

Beyond Post-war Cinema. Historical Experience and Cultural Agency in Post-Yugoslav Film

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Bosnia and Herzegovina is still considered a post-war country, both by its inhabitants and external observers. The concept of 'post-war' implies that the country and its people are tied more strongly to the past than they are oriented towards the future. A post-war society appears to be permanently overshadowed by the past, while the future is permanently postponed. Paradoxically, as long as the future is kept at bay and the post-war condition kept alive, Bosnia maintains certain significance on the global scene. However, living in the temporal vacuum of the post-war condition cannot be a long-term perspective. But when and how will the status of a 'post-war' society be lifted?

This project asks to what extent films and filmmakers can contribute towards overcoming the post-war condition.

Inevitably, war is a major topic in contemporary post-Yugoslav films. The experience of war comes to the fore in cinema either through conventional representation or through what one could call, drawing on a concept of Gilles Deleuze, strategies of non-representation.² By conventional representation I mean clichés and images with definite and stabilized meanings, which produce no further associations. Non-representation, on the other hand, refers to images that encourage attentive spectatorship, evoke various and often conflicting experiences and are open to multiple layers of meaning.

A range of films, like Jasmila Žbanić's *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* (2013), Bobo Jelčić's *A Stranger* (2013), Aida Begić's *Children of Sarajevo* (2012), Šejla Kamerić's *1395 Days without Red* (2011), Vladimir Perišić's *Ordinary People* (2009), Goran Dević and Zvonimir Jurić's *Blacks* (2009), and Namik Kabil's *Interrogation* (2007) with its follow-up film *Inside* (2013), provide spectators with non-representational images that offer innovative approaches to the collective past, while simultaneously reframing contemporary experience. What I propose

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² See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011); Gilles Deleuze, 'Nomadic Thought', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 252–261.

to call non-representational images in post-Yugoslav cinema appear to offer a more dynamic relationship to the past and the present, while reflecting complex processes of the formation of collective and individual identity, memory, guilt and responsibility.

But if these dynamics are inherent in non-representational images, is there indeed a way in which such images can contribute to overcoming the post-war condition? In order to answer this question, I propose to examine the emergence of non-representational images of war within post-Yugoslav contemporary cinema of the last fifteen years (i.e. since 2000). In particular, I want to investigate how contemporary images of war shape film aesthetics and development of film language in post-war Yugoslav cinema, and to what extent non-representational strategies and their reception contribute towards the process of reconciliation.

In order to address the social relevance of non-representational images of war in addition to their aesthetic properties, my project will include an inquiry into the role of the Sarajevo Film Festival in selecting, showcasing and supporting production and circulation of post-Yugoslav films. I aspire to explore whether and how the Sarajevo Film Festival as a privileged showcase of post-Yugoslav film contributes to the overall discourse on reconciliation within post-Yugoslav society.

The Sarajevo Film Festival was founded in the days of the siege of Sarajevo as an act of resistance and strife for life. Coming out of its intimate phase as a small-scale event that gathered international filmmakers and intellectuals to celebrate the city's survival, over the course of twenty years it has grown into an international film festival with a focus on the broadly understood region of Southeast Europe. From the industry perspective, over the past decade the festival has aspired to become the hub for regional film professionals, as it plays an important role in the development and financing of European co-productions in the region. A close, inter-dependent relationship between the festival and the local society has remained throughout the years. It is embodied in the inner-city open-air cinema experience for up to 3000 people. The local audience is used to getting exposed to films produced in former Yugoslavia. Recognizing the need of society to engage with contemporary cinema, which, at the same time, reflects on the problematic past, the festival has come up with modes, which support wider circulation of non-representational images.

In particular, I want to find out to what extent the festival encourages the production and promulgation of films that avoid the use of representational images of war and address both the historical experience of war and the contemporary experience of post-war society through non-representational strategies.

The films in the corpus have been selected in terms of the way they deal with individual and collective memory, the relationship of past and present and their choice of representation and non-representational strategies. In addition, the corpus primarily includes films that premiered at the Sarajevo Film Festival.

Overall, my research can be divided in two major segments: the first segment covers a wide range of issues, from positioning the meaning of non-representa-

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tional (in relation to representational) images, exploring benefits and limitations of both modes, providing their diachronic analysis (film production of the last fifteen years in relation to the time before), to discussing their impact on reconciliation (cultural aspect) and the development of film language (aesthetical aspect). One of the main objectives is to enquire about whether post-Yugoslav cinema is more defined by the emergence of different national cinemas or by its shared, transnational identity.

The second segment focuses mainly on the role of Sarajevo Film Festival in exhibiting and fostering the distribution of non-representational images and stimulating their further production on one hand, while contributing to reconciliation within the present-day post-Yugoslav society on the other.