

## FILM REVIEWS

**The Unforgiven**, directed by Lars Feldballe-Petersen. Produced by Ari Matikainen (Finland). 2017, 75 minutes. English and Bosnian with English subtitles. Contact: Maëlle Guenegues, Cat & Docs (Paris), maelle@catndocs.com. Webpage: <https://www.asnconvention.com/the-unforgiven>. Shown at the ASN 2017 World Convention.

Esad Landzo was 18 when he joined the Bosnian army and became a prison guard. During his brief period as a guard, he killed and tortured numerous prisoners. For these crimes, he was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. (He was released in 2006, after serving 10 years.)

The documentary starts with Esad's release from prison and the question of whether he can ever receive forgiveness. The Finnish–Danish documentary team follows him for several years, first as he settles into Sweden, his new home, and later as he returns to Bosnia to meet those whom he had abused. Esad is presented as a broken man. He is not very healthy – he is overweight, smokes a lot, and feels emotionally drained. He has sleeping problems and suffers mental health issues. He is coming to terms with his crimes and he is struggling to adopt to life outside prison, and life with the guilt of what he has done.

Esad decides to return to Bosnia and meet several of the former inmates of the prison camp where he served. He reconnects with his parents, who struggle with his past and with his decision to meet his victims, too. When he finally meets some of the people who have known him as a murderer and torturer who enjoyed people's suffering, the atmosphere is not as tense as one would expect. It is mainly numb. Numbness on the side of Esad, as he does not dare to ask for forgiveness, and numbness on the side of his victims, who see the broken man that he has become, but who will also always remember the torturer and murderer that he was. In the end, he does not receive forgiveness from his victims, but, and this is the open question the documentary finishes with, Esad might be able to forgive himself and carry on with his life.

This documentary stands in line with a large number of documentaries on war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. This trend started in 2007, when the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade released *The Scorpions – A Home Movie*, which documents the war crimes of this famous paramilitary group. Even the ICTY itself has released publicity material about its work. Most notably, the 2011 documentary *Sexual Violence and the Triumph of Justice* highlights how the ICTY collects evidence and has made substantial advances in the prosecution of sexual crimes as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Where *The Unforgiven* is different is in its perspective. First, it focuses on a perpetrator who is seeking forgiveness. The perpetrator knows the truth and wants to meet his victims to demonstrate to them that he has changed. This is very different from other documentaries and portrayals of the region – usually it is the victims who seek answers, they are looking for their loved ones, and they want to know what happened to them before they died. The victims also seek justice, the punishment of those who killed, tortured, and raped. Esad, as

portrayed in *The Unforgiven*, is one of those perpetrators. He has been punished and has served his sentence.

Second, it is worth highlighting that Esad is a Bosniak, who served in a Bosniak prison camp for Serbs. This perspective is also relatively unique. While the ICTY has proven that all three sides in the Bosnian war committed war crimes, evidence clearly highlights that a vast majority of these crimes were committed by Serbs. Bosniaks are often portrayed as the main victims of Bosnia's war. While this might be true when looking at numbers and statistics, what *The Unforgiven* demonstrates is that Bosniaks were also perpetrators, and Serbs were also victims. By choosing this perspective, the documentary goes beyond a well-established binary portrayal of the Bosnian war and highlights that the difference is not so much between ethnic groups but between those who have committed crimes and those who were victims.

Overall, this is an interesting, sad, thought-provoking, and important documentary. The audience is left wondering if Esad should be forgiven. In fact, one might even wonder if it is right to give so much air-time to a convicted war criminal, instead of focusing more strongly on his crimes and the lives of his victims. While transitional justice and dealing with war crimes always need to center on the needs of the victims, what *The Unforgiven* highlights is that the perpetrators are human beings too. Some of them have never accepted their guilt, but others have, and they have to cope with life as a convicted war criminal, with a history of causing pain and suffering, and with their own internal demons. One cannot but feel that what happened in the prison camp where Esad worked has not only ruined and changed the lives of the prisoners forever, but it has also changed Esad. The war in Bosnia has broken all of them.

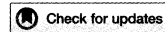
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**Liberation: The User's Guide (Manuel de libération)**, directed by Alexander Kuznetsov. Produced by Rebecca Houzel, Petit à petit production (Paris). 2016, 80 minutes. Russian with English subtitles. Contacts: Livia Bloom, Icarus Films (North America), [livia@icarusfilms.com](mailto:livia@icarusfilms.com); Morgane Delay, Wide House (Paris), [festivals@widehouse.org](mailto:festivals@widehouse.org). Webpage: <http://icarusfilms.com/new2016/libe.html>. Shown at the ASN 2017 World Convention.

*Liberation: The User's Guide* follows Katia and Iulia, two women who have spent their lives in closed Russian orphanages and an adult psychiatric institution, as they petition courts for the right to live on their own. What first consigned each woman to institutions were psychiatric diagnoses that doctors made when the women were young children, and courts' subsequent decisions to remove their "civil capacity" (*deesposobnost'*). In the end, Katia is denied civil capacity, in a long bureaucratic letter that cites her childhood diagnosis as an explanation. A judge grants civil capacity to Iulia, who is last pictured hugging friends from the institution goodbye on a train platform.

As much as the film is about these two women, it also shows the plight of many Russians confined to institutions, who endeavor to live as normal a life as possible while closed