Calling the Ghosts
Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic
60 minutes, color, video, 1996
Women Make Movies

Description
Calling the Ghosts was made by human rights activists in conjunction with their subjects. The film begins with the wordless image of a woman with frenzied eyes running her fingers through her hair. Under the accompaniment of an original version of traditional Balkan music elements (original soundtrack by Tony Adznikolov), the camera cuts to a fire rising to a blue sky. In voice-over, Jadranka Cigelj, whom we will meet later, begins narrating her story. "There was a period of self-questioning for me to speak or to stay silent," she says as we see her washing her face and hands in the Adriatic Sea. "If I stay silent, how moral would that be?" When she remembers the night she was taken out of her home, her own broken bones start to hurt. "If I speak, how good is that for me?," she asks, realizing that if she speaks, she would have to expose herself.
The camera takes us through a collage of documentary footage: aerial views of Bosnia, of a town with an ancient church and modern Coca-Cola ads in the streets. In a voice-over Jadranka remembers her childhood in her hometown of Prijedor, which she started to love only when she lost it. The camera illustrates her memories, which start around 1955, with some documentary footage of the time and with pictures of her as a child. She had many friends, but never thought of their ethnicities; remembering their names now, she realizes that most were Serbian or Muslim. We meet, in a close-up, one of her friends from that time: Nusreta Sivac, a civil judge from Prijedor. In another close-up, an interview filming technique that will become common in the film, Jadranka, an attorney from the town, describes herself as an ordinary woman interested in her home, in her son, and in whether the future would meet her expectations. The camera cuts to other ordinary people in the streets.

On April 29, 1992, the Serbs in Prijedor seized power over the town. Nusreta insisted that her husband leave, thinking that if anything happened, it would happen to the men and no one would touch the women. The fighting started the following day; parts of the city were cleansed, people were expelled on foot, killed, arrested, houses were burned (shown in documentary footage). Jadranka knew that it was just a matter of time before they came for her. As she sits with her parents and listens silently, they tell the story of how two policemen took her from their home, to Omarska.

Under the powerful soundtrack, the camera follows the road to Omarska, just outside of town. Jadranka draws a map of the camp: the men slept in the garage, in the barracks, in the White House. "In the Red House they killed them." As the camera cuts between close-ups of the two women, veiled in cigarette smoke, and desolate and dirty men with expressionless faces (documentary footage from Omarska), they relate their first impressions of the camp. "Is such a thing still possible in this century? People taken to camps? I thought that was the past," says Nusreta. She knew most of the guards personally, she had worked and talked with most of them, but now they pretended they did not know anyone.

Zeljko Mejakic was the commander of the camp. Over his picture, Jadranka states the facts: he either directly ordered or took part in the killings and torture in Omarska. There were 36 women in the otherwise male camp. They slept in the rooms where interrogations went on, and had to clean up blood from the floors every night, or were half dead from being interrogated themselves. As we see men, starved and dirty, run in and grab a spoon to receive their daily portions of food, we learn from a voice-over of the reality of "wild looks full of fear, men wounded, beaten up, torn apart." The voice belongs to Hasiba Harambasic, a dental practitioner and a victim of Omarska. She recalls a man with a broken collarbone, arm hanging limp, with ten cuts on his throat, beaten up, dirty. He held his collar closed, so that the women would not see his wounds and would be less afraid. Her testimony is illustrated by interspersed sequences of footage from the camp.

Nusreta prayed to be saved from a slow death. She prayed to be killed with a bullet, but that kind of death was rare; most people died from excruciating torture that went on for days. The women counted the dead by those missing at meals. They saw rows of corpsesCof friends, colleagues, or people they knew. Hasiba calls that mental rape. Nusreta remembers most vividly the screams; screams for help when they could do nothing to help those crying. She tried to construct a mosaic in her head. Why was she there; she was never involved in politics? But Muslim and Croat intellectuals, to whom she and the other detained belonged, were the first target of the new Serb rule. Avoiding the camera with her eyes, Jadranka tells how women were pulled out of the two rooms where they slept. She was spared until 9:30 at night on July 17, when the commander himself called her out. The camera cuts between him, unaware of it and looking up, and her, face and eyes down, as if in shame. There were six or seven men in the room where he took her. They started with verbal abuse, then ordered her to lie down. "Then he indulged himself on me while the others watched." That lasted until 2 in the morning, she says hiding behind cigarette smoke. When she was taken back to her room, she never said anything to the women; it was the unspoken rule not to talk about what happened during those absences.

The next night, she says, she was handed over to the commander's deputy for torture until morning, and raped and abused by guards as well. But the worst torture was when in the mornings the captain, who initiated or did the abuses himself, would ask the women if they had been raped during the night and to freely tell him.

Jadranka remembers St. Peter's day. Over a sequence of traditional dances around a fire, she tells of the (Serb) Orthodox tradition of burning a tree called Alile on that day. But in the camp they did not burn liles; they burned alive wounded and dying people over huge truck tires. She flips through pictures of wounded and dead bodies, bruised, bloody, shot with numberless bullets. Nusreta says they always had hope they would survive, even when taken out before a fire squad, to tell all this to the public and to the world, which would maybe then realize what was happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The camera cuts to documentary footage of Radovan Karadzic, leader of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska, who denies the existence of concentration camps for

civilians and invites journalists to search any town for them. That is how Ed Vulliamy from The Guardian, interviewed in the film, and a group of other journalists are able to visit Omarska on August 5, 1992. They are allowed to talk to anyone they want but with guards listening to what the detained would say. “Let me finish my lunch first please. I do not want to lie but I cannot tell the truth,” a man tells them as they watch him eat what he is given for food. The official version of the officers at Omarska is that these are investigation centers, not camps.
As Jadranka and Nusreta found out later, the first journalists were about to break into the camp when the guards told them to get ready quickly to go home. While they were released, seven women remained in the camp, locked in the bathroom so that they would not be seen. The miraculously released went home on foot.

In a close-up veiled in cigarette smoke, Miki Jakimovski, Jadranka’s son, recalls first seeing her after Omarska. He saw a skeleton walking toward him, forty-something kilos, barefoot and with feet bleeding from walking twenty kilometers. He stood there “dazed, like she’d never been my mother.” Then he carried her upstairs. Jadranka thinks she must have smelled of death, since her dog ran away from her. She spent the next twenty-two days afraid of her own shadow, she says. They were told that if not killed at the camp, extremists would find them at home.

Nusreta had nowhere to go, as a former friend from work, a court reporter, had moved into her apartment. She stayed with acquaintances and friends.

In a voice-over accompanying footage of exiles on the road, she says that she shared everyone’s wish to run away as soon as possible from the town they loved. But they needed papers, and money to pay for them, and letters from Croatia that it would accept them. Eventually, the women arrived in Zagreb, together with thousands of other exiles resettled there. Jadranka promised everything only to take her son. Nusreta met her husband after six months.

After the initial period of living anonymously and coping with how Omarska had changed them, they say, the women started becoming involved. Jadranka organized them to tell the truth about the camp. Through Roy Gutman, the Europe correspondent of Newsday, she sought Mejakic’s response to her charges. Mejakic faxed it; it said that no Muslim women were held or raped at the camp, as Jadranka reads. And why would he rape an old, “bad and unattractive woman.” “The way she was, I would not have leaned my bicycle against her.”
Nusreta and Jadranka have been working with women’s organizations since, they say. They have heard different stories of women being abused and raped, many impregnated, some having given birth, as a weapon of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Journalists always come with the same question: were women raped here, but Nusreta does not like that label. It reduces their identity solely to being raped; rather, they are “victims of war.” Jadranka thought of revenge, and became a field worker for the Croatian Information Center to collect memories and gather evidence. But as we see her traveling and talking to people, recorder in hand, she says that she is now in the role of the confessor. “In order to expose the crime, you violate the witness. You don’t force her, of course, you beg her

to speak; but you make her relive what she has suffered." For Jadranka, this is God's punishment for the times she casually glanced at the news of women suffering (illustrated by documentary footage) and for the times when "the world watches coldly while everything passes through women's bodies."

The film ends with Jadranka and Nusreta going to the Hague, to the International War Crime Tribunal where the Bosnian war criminals were indicted. Cutting between footage of the two women meeting each other and the work of the Tribunal, the camera shows us one of the international judges declaring that rape is now considered a crime of war. The Tribunal pronounces over twenty indictments in the Omarska case. However, a full year after Dayton, the NATO troops have not been able to arrest the war criminals, and Prijedor, where Nusreta and Jadranka do not believe they will live again, is still under the rule of the Serbs who created Omarska. The two women send a postcard to the city which they cannot visitCto the court, to say hello to former friends and colleagues and remind them of what awaits those who violate international law.
The film is dedicated to the five women who never left Omarska and to all those who suffered there.

Style/Structure
This is a testimonial film, in which the makers of the film worked with the subjects to achieve the goal, to raise public awareness of rape as a war crime. The two featured women show how the war crimes to which they were subjected transformed their lives and identities. The film combines interviews of Jadranka Cigelj, Nusreta Sivac, their families, other victims of the Omarska camp, and journalists who covered the Bosnian war. Often, the interviewees are shown in striking close-ups, a technique that emphasizes the centrality of their testimony and their chosen public identity as people who testify in order to bring change. The interviews and monologues of the women are subtitled. Pictures and tapes from the victims' ordinary lives before the war contrast with their marked status as witnesses now. Originally, British actress Julia Ormond was to have narrated the film, but Jacobson says, "we decided it would be more powerful to let the women speak for themselves and not strip them of their identity." Nonetheless there was a danger of sensationalizing the women's plight and reducing them to mere victims. Jadranka specifically addresses this when she talks of the consequences of testifying, and of her desire that her pain translate into action.
The sequences with Prijedor before the occupation and with Zagreb after the women find shelter there both bear symbols of Western culture, such as Coca-Cola ads. These visual symbols tie in with Nusreta Sivac's comments that she believed concentration camps were a fact of the past. Documentary footage is inserted to help the audience visualize the horrors of the war. It also follows the journey of the two women after Omarska, toward a larger goal for punishment of the guilty. The constant cuts between the women and this footage reminds of the mosaic Nusreta Sivac has been trying to construct to make sense of what was happening. This constant disruption conveys the sense of trying to patch together pieces of traditional knowledge, shocking news, and excruciating emotions in a disrupted reality.

Background on Director/Film

Calling the Ghosts is the first film for both Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic. Jacobson was born in South Africa and Jelincic was born in Croatia and brought up in the United States. Completing the documentary took them four years and left them in debt. Jacobson explained in an interview with Katherine Lewis for Film Nation that they did not want to make "just another victim story" or one that advanced "a purely feminist agenda." "We wanted to make a film not so much about what it means to have been raped," she says, "but about how these women made sense of what had happened, and how they were going to reconstruct their lives." The filmmakers chose Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac because they let them into their lives "in a very real way."

Another reason for choosing two middle-class intellectuals, as well as for opening the film with shots of American corporate logos as symbols of Western culture, was to place the message of the film closer to the reality of the viewer. Jacobson explains that they wanted to prevent the viewer from regarding the film as "yet another tale of age-old Balkan savagery, or something that could never happen in America, never to us." Mandy Jacobson became interested in the subject when she was working on music videos with Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski (Before the Rain, 1995). Watching television with him one day, she was struck by the systematic brutality going on in the Balkans. "I was frustrated that we weren't getting anything from the media but sound bites, where they find a stereotypical victim and elicit almost pornographic details about her abuse." Although Jacobson did not have any knowledge of the Balkans, her background in women and gender issues prompted her interest in the stories. "Milcho and I looked at each other and realized, 'My god! Here's the perfect opportunity to look at media and public policy and see if we can actually get behind the story.'"

Jacobson called Karmen Jelincic, who had also worked with Manchevski before, hoping to make use of her native Croatian knowledge. About that time her grandfather had died, so she already had a ticket back to Croatia. "We went to B&H Photo in New York, bought a whole lot of Hi-8 video equipment, stuck it on a credit card, and got her on the plane. I said: 'Go. Start researching, I'll find the money and I'll join you.'" Jacobson never imagined the film would become such a profound and lengthy project.

Jacobson recalls receiving Apats on the back and encouragement from many women's organizations, but no money. As a result, she sees the film a little late in coming out. It is tied in the events of the United Nations War-Crimes Tribunal, which in June 1996 recognized gender-specific war crimes and issued its first indictments for sexual crimes. "But money problems meant that I couldn't finish it for the best possible political timing. On the other had, because it took so long, I was able to go back to these women, show them editsCthey were involved in the process."

Production Context

This work emerged at a point when feminist activism worldwide had identified rape as a crime, well positioning the case for wartime rape as a war crime. It also participated in a trend to use testimonial video documents in human rights work, as Ellen Bruno was doing in the same period (Satya; Sacrifice) and as human rights organizations were doing worldwide. The Witness Project in fact established a website from which viewers could

gain access to videos on a variety of human rights issues.

Reception
Calling the Ghosts debuted on CINEMAX on March 3, 1997 and re-broadcast in May. CINEMAX hosted special screenings with Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac in Washington D.C. and Los Angeles in late February 1997. Earlier in February, HBO organized a meeting of Cigelj and Sivac at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, with the Undersecretary of State for Human Rights, John Shattuck, Kati Marton, chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists and her husband, Richard Holbrooke, executor of the Dayton accord. The government officials described the difficulties of apprehending the 67 men indicted as war criminals by the Tribunal who remain free. After listening to them, Nusreta Sivac said, “I don’t know whom to ask for an answer. I just wonder if we victims should simply head out and arrest them ourselves.”

Featured at the Toronto International Film Festival, winner of the 1996 Human Rights Watch, Nestor Almendros Award, Calling the Ghosts was recognized by Human Rights Watch for its original documentation of rape as a tool of war. The film has received the following awards: 1998 Emmy: Best Investigative Special; 1998 Emmy: Directing; 1998 Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award; 1997 Cable ACE - Best International Informational Special; 1997 Silver Apple - National Educational Media Market; 1997 Special Prize - Sarajevo International Film Festival; 1997 Special Prize - Minsk International Film Festival; 1996 Nestor Almendros Award - Human Rights Watch International Film Festival; 1996 Nomination - Best Feature Documentary, International Documentary Association; 1996 Honorable Mention - Amnesty International European Film. Amnesty International has highlighted the film, as well as the two subjects’ plight, as part of its campaign to have Europe and the United States insist that the indicted Serb officials be brought to trial before the Tribunal in the Hague. The organization sponsored a tour of twenty-five U.S. cities for the film. Nusreta Sivac and Jadranka Cigelj accompanied this promotional tour to share their experiences as victims of torture and their efforts to mobilize women to document rape as a crime of war.

Discussion What difference does it make that the women tell their own stories, rather than having the story be told by a reporter or other third party? Jadranka says that testifying makes her suffer all over again. When we watch her, are we enjoying suffering? The core facts of the movie were well-known already. What does the movie add to existing knowledge?

Further Reading
http://www.peacenet.org/balkans/mandy.html

http://www.wmm.org

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