

# MILLOSHEVIQ ON TRIAL - A DOCUMENTARY FILM

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

On Tuesday, June 17, I attended a showing at the American Film Institute's Silverdocs festival of documentary cinema, in Silver Spring, Md., of the film *Milosevic on Trial*. The work is a 2007 Danish production by director Michael Christopherson.

As usual, when the film began, I had no idea what to expect. In the Satanic world created by Serbian imperialism, and the parallel world of European indifference to it, in which those who remain indifferent are complicit in Satan's crimes, and the glorious universe of human resistance to Satan, the images chosen to appear on a movie screen are almost never predictable. And not least in all of this, the American audience has become cynical about Millosheviq and his fate.

But the drama of this Danish documentary begins not with the sneers of the Serbian troglodyte, but with the face of Shyhrete Berisha, a Kosovar woman, as she delivered testimony on July 10, 2002, at the Hague International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), about the chetnik assault on her family at a café in Suharekë (Theranda).

I watched her face as she said, "I solemnly declare that I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth... My name is Shyhrete Berisha." And each word struck my heart like a razor-sharp arrow-point.

Shyhrete Berisha is a minor figure in the documentary film. Most attention is given to Millosheviq himself, the prosecutor Geoffrey Nice, the American diplomat William Walker who went to Raçak, the chetnik terrorist Dragan Vasilkoviq who changed his testimony at the ICTY, apparently after being threatened by his Serbian brethren, the chetnik Milan Babic who told the truth but then committed suicide, and to a clip from the infamous video of the chetnik unit called the Skorpions executing Bosniaks from Srebrenica. The documentary also reveals the shock in Beograd over the undeniable actions of the Skorpions, with the lying face of Vojislav Koshtunica as he promises to bring the chetniks, whose guilt he shares, to justice. In a class similar to that of Koshtunica, crazy Carla Del Ponte appears. (The video *The Skorpions* - not for those with weak stomachs - will soon be posted on the websites of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, mainly at [www.islamicpluralism.eu](http://www.islamicpluralism.eu), along with valuable documentaries on the 1999 massacre by the chetniks at Korenica near Gjakova, and on the murder of two young men, Arben Xheladinaj and Mon Balaj, by the United Nations police at the demonstration by the Vetëvendosje Self-Determination movement, in Prishtina in 2007.)

In Silver Spring, watching *Milosevic on Trial*, here and there the audience snickered, but then it was silent.

The ICTY personnel, and the makers of the documentary, have never learned to pronounce the names of the Balkan protagonists, of the monsters no less than of the victims. Perhaps, in the end, the names do not matter for them, or even the



Serbian dictator, Slobodan Milosevic, during his unfinished trial in The Hague

images, but only the opportunity for them to posture.

Which returns me to thoughts of Del Ponte, who revealed her irresponsibility and imbalance with her recent hallucinated claim that the Kosova Liberation Army was involved in alleged commerce in human organs. I would specify, first, that the ICTY denied it had ever seen evidence of such activities; second, that as a U.S. government consultant and as a journalist I have thoroughly investigated what may best be described as "urban legends" about organ trafficking around the world, and third, that the idea that Albania in 1999, with its needy medical system, could sustain extensive organ transfer operations, even under normal and acceptable practice, is ridiculous.

In 2004, the World Health Organization made the revealing statement, "There are no reliable data on organ trafficking - or indeed transplantation activity in general - but it is widely believed to be on the increase." Real journalists and serious authorities avoid the term "widely believed," and it is silly to think that the WHO could not investigate and document such allegations. It is deeply unfortunate that the legacy of the ICTY will be grotesquely marred by the bizarre allegations of Del Ponte.

But I remain concerned with Shyhrete Berisha, above all. In an article published in *The Weekly Standard* of August 6, 2001, I recalled how I first heard in June 2000 of the massacre of the Berishas, a Kosovar extended family, some 14 months after it happened. A colleague and friend, Shpresa Mulliqi, asked me to polish a rough English translation of her long interview with Shyhrete Berisha for publication in a bilingual magazine, *Kombi (The Nation)*. Shyhrete Berisha had survived the events that left at least 22 of her relatives dead, and had escaped from a truck that was carrying the corpses away.

Subsequently, those very corpses played a role in the full exposure of the Belgrade regime's crimes when, in April 1999, a transport container loaded with dead Albanians surfaced in the Danube river. A number of the bodies were

those of children; at least four of them were later shown by DNA matching to be murdered Berisha offspring. Serbian opposition journalists tracked the measures taken to conceal this grim evidence not only to the offices of top Serb security bosses but to Millosheviq himself. The documentary *Milosevic on Trial* includes brief notice of this development.

Shyhrete Berisha's account of the killings and their aftermath conveyed with horrible immediacy the cost of Millosheviq's wars. The summary that follows is based on her original, full testimony.

In December 1999, the Berisha family provoked the anger of the Serb authorities by renting a house in Suharekë to representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The latter had come to Kosova to verify "confidence-building measures" intended to assist a peaceful resolution of the fighting between the Serb rulers of the territory and the KLA. After only three months, the OSCE pulled out. When NATO began bombing Serbia on March 24, 1999, the Berishas knew they were in danger. The women gathered up their children—four of them under 2 years old—and took them to stay with Shyhrete's brother-in-law, Faton.

On March 25, Serb troops showed up at Faton Berisha's house with an armored vehicle. They shouted demands like, "Give us the money the Americans gave you or we're going to kill all of you!" They robbed the Albanians of all their money, whereupon 25 family members fled to the house of an uncle.

The next morning, a crowd in paramilitary and police uniforms approached this house. The Berishas knew almost all of the Serbs by sight; most were civilians who apparently had donned uniforms only that day. One of them spoke Albanian and demanded that one of the younger men, Bujar Berisha, surrender himself. As soon as Bujar appeared, they shot him dead.

All the Albanians were driven out into the street. The men were separated from the group, and the Serbs methodically executed them

on the spot. When Shyhrete Berisha's husband Nexhat was killed, she recalled her daughter Majlinda screaming, "Oh father!"—a scream she believed the whole town must have heard. Some of the women were shot down alongside their men.

The rest of the women told the children to scatter. Shyhrete staggered, dazed, into the center of the town, where she saw a crowd at a restaurant and recognized among them some of her cousins. But police and paramilitaries arrived on the scene and ordered all Berisha family members into the restaurant, where the Serbs began firing machine guns into the group.

Shyhrete recalled every detail of this nightmare. Infants were killed before their parents' eyes. "I saw my [son] Redon," she remembered. "I said to myself, in two months, he would have been two years old. He...died. They shot him in the head....Ismet [aged 2] died." She herself was shot and injured by grenades.

After agonizing hours, Shyhrete and at least 40 dead and half-dead people were thrown into a truck. Her son Altin remained alive, but when his body was moved the Serbs realized he was breathing and killed him. She said that in the truck, "we were covered by the lifeless bodies of our children." In the tangle, Shyhrete heard a whisper from her uncle's wife, Vjollca, who had feigned death with one of her sons, Gramos. The women disagreed about what they should do. Vjollca said they should wait until they were buried and then try to claw their way out. Shyhrete said no, Gramos would be suffocated; they should jump out of the truck.

Shyhrete stuck her head out the back of the truck to see if they were being followed by police, and the wind blew her out. She struck her head and hung senseless by a foot while the truck dragged her. Then she fell free and lay unconscious on the highway. Some people from a nearby village saw her and, thinking she was dead or that it would be dangerous to approach her, left her there, until two villagers decided they should at least remove the body from the road.

When she was found to be alive, she was given first aid, then treated at a KLA field hospital, but Serbs attacked the hospital. She fled to a house in the mountains, but the Serbs began bombing the area. She tried to cross the border to Albania but was turned back by Serbian police, who again separated men and boys from the group and killed them. Finally escaping to Albania, she was found by an American missionary, Rufus Dawkins, who had stayed in her house when it was rented by the OSCE. "Mr. Rufus" took charge of her case, secured treatment for her wounds, and arranged for her return to Kosova after NATO forces entered the territory.

Later Shyhrete Berisha learned that Vjollca and Gramos had jumped from the truck and lived. But she had lost her entire immediate family in the massacre. Her husband Nexhat's body was located and buried; as noted, the corpses of her four children were among those found in the container in the Danube.

I recall that when Shpresa Mulliqi and I prepared Shyhrete Berisha's narrative for publication in Kosova, the document was considered controversial. The international authorities in Kosova believed such materials to be harmful to relations between Albanians and Serbs, and they disliked the journal *Kombi* for its independence. But the Berisha massacre was added to the original indictment on June 29, 2001, the day after Millosheviq was arrested.

Facts like these require no elaboration. They speak for themselves. Still, it was gratifying to see the narrative of Shyhrete Berisha gain the status of evidence at the ICTY, and to see her in the film at Silverdocs.

*Milosevic on Trial* is not a great work of documentary film, but I left the performance haltingly and quietly, my emotions shut down, with my thoughts filled with the face of Shyhrete Berisha. Suddenly I was inhabited by utter calm. Suddenly I had no anxieties about my future; suddenly I knew with absolute certainty the place God had made for me in the world, the place that will always be meaningful for me, the moment I will remember until my death as the defining experience in my life: that time when I contributed my small share to recording the story of Shyhrete Berisha and her family.

Things that matter, that we should not forget, include the face, and the voice, of our mother and sister - a mother and sister of all humanity that claims or aspires to morality, my hero, Shyhrete Berisha. Our hero, like Shota Galica and Marie Shllaku, but, by the grace of God, a survivor. She feigned death, but she lived to testify against the servant of Satan. And in our memory, she will never die. As for her relatives, who like her were Muslim, let us recall the ayat of Qur'an, 2:154, "Do not say that those slain in the cause of God are dead; they are alive, but you are not aware of them." Shyhrete Berisha's face and voice are proof that we live in God's world, not a world oppressed by Satan. For me, they are all that matters: they, and the scream the whole world should have heard.