

# Justice for Sale

By Melanie Goodfellow

Femke and Ilse Van Velzen's *Justice for Sale* is the final film in a trilogy addressing the issue of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The sisters first became interested in the subject while shooting their second documentary *Return to Angola*.

"In 2003, we visited refugee camps on the Angola-Congo border and heard some of the first stories about the rapes ... at the time, the issue was not getting a lot of international attention", explains Ilse van Velzen.

The trilogy kicked off with *Fighting the Silence*, focused on female victims of sexual violence, followed by *Weapon of War*, which examined the subject from the perspective of the perpetrators. *Justice for Sale* investigates the plight of former Congolese soldier Masamba, who was unfairly convicted in 2008 of raping his captain's wife. "While making *Weapon of War*, we spent four days filming public court hearings at which 10 soldiers were on trial – five to six of them on rape charges", says Van Velzen. "There was a lot of commotion around Masamba's trial, so we ended up paying special attention to it." Since the first film in the trilogy, the Congo's rape record has captured the world's attention and numerous international NGOs have set up local operations aimed at bringing rapists to justice. The NGOs' eagerness to put perpetrators behind bars, however, can lead to further injustices, *Justice for Sale* suggests.

"We were astounded by the proceedings. No evidence was ever produced and yet he was convicted. The issue for us wasn't whether he was guilty or not, but rather that he had not been given a fair trial ... he went on to receive a ten-year sentence."

"We screened our material to local lawyers and judges through a series of workshops to see what they thought of it and discovered it was not an isolated case ... the suggestion was that money had changed hands along the line somewhere", says Van Velzen.

Through the workshops, the Van Velzens met outspoken lawyer Claudine Tsongo, who agreed to re-investigate the case. The film follows Tsongo's efforts to get to the bottom of the al-

legations. The Van Velzens hope the film could help build a case for Masamba's conviction to be quashed. In October, they screened a rough-cut version of the film at the Ministry of Justice.

"High-ranking military court judges present at the screening told us Masamba's case could be re-opened on the basis of the footage of the tribunal and with the support of a qualified lawyer", says Van Velzen.

As with their previous productions, the sisters will take the feature on the road to communities across the Congo through their "mobile cinema" initiative which organizes open-air screenings. The last such event attracted some 10,000 spectators. Beyond this, and perhaps most importantly for the sisters, they are hoping the film will bring about a sea-change in the way international NGOs tackle the issue of rape in the Congo. "Now more and more NGOs are getting involved. They organize tribunals, pay the salaries of the judges and lawyers and present the rape cases. The combination of intense pressure and money-flow make the tribunals even less independent", says Van Velzen. "It's a bit of a taboo to discuss this, but that's the reality."

IDFA COMPETITION FOR DUTCH DOCUMENTARY

*Justice for Sale*

Femke & Ilse Van Velzen

23/11 19:30 OBA



# Mama Illegal

By Nick Cunningham

In Ed Moschitz's *Mama Illegal* the plight of economic migrants looking to transform their fortunes, and those of the families they leave behind, is poignantly presented. His subjects are three Moldavian women who work as domestic staff in Austria and Italy.

Shot between 2004 and 2011, the film also shows how the families back in Moldavia (which we are told is Europe's poorest country) develop without maternal influence.

Moschitz decided upon the story when he met Aurica in his home Vienna. He was in need of a nanny, and when she arrived she told her story. "Never before had I met such a person, I had just read about them in newspapers. Her story was so heart-warming and exclusive that I decided to observe her with a camera. That was the beginning of the history of the film.

And through Aurica I met other women, from the same village, who had the same situation as her", he comments.

Scenes of absence are the heartbeat of the film, as communication is continually made by Skype, mobile and video-cassette. One very moving scene has a teacher go through a class explaining how just about every child is missing a parent (or both parents) owing to financial necessity. Before Aurica embarks upon a return journey after two years away, her daughter Diana evokes much sympathy when she breaks down in tears practising a welcome home speech.

Aurica's return is, of course, very emotional but her sojourn ends in a personal tragedy that informs her subsequent actions and strengthens her resolve to find a permanent place for her and her family in Austria. When she eventually succeeds in this, her relief is palpable. "The difference between legality and illegality is like and heaven and earth", she says.

It would be easy to draw a false distinction between the heightened work ethic of women



migrants and the indolence of the men left behind to look after the kids. Life for everybody is very tough, Moschitz's film shows, and at least one of the husbands remains resolute despite not having seen his wife for six years. "As a man, you have to be above such things", he says. "We will pull through."

Moschitz places the migrants' dilemma into a very particular context. These are people whose terrible suffering goes unrecognized by a Western populace who take their own comfort for granted. "I soon realized that my family and I were part of this migration problem", Moschitz explains. "Because there is a need in Western Europe for illegal workers, nobody talks about it, it's still a taboo. The film is a view of people from Moldavia seen from a West-European perspective. I've never been hungry, I've never had to leave my children, I've never lived in a country with 80% unemployment. I've never had to pay thousands of Euros to human traffickers in order to get a better life for my family. Therefore, I have no right to judge these people."

IDFA COMPETITION FOR FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY

*Mama Illegal*

Ed Moschitz

23/11 17:00 Tuschinski 1

24/11 21:45 Munt 10

25/11 17:15 Munt 09

26/11 21:15 Brakke Grond Rode Zaal

# With Fidel Whatever Happens

By Mark Baker

"This is my first international film", says Serbian director Goran Radovanovic of his mid-length competitor *With Fidel Whatever Happens*. "I was able to live for one year in Cuba, teaching documentary directing at the film school. Being there, I just couldn't resist the temptation to make a film there."

"It is a very independent production", he continues. "I made it with my students and some friends. I received a little bit of post-production support from the Ministry of Culture in Serbia. And of course, the film was backed by the school in Cuba. If you are living and eating somewhere like that, with your family, it is like you are already in semi-production!"

The title of the film is taken from a slogan seen all over Cuba,

on banners, billboards and just painted on walls. "I wanted to make a film that reflects this zeitgeist, the last phase of 'Fidelism'. I didn't set out to make a political film or a political statement. But over there, everything is somehow marked by Fidel and his 'cult'."

"The Cubans don't have the traditional, European cultural and political background we have over here", he continues. "Most Europeans see the term 'revolution' in a negative light; as a break, a disruption; an interruption to history. Continuity is the basis of European democracy. Whereas in Cuba, revolution is seen in a much more positive light. It is also mostly an anti-colonial thing. It's a completely different tradition, and Fidel represents this."

The film is shot in the Sierra Maestra region in the southeast of Cuba in a minimalistic, poetic style, without a great deal of dialogue and supported by a soundtrack consisting of a single Cuban song ('Lgrimas Negras / Black Tears') that continues at pivotal moments. "Everything in the film is taken from life", the director says. "I started by filming the May Day celebrations marking the 52<sup>nd</sup> year of the revolution, and then built my film around this. I need to find the form first – for me, the form is the story; the story is the poetry; and the poetry is my character. Without a good form, I cannot make a film. I never use off-narration and I am very minimalistic with dialogue. I want the pictures to talk for themselves. The story should reflect both the Cuban reality and my character."

The mountainous, less-developed Sierra Maestra area (also the first foothold of Fidel Castro's tiny army of liberation in 1956) proved to be the perfect setting for the film. "I was with my students working on an exercise in the Sierra Maestra", the director



reveals. "As soon as I saw it, I felt I had to make the film there. It is a little bit *otro mundo* – very different from Havana. People there are still in the basic, anti-consumer social circumstances. This is the real Cuba. They have no problem with the revolution – they also have this modesty, almost like a super-ego poetry. I learned a lot about modesty there."

Much to Radovanovic's delight, *With Fidel Whatever Happens* will shortly be screening at the Havana Film Festival. "I am very proud that it will be screening in the 'Made in Cuba' section", the director says. "In fact, some of my Cuban film director friends said to me, 'It is as if a Cuban had made this film'."

IDFA COMPETITION FOR MID-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY

*With Fidel Whatever Happens*

Goran Radovanovic

23/11 17:15 Brakke Grond Rode Zaal

25/11 10:00 Brakke Grond Rode Zaal

