

Post-Yugoslav Cinema and Politics: Films, Lies and Video Tape

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ABSTRACT: *The article discusses politics of post-Yugoslav cinema in its extra-cinematic domain. Development of cinematography in post-Yugoslav states has often drawn on common cultural connections. Plurality of identities, cultures and political beliefs were developed during this period. It was also accepted that parts of the post-Yugoslav societies share common cultures and have many similarities in their identities. Thus post-Yugoslav cinema and space are defined in addition to remaining unanswered issues of what national cinema means in the post-Yugoslav cinema. The films produced in this period are classified in three categories: films for national audiences, films for regional, post-Yugoslav audiences and films targeting international audiences. Politics was heavily involved in film making throughout this period. The resulting cinema can be used for the analysis of cultural and identity developments and nation-building processes. Finally, the article proves existence of post-Yugoslav cinema as part of post-Yugoslav culture that is imaginary culture without geopolitical space.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dramatic geopolitical changes in the Balkans during the 1990s attracted global attention for several reasons. In this work the identities of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks are studied and analysed through studies of films produced in the newly independent countries. An answer to the question of how these films influenced, if at all, the changes in public identities is being sought. Therefore a two-way relationship is the subject of the analysis of causes and consequences of changed individual and collective identities during the nation-building processes.

Another level of analysis is added to this study as a result of the cultural interactions between these three nations. They arguably formed a common culture and spoke a single common language until the end of Yugoslavia. It is necessary to recognise very strong linguistic similarities and strong cultural interdependence between these nations. Fredric Jameson saw 'various options here which are not necessarily national in the limited sense, and which range from Croatian, Serbian or Bosnian cinema, through Yugoslav cinemas, ... all the way to some generalized notions of a Balkan cinema...'¹ Nebojsa Jovanovic, whilst justifying his criticism of some authors' views on Yugoslav cinema, culture and history, stated that 'the post-Yugoslav states (dubbed by Iordanova—not without irony, I believe—as “newly emancipated”) are exemplary of the rise of the ethnic *Gemeinschaften* in the post-socialist Eastern Europe.'² The changed historical and geopolitical circumstances have influenced strongly the perceptions, not only in the region but also internationally, as Jovanovic observes 'that this nation-focused optics has started affecting the work of the international cinema scholars with, I believe, a genuine penchant for Yugoslav cinema.'³

'Post-Yugoslav Cinema' as category is by now firmly established despite political efforts in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to 'nationalize' their cinemas. Several authors like Levi, Jelaca and Murtic offered their significant contribution to the debate and to defining Post-Yugoslav Cinema.⁴ It covers the same geographic space but different geopolitical units. Jelaca puts it in 'cultural context broadly defined by the term “post-Yugoslav cinema,” where “post” implies a cultural space that is never entirely “beyond”'.⁵

Many authors focus on three only states that share common language, culture, history, tradition and with populations that overlap across new borders. Experiences of conflict are also common as are processes of transition from communist societies to liberal democracies being intertwined with the post-conflict recovery and

¹ Jameson, Frederic, *Thoughts on Balkan Cinema*, in Egoyan, Atom and Balfour, Ian, eds. *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p.249.

² Jovanovic, Nebojsa, *Bosnian Cinema in the Socialist Yugoslavia and the Anti-Yugoslav Backlash*, in: KinoKultura, available at: <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/jovanovic.shtml>

³ Jovanovic, *Bosnian Cinema*, <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/jovanovic.shtml>

⁴ Levi, Pavle. *Disintegration in Flames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007; Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

⁵ Jelača, Dijana, *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, 2015, p.1.

reconciliation. This makes them unique and different from the rest. Murtic argues that 'film, Post-Yugoslav cinema demonstrates, is crucial to articulating our understandings of what it means to be human against the backdrop of political disintegration.'⁶

Despite its focus on Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina only, one should recognise existence of other post-Yugoslav states but Slovenia and Macedonia are characterised by linguistic and ethnic separateness. 'Yugoslavia,' as Murtic acknowledges, 'had been one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in Europe.'⁷ Yet, different languages bring about more pronounced cultural differences between the spaces populated by Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins on the one side from Slovenia, Macedonia and Kosovo on the other. The geographic position of the later, ethnic background and linguistic uniqueness make them peripheral to this study. Montenegro's size and alliance with Belgrade for most of the post-Yugoslav period in addition to the lack of significant cinematic achievements urges focus on only Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

There are several cinematic criteria to classify films produced during the post-Yugoslav years. It could be based on genre or it might reflect country of origin, but this study assesses whether the film was supported by government, i.e. nationalist policies that were omnipresent throughout the 1990s among all post-Yugoslav nations or whether the film was a reconciliatory attempt in rebuilding societies and cross-cultural networks. This work will look at target audiences of films, whether it is aimed at domestic, regional or international audience. The sheer number of films produced in particular categories might reflect the changes in popular attitudes and identities that have occurred. Murtic argues 'filmic texts demonstrate the degree to which nationalism was at the heart of violent disintegration of Yugoslavia.'⁸

The regimes in these states came into power by democratic means but policies were less so. They, however, were eager to present themselves as democrats. Soft power policies have been used in this processes. Films required huge budgets that only states or state controlled institutions were able to provide. This connected firmly politics and films.

Glorifying war efforts and general victimisation of the nation became major feature of public debates. Films were expected to positively contribute to national debates and reshape national identities during the processes of state-building and nation-building. Therefore the societies were more likely do adopt some new values that have previously not been part of their national identities. Religion and patriotism, as it will be shown, were of great importance in differentiating and strengthening national identities of all three groups.

The second group of films consists of those in which authors aimed at regional audiences. They also relied on state budgets but they often attracted interests in other countries of the region. This interest resulted in co-productions, larger markets and audiences that could understand the language without subtitles. These films usually offered light and general conclusions about war guilt. The audiences were supposed to laugh at main characters who were shown as grotesque individuals and were not supposed to represent whole nations.

"Parada" (The Parade) by Srđan Dragojević is typical film for this group showing homophobic attitudes that are common in the region and presenting main characters struggling with their prejudice. The film was Serbian but it included fictional characters from each of the countries, was filmed across the former Yugoslavia and became popular in the whole region. Karaula (Border Post) by Rajko Grlic is another film made in multi-national post-Yugoslav co-production that did not even have an ambition to try attracting audiences outside the region because, a critic claimed, the film was "a bit difficult for people outside the Balkans to understand."⁹ These films also offered something in the form of reconciliation and the increasing numbers of these films might be sign of readiness of societies to accept closer relationships with former enemies.

The final group of films is made of those aimed at international market. It is clear that some films that are to be found in the first two groups were originally also imagined and aimed at international audiences but lack of success and interest and the clear nationalist messages made them to belong to the first group. Even the films with regional appeal when their explanations are too complex cannot target international audiences.

Therefore it is logical that the third group is the smallest. Any increase in numbers of films in this group might show political changes in these societies. 'Nicija zemlja' (No Man's Land) by Danis Tanovic that won Oscar, Grbavica by Jasmila Zbanic (Golden Bear) or Underground by Emir Kusturica (Palme d'Or) are the obvious examples. This division of films into the three groups, however, cannot be firmly understood and it can

⁶ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.2.

⁷ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.1.

⁸ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.2.

⁹ International Movie Data Base, available at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0466561/reviews> (accessed on 8 January 2016)

be argued that some of the films could also be classified into another group. Political messages of Zbanic's or Tanovic's film are very different from Kusturica's film. 'This intimate relationship between film and politics,' argues Murtic, '... is important for furthering the humanisation of human beings against the return of nationalism in the context of Yugoslav politics...'¹⁰

The films are selectively included in this study because of the restricted space. A series of questions should be answered in this work. How much have politics been using films in order to influence and reshape popular identities? What is the role of films in processes of reconciliation and re-establishment of cross-cultural ties. Finally, the text is seeking evidence of survival and existence of former common culture despite the prolonged states' efforts to destroy common cultural and linguistic ties while reshaping national identities. Yet the question remains whether this survival is popular and with political support or imaginary one that potentially might have political influences?

II. NATIONALLY ORIENTED FILMS

Violent nature of Yugoslavia's break up added another feature to post-Yugoslav societies. They were not only post-communist countries in transition, inheriting the communist custom of supporting culture and the arts as a method of spreading loyalty to the regime, but they were also post-war nationalist societies. Thus regime policies were developed further to make it almost impossible for filmmakers to make films unless they supported the official stance on history. States, however, declined imposing bans, but they were in clear control of art. Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian films are in many ways different, but they all have this common background.

Pavicic wrote about the 'frustration of the conservative wing of Croatian cultural public' because the successful ones are 'art-films that problematize revenge and guilt, while the others [are] chauvinistic mess that poltroons of Tudjman's cinematography produced during the 1990s.'¹¹ Jakov Sedlar thus made '*Cetverored*' (Four by Four) in 1999 about the end of the WWII Croatian Nazi-state and the massacre committed by communist Partisans against members of the Nazi regime and civilians. The only audience that showed any interest was to be found among Croats.

Serbian critic stated that 'Sedlar made war movies full of hatred and political propaganda.'¹² A journalist in Croatia offered even stronger criticism: 'If he managed to do what he had tried to do, Jakov Sedlar would have entered the history of European culture as the director of the first openly revisionist, neo-Nazi film, which in a radical manner questions and distorts the results of WWII, and accuses war victors of crimes which have been assigned to the losers for the last fifty years.'¹³ This critique also serves as a sign of the two different Croatias existing throughout the post-Yugoslav period: one is nationalistic and often even chauvinistic, the other is open to influences from other cultures and eager to show tolerance in the post-war society.

The whole production of this era in Croatia reflects state policies and nation-building processes. 'During the nineties, this was ironically dubbed by its opponents "*državotvorni film*" (state-building cinema),' explains Pavicic, 'but a more descriptive name for it could be the "cinema of self-victimization."¹⁴ Croatian film is not unique in this nationalist patriotic attitude.

Serbian films had another feature in addition to their nationalist agenda throughout the 1990s. Their continued presentation of Yugoslavism was, however, based on false premises. Kusturica's 'Underground' is the most successful example of such films. The final scene states that 'once upon a time there was a country' amid a wild surreal celebration in the context of the general catastrophe of the post-Yugoslav wars. There was a Yugo-nostalgic public to buy into this artistic presentation of the events, but the film drew heavy criticism.¹⁵ Levi

¹⁰ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.2.

¹¹ Pavicic, Jurica, '*Jos jedan ocajan film o domovinskom ratu*' in *Jutarnji list*, Zagreb, published on 19/11/2008, available at: <http://www.jutarnji.hr/kultura/film/clanak/art-2008,11,19,,141738.jl>

¹² Pavlovic, Davor, '*Ratovi devedesetih sa tri strane*', available at: http://www.b92.net/kultura/moj_ugao.php?nav_category=389&yyyy=2011&mm=09&nav_id=538989

¹³ Jergovic, Miljenko, in *Feral Tribune*: <http://www.ex-yupress.com/feral/feral99.html#2>

¹⁴ Pavicic, Jurica, *From a Cinema of Hatred to a Cinema of a Consciousness: Croatian Film After Yugoslavia*, in: Vidan, A. and Crnkovic, G.P., (eds.), '*KinoKultura: Special Issue 11: Croatia (May 2011)*': <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/11/pavicic.shtml>

¹⁵ Cerovic, Stanko, '*Kusturica's Lies Awarded the Golden Palm in Cannes*', available at: <http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/junaug95/cannes.cfm> accessed on 12 January 2016.

observed that 'Underground presents position of "Yugoslavism without limit," which conceives of Yugoslav identity as a critical ideal and an essentially anti-ideological corrective for the ideology-soaked reality.'¹⁶

Many non-Serb characters were modelled on Serbian perceptions and stereotypes of other Slavic nations and often described as traitors and cheats. Levi noted that 'the comic book-like protagonists of Underground are construed as Serb national stereotypes who, even when they are mocked, still fulfil the role of the exclusive pillars of an ethnocentrically imagined "Yugoslavism".'¹⁷

By acknowledging this, one might start talking about two or even three Serbias. The first Serbia was pseudo-Yugoslav even after the wars of the 1990s. This can hardly be described as Yugo-nostalgia often found in other states because Serbian "Yugoslavs" supported Serbia and Serbs in all political and military struggles and favoured conflict resolution at the expense of others. Yugo-nostalgic ideas in other societies mainly favoured federal idea and diversity of the former state with little or no inclination towards re-stating the ideology. The other is pro-European Serbia, which puts blame for violent end of Yugoslavia to all sides. The third one was nationalist and the strongest throughout the 1990s and, according to the electoral results of 2014, is still the dominant force in the country.

A film by Miroslav Lekic 'Noz' (The Knife) from 1999 is based on the novel by Vuk Draskovic about a Herzegovinian Muslim in search of his roots that are to be found among Serbs. It focusses, more importantly on crimes committed by Muslims against Serbs. One critic in Serbia stated that 'the film is overwhelmed by chauvinistic ideas and fictitious events that incite hatred towards other peoples, especially towards Muslims.'¹⁸ It was clearly produced for the domestic market. 'Cetverored' in Croatia, and 'Noz' in Serbia are typical films of the 1990s in the post-Yugoslav countries.

The period of Tudjman's Croatia was marked by strong national identity-building processes. During most of this period, Serbian films were not screened in Croatia. Cultural and linguistic similarities had to be fought off like Serbian forces on the battlefield. The regime created an ideology which was implemented in Croatia with ease because a 'threat to nation leads to kinship, and (manifestations of) kinship leads to nationalist discourses (in the name of mother nation etc), i.e., a nationalism which in turn engenders the notion of nation.'¹⁹ 'Transformations in collective identity result from traumatic developments which,' Ian Aitkin argues, 'disturb the basic patterning of the cultural elements which make up the sense of continuity, shared memories, and notions of collective identity.'²⁰

Thus completely new policies were implemented in culture. One of the consequences and radical breaks with the recent past was a situation that in effect meant banning films coming from Serbia, some of which had been very popular until recent years. When Serbian films were offered to Croatian audiences once again, it was with the novelty of subtitles.

Film 'Rane' (The Wounds) by Srdjan Dragojevic was the first Serbian film to be given the new treatment. Reactions to it reflected attitudes towards the nationalist regime in power. Thus Croatian film director Neven Hitrec expressed his 'indifference whether it was translated or not.'²¹ The subtitles to this film, liberal critic observed, 'changed completely the genre of the film: from a dark social drama this film was transformed into a comedy. The audience laughed to literally every single subtitle...'²² Another Croatian columnist described the film presented in this way as 'a story about the apocalypse which Milosevic brought on to Belgrade but which was, in turn, helped by Tudjman's small and sweet contribution under the screen.'²³ Dalibor Brozovic opined that subtitling the Serbian film was wrong and it would have been better to have synchronized it.²⁴

Some films subtitled before the changes in Croatian linguistic policies caused upset among nationalists because this was clear reminder of close similarities with neighbours. For them, such films were 'not translated

¹⁶ Levi, P., *Disintegration in Flames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA: 2007) p.93.

¹⁷ Levi, P., *Disintegration in Flames*, p.96.

¹⁸ Pavlovic, Davor, *Ratovi devedesetih sa tri strane*, available at

http://www.b92.net/kultura/moj_ugao.php?nav_category=389&yvyy=2011&mm=09&nav_id=538989

¹⁹ Hayward, Susan, *Framing National Cinemas*, in Hjort, M. & Mackenzie, S., (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (Routledge, New York and London 2002) p.89.

²⁰ Aitkin, Ian, *Current problems in the study of European cinema and the role of questions on cultural identity*, in Everett, W. ed., *European Identity in Cinema* (Intellect Books, Exeter, UK 1996) p. 75.

²¹ Vjesnik, 07/04/1999, <http://www.vjesnik.hr/Html/1999/04/07/nzag.htm>

²² Raseta, Boris, available at the website: <http://www.kupus.net/klokan.htm>

²³ Jergovic, Miljenko, in Feral Tribune 05/04/1999, found on several websites including:

http://www.medioclub.cg.yu/zanimljivi/Malo_smijeha/maj/rane.htm

²⁴ Gudzevic, Sinan, 'Srpska slika, hrvatski ton' (Serbian picture, Croatian Sound) 1 January 2001, available at: <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/pubs/archive/data/200111/11101-007-pubs-zag.htm> accessed on 12 January 2016.

into the Croatian language but into a kind of Serbian language spoken in Bosnia-Herzegovina!!! [sic!] The only connection with Croatian language in this translation is Latin script.²⁵

During the first decade of Croatian independence, the regime underlined and insisted on differences from Serbs and Bosniaks. The reshaping of Croatian national identity was a major operation in a cultural sphere which included linguistic changes, the rediscovery of some writers with a greater sense of national belonging, a ban on folk music (presumed to be of Serbian origin) in public broadcast and state support for the film industry to produce historical films and films about the recent war that brought independence to Croatia. One might argue that the regime actually rightly recognised the need for such actions because 'to identify culture with a particular identity is to reify a one-to-one relationship.'²⁶ The other side of the argument is the opinion that 'films (and television) are not sufficient for nation-building. Indeed, they are not necessary, for the obvious reason that nation-building was accomplished long before the mass media were around.'²⁷

Nationalist authors eagerly participated in the development of new national identity. Neven Hitrec argued 'one should not insist on the subjects of so-called state interest any longer,'²⁸ as he produced the film 'Bogorodica' (Madonna) in 1999 while the original title when he started working on it in 1992 was 'Hrvatska Bogorodica' (Croatian Madonna). Still, this film remained strongly nationalistic, as Levi noticed that Hitrec has offered 'a collective portrait of the entire Serb ethnos as drunken wild beasts who, under favourable conditions, do not fail to turn to their primal desire to slaughter and rape.'²⁹ Many films of 1990s and cultural policies reflect Smith's theories of nationalism: 'Nation is product of nationalism which in turn is an expression of modernity's need for "high cultures".'³⁰ In Croatia, like elsewhere, 'cultural artefacts are fabricated ... to represent a nation, to function as evidence of the nation's distinctiveness.'³¹

Croatian production in 1990s proves this theories. 'Gospa' (Our Lady) by Jakov Sedlar is about Croat children seeing visions of Virgin Mary. Few Hollywood stars including Martin Sheen and Michael York starred in this film thus helping often found Croatian obsession of belonging to Europe and the West as opposed to their Slav neighbours. Zizek claimed that 'every participant in bloody disintegration tries to legitimize their place "inside" by presenting themselves as the last bastion of European civilisation...'³² However, the children in this film were not from Croatia as the alleged visions of Virgin Mary appeared in Herzegovina. Thus the nationalist film unintentionally reconfirmed that these two societies, as well as the Serbian, are intertwined and show that Croatia is not 'the last bastion of European civilisation.'

Seven cinema feature films were made in Croatia during 1999 and only one of them was without the war background. 'Kanjon opasnih igara' by Vladimir Tadej (Canyon of Dangerous Games) produced in 1998 was the first children's film made in 15 years. However even in this film, as in all children films, when the good defeated the evil, the evil was represented by ethnic Serb characters. Goulding found a general message of such films is that Serbs 'are bad as hell. The Croats are approaching sainthood.'³³

Croatia under Tudjman attempted to create positive image in the world and announce its arrival but none of the films that were heavily supported by the state attracted any positive attention abroad. Serbia was trying more complex approach as it remained unclear whether the regime would prefer larger, kind of quasi-Yugoslav, state or pure Serbian. However, many films from this country clearly belong to this group of films. Although Bosnia-Herzegovina has very different constitutional arrangement with weak central institutions and con-sociational system that prevents rule of one person or a small group, there were nationalist projects even when they were not aimed at national audiences first.

²⁵ Kastelan, Oliver, 'Linguistic Violence' (Jezicko nasilje), Slobodna Dalmacija, available at: <http://arhiv.slobodnadalmacija.hr/20000511/tribina.htm> accessed on 12 January 2016.

²⁶ Hayward, Susan, *Framing National Cinemas*, in Hjort, M. & Mackenzie, S., (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (Routledge, New York and London 2002) p.89.

²⁷ Jarvie, Ian, *National Cinema*, in Hjort, M. & Mackenzie, S., (eds.), 'Cinema and Nation' (Routledge, New York and London 2002) p.79.

²⁸ Vjesnik 07/04/1999 <http://www.vjesnik.hr/Html/1999/04/07/nzag.htm>

²⁹ Levi, Pavle, *Disintegration in Flames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA: 2007) p.113.

³⁰ Smith, Anthony, *Images of the Nation*, in Hjort, M. & Mackenzie, S., (eds.), 'Cinema and Nation' (Routledge, New York and London 2002) p.46.

³¹ Goulding, Daniel J., *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2002) p.210.

³² Zizek, Slavoj, in: Wayne, M., 'The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas' (Intellect Books, Bristol UK 2002) p.107.

³³ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.210.

Bosniaks' political elite invited Veljko Bulajic, who was responsible for blockbuster classics in Tito's Yugoslavia, from Zagreb. Their goal was to have another blockbuster epic that would put them in major roles while telling the story of the city of Sarajevo. Partisan films that Bulajic was famous for showed 'bright images and the spectacular history of partisan resistance,' which, Bjelic describes, 'replaced images of the poverty and misery of socialism'.³⁴ This was Bosniaks' nationalist leadership intention.

The project ended in farce and it never came to the filming phase while the tax-payers' money was wasted with allegations of money laundering that local press even offered to prove.³⁵ The Bosnian Ambassador to the UN and many of the elite, in this pretentious attempt to create a masterpiece that would glorify their own lives during the siege of the city, realised that the NATO Commander General Wesley Clarke's son was trying to create a career in film production and a lucrative contract was immediately offered. Bosniaks leaders argued this film was 'needed by multiethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina and that it was "a debt to Alija Izetbegovic"'.³⁶ The grotesque situation was created and the 'film council was headed by [Prime Minister] Haris Silajdzic while Izetbegovic wanted some changes in the screenplay'.³⁷

This exposes the Bosniak nationalist elite at many levels. Firstly, it proves their own political dilettantism. By trying to bribe a son of the NATO leader they thought of buying some favours as he was almost unknown in serious cinematic circles. Their own nationalist beliefs were mixed with tolerated presence of minorities. This was often the difference in practice to the Serbian and Croatian political and cultural nationalist elites. To bring the director from Zagreb of Montenegrin ethnic background for an epic about Bosniaks is rather unique. It is another issue that it was a state-supported project, but it was only Bosniak-led ministries that were involved in it. Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats were not part of the project.

Another issue separates Bosnian cinema from the Serbian and Croatian. The country is complex with three sets of nationalist political elites sharing power. The old, multi-ethnic elite, however, retained influence and some positions in culture. Their know-how was needed and have been used by dominantly Bosniak nationalist politicians as a sign of multiculturalism at work as opposed to ethno-nationalist policies of Serbs and Croats. This therefore explains some lack of Bosnian made films in this category.

Each nationalist side reworked history into a series of myths, Wayne found, 'which could legitimise or represent inter-ethnic conflict in a calculated repression of the economic determinants, which, of course, the nationalists as the new "personifications of capital", were in no way going to address'.³⁸

III. REGIONALLY ORIENTED FILMS

The 1990s were a period of nationalist attempts at restructuring national identities. Film production, however, was not exclusively nationalistic and therefore some authors describe 'post-Yugoslav cinema' during the 1990s as a 'vibrant period in its production'.³⁹

Some authors and disagreed with the closed societies that nationalist regimes successfully created. In 1996, Vinko Bresan directed the most popular Croatian film '*Kako je poceo rat na mom otoku*' (How the War Started on My Island), which depicted Croatian defenders and Serbian army officers, in a less than glorious and often very humorous manner. Despite the public criticism from circles close to the regime, some 350 thousand people saw the film in Croatian cinemas. It was made too soon, critics said alleging that the society was not yet ready for it.⁴⁰ The same critique was repeated in 1999 when Bresan directed '*Marsal*' (The Marshall), which was a comedy about a fictional reincarnation of the late Yugoslav leader Tito. Bresan made the hit by 'staging a

³⁴ Bjelic, Dusan, *Global Aesthetics and the Serbian Cinema of the 1990s*, in Imre, A., ed., '*East European Cinemas*' (Routledge, New York and London 2005) p.105. He was wrong, though, by including Sutjeska in Bulajic's opus as this film was directed by Stipe Delic.

³⁵ Pecanin, Senad, in BH Dani 15/10/1999; <http://www.bhdani.com/arhiva/124/t246a.htm>

³⁶ Another Bosnian Ambassador involved, Nedžad Hadzimusic quoted by Senad Pecanin in BH Dani 15/10/1999; <http://www.bhdani.com/arhiva/124/t246a.htm>

³⁷ Bulajic, Veljko, in Vjesnik, 15/02/2004: <http://www.vjesnik.hr/html/2004/02/15/Clanak.asp?r=kul&c=4>

³⁸ Mike Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (Intellect Books, Bristol UK 2002) p.109.

³⁹ Mazaj, Meta, '*Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars: Nation and Heterotopia in Post-Yugoslav Film*', in: Aleksic, T., ed. '*Mythistry and Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans*' (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, UK, 2007) p.54.

⁴⁰ As explained by journalist interviewing the director in Nacional 05/03/2003 <http://www.nacional.hr/articles/view/13391/5/>

hilarious conflict between the socialist past and post-socialist present, in which both came to be seen in ways very different from those dominant at the time.⁴¹

This indicates a deeply divided society, two Croatias. The state television refused to broadcast trailers for this film.⁴² This ideological division is clearly manifested in Croatian politics and is another proof of how film and culture reflect society and politics. 'With the departure of Franjo Tuđman ... who held a relatively tight grip on the film industry,' observes Vidan, 'and with the subsequent disassociation of political and cultural structures, a stage has opened for a new group of filmmakers who have engaged both domestic and foreign audiences in ways that were previously unthinkable.'⁴³

Regional audiences liked the Croatian comedy '*Sto je muskarac bez brkova?*' (What Is a Man Without a Moustache?), which challenged two main national institutions: the Catholic Church and the Croatian Army. Ante Tomic, author of the book on which the film was based claimed that 'all the characters are die-hard chauvinists, political negatives' which were presented in a way to be laughed at.⁴⁴ It was the priests and generals, after all, who provided Croatia with a nation-state according to the films created during the previous decade, and then there was suddenly a comedy about the two sacred institutions of Croatian national being.

Another of Tomic's books provided a screenplay for the film '*Karaula*' (Border Post) by Rajko Grlic in 2006. This regional co-production adds another layer of complexity to post-Yugoslav identities by pointing at social rather than ethnic divisions during the Yugoslav period. The majority of soldiers in the film are fans of folk-music and come from rather traditional, often rural or small town, families with very little knowledge of the world outside of their own communities. They are as eager to adopt nationalism as they were to follow communist ideological rituals. The two characters in the film who are exceptions to this come from the urban areas of Belgrade (Serbia) and Split (Croatia), listen to rock 'n' roll, smoke marijuana, and are not easily indoctrinated.

Diverse views on post-Yugoslav crisis can be found in Dragojevic's films '*Lepa sela lepo gore*' (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame) and '*Rane*' (The Wounds), which show the spectrum of characters who joined the war for very different reasons. The society in Serbia is nearing its collapse, enabling the audience to identify with any of the characters in the background of the main story. 'Pretty Village, Pretty Flame does, nonetheless,' Levi argues, 'criticize primitive, debased wartime rhetoric of the Milosevic-controlled television and print media.'⁴⁵ Goulding offered similar thoughts by seeing in the film 'indictment of the Milosevic regime's cynical appropriation and vulgarisation of Serbian national myths.'⁴⁶

Divisions in Serbian society are shown through characters fighting on the same side for very different reasons. Some were openly nationalist, others were looking to gain from the war, there were criminals and there were those who were drafted into the army. A very interesting part of the society are Serbs who still lived in the illusion of Yugoslavia. 'The Underground' was ideal for them, while Dragojevic's work showed too many painful sides to it.

They needed Kusturica's work for their own understanding of their identities regardless of how unrealistic this was. After all, even after the breakup of Yugoslavia their new state was still called Yugoslavia for several years. It is easy to pick up some tones from Serbian dominated social networks where self-victimization takes form of persistent belief in Yugoslavism even though actual policies of Serbian government were at least equally nationalist to others.

Another film by Dragojevic, '*Parada*' (The Parade) from 2011 reflects some pan-regional identities and attitudes. It demonstrates the homophobic nature of the Balkans, with former enemies uniting in hatred of 'the other'. This time 'the other' is not someone of a different ethnicity, nation, religion or political ideology, but of a different sexual orientation. This shows the strong commonality of particularised cultures.

Gay pride parades were brutally attacked in Split and Belgrade, had to be heavily protected in Zagreb and were never even attempted in Sarajevo or Banja Luka. In Budva, Montenegro, the activists had to be evacuated by police boat in order to escape the angry homophobic mob. The activists in Sarajevo downscaled original plans for a parade and organised the festival which was prevented from taking place on the opening night due to violent intervention by Muslim extremists and football hooligans. Ethnic unity was easily achieved when a threat was perceived. This time it was not from the outside elements of different ethnic groups, but instead that

⁴¹ Crnkovic, Gordana, *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012) 176.

⁴² Nacional 05/03/2003 <http://www.nacional.hr/articles/view/13391/5/>

⁴³ Vidan, Aida, *In Contrast: Croatian Film Today*, in: Vidan, A. and Crnkovic, G.P., (eds.), 'KinoKultura: Special Issue 11: Croatia (May 2011), URL: <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/11/croatian.shtml>

⁴⁴ Jutarnji list: http://www.jutarnji.hr/clanak/art-2006,1,7,hribar_tomic,3955.jl

⁴⁵ Levi, *Disintegration in Flames*, 145.

⁴⁶ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 195.

nationalists' own perception of their strength was threatened by 'sick elements' within their own society. The film about homophobia 'reached [an audience of] 330,000 ... in Serbian cinemas after 12 weeks of distribution and 600,000 ... in Yugo-sphere.'⁴⁷

The precedent to *The Parade* was 'Go West' by Ahmed Imamovic from 2005. Two male lovers, one Muslim and the other Serb, escape wartime Sarajevo and hide in a Serb village by camouflaging the Muslim as a girl and thus making the couple heterosexual. The film was heavily criticised in Sarajevo. The BBC reported that 'the director has received death threats, religious groups have condemned it and those who have actually seen the film do not want to be identified for fear of attack.'⁴⁸ The setting of 'Go West' during the war might have prevented it from being a hit like 'The Parade,' which is set in a post-war post-Yugoslav ambient. The topic clearly defines the message to all these 'others' or 'different' in the 'Yugo-sphere', a term invented by Tim Judah to refer to the nations that constituted territories of Yugoslavia.⁴⁹

The most popular film in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the post-war period, '*Gori Vatra*' (Fuse), was made in 2003 by Pjer Zalica, who produced another local hit '*Kod amidze Idriza*' (Days and Hours) in the following year. The latter film presents a perception of typical family life of Bosniaks and was loved by the public. With its slow pace, often humorous and unusual moments and the fairly tolerant attitudes of its characters, it was a picture that the public had of themselves. Sarajevo, seen by Crnkovic through the lens of this film, is a 'community largely built on conversations' where 'people also help or treat each other in a myriad delicate ways.'⁵⁰ For Jelaca, this film is 'a heartbreaking testament to the processes of grief and healing, traumatic memory and loss in the face of a devastating war, yet a film that barely mentions war.'⁵¹ Zalica does not belong to the dominant ethnic group in Sarajevo, but was so glorified and widely respected that he even stars in television commercials thus reconfirming perceptions of Sarajevo, rightly or wrongly, as tolerant community.

Bosnian state is weak state with small budgets and decentralised institutions. Therefore no nationalist leadership can determine general direction of policies because every government is made up of at least six coalition parties at the state level. This perceived obstacle might be liberating factor at the same time because the state is not capable to impose restrictions on creative freedoms even during the most fervent nationalist periods. Thus Bosnian films avoided some of the traps that politics have created in Croatia and Serbia. This might also help understanding greater success of Bosnian films abroad.

IV. FILMS AIMED AT THE WEST

Mazaj saw it as 'no surprise that ... films clearly addressed to the West are not detached personal narratives but, rather, express a central preoccupation with history, the notion of the nations and national identity.'⁵² The only Oscar for the best foreign language film to any of the directors from the 'Yugosphere' was awarded to Danis Tanovic in 2002. '*Nicija zemlja*' (No Man's Land) was small budget film with no pretensions of targeting great historical truths or putting the blame entirely on any particular side. After the award was received, some Croatian media published claims that '*Nicija zemlja*' was actually a Croatian film because few leading actors were Croats and the producer was originally from Croatia.⁵³ The reactions in Serbia were calmer with less media attention.

A euphoria following the Oscar was used in Sarajevo as proof of the righteousness of their side during the war. The film showed two soldiers from the opposing armies stuck together in no man's land. The argument of who started the war was used yet again, but this time with a great sense of humor. The state television in Sarajevo broadcast the film following the victory in Hollywood and it is interesting to note translations that were produced for this purpose. For example, when United Nations forces discuss the situation in English, subtitles refer to a 'Bosniak soldier' although the UN officials actually said 'Bosnian soldier'.⁵⁴ A duality of identities between the ethnic group and the state that is often confusing for outsiders this time seems to have showed its

⁴⁷ Internet Movie data Base: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1784575/trivia> accessed on 14/10/2012

⁴⁸ BBC: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4368077.stm>

⁴⁹ Judah, Tim, *Yugoslavia is dead: long live the Yugo-sphere: good news from the Western Balkan*, in: *Papers on South Eastern Europe*, Economides, Spyros and Kovanović, Ivan (eds.) 1. LSEE - Research on South Eastern Europe, London: 2009.

⁵⁰ Crnkovic, G.P., '*Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes*' (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012) p.142.

⁵¹ Jelača, Dijana, *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, 2015, p.10.

⁵² Mazaj, Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars, 50.

⁵³ Nacional, weekly, and few film critics made claims it was Croatian film. <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/pubs/archive/data/200203/20327-006-pubs-sar.htm>

⁵⁴ Radio Television of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina

existence within the Bosniak cultural elite. They insisted on the multiethnic character of the Bosnian Army, but when it came to identifying a soldier of this army, they recognized him as Bosniak despite the fact that there were no clear indications of this.

The character in the film is called 'Ciki,' clearly a nickname, who could belong to any ethnic group. He does not wear any religious or ethnic symbols, and even in his words he does not lead us to any assumption of his ethnicity. The soldier's only known collective determination is through his uniform, or rather a lack of proper uniform as Bosnian army often lacked basic resources. Politicians in Sarajevo and many citizens have consistently claimed that this was a multiethnic army, while Serbian and Croatian leaders often claimed it was an exclusively Bosniak military. The television corporation that subtitled the film kept with the official line of Sarajevo politicians but the real sense of belonging was projected with this subtitles when it was assumed that the soldier of the Bosnian army was actually Bosniak. Tanovic created a film that would be acceptable internationally as an antiwar work where 'ordinary, non-heroic protagonists ... who are "enemies" who resemble each other so closely in language, cultural experience and background that you cannot tell them apart,' were actually sending a different message from nationalist propaganda.⁵⁵

Another internationally recognized film, Jasmila Zbanic's '*Grbavica*' as 'extraordinary example of socially engaged cinema,' Murtic claims.⁵⁶ However, it is also an example of the huge differences that exist between Bosnian ethnic groups. A story of the rape of Bosniak women by a Serb soldier and the consequences thereof in peacetime Bosnia-Herzegovina formed the basis of an essentially female film that attracted the attention of women authors in Europe and feminist activists in the region. Despite this essential message of the vulnerability of women in times of war, it was seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a film critical of Serbs only. The film was hugely popular among Bosniaks but was not screened in the Republic of Srpska, whose then Prime Minister made conflicting statements concerning whether he had seen the film or not. Unlike in academia, this topic was not often explored in post-Yugoslav films.⁵⁷ Lene Hansen found that 'despite the traditional ignorance of this gendered aspect of warfare by policy makers as well as the academic field of Security Studies ... The war in Bosnia brought gender issues onto the international security agenda to an unprecedented extent.'⁵⁸

Grbavica's 'political significance lies in the fact that the director, Jasmila Zbanic, successfully gained international attention for the impossible conditions of women who had been sexually abused in the recent Yugoslav wars.'⁵⁹ It won several international awards including the Golden Bear in Berlin, and yet it was never screened in almost half of the country. One could use this example in proving the enormous difficulties of the nation-building process in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While 'it is now conventional to define the nation as the mapping of imagined community with a secure and shared identity and sense of belonging, on to a carefully demarcated geo-political space,' as Higson observes, this country shows a lack of the common society.⁶⁰ '*Grbavica*' might have created better grounds for understanding the situation of female victim in a war-torn society than for creating more common ground for a shared society with a shared narrative of the recent past.

The director that many describe as 'the most original auteur to emerge within the poetic paradigm responding to the gaze of the Western Eye is certainly Emir Kusturica.'⁶¹ He personally disturbed a sense of identity and belonging as given by birth with his reported acceptance of Orthodox Christian rites. While religion is often viewed in the West as a chosen identity, it is frequently understood as a given identity in the Balkans.

⁵⁵ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.222.

⁵⁶ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. p.6

⁵⁷ Allen, Beverley, *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA: 1996); Hansen, Lene, (2000) *Gender, Nation, Rape: Bosnia and the Construction of Security*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3:1, 55-75, DOI: 10.1080/14616740010019848; Helms, Elissa, *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013; Stiglmayer, Alexandra ed., *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1994.

⁵⁸ Hansen, Lene, (2000) *Gender, Nation, Rape: Bosnia and the Construction of Security*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3:1, 55-75, DOI: 10.1080/14616740010019848.

⁵⁹ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. p.6

⁶⁰ Higson, Andrew, *The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema*, in Hjort, M. & Mackenzie, S., (eds.), '*Cinema and Nation*' (Routledge, New York and London 2002) p.64.

⁶¹ Longinovic, Tomislav Z., *Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema*, in Imre, A., ed., '*East European Cinemas*' (Routledge, New York and London 2005) p.40.

After all, a major mark to differentiate Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks is religious affiliation. Thus family traditions, all the origins are rooted in this identity.

Great filmmaking talent and refusal to be identified as who he was supposed to be by birth led many Western observers to believe in Kusturica's impartiality. He was seen as an artist who '...undermines any and all notions of national identity and insofar as it is also recycling embedded Balkan cultural traditions.'⁶² Coates stated that the end of Yugoslavia was seen by some in the West 'as the possible nightmare terminus of Western multiculturalism should it too fail to integrate its ethnic minorities, casting them (out) instead as images of the paranoid Other.'⁶³ In Kusturica, they saw someone to save their ideas.

The 'Underground' was often seen as a utopian yet wishful peace of identity that would be acceptable to Europe. The critics failed to see many of the hidden messages that did not correspond with reality and insisted that 'disrupting classical narrative logic, these films, to varying degrees and with diverse methods, attempted to inscribe the dislocation, the loss of normality and reason which war brings, into their very forms.'⁶⁴ Žižek argued that Westerner 'wants to see in the Balkan war – the spectacle of timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anaemic Western life,'⁶⁵ and named 'the reverse racism which celebrates the exotic authenticity of the Balkan Other'.⁶⁶ Levi cited Kusturica's summary of such views 'that war is in the Balkans a "natural" phenomenon, like an "earthquake."⁶⁷

Kusturica duly provided satisfaction to those tastes. It was widely observed that 'Kusturica's characters romanticise the Serbs as people "who fight and make love better than anyone else in the world"...'⁶⁸ This observation corresponds with the description of Yugoslavs by Tito's wartime ally: 'Sir Fitzroy MacLean told me about Yugoslavs that they either fight like dogs or fuck like dogs.'⁶⁹ One should bear this in mind when analysing international success of the Underground. Pavle Levi provided excellent summary of Kusturica's ideological pattern in the 'Underground': 'The film's "Yugoslavism" - grounded in excessive, uncontrolled dissipation of energy - is similarly a mere perversion of Yugoslavism: a false offering of instinctual freedom from a perspective in line with repressive nationalism...'⁷⁰

Kusturica's work together with Dragojević's 'Lepa sela lepo gore' (Pretty Villages, Pretty Flames), Wayne argues, 'may be succinctly defined as disillusioned nationalism. Because these films are disillusioned, they cannot be seen as propagandising on behalf of Milosević's regime.'⁷¹ This critic failed to notice that it was Milosević's regime's facilities that provided the necessary logistics for filming 'Underground'. Iordanova analysed in great detail both cinematic and socio-political aspects of the film and found it should be defended by stating that 'even if Underground could be read as pro-Serbian propaganda by audiences within the borders of former Yugoslavia, it barely worked as such in international context, since the alleged pro-Serbian message was "lost in translation".'⁷² Another foreigner saw it as 'lament about the destruction of a united Yugoslavia' and described Kusturica as 'Bosnian Muslim-Jewish filmmaker' which was certainly false, wrong, not true and ultimately irrelevant.⁷³

Kusturica's ethnic identity causes continuous debate locally and misunderstanding globally. Is he Bosnian or Serbian author? If one accepts legacy of international system of human rights, every individual has a right to identify or not to identify with ethnic and national group as well as to change the individual's ethnic or national identity. Therefore it is Kusturica basic human right to declare himself whichever way he wants to. The

⁶² Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, p.112.

⁶³ Coates, Paul, *East-Central European Cinema: Beyond the Iron Curtain*, in Ezra, E. ed., 'European Cinema' (Oxford University Press 2004) p.276.

⁶⁴ Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, p.110.

⁶⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, quoted in Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, p.111.

⁶⁶ Žižek, Slavoj, quoted in Coates, *East-Central European Cinema*, p.276. See also: Longinovic, T.Z., 'Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema' in Imre, A., ed., 'East European Cinemas' (Routledge, New York and London 2005)

⁶⁷ Levi, *Disintegration in Flames*, p.104.

⁶⁸ Cerovic, Stanko, quoted in Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, p.111. See also Alain Finkielkraut's critique.

⁶⁹ The meeting took place in 2000 with the high ranking British Army officer under the Chatham House Rules. If I provided any more detail he could be identified.

⁷⁰ Levi, *Disintegration in Flames*, 104.

⁷¹ Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, p.115.

⁷² Iordanova, Dina, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and Media* (British Film Institute 2001) p.123.

⁷³ Naficy, Hamid, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001) p.226.

difficulty is to specify national cinema to which his films should belong to. The term post-Yugoslav cinema might provide the framework for this but his personal flirting with Serbian nationalist political ideas might tempt authors to understand him as Serbian author after the end of Yugoslavia. Iordanova compares the role of Kusturica to Leni Riefenstahl, which Coates understood morally in favour of Kusturica, although one might argue that this comparison actually works against him.⁷⁴ As Iordanova says, Riefenstahl was a German that happened to live under the Nazi regime.⁷⁵ Kusturica, however, came to Serbia by his own choice. Furthermore, he did not come to Serbia from Sarajevo but from Paris, where he had been living and working when the war in Bosnia started.

V. CONCLUSION

Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sarajevo in particular were often described as 'small Yugoslavia' throughout the existence of this state.⁷⁶ Sarajevo's pre-war cosmopolitan character has been described and understood as something unique during the period and in the area when and where particularization of national identities, cultures and lack of openness were dominant. Therefore the concluding part of this work will draw on examples from Sarajevo to provide and sustain relevant arguments and answers to issues raised in the study.

Wars are at the core of the contemporary identities of post-Yugoslav nations and, as has been seen, they are also at the core of film productions from these societies. Sarajevo had additionally received unprecedented media attention during the siege of the city and thus became a symbol, especially among Western audiences, which 'resulted in appreciation and respect for Sarajevo's martyred citizens, with a degree of attentiveness not normally granted to inhabitants of the region.'⁷⁷ When talking about the Balkans, Iordanova saw that 'people may well get the chance to liberate themselves from the complex of being "insufficiently European".'⁷⁸

It seems that the medium of film might contribute to this 'liberation'. During the siege of Sarajevo, local enthusiasts founded the Sarajevo Film Festival and offered a kind of openness of society to the region that was atypical for the Balkans at the time. Thus the processes of particularizing former common culture, developing new national identities, creating closed instead of open societies that were omnipresent throughout these lands have suddenly been confronted by the opposite example. Furthermore this example came from the community that arguably suffered the worst forms of nationalistic violence at least among larger cities.

The first edition of the festival took place 'during the worst periods of siege.'⁷⁹ Global artistic elites liked the city's "crazy charisma" [that] emerged parallel with its destruction.⁸⁰ Sarajevo came out as no longer only a place, but rather a specific understanding of space. 'The problem of national identity as the problem of space,'⁸¹ argues Mazaj, was reflected in the leading regional films among the western cinemagoers: 'the trench in Danis Tanovic's 'No Man's Land', the tunnel in Srdjan Dragojevic's 'Pretty Village, Pretty Flame', and the cellar in Emir Kusturica's 'Underground' are constructed as tangible spaces with real parameters, yet spaces that are marginal...'⁸²

Sarajevo, Dina Iordanova described, 'was just an ordinary Balkan city, like any other in the region...'⁸³ Goulding saw pre-war Sarajevo as a 'small but vital and lively center of film production and film culture.'⁸⁴ Murtic talks about the '1980s Sarajevo ... [that] signified a microcosmic example of a cosmopolitan space within broader Yugoslav and European contexts.'⁸⁵ Thus it was certainly not for aesthetic reasons that Sarajevo attracted global attention. Iordanova argues that the 'cinematic image of Sarajevo from before the war differs significantly from the elevated one which emerged during the times of siege and conflict.'⁸⁶

There is often a problem with film presentations of the Bosnian war. 'London's Hyde Park,' Crnkovic points out, 'as Monet painted it is quite different from a Hyde Park of a tourist's photo; the siege of Sarajevo, as

⁷⁴ Coates, *East-Central European Cinema*, p.278.

⁷⁵ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.123.

⁷⁶ Andjelic, Neven, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: The End of Yugoslavia*, (Frank Cass Publishers, London: 2003) p.18.

⁷⁷ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.236.

⁷⁸ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.276.

⁷⁹ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.230.

⁸⁰ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.237.

⁸¹ Mazaj, *Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars*, p.51.

⁸² Mazaj, *Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars*, p.51.

⁸³ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.235.

⁸⁴ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.228.

⁸⁵ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.4.

⁸⁶ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p.236.

seen through the lens of the first post-war Bosnian feature film, 'Perfect Circle' (*Savršeni krug*, 1997), is quite different from the CNN coverage.⁸⁷ Danis Tanovic emerged after the war as one of those who contributed the most to this difference. His film was described as 'a story of how the West perceives the Balkans in general, how the Balkans perceive the West, as well as how Balkans perceive themselves.'⁸⁸

Perceptions of mutual hatred in the Balkans were seriously undermined by the Sarajevo Film Festival. A Western author has glorified 'the case of a Serbian film winning best picture in a Sarajevo-hosted film festival,' as reflecting, in his understanding, how 'film culture plays an integral role in promoting the culture of the autonomous regions of the former Yugoslavia collectively.'⁸⁹ 'Contemporary Sarajevo is the very opposite of the promising cosmopolitan place it was considered to have been in the 1980s,' claims Murtic. 'Yet Sarajevo, during ten days each summer, transforms itself again into cosmopolitan urban place for the annual Sarajevo Film Festival.'⁹⁰

A perception of others is always of great importance for identities. Therefore it is not only how we see ourselves, but how the others see us as well, which is important. Mazaj states that Tanovic's film 'circumscribes and closes off the no man's land as the space of a new Bosnian nation,' which illustrates her different understanding of the whole issue of national identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁹¹ However, it still remains unanswered what is and who belongs to this new Bosnian nation.

Sarajevo Film Festival as symbol of reconciled and open societies and a possibility of preserved common culture does not reflect Bosnian nation if it was ever developed. Religion certainly proved to be of greater importance for the majority of Bosnians. Thus Sarajevo Film Festival, like Danis Tanovic's films, or some other Sarajevo authors like Pjer Zalica and few others, is actually reflection of culture that is spread in some liberal circles in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia but is minority culture, only temporary feature in summer and could be better off described as imaginary common culture. As Mary Kaldor famously described Cold War as imaginary war,⁹² this symbolically described Sarajevo culture should better be named imaginary culture.

While the national identities of Croats and Serbs are by now clearly formed, Bosniaks find themselves in a rather different situation. A lack of their own nation-state further complicates their nation-building process. 'Instead of seeing it as analogous with the other post-Yugoslav national cinemas,' Nebojsa Jovanovic suggested that 'Bosnian cinema should be acknowledged as a cinematic entity that defies the ethno-national imperative that dictates the proliferation of national cinemas.'⁹³ Another author in the same publication also sees the need to address the issue of 'films belonging to a particular national, regional, or international cinema, as either Bosnian, Balkan, or European.'⁹⁴ During the post-war period, Sarajevo's spirit was endangered 'by tripartite Bosnian Serb, Croat and Muslim educational and cultural policies that ... erode Sarajevo's traditional multiculturalism.'⁹⁵ Danis Tanovic, when receiving the Oscar for the best non-English language film in 2002, stated, 'Thank you. This is for my country, Bosnia.' The film, however, was an international co-production without Bosnian participation. Thus Mandusic quotes Horton, who questioned national definitions of films by stating that the Bosnian-ness of 'No Man's Land' was based on the director's birthplace and by admitting that the same criteria had not been used for the films of Emir Kusturica, who was also a Sarajevo-born director.⁹⁶ There is an even

⁸⁷ Crnkovic, Gordana, *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes* (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group) p.129.

⁸⁸ Mazaj, *Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars*, p.54.

⁸⁹ Jockims, Trevor L., *Why a War During a Film Festival? A History of a Sarajevo Film Festival*, in: *KinoKultura: Special Issue 14: Bosnian Cinema* (August 2012): <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/jockims.shtml>

⁹⁰ Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p.7.

⁹¹ Mazaj, *Tunnels, Trenches, Cellars*, p.57.

⁹² Kaldor, Mary, *The Imaginary War: Understanding East-West Conflict*. Blackwell Publishing. 1990.

⁹³ Jovanovic, *Bosnian Cinema*, <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/jovanovic.shtml>

⁹⁴ Mandusic, Zdenko, *Compromising Images: Film History, the films of Jasmila Žbanić, and Visual Representation of Bosnian Women*, in: *KinoKultura: Special Issue 14: Bosnia* (August 2012): <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/mandusic.shtml>

⁹⁵ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.231.

⁹⁶ Horton, Andrew J., *Lyric Landscapes and Living Hell*, *Kinoeye* 2 (2002) 17. quoted in: Mandusic, Z., *Compromising Images: Film History, the films of Jasmila Žbanić, and Visual Representation of Bosnian Women* in: *KinoKultura: Special Issue 14: Bosnia* (August 2012): <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/mandusic.shtml>

more complicated question, however, which begs for an answer. The Sarajevan author Jasmila Zbanic 'received the bulk of [the film's] funding from Croatia, where the story takes place and the film [would] be shot.'⁹⁷ Is it then a Croatian or a Bosnian film?

The same question has been asked after Veljko Bulajic announced that his film *Bitka na Neretvi* (Battle of Neretva), the greatest Yugoslav war spectacle, was no longer Yugoslav, but rather a Croatian film.⁹⁸ 'The violent breakup of Yugoslavia,' says Goulding, 'brought to an end a complex and fecund postwar experiment in building and sustaining multinational film culture.'⁹⁹

Therefore after taking into consideration wave of nationalistic films produced in all three countries, reconciliatory films also made in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and films seeking global appeal from these lands, it is still difficult to come up with a clear understanding and define national cinemas and national cultures. While many works can easily be classified as parts of national cinematographies and cultures, there are more films that intentionally defy such definition. They belong to broader communities that are not political reality and have no entities. They are imaginary communities with the imaginary culture who's existence is proven by these films, authorships and the festival.

An 'artistic heritage became a contested territory in cinema, tradition could be granted to the new countries only by separating the coherent shared film history of Yugoslavia,' observed Iordanova, who further stated that 'creating distinct film traditions is particularly artificial because ... borders of national cinemas were collapsing and giving way to increasingly trans-national film-making.'¹⁰⁰

The other side of the argument is presence of national cultures that clearly reflect national identities, political realities and entities that, by now, already exist for a quarter of century. 'To speak of Croatian film as starting only with 1991,' Vidan says, 'would mean disregarding the directors who both laid the foundations for a nascent cinema and created some of the basic orientations.' She concludes that 'reality is different now, however, and despite continuous collaboration within the region ... there are many points of differentiation.'¹⁰¹

Some authors are more inclined to understand all these new national cinemas as one entity - post-Yugoslav cinema. This, however, does not do full justice as there is significant number of films and authors who clearly belong only to their own national cinema. 'While neighbouring Serbia and Croatia were setting their national cinemas on their courses, Bosnia was seriously lagging behind,' observed Milas, arguing that 'Bosnia never participated in the trend so prominent in the nineties that came to be identified as the cinema of "self-balkanization," which featured Balkan as exotic locale and its inhabitants as savage and psychotic.'¹⁰² This might have further diluted the development of a stronger Bosnian identity and has left a rather weak state with disunited ethnic groups never really attempting to constitute a nation.

Popular tendencies proving the closeness of the national spaces had always been there, but the influence commanded by the elites, whether through the media or their policies in general, kept them apart for a prolonged period. Once national consciousness had been developed to the point of no return, the cultural, political and economic elites in the new nation-states realised the benefits of a thorough reconciliation and re-unifying of the cultural space. The films produced during this period proved that these changes had taken place. As Goulding stated, 'the "Yugoslav" film experience survives even if Yugoslavia itself has slipped into oblivion.'¹⁰³

This view from the outside is supported by some insiders like Jergovic who argued that the Bosnian film "An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker" (*Beraci zeljeza*), the Croatian film "A Stranger" (*Obrana i zaštita*) and the Serbian film "Circles" (*Krugovi*), all made in 2013, all 'belong to the same culture.' 'They are created on common cultural and historical premises,' Jergovic continues, 'on very, very similar interpretations of

⁹⁷ Vidan, *In Contrast: Croatian Film Today*, in: Vidan, A. and Crnkovic, G.P., (eds.), 'KinoKultura: Special Issue 11: Croatia (May 2011)': <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/11/croatian.shtml>

⁹⁸ Radio Slobodna Evropa, 17/03/2013, URL: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/bulajic-i-samardzic-cija-je-bitka-na-neretvi/24930558.html>

⁹⁹ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.186.

¹⁰⁰ Iordanova, D., Introduction to: Horton, A.J. ed., *The Celluloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav Screen Reflections of a Turbulent Decade*, in: Central Europe Review (Central Europe Review Ltd., Telford, UK, 2000) p.5.

¹⁰¹ Vidan, Aida, *In Contrast: Croatian Film Today*, in: Vidan, A. and Crnkovic, G.P., (eds.), 'KinoKultura: Special Issue 11: Croatia' (May 2011): <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/11/intro-vidan.shtml>

¹⁰² Milas, Natasa, *Cinema of War and Peace: Bosnian Film from 1992 to Present*, in KinoKultura: <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/14/milas.shtml>

¹⁰³ Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, p.232.

events from recent history.' He concludes: 'Therefore it is plausible to speak of the same culture these films have come from, within the one community, within the same - albeit virtual - cinematography.'¹⁰⁴

This kind of understanding supports the argument of imaginary culture that survived all nationalist efforts that were strongest in 1990s but are still present in the three societies. This culture offers reconciliation and coexistence of national cultures. It develops on the traditions of Yugoslav culture or multi-cultural society and exploits grounds of tolerant and open societies. These societies are not necessarily opponents of national cultures but are often perceived as such. Jergovic argues these films are produce 'of the outside of the social and cultural context of the countries they were created in and therefore they cannot be put into national contexts and their cultures.'¹⁰⁵ One might question his statement. Although Jergovic comes from a liberal and tolerant point of view it actually is actually not dissimilar to nationalist points who criticise this kind of films for being too open to 'others' and too critical of their own national cultures.

These films could not possibly have been shot in the 1990s. It took almost two decades for the three post-war societies to accept the strong similarities between their cultures and identities. Tony Judt has described the violent break-up of relations between Yugoslavs as a 'narcissism of small differences' before concluding that 'Yugoslavia did not fall: It was pushed. It did not die: It was killed.'¹⁰⁶

Recent post-Yugoslav cinematography finally shows the plurality of identities and cultures, and for that matter of political beliefs, within each of these societies. Thus it became acceptable that significant parts of the post-Yugoslav societies do have common cultures and similar identities. Jergovic has rightly described the origins of these films ' within one imaginary culture.'¹⁰⁷ It is clear that some Post-Yugoslav films like some people cannot be sourced to or find their identities within one national culture. It took some quarter of a century of nation-building and state-building processes among Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks to develop their societies and national cultures and crucially to accept that the 'other' culture, post-Yugoslav culture and Cinema has survived despite all the nationalizing efforts. It might be part of imaginary culture that cannot be put into context of any national cinema but this imaginary post-Yugoslav cinema gets its imaginary territory, space and time, every summer during the Sarajevo Film Festival.

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¹⁰⁴ Jergovic, Miljenko, 2013. URL: <http://www.jergovic.com/ajfelov-most/tri-filma-iz-nicije-zemlje-koji-ce-ovom-svijetu-spasiti-dusu/>

¹⁰⁵ Jergovic, Miljenko, 2013. URL: <http://www.jergovic.com/ajfelov-most/tri-filma-iz-nicije-zemlje-koji-ce-ovom-svijetu-spasiti-dusu/>

¹⁰⁶ Judt, Tony, *Postwar: History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010) 685.

¹⁰⁷ Jergovic, Miljenko, 2013. URL: <http://www.jergovic.com/ajfelov-most/tri-filma-iz-nicije-zemlje-koji-ce-ovom-svijetu-spasiti-dusu/>

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