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Changed the International Law on Rape

The documentary film *Calling the Ghosts* tells the story of two rape survivors from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it helped changed international law. For the first time, systematic rape in war is now a crime against humanity and crimes against women are to be investigated specifically within this context.

South African film-maker Mandy Jacobson received a double Emmy Award last year for the work.

In the film, two extraordinarily brave women speak about the atrocities and humiliations inflicted during the war. One of them,

Jadranka Cigelj, is a 46-year-old Bosnian Croat who was raped by the security commander of a concentration camp, Zeljko Mejakic, in front of his men on camera. Later, Mejakic said in a statement about her accusation:

“I don’t know why I would have done that. She is 45 years old and I am 26, and the woman in question is unattractive. I would not have leaned my bicycle against her, let alone raped her.”

Jadranka and her childhood friend,

Bosnian Muslim Nusreta Sivac, lived the lives of ordinary women until their neighbours raped and tortured them in a concentration camp called Omarska. Because they chose to tell their story, those men now stand indicted before the International War Crimes Tribunal. The aim of the women to put rape in the international lexicon of war crimes has been fulfilled.

When Mandy, a social worker, saw a TV programme about 30,000 women being raped

in Bosnia, she was appalled by the salacious way in which the details of the women’s trauma were presented. This started her on a four-year research project. She filmed interviews with victims of genocide in the refugee camps. “You cried every day,” she says simply about her own emotion during this time. “They’d lost everything. For me, the question was where to place rape in the hierarchy of war crimes.” After that she returned to Zagreb and covered every person connected to the issue of the crime of rape—social workers, psychologists, the gamut.

She needed to raise funds to continue the project. The big foundations would not give her any money. It became clear that she needed to go back to follow the women in more depth. As there was no money, the women decided to own the film themselves.

They went with Mandy to The Hague, the seat of the International Court of Justice, to present their testimony on what survivors needed in order to feel comfortable about speaking out against the men who had raped and tortured them. Judge Richard Goldstone, (a South African) set up a gender commission which treated women’s issues in war with extra sensitivity and care.

It was through these women’s testimony that the law was rewritten. At the same time, other women were beginning to speak out—like the Korean “comfort” women who had been raped by the Japanese during World War II. The film premiered at the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in 1996 and won an award.

Aside from getting two Emmys, Mandy Jacobson was honoured by the South African Consul, Sheila Sisulu, as an outstanding South African at ceremonies held in New York in November 1998.

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Nusreta Sivac



Jadranka Cigelj