



THREE DISTINCT POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL PERIODS OF SERBIA

BY MILA TURAJLIC

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THE EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY MAGAZINE



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Guilty of Murder

The Making of Justice
Director Sarah Vanhee

Vanhee shows us the power of engaging conversation, charged, by an equally engaging topic: a crime career.

PRISON

BY SVERRE V. SAND

When seven prisoners, all guilty of murder, talk to director Sarah Vanhee about the plot for a crime film, one would expect their own experiences to fuel the discussions. Like many documentarists exposing the fates of people in various unfortunate positions (like homeless people, junkies, religious minorities), Vanhee also has the more or less therapeutic function of the social worker – if nothing else by being somebody the portrayed can talk to. A frequently debated dilemma is the extent to which the interviewee is exploited by his confiding in the one person who – at last – “sees him for who he is”. The price to pay for the immediate therapeutic value of this confidence may extend his expectations: being eternally exposed in a vulnerable situation, not necessarily adhering to future preferences regarding private life made public.

No fear in this case. Vanhee avoids this problem completely by blurring out all participants, including herself. We get a fair share of jeans, naturally, we see the occasional backside of an ear, a tattooed arm here, a wristwatch there, but no blatant giveaway as to the owner's identity. For certain readers this might sound like a dry and monotonous experience, but it works just fine, and Vanhee shows us the power of engaging conversation, charged, of course, by an equally engaging topic: a crime career – including imprisonment and the challenge of rehabilitation thereafter – as imagined by people with first hand experience.

Family, society, abuse, trauma. *The Making of Justice* sets out trying to establish the protagonist's childhood, and quickly turn into an exchange of ideas about family, society, abuse, trauma, not to mention the general life quality of being a professional criminal. A passing anecdote informs us that *mafiosi* in their thirties tend to have the heart conditions of 50-, 60-year olds, due to stress. The discussions run smoothly, surprisingly neat, even, the ignitable themes considered, and without as much as the bud of a quarrel. What's been left out in the editing is anyone's guess, of

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course, but *The Making of Justice*... as it now

Jihlava plays out seem like an honest debate, and to the point. One of the major points are the plausibility of the story, the protagonist's development, like when one of them questions the likelihood of a juvenile delinquent committing petty crimes all of a sudden is trusted with money laundering for a crooked bank.

Prison. It goes without saying that any portrayal of inmates will inevitably host a critique of the prison system, and we've all read or heard some version of the prison as an institution of “criminal higher education”. Well, sure enough, we get it here as well, but merely *en passant*, and as an answer to a question. In jail you make new connections, not necessarily good ones, as is stated here as a dry fact, and without making a meal out of it. This seems to be the film's forte, along with its participants, how it simply states the facts and probabilities of this or that happening, during a robbery, or the panicked getaway.

Different scenarios of the story are tentatively imagined, also the return to society. All obstacles are taken into account: sceptical communities, reluctant employers, reactions of families, and so on. Challenges abound, but hope is to be found with the usual benefactors: love, family life, children – anything but, apparently, prisons' concentration of people with more or less antisocial actions and/or attitudes as their common ground.

The most interesting part of the discussion evolve around the confrontation with the so-called “traitor”, the “snitch”, the one who told on the protagonist and had him imprisoned. How would he, supposedly rehabilitated, act upon meeting this person again?

A few of the statements here leaves the question of whether it's the speaker's purely narrative contribution or if he's actually exposing his own personal attitudes. It would be reassuring to know it's purely make-believe, but it's really hard to tell.

Speaking of meta-speak, the film wouldn't have been worse off by letting the inmates talk about the very experience we've just seen, or maybe comment on the result so far. But this is a minor objection, easily offset by the sympathetic length of the film. It clocks in at roughly 60 well spent minutes.

More enlightened. 99 percent of the statements forwarded here stands to reason, a reminder that, as is mentioned early in the film, most prison inmates are not professional criminals, but perpetrators of crimes of passion, of circumstances gone terribly wrong. *The Making of Justice* leaves us a little more enlightened, in line with how a crime novelist once described his motivation to write: an urge to comprehend what it is that makes somebody become a criminal. That is quite an ambition, but any contribution, like Vanhee's film, adds to our understanding. We'll never have enough of that.

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SCULPTURE BY ANISH KAPOOR PHOTO: ADYMS665 / FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS SEE ARTICLE ON PAGE 11.

Communism: Beyond Images of Ideology

“Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of these images can be deciphered, one finds the basis of social reality.”

Ronald Kracauer

COMMUNISM (1917-)

BY VLADAN PETKOVIC

This year's retrospective programme at DOK Leipzig is comprised of films of different geographical origins that rotate around some key terms in the history of communism. Titled “Commanders – Chairmen – General secretaries. Communist rule in the visual languages of Cinema”, the Retrospective is divided into eight categories and explores Marx's notion that history repeats itself – first as tragedy, then as farce. From the great selection of films in the programme, I chose four...

Different continents. The above quote by Ronald Kracauer opens the film *Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body* (2013) by Serbian-born, Berlin-based director **Marta Popivoda**. In this 60-minute documentary composed exclusively of archive footage ranging from 1945 to 2000, the filmmaker – who was 32 when she made the film – explores the post-WW2 history of Yugoslavia through images representing communism and its consequences. These range from protests against the King of Yugoslavia in 1945, the building of the new country and its ideology in 1947, and its development and student protests of 1968; then to the bloody dissolution of the common state in the wars of the 1990s in Croatia and Bosnia – in many ways started by Slobodan Milosevic's – Chairmen – General secretaries. Communist rule in the visual languages of Cinema”, the Retrospective is divided into eight categories and explores Marx's notion that history repeats itself – first as tragedy, then as farce. From the great selection of films in the programme, I chose four...



of young people who witnessed the end of the country and took (or tried to take) part in forming of the new Serbian society. **Agnes Varda's** 1968 documentary *Black Panthers* presents what has turned out to be a time capsule – so timely that it was not screened on French television for which it was intended as the editors feared its ideas and images would re-ignite the student protests in France. The 25-minute film was shot in Oakland, California, and it combines footage from one of the Panthers' peaceful protests with an interview with Huey Newton, an icon of the movement who was jailed for killing of a police officer. The protesters speak of liberation of black people through both militant and peaceful means, in part aligning themselves with the hippie movement and protesting the Vietnam war, and in part with the teachings of Mao.

In *Thomas Sankara – The Upright Man*, a 52-minute documentary by **Robin Shuffield** for French television in 2005, we are presented with communism in the context

of anti-colonial struggle. Sankara was the man who renamed the former French colony Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (which means “Land of Upright Man”), and he is known as the “African Che”. He was a charismatic leader with Marxist leanings who ruled the country from 1983 to 1987, when he was assassinated by the forces of his one-time closest collaborator, and then rival Blaise Compaore – who was, by the way, just re-elected as president last summer.

A much longer path from belief in communism to disillusionment is shown in an impressively concise and straightforward manner in the short animated documentary *Sunrise Over Tiananmen Square* by Chinese filmmaker **Shui-Bo Wang**. It was nominated for Best Documentary Short Academy Award in 1998. Compared to the above-mentioned three films, Wang's work is aesthetically and visually pure. No shaky hand-held cameras, no tattered VHS and TV archive footage; just a succession of animated, mostly hand-drawn images and photographs describing the author's

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Revolution and Power

What can books and films tell us about the 1917 revolutions?

OCTOBER 1917

BY TRULS LIE

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Kåre Selnes' Norwegian book from 1967 *The Great Year of Revolution – The October Revolution and Its History* has been republished. Behind the republishing lies a desire to provide a reliable account wherein, as the new preface says, “the sympathy lies with the revolutionary Bolsheviks.”

Similar to, Per Egil Hegge's new Norwegian book *Russia 1917* on the same topic, we have detailed reviews of the events running up to, and during, the days of the October Revolution. And both releases show, like Sergei Eisenstein's film *October* (1927), that there was a chaos of violence, divisions, improvisations and factions that led to the two revolutions that year – firstly, the Tsar's abdication during the Spring of 1917, followed by the fall of the new government the same autumn. A small group of well-educated Bolsheviks, including Vladimir Lenin and Leo Trotsky, mobilized tremendous support for the Revolution in a time characterized by the exhaustion of war and starvation.

At the 50 year anniversary a prominent editor in Norway, Sigurd Evensmo, reviewed John Reed's eyewitness observations in the novel *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919). He also states “how chaotic and uncertain the situation was from day to day” with “leaders gambling for high stakes.” But what about the movies that retell what happened? We remember Warren Beatty's *Reds* (1981), based on Reed's novel – about the struggle to gain followers for the Revolution. As a journalist, Reed had access to “everyone”. As Reed mentions in the preface, his sympathies were not neutral but in his account he “tried to see events with the eye of a conscientious reporter, interested in setting down the truth.” The book was published in two million

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REDS, WARREN BEATTY

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- A MEMORY IN KHAKI
- A STRANGE NEW BEAUTY
- ADRIANA'S PACT
- APOCALYPSE
- BIRTHRIGHT – A WAR STORY
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- DIL LEYLA
- FIND FIX FINISH
- GOLDEN DAWN GIRLS
- I CALLED HIM MORGAN
- I PAY FOR YOUR STORY
- ICARUS
- INTENT TO DESTROY
- KOLYMA: ROAD OF BONES
- LAND OF THE FREE
- LIDA
- MACHINES
- MY WONDERFUL WEST BERLIN
- ONE OF US
- OUT OF THIN AIR

- POWER TO CHANGE – THE ENERGY REBELLION
- SCARED VERY SCARED.
- SYRIA'S DISSAPPEARED: THE CASE AGAINST ASSAD
- TASTE OF CEMENT
- THE AGE OF CONSEQUENCES
- THE CHINA HUSTLE
- THE CONGO TRIBUNAL
- THE ETERNALS
- THE FINAL YEAR
- THE MAKING OF JUSTICE
- THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERYTHING
- THE REBEL SURGEON.
- THE RED SOUL
- THE TRIAL: THE STATE OF RUSSIA VS OLEG SENTSOV
- THE TRUE LIFE: A PLEA FOR CORRUPTING THE YOUNG
- THE WALL
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The energy revolution

It is imperative to rouse people to take control of the issue themselves – if we want Earth to survive, says Carl-A. Fechner, director of *Power to Change*.

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