



# Grozny Blues

A film by Nicola Bellucci  
written by Nicola Bellucci & Lucia Sgueglia

Switzerland 2015, 104 min, documentary, DCP  
OV: Russian, Chechen with English, German, and French subtitles

Produced by Frank Matter, soap factory GmbH

Contact:

Loredana-Nastassja Fernández, soap factory GmbH, Hafenstrasse 25, Postfach,  
CH-4019 Basel - [film@soapfactory.ch](mailto:film@soapfactory.ch) - +41-61-6320050 - [www.soapfactory.ch](http://www.soapfactory.ch)  
[www.facebook.com/soapfactoryfilms](https://www.facebook.com/soapfactoryfilms)

## CONTENT

I. Synopsis.....	3
II. Ordinary Heroines - On Nicola Bellucci's «Grozny Blues».....	4
III. Historical Background.....	6
IV. Press Quotes.....	9
V. Crew.....	11
VI. Bio-/Filmographies Director & Producer.....	14
VII. Festivals & Awards.....	16
VIII. Contact.....	17

## I. SYNOPSIS

«Grozny Blues» follows a handful of people around Grozny, the capital of war-torn Chechnya where daily life is defined by political repression, constricting customs, forced Islamification and the failure to come to terms with recent history. The film revolves around four women who have been fighting for human rights under worsening conditions for many years but get more and more disillusioned with the situation in Putin's Russia. The building where they work is also home to a Blues Club that is frequented by a group of young people. Having only vague memories of the Chechen wars in the 90s, they try to make sense of the strange things that are happening in their country. In linking the personal and intimate to the political, Nicola Bellucci shows in a dramatic and yet very poetic way what it means to live in a divided society that navigates a no-man's land between war and peace, repression and freedom, archaic traditions and modern life.

## WITH

Zainap Gashaeva  
Zarman Makhadzieva  
Taisa Titiyeva  
Taita Yunusova  
Ruslan Lalayev  
Musa Sadulayev  
Taisa Kantayeva  
Timur Tumgoyev  
Vakhid Turayev & Arubika Gayeva  
Zaurbek Dataev  
Malik Goldenberg  
Kazbek Hatsaev  
Taisa Kantayeva  
Amina  
Rada

and many others

## II. ORDINARY HEROINES – ON NICOLA BELLUCCI’S «GROZNY BLUES»

*An essay by Irena Brežná*

Creating a nation of terrorists out of a people is startlingly easy. The only thing needed is a war of information lifted from the old KGB manual, a few lunatics with explosive vests and chapters from the Koran, and the complacency, the apathy of the global public. Following this recipe, Russia bombed Chechnya into submission for over a decade, erected concentration camps, abducted, tortured, and executed ten thousand men, women, elderly, and children without even sanctions being imposed, without the existence of a Chechen war crimes tribunal – and which will likely never exist.

“Restoring constitutional order” Vladimir Putin declared, calling his war crimes “anti-terrorist operations”.

In the 1960s Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago* “If there were a people in the gulag who always kept their pride, it was the Chechens”. Today we encounter them throughout Europe as traumatized asylum seekers. And it is still vaguely insinuated that Chechens are terrorists. Didn’t “Allahu Akbar!” shouting fanatics take an entire movie theater hostage in Moscow a few years ago and a school in Beslan? The radicalization of the armed Chechen resistance prospered from the bombed-out schools, and these bearded Salafists were not inopportune for the empire. That Russia has held an entire people hostage since it was first brutally colonized in the nineteenth-century, that Stalin deported it to the central Asian deserts and steppes, and that state terrorism has reigned in the North Caucasus region since December 1994, are all things people are not interested in acknowledging. Because then you would have to start thinking about and dealing with it.

Nicola Bellucci’s film *Grozny Blues* is astounding for its poetic approach and its depiction of the eerie normality of everyday Chechen life. We follow three human-rights activists, passionate and motivated to act, who resist the forgetting of the atrocities in a quiet and persistent way. These are unspectacularly strong women who expose themselves to the horrors and suffering of the families whose daughters or sons have disappeared. While driving at night in a car through Grozny they laugh heartily. Inside this little capsule they seem so protected in the midst of omnipresent and arbitrary danger, so small under the giant portraits of the tyrant in so-called liberated Grozny. Nicola Bellucci could have focused on the horrors, there are enough for a thousand films, but he shows those who have preserved their dignity and humanity. And he also gives space to the silence induced by fear. An eloquent silence.

When I travelled to Chechnya for the first time in early 1996 for a reporting assignment, in the middle of Yeltsin’s war, I consciously avoided the war’s victims and instead sought out the non-violent resistance. Earlier on television, I had seen women with large woolen headscarves who formed a human chain, holding hands together in an attempt to stop the Russian tanks from rolling toward Grozny. These were my heroines! In order to get past Russian checkpoints undetected and into the destroyed village of Sernovodsk, these female farmers tied the very same headscarf around my head.

Zainap Gashaeva was also there in the acrid smell of smoldering Sernovodsk. She was filming mothers in the burned mosque who were pressing the charred remains of their sons to their chests while cursing the Russian soldiers. Since that time, a deep friendship connects me to

Zainap. Undaunted, she keeps watch over the largest film and photo archive of human rights violations by the Russian army during both wars from 1994-97 and 1999 to 2008. This came about because this mother of four picked up her camera, which she hid under her skirt, and, putting her life on the line, rushed off to where the ethnic cleansings were happening. She was not alone; she had fellow activists. But instead of being commended now by her people for her preserving of the past, she had to escape four years ago as human-rights activist under threat, and was granted asylum in Switzerland. One of her companions is in exile in Belgium, while others hold out in Grozny. But for how much longer?

What every Chechen family knows – death, abduction, mutilation – does not have a place in the city of glass facades that has been resurrected out of the ashes. Grozny was completely destroyed on Putin's orders, who then financed its reconstruction. His understudy son and proconsul Ramzan Kadyrov orders the people to worship the Russian president in order to shore up his own power. Is there a worse indignity? The film allows us to sense this grief. And yet therein lies the resistance I have always admired so much in the Chechen people. Nicola Bellucci subtly shows how it lives on behind the bombastic facades.

Irena Brežná, author and expert on Chechnya, [www.brezna.ch](http://www.brezna.ch)

### **III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **The Chechen Archive**

The Chechen Archive (in Berne) collects audiovisual materials relating to the wars in Chechnya, which began in 1994. The initiator and main contributor of the current collection is human rights activist, Zainap Gashaeva. Materials received at the Chechen Archive are catalogued, digitized onto a long-term carrier and stored at a safe location. Having been hidden underground for many years in Chechnya, some videos required intensive restoration before they could be played and analyzed. One of the biggest challenges is the analysis of the materials which, having been filmed in a conflict context, are often chaotic and lacking in basic information necessary for human rights documentation. Where these facts can be extrapolated however, the information is recorded in a database accompanied by transcription and link to the relevant footage.

In addition to these recordings, the Chechen Archive also contains videos depicting scenes of historical importance. Most of the videos relate to the first war (1994-6) but the materials also continue to cover the period until 2005. They cannot be accessed on-line for security reasons but the Archive catalogue can be browsed and copies made on request for purposes of public or legal redress, or if requested by a relative of a victim of the conflict.

(Excerpt from the conference report “Memory, Truth and Justice in Chechnya”, copyright Shoma Chatterjee, Chechny project coordinator, Society for Threatened Peoples)

#### **First Chechen War**

The First Chechen War took place over a two-year period that lasted from 1994 to 1996, when Russian forces attempted to regain control over Chechnya, which had declared independence in November 1991. Despite overwhelming numerical superiority in men, weaponry, and air support, the Russian forces were unable to establish effective permanent control over the mountainous area due to numerous successful full-scale battles and insurgency raids. For three months, Russia lost more tanks (over 1,997 tanks) in Grozny than during the Battle of Berlin in 1945. The Budyonnovsk hospital hostage crisis in 1995 shocked the Russian public and led to international condemnation of the Chechen rebels.

In April 1996 the first democratically elected president of Chechnya, Dzhokhar Dudayev was killed by two laser guided missiles fired from a warplane which had an equipment of voice recognition and triangulation on Dudayev's position. American journalist Eric Margolis in his article "Stalin's Crimes Haunt the Sochi Games" writes:

Dzhokhar Dudayev, the moderate Chechen leader, was assassinated in April, 1996 by the Russian FSB thanks to technology reportedly supplied by the US National Security Agency. All the moderate Chechen leaders were assassinated, leaving only a handful of extreme militants. The US largely financed Yeltsin's war.

The widespread demoralization of the Russian forces in the area and a successful offensive to re-take Grozny by Chechen resistance forces led by Aslan Maskhadov prompted Russian President Boris Yeltsin to declare a ceasefire in 1996, and sign a peace treaty a year later that saw a withdrawal of Russian forces.

### **Inter-war period**

After the war, parliamentary and presidential elections took place in January 1997 in Chechnya and brought to power new President Aslan Maskhadov, chief of staff and prime minister in the Chechen coalition government, for a five-year term. Maskhadov sought to maintain Chechen sovereignty while pressing Moscow to help rebuild the republic, whose formal economy and infrastructure were virtually destroyed. Russia continued to send money for the rehabilitation of the republic; it also provided pensions and funds for schools and hospitals. Most of these funds were taken by Chechen authorities and divided between favored warlords. Nearly half a million people (40% of Chechnya's prewar population) had been internally displaced and lived in refugee camps or overcrowded villages. There was an economic downturn. Two Russian brigades were permanently stationed in Chechnya.

In lieu of the devastated economic structure, kidnapping emerged as the principal source of income countrywide, procuring over \$200 million during the three-year independence of the chaotic fledgling state, although victims were rarely killed. In 1998, 176 people were kidnapped, 90 of whom were released, according to official accounts. President Maskhadov started a major campaign against hostage-takers, and on October 25, 1998, Shadid Bargishev, Chechnya's top anti-kidnapping official, was killed in a remote-controlled car bombing. Bargishev's colleagues then insisted they would not be intimidated by the attack and would go ahead with their offensive. Political violence and religious extremism, blamed on "Wahhabism", was rife. In 1998, Grozny authorities declared a state of emergency. Tensions led to open clashes between the Chechen National Guard and Islamist militants, such as the July 1998 confrontation in Gudermes.

### **Second Chechen War**

The War of Dagestan began on August 7, 1999, during which the Islamic International Brigade (IIPB) began an unsuccessful incursion into the neighbouring Russian republic of Dagestan in favor of the Shura of Dagestan which sought independence from Russia. In September, a series of apartment bombs that killed around 300 people in several Russian cities, including Moscow, were blamed on the Chechen separatists. Some journalists contested the official explanation, instead blaming the Russian Secret Service for blowing up the buildings to initiate a new military campaign against Chechnya. In response to the bombings, a prolonged air campaign of retaliatory strikes against the Ichkerian regime and a ground offensive that began in October 1999 marked the beginning of the Second Chechen War. Much better organized and planned than the first Chechen War, the Russian military took control over most regions. The Russian forces used brutal force, killing 60 Chechen civilians during a mop-up operation in Aldy, Chechnya on February 5, 2000. After the re-capture of Grozny in February 2000, the Ichkerian regime fell apart.

Chechen rebels continued to fight Russian troops and conduct terrorist attacks. In October 2002, 40–50 Chechen rebels seized a Moscow theater and took about 900 civilians hostage. The crisis ended with a large death toll mostly due to an unknown aerosol pumped throughout the building by Russian special forces to incapacitate the people inside. In September 2004, separatist rebels occupied a school in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, demanding recognition of the independence of Chechnya and a Russian withdrawal. 1,100 people (including 777 children) were taken hostage. The attack lasted three days, resulting in the deaths of over 331 people, including 186 children.

In response to the increasing terrorism, Russia tightened its grip on Chechnya as well as expanded its anti-terrorist operations throughout the region. Russia installed a pro-Moscow Chechen regime. In 2003, a referendum was held on a constitution that reintegrated Chechnya within Russia, but provided limited autonomy. According to the Chechen government, the referendum passed with 95.5% of the votes and almost 80% turnout. The Economist was skeptical of the results, arguing that "few outside the Kremlin regard the referendum as fair". In 2005 and 2006, prominent separatist leaders Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev were killed.

In April 2009, Russia ended its counter-terrorism operation and pulled out the bulk of its army. Three months later, the leader of the separatist government, Akhmed Zakayev, called for a halt to armed resistance against the Chechen police force starting on August 1, 2009.

Insurgency in the North Caucasus continued even after this date.

(Copyright Wikipedia)



#### IV. PRESS QUOTES

««Grozny Blues» is a web of associations, suggestive and full of contrasts, a film without commentary or text inserts. A cinematic journey of multiple narratives that form together into a unified image, which has little to do with the clichés of the Kalashnikov-toting terrorists from the Caucasus. Instead we are presented with the simultaneity of destruction and everyday life in Chechnya, of a past that has been leveled and a surreal normality. (...) A form of carnival-esque subversion seems to be present in this post-war Chechnya. A kind of creative infiltration that Nicola Bellucci employs as a tool when swirling together different time periods in «Grozny Blues». He invokes the devastation until it runs through the veins of everyday existence and the office towers in Grozny seem like gravestones. He keeps those who have disappeared alive, as a form of ghostly consciousness in the present. He collides things together so that we can make our own connections. We are frightened – and illuminated.»

*Pascal Blum, Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich*

«This kaleidoscopic documentary offers fragmentary narratives (...) disturbing.»

*Bertrand Tappolet, Le Courier, Geneva*

««Grozny Blues» reconstructs both the past and the present of this traumatized region: two hours of goosebumps during which archival video material and manifestations of present-day neo-fascism and collective forgetting are presented.»

*Carlota Mosegui, El antepenúltimo mohicano, Cáceres, Spain*

«Every time «Grozny Blues» presents a relatively harmless image of everyday life in the city, every time when you can breath normally again, feel secure, and think that maybe it's not that bad (in Chechnya), Nicola Bellucci shows excerpts from the video material that the women shot during the war, (it's) full of destruction, misery, and death. (...) If there is no better future for Grozny in sight, then everyone should at least know about the events that led things down this path.»

*Mark Kuzmanic, Billet.ch*

««Grozny Blues» is a journey as passionate as it is dramatic, into a paradoxical Chechnya divided between a phantasmagorical past and an apparently (post) apocalyptic future. The lucid and sensitive gaze of Nicola Bellucci explores this uncertain land, digs through the few remaining ruins to bring to light a past that screams otherworldliness. (...) «Grozny Blues» tries to give a voice to the ghosts haunting the Chechnyan capital using a complex system of echoes. The droning sound of revolutionary speeches, the dramatic images of war (bravely compiled by the three activists who are transformed in a common thread of the film) are often placed in parallel with the fake glitz of everyday life like a scream which, instead of going on forever, is blocked by a huge wall, bouncing back in the form of an echo, again and again.(...) Since talking about it is prohibited, another form of communication has come about, which Nicola Bellucci captures magnificently, made up of gestures, gazes, ghosts still lingering in the empty houses and laughter echoing in the ears of those who are left.

The desperate testimonies of the few militants who still live in Grozny and the extraordinarily rich archive material that Bellucci brings to life in his film throw us into an extremely complex reality that of a dreamt-of Caucasus that became a nightmare. A deep and sensitive piece, which deserves our undivided attention.»

*Giorgia del Don, Cineuropa.org*

## V. CREW

written by	Lucia Sgueglia & Nicola Bellucci
directed by	Nicola Bellucci
produced by	soap factory GmbH, Basel
in co-production with	Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRF
producer	Frank Matter
co-producer SRF	Urs Augstburger
production office	Loredana-Nastassja Fernández Zoë Meyer
director of photography	Simon Guy Fässler
location sound	Nicola Bellucci
assistant director	Lucia Sgueglia
editor	Anja Bombelli
interpreter	Lucia Sgueglia Andrei N. Mironov
additional camera	Olga Kravets Nicola Bellucci Géraldine Zosso
additional sound	Patrick Becker
music	Blues Brothers Cafe Band: Ruslan Abdullayev (guitar) Aslan Pakiev (bass guitar) Haron Erayev (guitar) Ramzan Umarov (drums)
additional original music	Bruno Franceschini
additional original music	Marcel Vaid performed by Martin Schumacher (bass clarinet) Martin Biernstil (cello) Pardeep Schroeder (guitars, piano)

translations from the Russian	Riva Evstifeeva Lucia Sgueglia
editing assistants	Chiara Ronchini Alkmini Boura Sophie Brunner
color grading	Peter Guyer Ueli Müller RecTV, Bern
sound editing	Pedro Haldemann Olivier JeanRichard himex:sounddesign
audio post-production rerecording mixer general manager line producer inhouse producer	DIE BASISberlin Ansgar Frerich Florian Beck Tobias N. Siebert Frauke Ahlers
stills photography	Davide Monteleone
subtitles	Erik Smith (English) Frank Matter, Zoë Meyer (German) Manuela Vonwiller (French) Lucia Sgueglia (Italian)

## **HISTORICAL VIDEO MATERIAL**

HISTORICAL VIDEO MATERIAL FROM THE ARCHIVES OF ECHO OF WAR (EKHO VOYNY)  
 shot by Zainap Gashaeva, Fatima Gazieva,  
 Tamara Kalaeva, Maya Shovkhalova and  
 Taita Yunusova from 1994 to 2006  
 © Courtesy of Zainap Gashaeva  
 and Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (GfbV), Switzerland

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL VIDEO MATERIAL BY  
Petra Prokhaskova  
Andrei Babitsky  
© Courtesy of Zainap Gashaeva  
and Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (GfbV), Switzerland

EXCERPTS FROM THE FILM "GROZNY" (1987)  
directed by Ilies Tataev  
written by S. Lagutin and shot by U. Timofeev,  
a production of North Ossetian Television  
in cooperation with Chechen-Ingush Television.  
Footage courtesy of and provided by Gosteleradiofond,  
the State Fund of Television and Radio Programs

#### **ADDITIONAL MUSIC**

„EVERY 5TH IS FREE“  
Written by Toni Vescoli  
Performed by Les Sauterelles  
© Courtesy of PM MUSIC in accordance with Düde Dürst and Toni Vescoli

„SI TU VOIS MA MÈRE“  
music and words: Bechet, Sidney (CA)/ Broussolle, Jean (A)  
© by Warner Chappell Music France SA  
courtesy of Intersong Musikverlag GmbH, a Warner/Chappell Music Company  
and with the kind permission of Sony Music Entertainment Switzerland GmbH

#### **PRODUCED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF**

Swiss Federal Office of Culture (FDHA)  
Fachausschuss Audiovision und Multimedia Basel/Baselland  
Amt für Kultur und Sport und Lotteriefonds Kanton Solothurn  
Kulturfonds Suissimage  
Migros - Kulturprozent: Postproduktion  
Ernst Göhner Stiftung  
george foundation  
Georges und Jenny Bloch-Stiftung  
Evangelisch-Reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich  
Succès Passage Antenne SRG  
Succès Cinéma

## VI. BIO-/FILMOGRAPHIES DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

**NICOLA BELLUCCI, director**



- 1963      Born in Arezzo (Italy).
- 1982-86    Studies at the University of Florence (Philosophy, Literature, Film)
- 1987-88    Directing Diploma at “Istituto di scienze cinematografiche Firenze”
- 1992-96    Works as author and director of photography in Italy
- 1996      Move to Basel, Switzerland
- 2000      Founder of Neuland Filmproduction in Basel with Vadim Jendreyko

filmography as a director:

- 2015      GROZNY BLUES. Documentary feature
- 2010      NEL GIARDINO DEI SUONI. Documentary feature
- 2002      ONOMA. Six short films for Swiss Expo 02
- 2001      DO IT. Short film, Regione Toscana - RAI 3
- 1994      SITUATIONSANSATZKONKRET. Educational video
- 1989      ERA LA NOSTRA FONTE. Short fiction film

## **FRANK MATTER, producer**

Frank Matter, born in 1964, first worked as a reporter for various Swiss magazines and newspapers. 1992 he got into filmmaking as an assistant director on Peter Aschwanden's «Unzucht – Ermittlungen im Fall des Pädophilen H.». A year later he moved to Brooklyn, where he has been working for many years as a director, producer, writer and reporter. After returning to Basel in 2006, he founded the film production company soap factory GmbH. His films have garnered numerous international awards.

filmography as a producer:

2015	GROZNY BLUES by Nicola Bellucci
2015	LA VIDA BUENA by Jens Schanze
2015	THOMAS HIRSCHHORN – GRAMSCI MONUMENT by Angelo A. Lüdin
2010	NEL GIARDINO DIE SUONI by Nicola Bellucci
2000	JUDGE NOT by Robert Champi

as a director, producer, writer:

	PARALLEL LIVES (in development). Documentary feature
2012	VON HEUTE AUF MORGEN. Documentary feature
2004	THE DEFINITION OF INSANITY. Fiction feature
1999	THE BEAUTY OF MY ISLAND. Documentary short
1997	MOROCCO. Fiction feature
1994	HANNELORE. Fiction short

## VII. FESTIVALS & AWARDS

### «Nel giardino dei suoni» by Nicola Bellucci

- Prix de Soleure, 2010
- Best Documentary, Mostra Internacional de Cinema 2010, Sao Paolo, Brasil
- Grand Prix, Taiwan International Documentary Film Festival 2010
- Audience Award, Festival dei popoli 2010, Florence, Italy
- Mention Spéciale, Film Prize of the City of Basel, 2009 (short version)
- Best Documentary, Festa del documentario "Hai Visto Mai?" 2011, Siena, Italy
- Special Mention, The London International Documentary Festival 2011, UK
- Vision du Réel Nyon 2010, Switzerland
- Mostra Internacional de Cinema 2010, Sao Paolo, Brasil
- Festival dei Popoli 2010, Florence, Italy
- Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2010, Taichung
- Palm Springs International Film Festival 2011, USA (Best of Fest selection)
- Margaret Mead Film Festival 2010, New York, USA
- Docaviv Festival 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel
- Thessaloniki Documentary Festival - Images of the 21st Century 2011, Greece
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2011, Durham, USA
- The London International Documentary Festival 2011, UK
- Reykjavik International Film Festival 2011, Iceland
- Bergamo Film Meeting 2011, Italy
- Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival 2011, USA
- Reel Music Festival 2011, Portland, Oregon, USA
- The Finnish Red Cross Film Festival 2011, Turku, Finland
- Festa del Documentario Hai Visto Mai? 2011, Siena, Italy
- Reframing Reality 2011, Jerusalem, Israel
- DMZ Korean International Documentary Festival 2011, Paju, South Korea
- Docaviv Galilee Film Festival 2011, Galilee, Israel
- iDocs International Documentary Forum 2011, Beijing, China
- Festival de Cine Internacional de Ourense 2010, Spain
- Sprout Festival New York 2011, USA
- Taipeh Golden Horse Festival (DocDay) 2010, Taiwan
- Sguardi sul Reale 2011, Terranuova Bracciolini, Italy
- Festival DiversArte 2011, Bari, Italy
- Solothurner Filmtage 2010, Switzerland



## **VIII. CONTACT**

### **Production**

soap factory GmbH  
Hafenstrasse 25  
Postfach  
CH-4019 Basel

Frank Matter  
Loredana-Nastassja Fernández

film@soapfactory.ch  
+41-61-6320050  
www.soapfactory.ch  
www.facebook.com/soapfactoryfilms

### **World Sales**

Antipode Sales & Distribution  
Novolesnoy pereulok 5-38  
Moscow, 127055  
Russia

Elena Podolskaya (Head of sales)

elena@antipode-sales.biz  
+7-499-9787314  
Cell: +7-916-6045884  
www.antipode-sales-biz

### **Distribution Switzerland**

cineworx GmbH  
Clarastrasse 42  
CH-4005 Basel

Pascal Trächslin

info@cineworx.ch  
+41-61-2616370  
www.cineworx.ch