

Posted on

16.09.2004

Share on

- —
- —
- —
- —

EIUC Human Rights Film Award 2004

The European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation (EIUC) has the pleasure to announce the **EIUC Human Rights Film Award 2004** which has been presented in the framework of the **61st Venice International Film Festival**.

The event took place in the Garden - Area Events at the presence of **Mr Marco Müller**, Director of the 61st VIFF and the prizes were awarded in partnership with the Human Rights Film Network.

The selected movie was **Yesterday**, written and directed by **Darrell Roodt** and produced by **Anant Singh**. The award was handed in by Maria Alcidí, President of the EIUC Jury, to Mr Alwyn Figgins, Consul of the Republic of South Africa, on behalf of the producer.

Combining esthetic merits and emotional values, the Movie raises the awareness of the viewer upon current topics regarding human rights, first and foremost human dignity. Through the perspective of a woman's life story, whose experience is shared by many all over the world, the Movie deals with the dramatic reality of HIV/AIDS, and its human rights implication. In particular, the Movie tackles issues such as health care, gender discrimination, and rights to water, housing, and education. Furthermore, the EIUC Jury has conferred a **special mention** to the film **The 3 Rooms of Melancholi** directed by Pirjo Honkasalo and produced by Kristiina Pervil, for its poetry, and its courage in presenting the sad reality of a conflict, which has been too often neglected by the media until the tragic events of [Beslan killings](#) in Russia. The above mentioned movie was also given the price of the **Human Rights Film Network**. The **jury** was composed by 5 graduating students of the academic year 2003/2004 (Maria Alcidí - Italy, Daiana Banciu - Romania, Carl Ekstrom - Sweden, Laure Malchair - Belgium, Reinhard Peneder - Austria, and 2 graduates of E.MA 2001/2002 (Claudia Modonesi - Italy, and Ruken Tekes Calikusu - Turkey). Prof. Carmen Marquez Carrasco and Prof. Koen De Feyter provided the students' jury with additional expertise.

The establishment of the **EIUC human rights jury** is an initial step in the development of a permanent relationship with the **Biennale**, and with the **Venice International Film Festival** in particular. In the academic year that is about to start, EIUC will for the first time offer a master class on cinema and human rights in the context of its regular master programme, and will also set up a special project involving the new students in analysing both classic and contemporary films from a human rights perspective. In cooperation with the **Ca' Foscari University of Venice**, the relevant films will also be shown and discussed at a theatre in Venice in the October-December period. EIUC seeks to expand its activities in the field of cinema and human rights, and more generally in the field of the representation of the theme of democracy and human rights in the visual arts. Events organised by the Biennale offer a unique opportunity to develop educational and research projects related to EIUC's field of expertise. They also provide EIUC with a welcome opportunity to offer something in return to the **City of Venice** and the **Region of Veneto** that have so generously hosted the Centre.

Diary of the 61st Venice Film Festival

Koen De Feyter, EMA Academic Coordinator 2004/2005

The seven films I watched at the 2004 Venice International Film Festival were all shortlisted for the 2004 EIUC Human Rights Award. The jury was students only. They each watched well over twenty films.

20 Fingers is a film from Iran, by a woman director who also plays the female lead. The title comes from a conversation between two women: if you have not slept with more men than can be counted on two persons' hands, you are not a whore, they say. This digital film shows scenes from the life of different couples, played always by the same two actors, in contemporary Iran. Long conversations in front of moving landscapes that are meant to symbolize change. The actors are in a train, on a boat, a motorcycle. A smart film that speaks to the mind rather than to the heart. In the first scene a couple drives their car out into the snow, at night. They stop in a godforsaken place. He makes love to her, while the screen turns black. She cries, because she has lost her virginity. I had to make sure, he says. If you are patient, this is an impressive film about gender.

Delivery was in the official competition. This is about poor people in Athens. The main character is a man who comes from the province; he hardly speaks. Which is why everyone thinks he is Albanian, the lowest of the low. He finds a job as a pizza delivery boy, and inevitably falls in love with a tight skirted junkie who also works in the place. The homeless deliver philosophical one-liners. Poetry is a man with long hair singing a song. The policemen who inevitably kill the main character at the end come straight out of Robocop. Some of the EIUC jury members liked it.

Naomi Klein, an icon of the anti-globalisation movement and the author of the book *No Logo* changes media, and together with her husband made the documentary **The Take**. The couple spent a year in Argentina following a group of workers who take over the shut down factory where they used to work. I knew she was making the film, because I tried to invite her for the EMA program last year, and the response was that she was making this movie, so it was fun to see the result. She bowed to warm applause at the screening I attended. This is an effective film that may win a few hearts for the cause. Naomi Klein and Tim Robbins opened the Global Beach, that was set up to protest against the absurd amount of money spent on and by American stars at the festival, flying in with private jets and complaining about some of the most expensive hotel rooms in Venice. Hanks, Cruise, Depp, Pacino were here. And De Niro who received a knighthood from p.m.. Berlusconi for promoting Italy all over the world by playing mafia films. Whether *The Take* will achieve the same success as the *No Logo* remains an open question, however.

Yesterday won the 2004 **EIUC human rights award**, and as far as I can tell, deservedly so. The film tells the story of a woman who lives in a small village in South Africa with her daughter Beauty. It is spoken in Zulu, and perhaps the first film in that language that reaches an international audience. This is a sweet, well balanced film about a woman who discovers she has been infected with AIDS by her husband, who

works in a far away mine. She survives until her daughter starts school. All characters are treated with respect, even if they behave terribly, like the villagers when they find out the disease is amongst them. Perhaps human rights films as a category are not just about the subject matter, but also about the approach the filmmakers take to the characters in their story. Certainly in that respect, Yesterday is an excellent film.

Land of Promise is an ugly, aimless film about trafficking of women. The story involves Eastern European women sold into a prostitute ring in Israel. The women are treated as cattle, and so are the actresses. The film is full of strong, raw images, but does not know where it is going.

A human rights home movie may seem an improbable idea, but that is exactly what **Letters to Ali** is. An Australian family adopts an Afghan refugee boy as a pen pal. He is locked up in a closed detention centre at the other end of the country. The family travels through the desert to meet him. The digital no-budget film may not win any prizes, but it sticks to my mind. There are nice touches. The director herself is an immigrant from Hong Kong. The father of the Australian family is a descendant of survivors of the Holocaust and a first generation immigrant into Australia. Most striking is the huge (also visual) paradox between the emptiness of the landscape and the perseverance of Australian politicians to lock up undocumented immigrants indefinitely behind electric fences.

Land of Plenty is Wim Wenders' ironic reflection on post 9/11 America. The award ceremony of the Film Festival was on 9/11, so some clever marketing was involved in world premiering Land of Plenty here. I liked the film; some found it naive. Here is a Vietnam veteran who is obsessed with surveillance - of Arabs in particular. He drives around Los Angeles in a van filled with surveillance equipment and spies on people, hoping to prevent another 9/11. His niece, who he has never met, travels from Israel to give him a letter from his sister who has recently died. She is religious, nice, full of compassion for the homeless (and the Palestinians). They meet, travel through familiar Wenders territory, and end up at Ground Zero, now a construction site. A straight story.

61st Venice Film Festival

(by Prof. Carmen Carrasco, University of Seville)

The Films short-listed for the 2004 EIUC Human Rights Award that I was able to watch during the Mostra were the following:

Raging Years

The film takes during the political upheaval and social unrest that accompanied the fall from power of the Liberal Party's regime in South Korea in 1960, and the rise of military power following the bloody Student Revolution (April 1960) and Revolution/ coup d'etat (May 1961). Amidst this anarchy the central character is more concerned with revenge: seeking out and beating up the boy responsible for attacking his friend. The story revolves around Tae-woong's relationship with the family of Seung-moon (the man who subsequently stabs him) especially his sister (who he later marries) and his father (an opposition politician running for office). The film successfully recaptures the social insecurity experienced by the population of South Korea in the early 1960s, revealed through the desperate actions of one man (Tae-woong). Despite the seriousness of the subject, the film deals with the material in a light-hearted and entertaining way. Nevertheless one could ask whether it really should be considered a human rights film given the scant attention it pays to these issues.

Vera Drake

Vera Drake is a wife and mother in a normal happy working class family living in Mike Leigh's excellently

recreated post-war London. As in many Mike Leigh films, however, the protagonist, superbly played by Imelda Staunton, has a secret. She voluntarily helps young girls terminate unwanted pregnancies. One could argue that with respect to other more contemporary social debates the issue of abortion is rather passed. Certainly in most liberal/progressive societies women's pro-choice position has prevailed over the pro-life stance. Nevertheless given the political influence enjoyed by the religious Right (especially in the United States) and Catholic Church (e.g. Southern Europe and South America) the human rights questions raised by the film remain still relevant.

Stray Dogs

Stray Dogs is a vision of the world post-11 resolve world problems. On one level this entertaining but realistic film explores the relationship between these two characters (and respective visions) as they set about investigating a murder in post-11th September America. On another level, though, Wenders uses the film to highlight other lesser discussed aspects of post 11th September American society, especially those policies detrimental to the lower classes such as the reallocation of resources away from health and education in favour of the military and security forces.

Three rooms of melancholia

The director P. Honkasalo has set the film in the Chechen war. The inability of adults to resolve the war gives rise to a generation of orphan Russian and Chechen children upon whom hatred has been visited like the issue of a deity incarnate. Children have taken on a burden of hatred which they believe springs from within. The transposed hatred casts a pall to the depths of their minds; they are accompanied throughout their lives by an inexplicable melancholia and sudden outbursts of rage. This melancholia and suffering of those children is expressed in the film by silence and the music put in the sound track.

Russian children are filmed on Kronstadt, an island that lies before St. Petersburg. They are being trained in the Kronstadt cadet academy as child soldiers. The imagined enemy is the Chechen. He is the foe whose utter defeat turns a soldier into a hero of the fatherland.

Chechen children are filmed in Ingushetia, in the family of Xhadizhat Gataeva, which now consists of 75 orphans for whom Xhadizhat has vowed to act as mother. She has brought them together from the ruins of a devastated Grozny. All of their parents were killed by the Russians.