

Public Enemy Number One: “The Man Who Killed a Hundred Boys”

UK TV documentary : 2001 : dir. Clive Entwistle : Chameleon / Channel 4 : c60 min
 prod: Clive Entwistle : scr: : dir.ph.: Paul Otter

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Radio Times comment:

“This film, **“The Man Who Killed a Hundred Boys”**, documents Javed Iqbal Moghul’s horrifying mission to avenge his mother’s death. After he was accused of raping two street boys in 1992 and his mother died of a heart attack soon after. Moghul crossed the line from sex offender to serial killer. By chronicling Moghul’s 200-day killing spree, the film also calls into question the attitudes of police, government and citizens towards the

hundreds of children who inhabit Lahore’s streets.”

“Series on crimes that have caused moral panic abroad: The story of Javed Iqbal Moghul, whose confession related how he used poison and acid to dispose of homeless boys in Pakistan.”

Broadcast Channel 4: 28/08/01. Britain is still – if the TV schedules are any indication – consumed with an unhealthy fascination about “serial killers” and violent crime in general. This programme, for example, coincided with a BBC2 documentary strand called **“Catching the Killers”**, a BBC2 documentary on the murder of Gianni Versace, a Channel 5 **“Post Mortem”** on multiple child-killer Beverley Allitt, a UK Horizons documentary **“The Denver High School Massacre”**, another on the trial of John Wayne Gacy, and yet another, **“Russian Cracker”**, on behaviour profilst Dr Alexander Bukhanovsky, who works with “serial killers”. To say nothing of the usual sprinkling of murder movies and police drama series for the August Bank Holiday The UK is Hannibal Lektter crazy, it seems. If this is schadenfreude, it must be a particularly psychotic variant of it.

Wherever possible, mass murderers who prey on children are the bogeymen of preference, and if the tag “paedophile” can be worked into the story then it becomes doubly appetising (see **“CITIZEN X”**, broadcast a few weeks previously, on the hunt for Russian multiple sex-killer Chikatillo). Television is at one with the supermarket tabloids on this topic, ever keen to hammer away at the same drum, losing no opportunity to inflame public paranoia or blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. So here truly is a story to warm the cockles of their hearts – a Pakistani man who lured runaway boys to his home and raped them, but when an older victim of 18 retaliated by attacking him while he slept, the rapist conceived a personal mission to avenge himself through the systematic murder and disposal of 100 runaway boys, recording his crimes fastidiously for posterity.

It is a sad, depressing tale, all the more so for seeing snapshots of some of Moghul's unsuspecting victims, many smiling for him, some not, as they thought they'd found a sanctuary from the compassionless streets of Lahore. Round numbers blunt the imagination. 100 victims is as meaningless to the mind as 6 million slaughtered Jews, and it somehow diminishes the individual tragedies – captions identify the boys as “84th victim” or “43rd victim” as though they were truly part of a process more significant than themselves. Moghul admitted on capture that he could just as easily have done away with 200, or 500 – more round numbers – and that does not sound shocking to us, simply more ambitious.

Allegations of rape had been made against Moghul earlier in his career by two homeless boys, but at that point he had cultivated the local police sufficiently to protect himself, and no proceedings were brought. He then escalated to holding a boy captive in his home (he had won the boy's confidence by pretending to be searching for a lost son of his own). The boy was beaten, raped, but then Moghul made the error of bringing home an older youth, 18, ostensibly to work as his houseboy. He raped this youth in turn, but the indignant youth attacked him later that night, and matters came to light when Moghul was rushed to hospital. He recuperated under the care of his elderly mother, but the stress and shame of his actions brought on her death. He moved to a squalid district of Lahore, and conceived his revenge against the mothers of all the runaway boys in Pakistan.

The film-makers interviewed on camera the boy, 13/14, who had been held prisoner in Moghul's home. He is identified by name, neither his face nor voice disguised in any way – which would probably have been illegal had he been a British victim of a comparable crime. Still it is important – for once – to hear an account of what actually took place from the boy in person, unfiltered by official disapproval of certain sexual practices. It seems clear enough that Moghul had no affection or concern for the objects of his desire. Excerpts from his “confession” are read throughout the film, and they also betray no indication that he even liked boys at all. Boys existed merely to gratify him and serve his purpose, and that is why in due course he chose them as the vehicles of his vengeance on society for what he saw as his own downward spiral into poverty and disgrace.

He learned that by combining two acids in a barrel he could dissolve a human body in twelve hours. Initially he poured the remnants down his toilet, but when neighbours complained of the stench from the acid he began pouring the residue into a neighbourhood river. The victims were poisoned or strangled with chains. His diary of the crimes speaks of his elation when he reached his target figure of 100 victims. He then fled the city and took refuge in caves, where he was ultimately captured. In his home he had left behind the bundled clothing of all his victims, as proof to the world of what he had done, and those sad snapshots of the boys, mostly 10 to 15, who had sought their fortunes in the big city, and found only him.

Having satisfied its own – and our – prurient interest, the programme had to exit on the required note of moral censure, and makes some passing remarks about societal indifference to runaways. But Britain had its own army of inner city homeless all through the years of Thatcher prosperity, and there was scant enough societal anxiety for their welfare at the time, so the holier-than-thou note rings hollow. What will be left, in the mind of the undiscerning viewer (as the *Radio Times* writer demonstrates), is the indelible conclusion that men who seek sex with boys proceed in due course to murder. It was true in this single case, but, as a Pakistani clinical psychologist comments on the programme, Moghul was clearly psychotic. He cites Moghul's homosexuality as evidence of this. And if one is homophobic enough, one can accept that chain of logic.

Moghul was found guilty at his trial without too much difficulty, and sentenced under Islamic law to be put to death in the same manner as his victims. He is therefore to be strangled by chains in the presence of his victims' families, his body cut into 100 pieces and dissolved in acid. Javed Iqbal Moghul, perhaps surprisingly, is currently appealing against that sentence.

See subject index under **ASIA, CRIME, DOCUMENTARIES, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS** and under **SEX & SEXUALITY** for a sub-section on lust-killers.

