



**Contemporary Southeastern Europe**

An Interdisciplinary Journal on Southeastern Europe

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Research Article

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*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2017, 4(2), 102-120

DOI 10.25364/02.4:2017.2.7

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# Post-Yugoslav Film and the Construction of New National Cinemas

Nikica Gilić\*

Post-Yugoslav cinema is commonly seen as a field abundant in nationalist traits, while the work of post-Yugoslav scholars is criticized for advocating the notion of continuity of nations. However, by analyzing the most representative films from Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav eras, it can be argued that many traits dominant in post-Yugoslav cinema (not exclusively those connected to the prevalence of nationalism) began long before the actual dissolution of Yugoslavia. However abrupt these historical occurrences might have been, Yugoslavia and its cinema still did not sever all ties with the past: the newly forming national cultural traditions and discourses still shared some traits with traditions and discourses from the Yugoslav period of history. This text attempts to explain the elements of these continuous traits, including those which can be observed in films made both before and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but also in the films created on the border of the two eras. Since post-Yugoslav countries and cinemas diverge in many ways, this article concentrates mostly on Croatian examples, hoping they will also illuminate other post-Yugoslav situations, while not completely disregarding examples from other leading centers of (post-)Yugoslav cinema.

**Keywords:** post-Yugoslav cinema, Croatian cinema, nationalism, gastarbaiter

## Introduction

The concept of post-Yugoslav cinema or literature has become common in cinema studies and other fields of cultural analysis.<sup>1</sup> Discussions of post-Yugoslav cinema can frequently be regarded as an attempt of critical dialog with nationalist views that claim there is a significant continuity of separate post-Yugoslav entities (such as Croatian, Serbian or Slovenian cinema) during and after the Yugoslav era. For instance, the Croatian film historian Ivo Škrabalo at one point even calls *Filmska enciklopedija*<sup>2</sup> a “Croatian Film Encyclopedia” (“hrvatska Filmska enciklopedija”),<sup>3</sup> although the book deals

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<sup>1</sup> Crnković, Gordana P. 2012. *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film. Fires, Foundations, Flourishes*. London, New York: Bloomsbury; Dumanjić, Marko. 2013. *Hiding in Plain Sight?: Making Homosexuality (in)Visible in Post-Yugoslav Film*, in *Queer Visibility in Post-socialist Cultures*, edited by Fejes, Nárcisz and Andrea P. Balogh. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 58-80; Hansen-Kokoruš, Renate. (ed.). 2014. *Facing the Present: Transition in Post-Yugoslavia*. Hamburg: (Grazer Studien zur Slawistik. Band 6); Pavičić, Jurica. 2011. *Postjugoslavenski film: stil i ideologija*. Zagreb: HFS.

<sup>2</sup> Pete, Ante. (ed.). 1986. *Filmska enciklopedija 1/2*. Zagreb: JLZ Miroslav Krleža.

<sup>3</sup> Škrabalo, Ivo. 2007. *Hrvatska filmska povijest ukratko (1896-2006)*. Zagreb: VBZ, HFS.

with the history of all Yugoslav cinema. This particular wording can be regarded as something akin to a Freudian slip, revealing the true desire (cultural stance) behind Škrabalo's work. The implicit stance should probably be attributed to the whole cultural context of the book as some sort of desire for a non-existent Croatian encyclopedia of film. It is not difficult to criticize a continuity narrative of Croatian cinema when the complexities of the Yugoslav context are taken into account. In addition, as is to be expected, the critical approach to studying (post-)Yugoslav cinema can track and easily trace vulnerable spots in some post-Yugoslav historians' and critics' insistence on the image of Yugoslavia as a totalitarian *gulag*, a prison for creative artists.<sup>4</sup>

Although the critique of such traditional (mainstream) scholarship<sup>5</sup> is often well-founded, it is not immune to bias itself, as demonstrated by Goran Gocić's claim that there is no entry on Emir Kusturica in *Filmska enciklopedija*, used as evidence of nationalist bias against Kusturica.<sup>6</sup> Gocić's criticism therefore seems to be representative of another, less prominent continuity narrative: in order to show that separatist tendencies were in abundance even before the official dissolution of Yugoslavia, one should attempt to find evidence of such tendencies, for instance, of neglecting a Bosnian or a Serbian artist, such as Kusturica, in a book published in Zagreb.

However, although using an untrue example, Gocić is probably on the right track when he assumes that methods and cultural practices of constructing and (re)affirming national identities in the post-Yugoslav era actually had deep roots within the Yugoslav era, even if *Filmska enciklopedija* did in fact have numerous entries on Yugoslav filmmakers (including Kusturica). Recognizing these continuities might even eventually aide the criticism of separatist tendencies.

Naturally, artists who belong to more than one Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav tradition are anything but uncommon. After the hiatus caused by war in the 1990s and resulting poverty, co-productions between post-Yugoslav countries have become quite frequent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though they have never reached the level of the Yugoslav period.<sup>7</sup> One of the first internationally successful post-Yugoslav co-productions was Danis Tanović's *Ničija zemlja* (*No Man's Land*, 2001; recipient of Oscar) often regarded as a Bosnian Herzegovinian film although, as Ibrahimović justly states, did not have

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<sup>4</sup> Jovanović, Nebojša. 2011. *Kinematografija bunkera: O "crnim knjigama" jugo-filma*, in *Horror, Porno, Ennui: Kulturne prakse postsocijalizma*, edited by Prica, Ines and Tea Škokić. Zagreb: IEF, 299-310; Jovanović, Nebojša. 2011. Fadil Hadžić u optici totalitarne paradigme. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 17(65-66), 47-60.

<sup>5</sup> Jovanović, Nebojša. 2012. *Futur antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema, or, Why is Emir Kusturica's Legacy Worth Fighting For*, in *Retracing Images. Visual Images After Yugoslavia*, edited by Šuber, Daniel and Slobodan Karamanić. Leiden: Brill, 149-69.

<sup>6</sup> Gocić, Goran. 2001. *The Cinema of Emir Kusturica. Notes from the Underground*. London: Wallflower, 38. *Filmska enciklopedija*'s volume one (1986) had been edited by the December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1984 (the fact is printed on the last, non-paginated page). The second volume (1990) has an addendum for people missing from the first volume - either by mistake or because they came to real prominence only after the work on the first volume was concluded (Kusturica is joined in the addendum by Ivo Gregurević, James Cameron, Vna Begović and others).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion on films that are Croatian as well as Bosnian, see Crnković, *Post-Yugoslav Literature*, 132-35; Ibrahimović, Nedžad. 2012. *Bosanske filmske naracije, dokumenti o raspadanju*. Tuzla: Bosanska riječ, 77-84, 105-9.

financial support from Bosnian film companies.<sup>8</sup> Being the most ravaged by the war, Bosnian state was for a while less likely to invest a lot of money in cinema, so several post-Yugoslav and other countries actually financed *Ničija zemlja*. But, since trans-national and international phenomena in culture and cinema are hardly a post-Yugoslav invention, the complexity of such phenomenon should not discourage this discussion.

This article will therefore attempt to analyze both precursors and fully-fledged nation-building films in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav eras, describing the chief characteristics of these tendencies, placing special emphasis on Croatian cinema.

### **Decentralizing Yugoslavia in culture and cinema**

When Yugoslavia dissolved, Yugoslav cinema disintegrated as well. The production and distribution of films, as well as critical reflection, were suddenly split into separate states, some of which were barely capable of producing films at all. Very few local or international observers could have imagined the eventual dissolution of Yugoslavia, even judging from Yugoslav films from the 1980s. The dissolution of Yugoslavia may have been a desire of many, but even those who desired it could often barely have imagined what it would be like and when it would happen.

The dissolution of Yugoslav cinema was definite and systematic enough to be considered a landmark in historical periodization,<sup>9</sup> although, for instance, the Serbian critic Dimitrije Vojnov seems to place the beginning of the new era in Serbia with Slobodan Milošević's rise to power (before the dissolution of Yugoslavia).<sup>10</sup> With more than two decades passing since the fall of Yugoslavia, the flourishing of historical reflection on the subject is to be expected. However, the tendencies of decentralization and federalization, typical for Yugoslav cinema as early as 1950s, may have heralded the described turn of events, as suggested by Škrabalo and other historians.

The start of socialist Yugoslav cinema can be well understood through the fact that Vjekoslav Afrić from Croatia directed the first Yugoslav feature-length

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<sup>8</sup> Ibrahimović, *Bosanske filmske naracije*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Škrabalo, *Hrvatska filmska povijest*, 165-72; Gilić, Nikica. 2011. *Uvod u povijest hrvatskog igranog filma*. Zagreb: Leykam Int, 141-62; Kragić, Bruno. 2008. *Hrvatski film nakon 1990 - prijedlog stilske klasifikacije*. *Sarajevske sveske* 7(19/20) (accessed: 01. March 2018); Rubeša, Dragan. 2008. *Geneza novog hrvatskog filma*. *Sarajevske sveske* 7(19/20) (accessed: 01. March 2018); Galevski, Vlatko. 2008. *Novi makedonski film između tetoviranja, iluzija i sjenki*. *Sarajevske sveske* 7(19/20) (accessed: 01. March 2018); Đerić, Zoran. 2008. *Srpski i hrvatski film: pretpostavke za pisanje istorije nacionalnih, odnosno državnih kinematografija*, in *Serbo-Croat Relations in the 20th Century - History and Perspectives / Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi u 20. Veku - prošlost i perspective*, edited by Gavrilović, Darko. Salzburg, Novi Sad: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, 103-12; Pavičić, Jurica. 2000. *Moving into the Frame*. *Central European Review* 19 (accessed: 01. March 2018); On post-independence Croatian cinema, see Alexander, Edward J. 2013. *Affording Room for Deviance in Croatian National Cinema Discourse*. *Emergence* 5, 43-49.

<sup>10</sup> Vojnov, Dimitrije. 2008. *Politički aspekti savremenog srpskog filma*. *Nova srpska politička misao*, 23. March 2013 (accessed: 01. March 2018).

fiction film (*Slavica*, 1947) for a Belgrade company, Avala film, while Nikola Popović from Serbia directed the first such production of a Zagreb-based company, Jadran film (*Živjeće ovaj narod / This Nation Will Live*, 1947). Afrić was not the only Croatian artist involved in the production of *Slavica*, while the story of *Živjeće ovaj narod* to a great extent deals with Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>11</sup> Decentralization soon took place, and although Škrabalo's book on Croatian Cinema from the 1980s<sup>12</sup> has been seriously criticized as nationalist and oblivious to (or rather, ignoring) the Yugoslav context, in this instance he seems to be correct, while the true comprehensive Yugoslav history of cinema was not actually been produced in Yugoslavia.

Even Volk's *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma* told the story of "republic centers" of cinema in separate chapters, without a unifying historical vision.<sup>13</sup> After the fall of Yugoslavia, Volk actually became a very passionate historian of Serbian cinema, at least as guilty of a nationalist perspective as Škrabalo, but in Yugoslav times his writings did not show nationalist tendencies.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the film historian Daniel Goulding, from the USA, remains the only author of a serious attempt to write a history of Yugoslav film: a book less useful for dealing with the subtleties in Croatian or Slovenian production than in recognizing and describing the intricacies of the Black Wave.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1950s, the tight grip and control of the state and the idea of centralized production started to gradually loosen (Škrabalo eloquently explains many aspects of that process)<sup>16</sup> and, in the 1980s in particular, after the death of president Tito, the traces of different tendencies that flourished after the dissolution of Yugoslavia were already visible. The differences within late Yugoslavia's production center, however, need not be understood only in terms of nationalism. The film historian Nebojša Jovanović, for instance, points out that the specific type of war of the sexes (with women being civilized and men primitive and wild) is a trait of Bosnian-Herzegovinian cinema before as well as after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.<sup>17</sup>

After watching the entire Croatian feature film production, one can conclude that the *gastarbeiter* complex is among the earliest heralds of Croatocentric cinema. This cultural phenomenon encompassed workers being exported to West Germany by socialist Yugoslavia, but most films depict non-governmental circumstances leading to emigration. Naturally, these workers came from different Yugoslav republics and were of different ethnic backgrounds, but ethnic Croats (from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) became most

<sup>11</sup> Škrabalo, Ivo. 1998. *101 godina filma u Hrvatskoj, 1896-1997*. Zagreb: Globus, 159-65.

<sup>12</sup> Škrabalo, Ivo. 1984. *Između publike i države. Povijest hrvatske kinematografije 1896-1980*. Zagreb: GZH.

<sup>13</sup> Volk, Petar. 1986. *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma*. Beograd, Ljubljana: Institut za film, Partizanska knjiga.

<sup>14</sup> Volk, Petar. 2001. *Dvadeseti vek srpskog filma*. Beograd: Institut za Film.

<sup>15</sup> Goulding, Daniel. 2003. *Liberated Cinema. The Yugoslav Experience 1945-2001*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Škrabalo, *101 godina filma*, 180-88.

<sup>17</sup> Jovanović, Nebojša. 2013. Bosanski psiho: *Kuduz*, rat spolova i kraj socijalizma. *Sarajevske sveske* 12(39/40), 156-75, 156, 171-5; Ibrahimović, however, claims that many traits of Bosnian-Herzegovinian cinema were inherited from the entire Yugoslav context: Ibrahimović, *Bosanske filmske naracije*, 15.

cinematically and politically important,<sup>18</sup> as demonstrated by Krsto Papić's ominous documentary *Specijalni vlakovi* (*Special Trains*, 1972), part of his socially provocative documentary opus. In *Specijalni vlakovi* the treatment of workers by West-German authorities is eerily reminiscent of the treatment of Jews and other people being sentenced to go to the concentration camps, with the iconography of trains and the motif of reducing humans to mere numbers (stripping them of their name as part of a strategy to take away their dignity) being particularly effective in calling to mind the vile iconography of the Holocaust.

These problems are also pertinent in the fiction films of Obrad Glušćević (*Čovik od svita / The man of the world*, 1965)<sup>19</sup> and, particularly, of Bogdan Žižić. Although the poor, rural, more religious parts of Yugoslavia where the travelers were recruited included regions with a higher concentration of nationalist sentiment (such as rural Dalmatia and Western Herzegovina), the ethnic component of the theme of *gastarbeiter* had not immediately been recognized at the time.<sup>20</sup> Thus Bogdan Žižić won one of his two main awards at the Pula film festival with *Ne nagingi se van* (*Don't Lean Through The Window*, 1977), a drama about a young and naïve man going to work in Germany, where all his ambitions fall apart, fueled in part by a very sensitive acting portrayal of the hero by the young actor Ivo Gregurević, who became a stalwart of Croatian cinema in subsequent decades. Žižić returned to the topic in *Rani snijeg u Münchenu* (*Early Snow in Munich*, 1984).

Part of the same *gastarbeiter* trend was definitively Slobodan Praljak's only feature film *Povratak Katarine Kožul* (*The Return of Katarina Kožul*) from 1989, the story of a *gastarbeiter's* widow from Herzegovina, who becomes a *gastarbeiter* herself,<sup>21</sup> while in *Hamburg Altona* (Vedran Mihletić / Mladen Mitrović / Dragutin Krečner, 1989), a Croatian-Serbian co-production, three crooks from different regions plan to hop a train to Hamburg, Germany, after they settle their affairs in Yugoslavia. Praljak and the directors of *Hamburg Altona* were relatively young artists, all debutants at the time, which might indicate the relevance of the topic to the idea of contemporary society in Yugoslavia's later years, and probably to the future of cinema as well, since young directors often set standards for future developments in cinema (although this did not occur with Praljak, Mihletić, Mitrović and Krečner, one might argue that the severity of war in the 1990s probably contributed to thwarting many promising film careers).

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<sup>18</sup> "Given the massive character of this type of migration from [...] Croatia [...] and ethnically Croatian parts of [...] Bosnia and Herzegovina [...], the study of immigration was at start mainly a Croatian matter." Ondrej, Daniel. 2007. *Gastarbajteri: Rethinking Yugoslav Economic Migrations towards the European North-West through Transnationalism and Popular Culture*, in *Imaging Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, edited by Ellis, Steven G. and Klusakova, Luďa. Pisa: Edizioni plus - Pisa University Press, 277-302, 278-9.

<sup>19</sup> In this film the conflict between Serbs and Croats in Munich is clearly depicted in the fistfight-scene near the end of the hero's sojourn in Germany.

<sup>20</sup> Škrabalo does not mention this in his books on Croatian cinema. The motif appears elsewhere as well: in Goran Paskaljević's *Čuvar plaže u zimskom periodu* (*Beach Guard in Winter*, 1976) Sweden is the "promised land" for Serb workers. *Gastarbeiter* is the German word for "guest workers" who came to work in Germany (from Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia...), widely accepted in Croatia and its region ("gastarbajter" or "gasterbajter") as a generic name for workers working abroad.

<sup>21</sup> The script was written by Abdulah Sidran and the director himself.

The theme of crooks in *Hamburg Altona* is not so surprising, since it was not only legal or regular workers who went to the west. Controversial at the time, Antun Vrdoljak's seminal TV series *Prosjaci i sinovi* (*Beggars and Sons*) from 1971 also contained the motif of beggars and smugglers who regularly went across the border, in a similar manner to before and during the period of socialist Yugoslavia. The main character, Matan, eventually became quite popular due to his resourcefulness in dealing with authorities, but the focus on social continuities probably constituted a major part of the reason why the series was not premiered on Televizija Zagreb until 1984.

In the 1980s, Yugoslav culture showed strong signs of decentralization, with different, often ethnically and/or religiously depicted phenomena. The following overview is not meant to pigeonhole certain republics of socialist Yugoslavia as nationalist or liberal; it is just meant to illustrate the tendencies deviating from Yugoslavia's Titoist political course. For at the time liberalism and nationalism went hand in hand as enemies of the socialist way of thinking, as demonstrated by the simultaneous squashing of nationalist and liberal tendencies in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia at the beginning of 1970s.

If we search for the roots of nationalist cinema outside Croatia, it is hard to overlook one of the most important tendencies in Serbia (though also prominent among ethnic Serbs living elsewhere) - the growing importance of religion and the Kosovo myth, very important for Serb Orthodox Church, as well as the renewal of the *Chetnik* movement, its ideology and iconography. The growth of these tendencies culminated with the great gathering of Serbs at the Gazimestan field in Kosovo, a place of battle that became the foundation of Serbian national mythology. It was at this gathering that Slobodan Milošević emerged as a true political leader in 1989.

The influence of this political movement was obvious, for instance in Zdravko Šotra's pseudo-historical feature *Boj na kosovu* (*The Battle of Kosovo*, 1989), heavily based on epic poetry dealing with the historical event. But, these changes were not confined just to official culture and politics - for instance, it can be claimed that Darko Popović's very popular novel *Knjiga o Milutinu* (*Book of Milutin*, 1985), a fictionalized take on Serbian history, was also an equally important herald of changes, and television took part in these trends as well. One of the most interesting images from this era was a commercial for an after-shave called *Vožd*,<sup>22</sup> with a tag-line "Vožd je stigao" (The Leader has arrived).

The Slovenian situation has proved to be quite interesting as well: among the most interesting phenomena of this era, the 1980s, is probably the counter-cultural provocation of Laibach, a conceptual pop group using neo-Nazi iconography (the name of the band is the Germanic name for Slovenia's capital Ljubljana), challenging the consensus of Slavic brotherhood and anti-fascism as a foundation of the Yugoslav state. Another such bellwether phenomenon was *Mladina*, a youth-political journal that became the most liberal political journal

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<sup>22</sup> The word "Vožd" (leader), would never be used among Croats in Croatia at the time. It clearly connoted a Serbian context and an ethnically Serbian target audience for the product itself.

in the whole of Yugoslavia, putting into use the western idea of free press, but also occasionally toying with Slovenian national politics, for instance in giving prominent coverage to the heroic struggle of the Eritrean people to secede from Ethiopia. No politically well-informed reader was unaware of the fact that, for *Mladina's* editors, Eritrea stood for Slovenia.<sup>23</sup>

Although Bosnia-Herzegovina was probably the most orthodox in adherence to socialist ideals and belief in modernity brought about by the socialist turn since the end of the Second World War, Nebojša Jovanović has identified at least one Bosnian-Herzegovinian film from the Yugoslav era outside the Yugoslav ideological framework, Ademir Kenović's *Kuduz* (1989; the director wrote the script with Abdulah Sidran), in which the deep forces that turn the problematic hero into a murderer cannot be tamed by culture, civilization, women or socialism, since the hero (Kuduz, played by Slobodan Ćustić) cannot act rationally and accept the value of love, family and forgiveness, driven rather by toxic ideals of masculinity.<sup>24</sup> However, at least in the characterization of central characters, Ivica Matić's rarely screened TV production *Žena s krajolikom* (*A Woman with the Scenery*, 1976) is not so distant from Kenović's film and (as Jovanović himself explains), since the topic of the battle of the sexes is central for that film as well. Matić, interestingly enough, wrote a script for Emir Kusturica's early television work *Nevjeste dolaze* (*The Brides are Coming*, 1978), and Kusturica's later cinema features, with Sidran's scripts, also show some traits of the "battle of the sexes" theme. On the other hand, Sidran also wrote the script for Praljak's directorial debut, where the issue of gender is surprisingly prominent considering the era and the topic of the film.

Having all this in mind, it is hardly surprising that Croatian culture has also undergone some changes in this period, in spite of the pervasive view of the importance of the "Croatian silence" as the official political stance and major guideline of the Croatian branch of the ruling Union of Communists in the 1980s. For instance, popular culture in the 1980s saw the unexpected rise of religious pop culture in an album of Christmas songs sung by the popular singer Krunoslav Kićo Slabinac: the album had an English name, which signified its western political orientation, as opposed to a socialist/eastern orientation (this might also have served to make the provocation less conspicuous). *Christmas with Kićo*, with the singer dressed as Santa Clause on the cover of the album, was widely sold to Croats (and, presumably, Catholics) in Yugoslavia and abroad, marking a great shift in what was allowed and

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<sup>23</sup> Film historian Škrabalo received his M.A. in law in 1975 with a thesis on the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. His thesis was later published: Škrabalo, Ivo. 1997. *Samoodređenje i odcjepljenje. Pouke iz nastanka države Bangladeš: politološko-pravna studija*. Zagreb: Školske novine.

<sup>24</sup> Jovanović, *Bosanski psiho*, 175; A Montenegrin scholar came to similar conclusions: Bogojević, Maja. 2013. *Cinematic Gaze, Gender and Nation in Yugoslav Film: 1941-1991*. Podgorica: Univerzitet Donja Gorica, Fakultet umjetnosti, 342-45. It can be argued that (from a queer perspective) Dumančić's analysis of Adi Imamović's *Go West* (2005), a Bosnian film heavily relying on ethnic and gender stereotypes, uncovers structures similar to those described by Jovanović and Bogojević (Dumančić, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, 69-73). Hansen-Kokoruš, writing on Jasmila Žbanić's *Grbavica* (2006) points out that this film almost altogether leaves out men, pointing to the critical and conscious attitude by a female character as a way forward: Hansen-Kokoruš, Renate. 2014. *Ne/pripadnost. Pitanje identiteta u novijim postjugoslavenskim filmovima*, in *Facing the present*, edited by Hansen-Kokoruš, Renate. Hamburg, 199-216, 213.

normal for markets in socialist Yugoslavia. Croatian TV-stations<sup>25</sup> also gradually started towards a decentralizing direction, for instance by re-transmitting western news stations (such as Sky News), or showing commercials for batteries simply named “Croatia.” The visual part of the commercial for this household item consisted of practically nothing else but the title “Croatia” written across the screen.

And, finally, it would be strange to omit one of the most fascinating cultural and pop-cultural phenomena of late Yugoslavia: the miracle of Međugorje, where a group of children in the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina with a clear Croat ethnic majority allegedly witnessed the Virgin Mary. This religious phenomenon occurred among the Croats indigenous to Bosnia Herzegovina, but its excitement was shared by the majority of Croats in the rest of Yugoslavia as well, and it was carried over into the 1990s. Jakov Sedlar, a director of both documentaries and fiction films, has tackled many topics mostly from Croatian history and religion, national suffering and significant figures of the past, although not all his films are politically charged to the same extent.

Although Sedlar is one of the filmmakers most representative of the ruling political ideology in Croatia in the 1990s,<sup>26</sup> his aesthetic and political approach to cinema began in the 1980s, when he was already making use of the infrastructure of the Catholic church (particularly the Franciscan monks from the Herzegovina region of Bosnia-Herzegovina) and on ethnic Croats living outside Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup> It is in this context and for this church-supported distributive network that he made works such as his first fiction feature *U sredini mojih dana* (*In the Middle of my Days / The Way It Is*, 1988),<sup>28</sup> dealing with the Međugorje phenomenon, and documentaries such as *Gospi u pohode* (*Visiting Our Lady*, 1984) and *Lijepa naša* (*Our Beautiful*, 1987).<sup>29</sup>

Typically for Sedlar’s later works, his feature debut also found a way to acquire a certain amount of foreign, in this case American, funding. But, more significantly, this fiction film starts with a claim of truthfulness, with an inscription claiming that it was based on authentic events and shot at their historical locations: “This film was based on a true story and was shot on location in Međugorje where, as eight children testify, in June 1981, the Virgin Mary appeared to them.”<sup>30</sup> As the opening credits inform us, this film is dedicated “to Mary” (“Mariji”), which leaves no room to doubt his approach to the Međugorje phenomenon. The first prayer to the Virgin Mary in this film is featured in its second minute, as part of theater rehearsals. However, the actress playing the Virgin Mary (the already famous Slovenian actress Milena Zupančič) descends from wires holding her in the air. She is unhappy with playing in a religious play (she is obviously not religious), but the illness she discovers eventually takes her on a pilgrimage to Međugorje.

<sup>25</sup> In the 1980s local TV stations provided an important venue for counter-cultural tendencies.

<sup>26</sup> Škrabalo, *101 godina filma*, 473-78.

<sup>27</sup> Škrabalo, *Hrvatska filmska povijest*, 145-46; Škrabalo, *101. godina filma*, 436.

<sup>28</sup> The internationally distributed VHS tape, occasionally digitalized and uploaded online used the latter English translation of the title.

<sup>29</sup> *Lijepa naša* is the title of the Croatian national anthem and a nickname for Croatia.

<sup>30</sup> “Ovaj film snimljen je prema istinitoj priči i na autentičnim mjestima u Međugorju, gdje se prema svjedočenju osmero djece vidjelaca, u lipnju g. 1981. ukazala Majka Božja.”

Sedlar's work in Yugoslavia was, however, not entirely unique nor unprecedented - the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia started producing religious-themed documentaries as early as the 1970s, with the theologian Josip Turčinović and the Franciscan monk Miroslav Hlevnjak being the most important in producing and directing these works.<sup>31</sup> How significant are these ongoing traits in Croatian cinema from Yugoslav to post-Yugoslav times? A good way to illustrate this is probably through some of the most important films made at the very border of these two eras, when the new regime had not yet fully established itself, while the old one had already lost much of its grip on cinema and society. Films produced in these transitional stages in society can often provide very interesting insights into wider trends.

### Post-Yugoslav tendencies in Croatia

Among the quite small number of Croatian feature films from 1991 made for cinemas (there were only five), there are three works that can be seen as important based on their critical reception and the later evaluation of the era's cinema, and may also serve as an interesting segue to post-Yugoslav cinema. Their production began before the dissolution of this complex country, and finished in the era when there was little doubt that Yugoslavia was ending - *Priča iz Hrvatske (Story from Croatia)*, directed by Krsto Papić, born in 1933, a veteran of 1960s and 1970s auteur cinema, who died in 2013; *Vrijeme ratnika (The Time of Warriors)* by Dejan Šorak (born in 1954), an author already influential and popular for his cinematic achievements in the 1980s; and *Krhotine - kronika jednog nestajanja (Fragments: Chronicle of a Vanishing)*, directed by Zrinko Ogresta (born in 1958), who started working for television in the 1980s and became a prominent cinema director in the 1990s.

Krsto Papić was often perceived as an oppositional or subversive artist, for instance because his film *Predstava Hamleta u Mrduši donjoj (Acting Hamlet in the Village of Mrduša donja, 1973)*, based on a controversial play by Ivo Brešan,<sup>32</sup> had trouble with the authorities,<sup>33</sup> while *Izbavitelj (The Rat Saviour, 1976)*, an adaptation of Alexander Grin's story *Ratcatcher* about rat-people who try to overtake a town, has often been interpreted as an allegory of socialism.<sup>34</sup> Papić's *Život sa stricem (My Uncle's Legacy, 1988)* quite openly portrayed Yugoslav post-Second World War society as repressive (thus continuing the theme of Papić's best fiction film, *Lisice / Cuffs, 1969*), drawing on a barrage of attacks of fledgling subscribers to the Yugoslav socialist ideology.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Škrabalo, *101 godina filma*, 437.

<sup>32</sup> Milutinović, Zoran. 2004. The People are Hamlet's Friend: Meta-Theatricality and Politics in Ivo Brešan's *Predstava Hamleta u selu Mrduša donja*. *Central Europe* 2(2), 161-77.

<sup>33</sup> Lazović, Miško. 1990. *Krsto Papić (2. deo): Tesla je našoj vladi nudio lasere za odbranu zemlje!*. *Yugopapir* (accessed: 01. March 2018); Kukoč, Juraj / Rafelić, Daniel and Tomislav Šakić. 2010. Krsto Papić u razgovoru: "Želim pridobiti vječnu publiku." *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 16(61), 10-69, 39-42.

<sup>34</sup> Gilić, Nikica. 2005. *Predratna psihoza: slike tridesetih u Izbavitelju Krste Papića*, in *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti. Zbornik radova VII. Komparativna književnost tridesetih godina 20. stoljeća*, edited by Pavlović, Cvijeta and Vinka Glunčić-Bužančić. Split: Književni krug, 260-72.

<sup>35</sup> Škrabalo, *101 godina filma u Hrvatskoj*, 426-27.

Although *Život sa stricem* was highly critical of the root values of socialist Yugoslavia, Ogresta's *Krhotine* can be described as a much more open anti-Yugoslav film: it does not only show what used to be very wrong in Yugoslavia from the beginning, it tries to show what is wrong with Yugoslavia from the beginning until the present of the era in which the film was made. The hero Ivan finds out just how deeply his grandfather had been wronged by the communists, and how much his father has suffered as a consequence (that is why he went to work outside Yugoslavia). Consequently, the traumas of the past directly influence and endanger the hero's happiness, family and everything else he holds dear.

Finally, Šorak's *Vrijeme ratnika* shows an inexplicable and irrational armed conflict taking place in nature, where two friends (one former partisan, another a former member of the foreign legion - a special type of *gastarbeiter*) have to fight off the unknown enemy in a situation that has often been said to prefigure the war that had not yet arrived when the film went into production. This film uses American genre cinema as quite an obvious role model for the action-packed depiction of life and atmosphere in the surroundings where the film was made,<sup>36</sup> down to the music reminiscent of John Carpenter's scores for his own films. The fact that Walter Hill and John Carpenter are the models for *Vrijeme ratnika* is in no way in contradiction to the fact that Šorak was one of the Yugoslav-oriented directors of the 1980s, who approached the past in his films without radical or acerbic political accents that would put Yugoslav ideology in question.<sup>37</sup>

These three films hold the key to many of the future traits of post-Yugoslav cinema (not only in Croatia). Together, they bring about the revamping of nationalist sentiments, a religious renaissance, the seemingly ubiquitous *gastarbeiter* theme (the theme of the economic emigration inextricably linked to political emigration). In addition to this, they embolden the tendency of the international model of genre cinema tradition to be employed as a manner of approaching even the most local of topics. These traits cannot be completely separated from each other, as they often reinforce each other and enable a complex political and cultural meaning.

In the post-Yugoslav period in Croatia the revamping of nationalist sentiments is often connected with religious themes and rituals. Of course, many post-Yugoslav films have been guilty of this crime, from all over the region, but not many are mentioned in this respect as often as the Croatian films *Vrijeme za...* (*A time for...* Oja Kodar, 1993),<sup>38</sup> actually a co-production with Italy;<sup>39</sup> perhaps also Neven Hitrec's *Bogorodica (Madonna, 1999)*, a visually often compelling film based on a rigidly nationalist script; and, most certainly, *Četverored (Files of Four, Jakov Sedlar 1999)*: the latter film is even sometimes chastised as the

<sup>36</sup> Čegir, *Filmski prostori*, 69-81.

<sup>37</sup> In 1989 Šorak made a feature *Najbolji (The Champion)* commissioned by the Yugoslav army's film company Crvena zastava, Gilić, Nikica. 2013. *Oficir s ružom i Najbolji Dejana Šorka-dvije vojničke naracije*, in 60 godina festivala igranoga filma u Puli i hrvatski film, edited by Gilić, Nikica and Zlatko Vidačković. Zagreb: MH, 117-32.

<sup>38</sup> Träger, Tobias. 2014. *Faith, Religion, the Church and Nationalism in Croatian Film since 1993*, in *Facing the Present*, edited by Hansen-Kokoruš, Renate. Hamburg, 103-20.

<sup>39</sup> Škrabalo, *101 godina filma u Hrvatskoj*, 587.

first feature film depicting the Second World War from the perspective of the losing side of Hitler and his allies (including the Croatian fascists, the Ustaše).<sup>40</sup>

For instance, the imagery of *Vrijeme za...* includes a funeral mass in a war-damaged church (around the beginning of the final third of the film), where a priest says that the small stones of the broken church can serve as the foundation of a “new cathedral” and a testament to our existence. The funeral mass for the hero’s son, a Croatian soldier, is concluded by a national song about Croatia (“Oj Hrvatska mati/nemoj tugovati”)<sup>41</sup>, and followed by a van-driver’s monologue about the worst destruction in the history of the world being committed against Croatia. Towards the end of the film, the hero (Nada Gaćešić-Livaković) hides in the Roman-Catholic graveyard, next to the completely burned church.

In comparison with *Vrijeme za...* (but also *Bogorodica* and *Četverored*), one can say that *Život sa stricem* and *Krhotine* are actually quite restrained in putting forward a Croatian nationalist agenda: they give more space to depicting the vagaries of Yugoslavia, socialism and communism and can therefore more easily appeal to the viewers who are less tolerant towards nationalism, while *Vrijeme ratnika* is actually quite ambiguous. Had Šorak’s execution of the genre poetics been more subtle, it could have become a real classic of Croatian and early post-Yugoslav cinema.

This uneven mix of nation and religion is obvious, for instance, in Dejan Šorak’s political thriller *Garcia* (1999), where a tragic hero, a Croat from Argentina, is aided by a nun (Catholic imagery being pushed to the front in this manner), and even Bruno Gamulin’s drama *Sedma kronika* (*The Seventh Chronicle*, 1996), an ambitious attempt to lyrically approach the political past (the hero escapes from Goli otok, Tito’s *gulag*),<sup>42</sup> concentrates on the clergy and their institution (presented as something noble and poetic) as a clear alternative to Tito’s brutal prison camp.

Yugoslavia is, however, long gone by the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, so it is possible to criticize religion without falling back on the tenets of Yugoslav communist ideology. The contemporary approach to religion is, for instance, criticized from these modern standpoints in Hrvoje Hribar’s popular comedy *Što je muškarac bez brkova* (*What is a man without a moustache*, 2005), not only because the hero, a priest, finds love and contemplates leaving the cloth, but more particularly because of a short scene of a lunch where a bishop does not mind the fact that some pro-fascist sentiments are being expressed in conversation (he actually chuckles at the idea that such sentiments would bother him in any manner). Vinko Brešan’s *Svećenikova djeca* (*The Priest’s Children*, 2013), although awarded by a Catholic-inspired festival in the Festivals of Religions and Nations (Popoli e Religioni) in Terni (Italy), has been

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<sup>40</sup> Levi, Pavle. 2009. *Raspad Jugoslavije na filmu*. Beograd: XX. Vek, 173. Levi quotes a statement by Croatian diplomat Darko Bekić on *Voice of Amerika*.

<sup>41</sup> The translation of *hrvatska mati* can be both *Croatian mother* and *Mother Croatia*.

<sup>42</sup> Marković, Dragan. 1987. *Istina o Golom otoku*. Beograd: Narodna knjiga; Banac, Ivo. 1990. *Sa Staljinom protiv Tita*. Zagreb: Globus.

attacked by some very influential Catholics<sup>43</sup> because it shows a Roman-Catholic priest making holes in condoms before they are sold to the unsuspecting islanders (in order to prevent contraception). Another interesting figure of the clergy in Brešan's film (higher up the ladder of hierarchy) is a bishop who travels on a beautiful yacht, not giving much thought to spiritual values, while yet another (initially very likeable) priest turns out to be a vicious and calculating pedophile.

The interest in the *gastarbeiter* and political emigration complex, yet another of the themes developed at the end of the Yugoslav and start of the post-Yugoslav period, can also be seen in Branko Schmidt's *Božić u Beču* (*Christmas in Vienna*, 1997), or Papić's *Kad mrtvi zapjevaju* (*When the Dead Start Singing*, 1999), a dark comedy based on Mate Matišić's play *Cinco i Marinko* (*Cinco and Marinko*), as well as in Hribar's hit *Što je muškarac bez brkova*, where the entire plot is made possible only because a *gastarbeiter* dies at the beginning of the film, while another *gastarbeiter* returns from Germany alive and willing to marry (while the love between his daughter and a local poet complicates the intricate narrative structure). Dejan Šorak's thriller *Garcia* is yet another example: although the hero does not come from German speaking countries, he is still part of this complex phenomenon as he searches through the criminal establishment of Croatia's past and the present. The fact that Garcia is a maladjusted Croatian war hero explains the interplay of all these traits even more, while a former *gastarbeiter*-soldier, Vieri, is a prominent figure in Kristijan Milić's war-thriller *Živi i mrtvi* (*The Living and the Dead*, 2007) as well.<sup>44</sup>

Even art-film, the playground of temporal shifts, unreliable narration, associative montage and other modernist traits,<sup>45</sup> can also be said to be continuing the traditions from the Yugoslav era, sometimes even merging with the other traits discussed so far. There are older Yugoslav authors who made significant films in the post-Yugoslav era, such as the Croatian director Tomislav Radić and the Serbian director Želimir Žilnik. Tomislav Radić's (aesthetically quite inferior) war-time drama *Anđele moj dragi* (*My dear Angel*, 1996) uses the fragmental nature of modernist narration to tell quite a conventional and rudimentary symbolical story from the last war, again merging the national (war-trauma) with the religious (the title comes from a prayer to the protecting angel).

Lukas Nola's allegorical and at the same time also partly nationalist and religious art-drama *Nebo Sateliti* (*Celestial Bodies*, 2000) is a different example: its artistic merits are beyond reproach, with the hero Jakov Ribar

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<sup>43</sup> Laušić, Frenki. 2013. *Teolog Adalbert Rebić: pederi, lezbe i razni Štulhoferi upropastit će nam Hrvatsku*. *Slobodna dalmacija*, 09. January 2013 (accessed: 01. March 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Maladjusted warriors or veterans occur frequently in Croatian cinema, for instance in Zrinko Ogresta's *Isprani* (*Washed Out*, 1995) or Davor Žmegač's *Prezimiti u Riju* (*Winter in Rio*, 2002). Mladen Juran's *Transatlantic* (1998) attempts to give a comprehensive view of the migration of ethnic Croats into North America, at times reminiscent of Krsto Papić's *Tajna Nikole Tesle* (*The Secret of Nikola Tesla*, 1980).

<sup>45</sup> For the many faces of European modernism and art film, see Bálint Kovacs, András. 2007. *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.

being the most convincing Christ-like figure in recent Croatian cinema. The film has been rightly compared to the modernist tradition of Vatroslav Mimica from the 1960s,<sup>46</sup> although it can be compared, for instance, to some works of the great Serbian director Puriša Đorđević as well. Some other Croatian post-Yugoslav authors, such as Vicko Ruić (*Nausikaja / Nausikaa*, 1995; *Serafin, svjetioničarev sin / Serafin, The Lighthouse Keeper's Son*, 2003) Goran Rušinović (*Sujetsko čudovište / The World's Greatest Monster*, 2003, *Buick Riviera*, 2007) or Zvonimir Jurić (*Onaj koji će ostati neprimijećen / The One Who Will Stay Unnoticed*, 2003, *Kosac / The Reaper*, 2014) also made films that rely on this strain of prototypical modernist cinema, showing how this tradition never really died out.

There are, however, other traits of post-Yugoslav cinema deeply rooted in the Yugoslav era. One is definitively a very resilient orientation towards genre cinema, quite often surging regardless of the interest of the audience and distributors, or of the critics' response to such poetics. Both the critics (such as Ante Peterlić, Vladimir Vuković, Hrvoje Turković, Nebojša Pajkić, Nenad Polimac, etc.) and the authors, such as Goran Marković, Živorad Tomić, Rajko Grlić, Vlasta Radovanović,<sup>47</sup> exhibited a strong preference for genre in many occasions in Yugoslavia,<sup>48</sup> and even in the 1960s one could speak of a strong genre orientation, with some authors, such as Veljko Bulajić, Obrad Glušćević, Veljko Bulajić, Žika Mitrović, Marijan Vajda, Radivoje Lola-Đukić or Soja Jovanović (the first Yugoslav female feature film director).<sup>49</sup>

The genre model has been continued not only by older authors working after 1990, (Rajko Grlić, Zoran Tadić, Goran Marković, Zdravko Šotra, Dejan Šorak, Zoran Čalić, Milan Blažeković), but also in many films by younger authors, such as Snježana Tribuson, Vinko Brešan, Danilo Šerbedžija, Kristijan Milić, Srđan Dragojević, Srđan Spasojević, Pjer Žalica, Dragan Bjelogrić, Danis Tanović, Nevio Marasović etc., as well as in the work of many younger film critics in the post-Yugoslav era: critics who discuss older and more recent genre cinema.<sup>50</sup>

Historian Škrabalo, for instance, seems justified to connect Snježana Tribuson's comedy *Ne dao Bog većeg zla* (2002)<sup>51</sup> with the tradition of Krešo

<sup>46</sup> Radić, Damir. 2000. Filmovi Vatroslava Mimice. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 6(23), 39-51, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Bosnian critic Štaka singles out Radovanović's action-oriented crime film *Halo taksi* (*Hey, taxi*, '83). Štaka, Aco. 1986. *Crni protiv bijelih lakova. Zapisi o jugoslovenskom filmu*. Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 313-15.

<sup>48</sup> For genre criticism in Croatia see Krelja, Petar. 1995. Vladekov stol. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 1(½), 34-39; Vuković, Vladimir. 1992. *Imitacija života*. Zagreb: Mladost; Vuković, Vladimir. 2014. *April u novembru. Ogledi, kritike i promišljanja o filmu i kinematografiji*. Zagreb: Vedis.

<sup>49</sup> Bogojević, *Cinematic Gaze*, 13; Štaka, *Crni protiv bijelih lakova*, 52-54.

<sup>50</sup> Vojnov, Dimitrije. 2011. *Novi srpski film*. *Nova srpska politička misao*, 18. February 2011 (accessed: 01. March 2018); Ognjanović, Dejan and Ivan Velisavljević. (eds.). 2008. *Novi kadrovi: skrajnute vrednosti srpskog filma*. Beograd: Clio; Velisavljević, Ivan. 2013. Žanrovski model filmova Živorada Tomića. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 14(72), 78-92; Ognjanović, Dejan. 2009. *Genre Films in Recent Serbian Cinema*. *Kinokultura* 8: "Serbian Cinema" (accessed: 01. March 2018); Gilić, *Uvod u povijest*, 121-32; Čegir, Tomislav. 2012. Filmski prostori. Hrvatske rekonstrukcije američkog žanrovskog filma. Zagreb: HDFK; Gilić, Nikica. 2014. *New Croatian Cinema: Literature and Genre in the Post-Yugoslav Era*, in *Small Cinemas in Global Markets: Genres, Identities, Narratives*, edited by Giukin, Lenuta / Falkowska, Janina and David Desser. Lanham: Lexington, 151-69.

<sup>51</sup> Škrabalo, *Hrvatska filmska povijest*, 240.

Golik (*Imam 2 mame i 2 tate / I Have 2 Dads and 2 Moms*, 1969). Neven Hitrec's and Dejan Aćimović's respective melodramas *Snivaj zlato moje* (*Dream my Sweetheart*, 2005) and *Moram spavat anđele* (*I Have to Sleep My Angel*, 2007), were probably also influenced by the Yugoslav melodrama tradition, for instance, by Dejan Šorak's political melodrama *Oficir s ružom* (*Officer with a Rose*, '87) as well as some films by Rajko Grlić - *Samo jednom se ljubi* (*The Melody Haunts My Memory*, '81) and *Za sreću je potrebno troje* (*Three for Happiness*, '85).

But the tradition that more recent comic and melodramatic films (such as *Ne dao Bog većeeg zla*) ascribe to should probably include other Yugoslav comedies as well, for instance those by Dejan Karaklajić, Mića Milošević or Zoran Čalić,<sup>52</sup> while Rajko Grlić's rather popular comedy *Karaula* (*The Border Post*, 2006) and Srđan Dragojević's hugely popular comedy *Parada* (*The Parade*, 2011), both international and post-Yugoslav co-productions, try to integrate the cultural space of post-Yugoslavia, successfully counting on audiences across the region with their mixture of stereotypes known from Yugoslav comedies made for cinema and television (by Grlić, but also by Antun Vrdoljak, Joakim Marušić, Danijel Marušić, Zoran Čalić and others), some quite fresh ideas and references to new times (the end of Yugoslavia in *Karaula*, the post-Yugoslav issue of queer activism in *Parada*). Actually, the review of nationalists in *Parada* (with the Albanian character being the most heavily caricaturized) is quite reminiscent of the review of ethnically diverse suitors to the characters of Rajko Grlić's very successful *U raljama života*, although Goran Navojec's version of a typical Croat / Dalmatian cinematic type in *Parada* goes back at least to Boris Dvornik's role in Branko Bauer's *Prekobrojna* (*Superfluous*, 1962)<sup>53</sup> and follows in many subsequent other films and TV series shot with this big star.

On the other hand, the younger critic Tomislav Čegir is completely right to speak of the continuing relationship of Croatian cinema to American genre film, starting his book with Branko Ivanda's *Zločin u školi* (*Crime in the school*, 1982) and finishing with *Živi i mrtvi* (*The Living and the Dead*, 2007),<sup>54</sup> while Ivo Škrabalo correctly points to the classical American inspiration for Hrvoje Hribar's thriller *Puška za uspavlivanje* (*Tranquilizer Gun*, 1995).<sup>55</sup> The same can be said, naturally, in other post-Yugoslav contexts as well. Srđan Golubović's *Klopka* (*The Trap*, 2007), for instance, is quite reminiscent of American genre concepts of authors such as John Badham, for instance the thriller *Nick of Time* (1995) while, on the other hand, one can easily argue that Maja Miloš's *Klip* (*Clip*, 2012) can be compared to American independent cinema, with Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) being one of the logical tenors of comparison. All these possible inspirations and comparisons do not, naturally, imply that genre films are necessarily derivative, since the influences and inspiration have floated around freely since the beginning of cinema.

<sup>52</sup> Štaka, *Crni protiv bijelih lakova*, 215-17, 221-22, 309-13.

<sup>53</sup> A decisively populist Serbian production directed by Zagreb's most canonical genre-oriented director of the 1950s, who shot several films for other Yugoslav republics' companies (mostly in Serbia).

<sup>54</sup> Čegir, *Filmski prostori*. The book covers only part of the films influenced by US cinema.

<sup>55</sup> Škrabalo, *Hrvatska filmska povijest*, 222.

Jurica Pavičić seems to be correct in his assumption that Serbian cinema had a stronger populist impulse than Croatian cinema, but he was wrong to state that film, just like the rest of Croatian culture, “seriously lacks populist impulses.”<sup>56</sup> This is shown, for example, by the concurrence of comedy as a genre both in Croatia and in Serbia, with the additional Croatian return to films for children and for the young in the years after Pavičić wrote the article in which he stated that there was a lack of populism in Croatia. Comedies toying with stereotypes are a strong feature in Croatian cinema as much as in Serbian, as proven, for instance, by films by Croatian directors: Dalibor Matanić’s *Blagajnica hoće ići na more* (*Cashier Wants to Go to the Seaside*, 2000) and *Majstori* (*Handymen*, 2013), Vinko Brešan’s *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the War Started on My Island*, 1996) and *Svećenikova djeca*, Vlatka Vorkapić’s *Sonja i bik* (*Sonja and the Bull*, 2012), or by Serbian directors such as Srđan Dragojević’s *Mi nismo anđeli* (*We are not Angels*, 1992), *Parada* and *Atomski zdesna* (*From Zero to Hero*, 2014), or Miroslav Momčilović’s *Smrt čoveka na Balkanu* (*Death of a Man in the Balkans*, 2012). A definite genre affiliation is shown in Snježana Tribuson’s nostalgic comedy *Ne dao Bog veće zla* (*God Forbid a Worse Thing Should Happen*, 2002), but it is also interesting to note that the nostalgic orientation towards history started at the latest with Krešo Golik’s *Tko pjeva zlo ne misli*, but was also revamped in Yugoslav times with films such as Emir Kusturica’s *Sjećaš li se Dolly Bell* (*Do You Remember Dolly Bell*, ’81) from Bosnia,<sup>57</sup> as well as Goran Paskaljević’s *Varljivo leto ’68* (*The Elusive Summer of ’68*, 1984) and Jovan Aćin’s *Bal na vodi* (*Dancing in water / Hey Babu Riba*, ’87) from Serbia.<sup>58</sup>

### Conclusions

As demonstrated, the number of films that continue some traits of the Yugoslav era in post-Yugoslav cinema is impressive (and directors from Slovenia or Macedonia, such as Damjan Kozole, Branko Djurić or Milčo Mančevski could also be added to this list). One might therefore wonder about the reasons for these continuing tendencies. Naturally, some of the directors from the Yugoslav era continued to work in cinema, but there was also a sense of apprenticeship concentrated around some careers. For instance, Vinko Brešan made his directorial debut feature collaborating on the script with his father, the renowned writer Ivo Brešan who had previously worked in the same capacity with Krsto Papić, while Vinko Brešan’s subsequent regular collaborator - playwright and screenwriter Mate Matišić - started working for cinema writing for Papić’s cinema projects.

There is probably, however, another phenomenon that might explain why the roots of post-Yugoslav national(ist) cinemas can be traced without much difficulty when one commits to such an endeavor. These cinematic continuances can be described as an underside of the “hushed histories” complex, convincingly advocated by Dina Iordanova. As she explains, the hushed histories that circulate in the Balkans are “stories of displacement and

<sup>56</sup> Pavičić, *Moving Into Frame*.

<sup>57</sup> Štaka, *Crni protiv bijelih lakova*, 231.

<sup>58</sup> Jakov Sedlar joined the trend with *Sjećanje na Georgiju* (*Remembrance of Georgia*, 2002). For Serbian examples, see Dragan Bjelogrić’s *Montevideo, Bog te video* (*Montevideo: Taste of a Dream*, 2010) or Radoš Bajić’s television series *Ravna Gora* (*The Rift of a Nation*, 2013-2014).

assimilation that are largely absent from official annals but live mostly in oral history and vernacular reports.”<sup>59</sup> It is easy to conclude that the nationalist narrations of Croatian (or Serbian or Slovene) history were not made-up in the 1990s. They also existed before that (in the case of these post-Yugoslav nations probably since the 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>60</sup>

The renowned American and Serbian film scholar and cultural theorist Pavle Levi was very critical of the idea that the post-Yugoslav nationalist tendencies of the 1990s were the culmination of a long tradition. In his opinion, the mere advocating of the idea that nationalist tendencies in this region have had a rich history much before 1990 is inherently essentialist (consequently making the national identities seem natural and inevitable). In Levi’s view, nationalisms were rather a reaction to the developments of capitalism and a consequence of other social and political factors, such as the work of intellectuals and the political elites.<sup>61</sup> However, even Levi recognizes that the early 1970s political movements in Croatia had developed along nationalist lines, but still does not go further than criticizing its leaders.<sup>62</sup> Levi even recognizes that ethnocentric jokes (such as those in Vinko Brešan’s *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku*) very much existed in the Yugoslav era as well.<sup>63</sup> When faced with Srđan Dragojević’s view that nationalisms already existed in Yugoslavia prior to its break-up, the best Levi can do to counter it is to explain how dangerous such a view is, without offering much of an argument for his belief that it is also wrong, in addition to being dangerous.<sup>64</sup>

Although it is easy to agree with Levi on the dangers of the essentialist views of nation, with his interpretation of Kusturica’s, Brešan’s, Sabljak’s or Dragojević’s films, or with the probability of development from defending the existence of nationalism into advocating nationalism, all of this in no way proves that Croatian, Slovene or Serbian nationalism did not exist in Yugoslavia. When the popular pop band Prljavo Kazalište sung *Pismo majci (Letter to Mother)*<sup>65</sup> on 17 October 1989 in Zagreb’s main square, everybody in the audience read his call to “Hrvatska ruža” (Croatian rose) as a reference to Savka Dabčević-Kučar, the Croatian leader deposed in 1971.<sup>66</sup>

One does not need to search very far to find evidence that, although not so rampant, nationalism existed during Yugoslavia as well - the very instances Levi himself quotes give ample proof, such as the endurance of nationalist

<sup>59</sup> Iordanova, Dina. 2008. Intercultural Cinema and Balkan Hushed Histories. *New Review of film and Television Studies* 6(1), 5-18, 6.

<sup>60</sup> On the roots of Croatian nationalism, see Perić, Ivan. 1984. *Suvremeni hrvatski nacionalizam*. Zagreb: August Cesarec; Boban, Branka. 1998. *Demokratski nacionalizam Stjepana Radića*. Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest; Tomljanovich Brooks, William. 2001. *Biskup Josip Juraj Strossmayer: nacionalizam i moderni katolicizam u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: HAZU.

<sup>61</sup> Levi, *Raspad Jugoslavije*, 17-24. Slavoj Žižek is one of the authors quoted in the critique of the alleged essentialism.

<sup>62</sup> Levi, *Raspad Jugoslavije*, 83. Levi quotes and ascribes to politician Mirko Tepavac’s opinion on this issue.

<sup>63</sup> Levi, *Raspad Jugoslavije*, 197-201. This subchapter is aptly called “Šala i njen odnos prema ratu” (“Joke and its relationship towards war”).

<sup>64</sup> Levi, *Raspad Jugoslavije*, 212-13.

<sup>65</sup> The historical performance is available [here](#).

<sup>66</sup> Jakovina, Tvrtko. (ed.). 2012. *Hrvatsko proljeće, 40 godina poslije*. Zagreb: Centar za Demokraciju i Pravo; Tripalo, Miko. 2001. *Hrvatsko proljeće*. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska.

jokes or the fact that in 1970 and 1971 the Croatian communist leaders basically could not contain nationalist tendencies. All this indicates how the grim reality on the ground is often much more serious than progressive academics would like to believe<sup>67</sup> and the cinematic examples listed in this paper make much more sense if we work on the assumption that nationalism in Yugoslavia existed long before it became the dominant political orientation.

### Acknowledgments

The text was written with the support of Graduiertenschule für Ost- und Südosteuropastudien and Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung in Regensburg. I am also thankful to Nebojša Jovanović and Karla Lončar for their help.

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<sup>67</sup> In order to fight nationalism, one would be wise to recognize how serious and deeply rooted it is. The recognition that something is not natural is not a deciding factor, since humanity commonly embraces non-natural notions. Yugoslavia probably kept stressing “brotherhood and unity” (bratstvo i jedinstvo) for a good reason - it must have recognized the need to constantly fight nationalism. If we add the influence of religious circles, as well as family histories (nationalism, just like patriarchy, often derives primarily from the family), it is hard to accept Levi’s view of post-Yugoslav nationalism.

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