



DAY FOR NIGHT
PRODUCTIONS

DESPOT HOUSEWIVES

a documentary series by

Joël Soler

(5x52')



DESPOT HOUSEWIVES

THE PIONEER DOCUMENTARY SERIES ABOUT DICTATORS' WIVES

The intermingled destinies of autocrats' or bloodstained despots' wives, divided into five big families, five episodes that combine love, glory and terror.

THE KLEPTO-LADIES
THE RED EMPRESSES
THE COOKS OF TERROR
THE ILLUSIONISTS
THE CROWNLESS QUEENS

Many films have shown dictatorial regimes all over the world, but only few films show the role played by these despots' spouses. Through an original angle, one of the goals of this documentary series is to better understand the unknown historical realities of our contemporary world.

For the first time, the autocrats' or bloodstained despots' wives, have accepted to participate in a documentary series to show us their new lives. The roles and responsibilities of these "despots' wives" are highlighted. Showing the agitated itineraries of the first ladies in the Arabic revolutions as a counterpoint, this original documentary series took five years to produce.

Despot Housewives is a pioneering reference, never before produced, about dictators' wives and the regimes incarnated by them and their families. The five episodes aim at deciphering history, and allow for a close investigation, seen through the prism of the autocrats' spouses for the first time, with the intention of bringing a new point of view to the matter, and of better understanding what really happened.

Each episode is built in the same way:

- **A main character:** personifying a dictators' wife family. We will discover at the introduction of the film her new life, her universe, and what made her strong in her times of glory.
- The elements of **glory and decadence for the three decades or generations of women** will be highlighted. For example: "the years 70-80" "the years 1990-2000" "the new millennium". The abuses and the fall linked to the main character are presented in parallel with the other women of her generation.
- The conclusion questions the notions of **justice and impunity**. How do these women, from all generations, face the tribunals after their husband's fall? How can many among them escape justice?
With the intention of giving coherence to the subject and the extension of the film, certain elements of information are recurring for each woman.
- A brief description (**Identity Card**) of the regimes they belonged to, introduced in a factual structure: the geographic position of the country, the important dates and elements linked to the regime and their husband: the glory, the drift, the number of victims, one or two statistics about the country under the regime.
- **The voice of the director** intervenes (voice-over) in the film in two different ways. He talks to the main characters. He gives for each woman a point of view about the situation as it was lived during the shooting of the documentary series or during the different meetings he had with them.
- **A "classic narration"** accompanies a deciphering of historical facts.
- **A contradictory version**, acquaintances (family members and friends) give another aspect to the character. Opponents (victims of the regime and lawyers) give us a clear view on the facts.
- **Archives** are used as historical accounts. They attest to the facts. These archives offer a context to the atrocities perpetrated by the worst regimes of the modern world.

EPISODE 1. THE KLEPTO-LADIES

THE GREAT SPENDTHRIFTS

Meet the first ladies that squandered most of their state coffers or cast a favorable light on their husbands, megalomaniac emperors who then became the « King of Thieves ». Often compared to Marie Antoinette, the crazy expenses of their clan centered people's hatred on them and hurried their husband's fall.

1970-1990 GENERATION:

Imelda Marcos, Philippines
(800 civil & criminal lawsuits)
Central Character



Michèle Duvalier, Haïti
(accusée d'avoir détourné la somme de
21 millions de \$)



Bokassa spouses

Catherine Bokassa, Central Africa
Ex Empress (accused of having
betrayed her husband before his fall
and taken a huge part of his fortune)



Marie Reine Hassen, Central Africa
married against her will after spending
two years in prison. She is currently
candidate for the Central Africa
Presidential Election of 2015



1990 GENERATION:

Bobi Mobutu, Zaire her twin Kosia



2000-2010 GENERATION:

Leila Ben Ali, Tunisia
(sentenced to 35 years of prison in
absentia)



EPISODE 2. THE RED EMPRESSES

DOCTRINARIANS INSPIRED BY MARXISM

Number two « women » of the government, they supported an ideal society which generated monstrous slaughters. Far from the glittering and glamorous world, they imposed their convictions. They have been called « Black Spider », « the Belgrade Witch », « the Purple Witch », « the Bloodstained Lady »

FROM POST WAR TO THE FALL OF THE
BERLIN WALL:

Nexhmije Hoxha, Albania
(5 years in prison)
Central Character



HISTORICAL REFERENCE
Madame *Mao*, China
(sentenced to death)



Margot Honecker, East Germany
(exil)



Elena Ceausescu, Romania
(shot dead)



1990 GENERATION
Mira Milosevic, Serbia
(international arrest Warrant)



2000-2010 GENERATION
Simone Gbagbo, Ivory Coast
(Currently incarcerated in her own
country, the International Criminal Court
has made an extradition request)



EPISODE 3. THE COOKS OF TERROR

THE BRAINS IN THE SHADOW

Housewives, cooks or just nurses, most of them didn't have an education. They were very reserved First Ladies. After the fall of their husbands, many of them were pushed into the limelight against their will. International arrest warrants, prisons, suicides: they had a tragic fate. Most of them were accused of playing an occult part in the atrocities that happened in their country's history.

1970-1990 GENERATION:

Agathe Habyarimana, Rwanda
(International Arrest Warrant for
Genocide)
Central Character



HISTORICAL REFERENCE

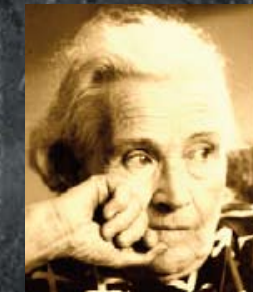
Eva Braun, Germany
(suicide)



Sajida Hussein, Iraq
(International arrest warrant and number
16 on the most wanted Iraqis list)



Rachèle Mussolini, Italy
(12 years of prison and house arrest)



Mea (Mrs. Pol Pot), Cambodia



2000-2010 GENERATION

Safya Gaddafi Lybia
(exile)



EPISODE 4. THE ILLUSIONISTS

AMBASSADORS OF CHARM SERVING TERROR

Beautiful, cultivated, their glamour makes us forget the atrocities committed by their husbands' regime. They don't hesitate to travel the world to successfully restore their country's reputation. They turn out to be the most ambitious First Ladies. Many of them wanted their husband's seat. One will become President, the other Prime Minister.

HISTORICAL REFERENCE

Evita Perón, Argentina



Isabel Perón, Argentina
(international arrest Warrant)



Khaleda Zia, Bangladesh
(2 years in prison for corruption)



1990- 2000 GENERATION

Jewel Taylor, Liberia
(international sanctions)
Elected Senator after her husband arrest by the International Criminal Court, she plans to become President
Central Character



2000-2010 GENERATION

Asma Al Assad, Syria
(international sanctions)



EPISODE 5. THE CROWNLESS QUEENS

ROYAL HIGHNESSESS

They embodied the real Queen Consort. They were wives « at the service of power » and not « powerful » women. They successfully conducted commitments in the social field that strengthened their husband's totalitarian regime. Most of them used their influence to keep their family at the head of the State and perpetuate a dynasty.

1940-1970 GENERATION
Carmen Franco, Spain



2000-2010 GENERATION
Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt



1970-1980 GENERATION
Lucia Pinochet, Chile
(Guilty of fraud)
Central Character



REFERENCES

Castro Spouses

Dalia Soto del Valle (Fidel Castro)

Vilma Espin (Raoul Castro)



DESPOT HOUSEWIVES : DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This project is without any doubt inspired by my first documentary "Uncle Saddam" shot in 2000 in Baghdad within Saddam Hussein's circle. It's at that precise moment that I noticed how extremely sensitive a subject evoking the wife of a dictator was. It was almost impossible to mention the first lady of Iraq, Sajida Hussein's name. Sajida's brother and father had played a leading political role in Iraq. Her sister had strengthened links between these two families by marrying Saddam's half brother. Even if she played no political role, Sajida Hussein ended up on the list of the world's "most wanted" after the fall of her husband. A taboo topic, I was discovering the Pandora's box of dictatorial regimes.

During my successive documentaries my suspicion was confirmed. How can we understand Osama Bin Laden's or Adolf Hitler's trajectory, without understanding the privileged place or the influence played by their spouses and their families?

The theme of dictators' wives intrigued me. My initial questioning was to understand how a woman, a mother who gives birth, could tolerate to see - and even sometimes trigger - so much death and terror. The reason why I wanted to make this documentary series is that the dictator's spouses are far from being simple "trophy wives". The Arabic revolutions have confirmed the influence of these first ladies. The importance of developing this subject, never before been dealt with, was evident to me.

While many of them aspire to come back at the center of the political stage, it seems important to me to analyze the reasons of their popularity and actual influence. Throughout generations, the similar fates of these women confirm that history repeats itself. The destinies of these women continue to have an echo today. Each "family" depicted finds a representative in the contemporary dictatorial regimes.

The study of judicial itineraries for these dictators' wives has been one of the many angles of my research. Imelda Marcos and Lucia Pinochet have many reasons to be happy: all the legal procedures against them have failed. The nineties witnessed the blocking of many bank accounts in Switzerland but also Bokassa's (Central Africa) amnesty and his wife official pardon, the end of judicial proceedings against Duvalier (Haiti) and his wife, Honecker's (East Germany) release after only one year of detention and the end of judicial proceedings against his wife Margot Honecker, former minister of education, and finally the choice to leave Mrs. Mobutu (Congo/Zaire) alone.

Given the vulnerability of the authorities, the years 2000 saw the establishment of a new world order thanks to the creation of the International Criminal Court by the United Nations. The generation 1990-2000 was the target of the International Criminal Court: Slobodan Milosevic (Serbia), Charles Taylor (Liberia). Jewel Taylor, ex-first wife of Liberia, is under international sanctions, but her status as a senator gives her parliamentary immunity. Mira Milosevic, nicknamed "the Belgrade red witch" is under an international arrest warrant, her Russian exile allows her to defy the Serbian justice. Ranging from extradition agreements, to the denying of any official role, parliamentary immunity, or divorce... each episode reveals the last resources these women had in order to escape justice.

The families of the victims only have one weapon against impunity: They refuse to forget, so history won't repeat itself. I'm convinced that if these women have agreed to participate in this film it is because they want to clear their moral conscience. As witnesses of a beneficial impunity for these women, everyone will have the opportunity to be judge and jury.

Joel Soler

JOEL SOLER'S FILMOGRAPHY

2009 Director and Producer "Uncle Hitler"

"A documentary about the descendants of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun"
Broadcasted in 15 countries. Distribution TVF, London.

2004 Director and Producer "Bin Laden Dynasty of Terror"

"Encounter with the family and the personal acquaintances of the most wanted man in the world just after 9/11"
Broadcasted in 15 countries: ZDF (Germany), RAI Uno (Italy), ABC (Australia), TV3 (New Zealand), Channel 4 (Finland), TV2 (Denmark), VRT (Belgium).
Produced with the support of the American foundation, The Fund of Investigative Journalism.

2001 Director and Producer "Uncle Saddam"

"An original document about the private life of Saddam Hussein when he was still the president of twenty million Iraqis. Never before seen footage, exclusive interviews, and sequences within his circle of close acquaintances, show Saddam Hussein beyond all we can imagine."

Out for the first time in 2001 in Los Angeles (Laemmle Theatre), for the official competition at the Academy Awards under the documentary category.

Highest ratings for HBO/Cinemax for non-fiction in 2002. Broadcasted in 42 countries: ABC (USA), HBO/Cinemax (USA), TF1 (France), Channel 4 (United Kingdom), ZDF (Germany), RAI Uno (Italy), CBC (Canada), ABC (Australia), TV3 (New Zealand), Channel 4 (Finland), TV2 (Denmark), VRT (Belgium), Antenna 3 (Spain), ORF (Austria), RTL (Hungary), TVB (Hong Kong), TBS (Japan), MBC (Middle-East), Orbit TV (Saudi Arabia), Telefe (Argentina) SFDRS (Switzerland).

Official selections for film festivals:

Amnesty International Film Festival, United Nations Film Festival, Hot Spring Film Festival, Denver International Film Festival, Vancouver Film Festival, Bangkok Film Festival, Florida International Film Festival, Amsterdam Film Festival, Jerusalem Film Festival, Outfest Los Angeles (member du jury)

Price of best documentary film:

Northampton Film Festival, New Orleans Film Festival, Mexico Film Festival, Rai Uno Television.

Other Tv experience:

1994-1995 Chronicler for "Tout Paris", PARIS PREMIÈRE.

1995 Journalist (à l'antenne), "Mag 5", LA CINQUIÈME.

1999-2000 Journalist/Correspondent freelance in Los Angeles.

2001-2005 Speaker at CNN, MSNBC, ABC Prime Time.

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Ventes Internationales

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