

MY UNCLE TUDOR

“The film continues after the credits”

The documentary selection process for children’s film festivals is a tricky task, with programmers debating about what is a documentary “for children” and which documentaries about childhood experiences are suitable for young audiences. These questions all faded when Dimitris Spyrou and the Olympia Festival selection team watched Olga Luconvicova’s short documentary *MY UNCLE TUDOR* (Golden Bear @ the Berlinale, EFA Award for Best Short).

A young woman is revisiting her family home in a rural setting in Moldova and confronts her uncle who had sexually abused her as a child. That child, now a young woman, is the filmmaker herself. Olga Luconvicova describes *MY UNCLE TUDOR* as “a Moldovan poetic film which helped me disclose my trauma and gain international recognition” – and she’s right! But how could the Festival bring this marvellous but harsh film to its audience without further harm being done?

It was decided to accompany the

screening with other activities, that would use the film itself to launch and extend a social discussion on the issues of sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape culture, internationally codified as “#MeToo”. The Greek society recently has had its own version of public debate on the issue, in which former sailing champion, two-time Olympic winner and now psychologist Sofia Bekatorou played a leading role, after revealing a rape she suffered at the age of 21, back in 1998, where a senior Hellenic Sailing Federation official was the culprit.

The Festival collaborated with Mrs Bekatorou and filmmaker Vania Turner, who is currently making a documentary on this subject. A roundtable discussion was prepared on the issues of abuse of children by adults, which – as we realised during the process – should not be thought as limited to sexual abuse.

The Festival, promoting the art of cinema, made Luconvicova’s film the starting point for the discussion. Va-



nia Turner, who as a filmmaker has had the chilling experience of documenting sexual violence in African countries, made an in-depth discussion with Olga Luconvicova on the emancipatory possibilities of filmmaking. This led to an online debate with a selection of specialists who have consistently worked on the issue: investigative journalist Mariniki Alevizopoulou, psychiatrist Yorgos Nikolaidis, with an extensive activist record on the protection of children from sexual exploitation, Alexandra Koronaïou, Professor of Sociology of Panteion Social & Political Sciences University, filmmaker Vania Turner, Elena Rapti, member of the Hellenic Parliament and Dr. Margarita Gerouki, researcher at the Finnish Jyväskylä

University. Highlighting different aspects of the issue, the participants presented an alarming reality in a very constructive way.

Furthermore there was a workshop for teachers, based on Dr. Gerouki’s research and expertise. Overall, this has been a successful case of using the art of cinema to raise social awareness.

Here you’ll find a transcription of the talk that Vania Turner had with director Olga Luconvicova, offering insights into an exceptional piece of cinematic art that stands out not only for its topical focus but also for its delicate and well-thought narrative framework and approach.



Olga Lucovnicova about MY UNCLE TUDOR

After 20 years of silence, the filmmaker travels back to the house of her great-grandparents, where she passed through harmful events that left a deep imprint on her memory forever. The long-awaited family gathering runs counter to her attempts to overcome the past. MY UNCLE TUDOR is a personal story that highlights all those personal stories that were never resolved.

Olga Lucovnicova: The film is a poetic journey into my childhood, taking me back to the house of my great-grandparents in Moldova. Many beautiful memories are related to that house, but it's also the place where something bad happened which had a lasting impact on me. After twenty years of silence, I decided to go back to confront my childhood fears and the person who caused them. I hope the film encourages people to speak up, as I realised that remaining silent only empowers evil. In the film, I used spiders as a symbol of the family's reluctance to acknowledge the truth. All family members know that spiders are there but choose to ignore them.

What kind of cinematic language was required to transcend these feelings?

Lucovnicova: Moldovan cinema was quite known in the 1960s for its poetic cinema, speaking to us through symbols and metaphors rather than strictly depicting reality. The house it-



self has a lot to tell about my feelings as a child. At first, it looks like a beautiful summer house bathing in warm sunlight, before transforming into an old house in which cold colours and shabby furniture abound. One

important element are the white curtains through which I filmed many of the scenes. I always knew I would use them in the film, as they were deeply imprinted on my memory. During the shooting process, I went through an inner journey, discovering myself as a filmmaker.

Throughout the film, we witness the confrontation with your uncle.

Lucovnicova: During the 10 days of filming I noticed my uncle sitting alone in one of the many chairs in the garden for hours. I thought may-

be he was analysing his past and had something important to tell me at this stage of his life. So I approached him; having my recorder and camera with me helped me to hide my emotions and remain patient. Without that, I wouldn't have had the courage.

Did the conversation strengthen you to carry on?

Lucovnicova: I realised that even though I couldn't go back in time to change the past, I could help others by sharing my story. During these two hours of conversation I took the chance to ask him the questions that have been haunting me for decades.

How did you feel at that moment? Like the girl who once went through all this, or like a filmmaker on the job?

Lucovnicova: The questions I asked came from Olga, looking back upon that bad experience from the past. However, I could never have been that patient and calm if I hadn't assumed the identity of Olga the filmmaker, preventing me from getting carried away by my emotions.

You seem to have strong bonds with your family members. Did you face any ethical dilemmas throughout the process?



Lucovnicova: Shooting the film was indeed a tough decision. Those people are still around – for them the film continues after the credits. But as soon as I realised that I wasn't the only in the family who had suffered from my uncle, I made up my mind. What if we saw even more children suffering due to my silence? By sharing my story, I could at least protect them from potential harm. This was my way of dealing with this reality. However, I decided not to have the film being screened in Moldova to protect the identity of the family members.

Do you think there can be healing and reconciliation through the film?

Lucovnicova: For me, family is an environment where you can talk honestly. It was very toxic for me not to be able to tell the truth about what I had experienced. Although in the film I said that I wouldn't forgive my uncle, I think by now I managed to forgive him in real life.

What does this concept of forgiveness mean to you?

Lucovnicova: All in all, this film has been like an act of forgiveness. I put the blame not only on my uncle, but also on my family and myself; I can't hold just one person accountable for what happened, as all the time



nobody confronted him with his bad deeds. My uncle was a great father and husband, but he had a dual personality which went unnoticed for many years. Family is supposed to be the safest possible place for children, but it is not always like that. I've always discussed everything with my parents – they truly are my best friends – but I never told them about what had happened when I was nine years old as back then I didn't understand something wrong was going on. I believe it is extremely important for parents to explain to their children what abuse is and to teach them to confront even their closest relatives.

For which your film could be helpful.

Lucovnicova: I believe in the power of cinema; my conversations with family

members didn't help me as much as making the film did. What I intend to do in the future is write a methodology of how to use films as a therapeutic tool to get over your negative experiences.

You think the general approach has changed since your days of childhood?

Lucovnicova: Definitely. Back then, my uncle wouldn't have been arrested even if my case had been reported. Nowadays, making a child get undressed might already be classified as an act of abuse. On the other hand, we are witnessing an increase in the rates of abuse, while nobody is speaking up due to the fear of being labelled by others. Conducting my research for the film, I found out

that the cases of boys being abused are disclosed even less than those of girls. Boys are scared of being labeled not only as victims but also as gay. It is of crucial importance to change this false perception in our society.

So all is in the hands of the young generation of today?

Lucovnicova: I admire this new generation that is more fearless compared to our grandparents. I'd advise everyone to speak up and be courageous, knowing that your story matters.

© Olympia Film Festival
 Transcription by Pelin Su Özdoğan
 Intro by Pantelis Panteloglou