kong, Baliwood are rivals in many ways for the market that Hollywood is supposed to be the predominant player in and it underlines the fact that we have a globalized entertainment economy. The notion that it's a jihad vs. McWorld doesn't quite capture the reality.

BRANCACCIO: Well, one can see the critique that American culture, represented by Hollywood, is the next thing that arrives in Afghanistan. You're saying it's much more complicated than that.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yeah. In fact, we live in a polycentric world, to choose a

\$2 academic word. If you look at, for example, Harry Potter, it's not appropriate to think of it as an American product. It is, after all, something from England, just as Pokemon is from Japan and "Big Brother" and "Survivor" and "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" are entertainment products from Europe. These things come and go from one culture to the other. They get amplified and magnified by countries like the US that have enormous resources and, in fact, those countries that don't have resources have to depend on imported product. But in nation after nation, when there is a domestic entertainment and cultural industry, their own homegrown stuff usually outsells the stuff that gets imported. They want to hear their own stories. What they need is the capital to tell those own stories, because you can't quite make a movie the way you might hum a song.

BRANCACCIO: You're mentioning "Harry Potter's" already in Kuala Lumpur, in the official version?

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, not quite official. These are the ones that people are bringing their handhelds and concealing them under their clothing and taking pictures, and so, in Malaysia and other spots right now, people from Warner Bros. are getting heartburn because of the domestic market share they're losing.

BRANCACCIO: Indeed, one Hong Kong distributor estimates that pirate copies of "Harry Potter" will siphon away 30 percent of the movie's Asia business. All right, thanks, Marty. Business and media analyst Marty Kaplan is also director of the Norman Lear Center at USC.

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