

INTERVIEW WITH ANJA SALOMONOWITZ FOR "UNIQUE"  
BY ANDREAS FILIPOVIC

**What is the background to your film?**

The screenplay for the film was produced in cooperation with LEFÖ. It is Austria's only officially recognised organisation that works with those who have suffered through trafficking in women. That means that LEFÖ has an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior whereby when the police have the feeling that

a woman in pre-deportation arrest might have been affected by trafficking in women, they call a LEFÖ contact person who then visits the prison to talk to the woman. There is a definition of when "women have been trafficked", special criteria: that they have come to a country because of false promises where they

have then been exploited and where the legal situation also leave no leeway. If the women want to cooperate they receive legal and psychological help. It was very important for me to work together with LEFÖ so that they can stand behind and confirm it.

**Are the stories real?**

It was agreed that the women should not be able to be identified. That's why there are no names, no countries, no addresses etc., nothing. The stories themselves are sometimes mixed together.

But it deals with real, exemplary narratives from specific areas in which trafficking in women takes place such as where women are sold into prostitution or, for example, where they have to work, effectively as slaves, in diplomatic households. Or that they are sold into marriage, that happens too, that a husband your husband exploits you. So they are real and come from interviews with the affected women.

**But in the film they're told by someone other than those affected?**

When, for example, a customs officer comes into a story I thought, I want to have the story told by a customs officer. The same happened with the woman diplomat. That's why we began to research in these areas, to look and see if there were people who were prepared, on the one hand, to take part, to take it on for very little money, to learn the text by heart etc. To engage with it, because there is an intensive confrontation involved which is what it is about, somehow, when they learn this text. And very simply: those who can do it and are "filmic" too, so to say. So I began to dig into the diplomatic world. I got to know Gertrud Tauchhammer, who is in the film now, really quite early. I went to receptions with her, found out how she lives, how everything works. That's how I researched the everyday life of those who appear in the film and how that, in turn, went into the screenplay.

**but it must have been very difficult with the customs officer, for example, to find someone who was prepared to do it and also then also be able to shoot in his actual workplace? this is the front line, exactly here, probably more strongly than in other milieus.**

It was indeed very difficult. But it was also like that with the diplomat, because she is basically speaking about her own community and saying, more or less, "things like this happen in diplomatic households". I asked if she was sure she wanted to get involved in an adventure like this, that she could

easily make enemies and she said, "After a certain age you know what you want". And she is doing it now. But she is very aware what it means for her.

**For a representational figure she reveals quite a lot of her private life.**

She does indeed. I told the people that what I also wanted was to show something of them. They became actors/actresses in the sense that they also play themselves, having to allow their own lives to become part of the film. It was one of the conditions they had to accept.

**What is the relationship of documentary to fiction in the film then?**

I was certainly concerned with questioning prevalent documentary methods. Does the victim always have to tell their own story? On the other hand, can someone else recite the story but nevertheless still communicate something of the person? In this case it is only in the images. Is it a documentary if someone learns a text by heart, recites it and I watch him at the time he is occupied with it? I'm concerned with this grey area.

**Does that mean that you have three levels here too? What is being documented are the stories that are being told, the "actors/actresses" in their surroundings and the meeting of these two levels.**

Exactly. The trick we wanted to pull off was that you had the feeling you were seeing two films at the same time. There is the film on the screen, the life of a person who is real and in their daily surroundings, and in front of the screen or in your head there is another story you can only imagine, like when you have something read to you. Together they produce a third, of course.

And I would also like to say that it very much concerns "invisibility" that comes from the fact that they are denied the right to legalisation, that means because they have no rights and cannot defend themselves and are open to extortion. So the stories are still amongst us and around us but we don't pay them any attention, we don't have to, because our world doesn't compel us to pay attention to them. You don't give a damn about what the old person sitting next to you in the tram has experienced. That they simply buzz around. I wanted to have that feeling in the film. That visibility is denied to them, they are so oppressed by society that you don't even see them.