Nationalities Papers (2024), 52: 1, 22–39
doi:10.1017/nps.2022.63

ARTICLE

The "Aliens" in Post-Yugoslav Cinema

Rimantė Jaugaitė

University of Bologna, Italy
Email: rimantejaugaite@gmail.com; rimante.jaugaite2@unibo.it

Abstract

This research explores how the post-Yugoslav film-makers, in particular Nebojša Slijepčević, Goran Dević, and Srđan Keča, investigate the dilemma of ethnic identity and face the cultural division in the post-conflict societies. The article aims to discuss cinematic representations of the *other* and conduct a deeper textual analysis of the film *Srbenka* (2018), in comparison to *After the War* (2006) and *Imported Crows* (2004). Also, the article bridges the gap between more conceptual literature on transnational cinema (Stephen Crofts, Steven Rawle, Saša Vojković), nationalism studies (Benedict Anderson, Rogers Brubaker, V.P. (Chip) Gagnon Jr.), as well as history (Tara Zahra) and more empirical analysis providing examples from the contemporary post-Yugoslav cinema. Therefore, the article demonstrates how applying theories from different disciplines enrich film analysis when investigating the *otherness*.

Keywords: post-Yugoslav cinema; fluid/hybrid identities; transnational cinema; otherness; ethnicity

The Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) brought destruction and exclusion as many citizens of former Yugoslavia found themselves in new nation-states/entities, homogenized through war violence that was not welcoming of *other* nationalities, now reconceptualized as minorities. Neighbors of different ethnicities living in a city/town/village suddenly became aliens for emerging states, which fostered the idea of mono-ethnicity. Therefore, national indifference was not an option, as membership in the majority ethno-nation became a prerequisite for citizenship. Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of "imagined communities" as well as Steven Lukes' (2005) theory of hegemony point out that (ethnic) identity is given by society rather than chosen by the individuals themselves, which became quite visible in the post-Yugosphere. Like any other media, films contribute to invoking the sense of an imagined community (Anderson 1991). Still, they often criticize and denounce a community's cracks and defects. This article explores how a new generation of post-Yugoslav filmmakers deal with the question of ethnic identity and face the division today.

The recent article "(Not) Dealing with War Crimes on Film: Post-Yugoslav Cinema as a Method of Fostering Reconciliation and Peace" (Jaugaitė 2021) argued that post-Yugoslav cinema "breaks through the cracks" of hegemony as contemporary filmmakers challenge narratives, impressions, and problems constructed by ruling elites. This article strives to answer how independent cinema in the nation states of former Yugoslavia investigates the dilemma of ethnic identity in order to overcome the political frames of ethnic identity constructed by nationalistic ideology. To answer this question, I will provide examples from contemporary post-Yugoslav cinema. I analyze cinematic representations and conduct a deeper textual analysis, using the case study of *Srbenka* (2018), directed by Nebojša Slijepčević. In such a way I explore the film's context, plot and structure, conflict, characterization, style, and point of view. I seek to chart how the *other* (other ethnicities)

are represented in *Srbenka* and other selected films, explaining why the characters do not fit or how they subvert dominant narratives of national identity. In this article, I will focus on various co-productions that cover almost the whole territory of ex-Yugoslavia.[1] Post-Yugoslav cinema shares cultural characteristics, a historical background, and, most importantly, a Yugoslav film tradition that I will shortly introduce before conducting the analysis.

Film Selection: Films Exploring the Dilemma of Ethnic Identity in the Mainstream Production Context

As the ethnic tensions raised by politicians appear as one of the main causes of the Yugoslav wars (Schierup 1997), it is worth investigating how filmmakers deal with this question today. This research analyzes socially engaged and war memory films that appear strongly anti-war films depicting no enemy *other*. The selected films primarily center on the issue of ethnic identity. Moreover, they fit into the category of "films presenting ethical dilemmas," as defined by theologian Martin Leiner (2014) when discussing films about the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In this case, the ethical problem is represented in the dilemma of ethnic identity: as the viewer, you may side with the majority or minority, or remain indifferent. Viewers might identify with one or another side presented in the film and then shift according to the plot; thus, the ending might leave the viewer confused, wondering about the resolution. Therefore, such films empower the viewer by constantly asking questions. My film selection was primarily determined by the exposed narratives and the ways these narratives are transmitted. Indeed, I could not include all the potential films due to the space limitations of this article. Snowball sampling, 17 interviews, and two questionnaires answered in written form by the most prominent filmmakers[2] from the post-Yugoslav space helped decide the filmography. Finally, I aim to investigate and cover films that have received less attention in the literature,[3] yet are worthy of attention. All of the films in this article are documentaries, but Vojković's (2011) research has demonstrated that fiction films might also raise the same dilemma.

The selected films belong to the group of non- or less commercial films known as art-house cinema, which refers "to films that are of high quality but may not be extremely popular or successful, such as foreign films or ones made by small film companies."[4] In other words, art films are independent films aimed at the niche market rather than a mass-market audience. However, a few of these films became very popular in their region of origin. At the same time, some of them were less recognized and appeared only at various cinema festivals. For example, the films of Rajko Grlić (e.g., *The Border Post, The Constitution*) are very famous in the region. *Srbenka* (2018) by Nebojša Slijepčević is also quite well-known. In comparison, *The Imported Crows* (2004) by Goran Dević and *After the War* (2006) by Srdan Keča are more known to the attendees of film festivals. *Srbenka* won 11 awards at international film festivals and received three nominations. *After the War* participated in nine European film festivals and received five awards. Although *The Imported Crows* started as the final student project of Goran Dević, it succeeded in receiving five awards (four in Croatia and one at the Sarajevo Film festival), participated in 11 international film festivals around Europe, and was screened in various small cinemas and art galleries worldwide.

In contrast to art-house cinema, the opposite is true for those select films that received generous state funding to promote a singular, dominant, national identity at the expense of the "other." For instance, Croatian right-wing film director Jakov Sedlar's *Four by Four* (1999) appears as the first revisionist spectacle of the Bleiburg national "Golgotha." *Jasenovac – The Truth* (2016) is another of Sedlar's pseudohistorical documentaries, created together with screenwriter Hrvoje Hitrec, denying massive atrocities against the Jewish and Serbian populations during Croatia's Ustaše regime. Such projects rarely include regional cooperation and often attain extensive government support. However, the world-famous Serbian director Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995), alongside the immense funding from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia), attracted capital from seven foreign countries. Kusturica, well-positioned abroad since the 1980s and becoming more well-known after two of his films won prizes at Cannes, used that base to garner further funding from

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

France. It is worth mentioning that cinema researcher Pavle Levi (2007) has analyzed Kusturica's shift from original and socially engaged early works to ethnonationalist films siding with the right-wing government. *Underground* (1995) is still an impressive film that depicts how the elite adjusted to different regimes to financially exploit other people, which may sound banal. Nevertheless, Kusturica simultaneously, as Levi (2007) highlights, places the blame on Muslims, Croats, and Slovenes – but never the Serbs – for all the misfortunes of war and the collapse of the state. The works analyzed in this article invoke the complete opposite. They present human dignity and human beings rather than centering on one nation; therefore, they usually have limited funding.

Reviewing the general mainstream film trends in the region,[5] apart from Kusturica's *Underground* (1995) or Srđan Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996), there were no real blockbusters in the 1990s. It is essential to mention that since the 1990s, directors like Kusturica, Dragojević, and Antun Vrdoljak have done nothing subversive. Vrdoljak, with the support of the Croatian government, tried to boost Croatian national sentiment with *General* (2019) but failed. *General* was supposed to be a new Croatian nationalist epic about general Ante Gotovina. Gotovina played the leading role in Operation Storm in 1995 and was charged with responsibility for many war crimes against humanity. Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and the Ministry of Culture wanted to give *General* the Pula Festival Award; however, "you can't fool the crowd totally," remarked Grlić.[6] Overestimated by right-wing politicians, *General* was badly regarded and received terrible reviews. Meanwhile, "[a] small black and white film [*The Diary of Diana B.* (2019) by Dana Budisavljević[7]] which is not trying to prove that 'we are best or the worst,'"[8] noted Grlić, became a total winner of the festival. Thus, fewer and fewer films appear to serve to fulfill political narratives in the region,[9] and the mockery of *General* (2019) proves that the audience can distinguish a good from a poor film. Another reason nationalist films are increasingly disappearing is purely economic: they are expensive, and the local market is too small. According to film critic Jurica Pavičić, *General* could be realized only because of generous television funds and the fact that it was financed as a TV series.[10]

The 2000s are remarkable for Pjer Žalica's and Danis Tanović's dark comedies (like *Fuse*, 2003 and Oscar winner *No Man's Land*, 2001) that socially engage the viewer. Also, one may mention films that, despite the complex topic of dealing with the war past and traumas, became very popular in the region: *Witness* by Brešan (2003) and Golden Bear winner *Esma's Secret: Grbavica* by Jasmila Žbanić (2006) (Jaugaitė 2021). Today, due to the same or very similar languages and cultural history, the regional audience mostly enjoys the comedies of Vinko Brešan and Rajko Grlić, as well as of the previously mentioned Pjer Žalica and Danis Tanović. TV comedy series are also top-rated in the region. For example, from 2015 to 2021, Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT) released the regionally popular nostalgic drama-comic TV series *Black & White World* (2015–2021), which depicted life during the 1980s in Zagreb, in former Yugoslavia. The Bosnian comedy TV series *The Crazy, The Confused, The Normal* (2007–2021) became another regional hit that has been shown in all the Yugosphere. Simultaneously, Serbian television began releasing historical TV dramas and sometimes feature films. Dragan Bjelogrlić's film *Montevideo, Taste of a Dream* (2010) and its sequel *See You in Montevideo* (2014) aim to romanticize the past and pursue the "golden age" of Serbia, which at that time was part of the Yugoslav kingdom. When the current reality disappoints, one looks to the past in order to stimulate national sentiment and nostalgia for the "lost good old times," using such phrases as "back in those days … " and "in those times, better than nowadays."[11] According to Pavičić,[12] these films embody the position of the Serbian government after 2005: everyone abandoned Serbia, nobody wanted to play on our team, but we could do something big alone. Pavičić[13] also highlights the romanticization of Dixieland, Charleston jazz, cabaret, and the Belgrade of the 20s, which appears even more expanded in Bjelogrlić's popular TV crime series *Balkan Shadows* (2017–current). *We Will Be the World Champions* (2015) by Darko Bajić is another example of invoking history for political purposes. Although the leading Yugoslav basketball team players were Croats, the story is told from the Serbian functionaries' perspective. As Pavičić (2015) remarks, the film sells the myth of the Yugoslav basketball dream team to a new anti-communist

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ideology. Therefore, Serbian TV production often invokes the narrative of national belonging or even historical revisionism.

To sum up, the comedy genre dominates the regional TV and cinema screens. Further research may explore this regional phenomenon of those comedy TV series and films that transcend the nation-states' borders and unite audiences through humor. Such comedies seldom distinguish ethnic differences but mock them, satirizing politics and the nationalistic approach. Although the comedy genre aims to exhilarate its viewer, claiming that it remains less critical than non-commercial cinema would express a vague elitist notion. As an illustration, Žalica's *Fuse* and Tanović's *No Man's Land* reveal that comedies and mainstream films may also contain meaningful content and socially engage the viewer to rethink important issues (e.g., war memory and traumas). However, this article focuses on art-house films that use a different approach to explore hybrid identities, digging deeper into the ethnic dilemma while making the viewer feel uncomfortable and confused.

Prague Film School – the Foundation of Post-Yugoslav Cinema

Before exploring post-Yugoslav cinema, it is worth considering the generation of the Prague Film School, which is a group of (post-)Yugoslav film directors[14] who graduated from the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU) in the 1970s. The work of the Prague Film School mainly addresses fluid identities, otherness, and the war's origins. *Occupation in 26 Pictures* (1978) is considered an early masterpiece in Zafranović's career and a prediction of the subsequent violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. It explores the friendship between Miho (a Jew), Niko (a Croat), and Toni (an Italian) with the advent of the Second World War, and the collapse of their relationship as the political climate changes and each friend chooses a different side. Similarly, in *The Border Post* (2006), Grlić traverses the roots of ethnic hatred in Yugoslavia and how it came to war, while expecting an external enemy instead of investigating what was going on inside the country. According to Grlić (2018),[15] *The Border Post* is "about the moment when the 'Yugoslav' version of utopia came to [an] end."[16] "I was feeling that I need[ed] to say something about this war. So I started to think about … the root[s] of the war … Where was the war really born, and how was [it] born? … I used as an example of how from something quite peaceful, quite normal between people … the war [came] and how people became criminals and some became victims; how the war in such a short period of time entered their minds and how they changed their view of … life,"[17] remarks the director. So, both films demonstrate the change of identities and political and moral values during times of significant political changes and, most importantly, the rise of the dark side within ourselves – when a friend becomes the enemy because of their different ethnicity. *The Border Post* also exposes the violence and demonstrates the absurdity of ethnic hatred that brings nothing but casualties and destruction. Although *The Border Post* was created after the Yugoslav Wars, it depicts a similar presentiment of the war as *Occupation in 26 Pictures*.

All Prague Film School graduates remained critical of the changing governments (before and after the collapse of Yugoslavia), remained loyal to their values, and always condemned nationalism, despite Kusturica's shift to the ethnonationalist side over time. "No other Yugoslav director who witnessed the dismantling of the country evinced such a radical break in his ideology-aesthetics [as Kusturica did]," remarks scholar Nebojša Jovanović (2012a, 153). Jovanović masterfully revealed Kusturica's metamorphosis from a director preoccupied with the topics prevalent in the socially critical cinema of the 1980s into a maker of nationalist blockbusters.[18] "[Kusturica] shifted from a benevolent identification with the socialist-Yugoslav cause back in the 1980s to the ultimate cinematic exercise in the denigration of the Yugoslav past in the 1990s. This change was most tangible, of course, in *Underground* (1995), the film that was recognized as a demystification of the "bunker of Tito's Yugoslavia […]" (Jovanović 2012a, 153). Although Levi (2007, 103, 85) acknowledged *Underground*'s "aesthetically impressive contribution" as "nationalist pleasure," he did not recognize the real danger of the kind of aesthetics already demonstrated by the Nazis

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

during the Second World War. Films like *Underground* (1995) or Srđan Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996) justify the war using self-balkanization clichés, explaining away savagery as a natural Balkan characteristic and promoting a primordial approach: claiming ethnic identities to be fixed and everlasting. Kusturica and Dragojević seized the opportunity of the demand for ethno-nationalism and gathered sizeable state funds to address the wars from "our side." In this way, they praised nationalist hegemony and legitimized violent ethnic unmixing, according to sociologist Ana Dević.[19] Thus, the later works of Kusturica (such as *Underground*) showcase the opposite values to those that the Prague Film School and post-Yugoslav cinema uphold, instead promoting a nationalist narrative flattering the ego of proud Serbs.

Besides the already discussed topics, the Prague School is highly concerned about the "hybrid identities" theme. *The Constitution [of the Republic of Croatia]* (2016) by Grlić follows a group of neighbors that do not fit into certain identity clichés: Vjeko is a Croatian ultra-nationalist, gay, and occasionally a cross-dresser, while Ante is an ethnic Serb and policeman in Croatia. However, they manage to recognize and support each other as human beings. Another example is Paskaljević's *When Day Breaks* (2012), where a retired music professor discovers his Jewish origins and new identity in his old age. The professor also discovers the Judenlager Semlin that the Nazis created in the middle of contemporary Belgrade. Hence, the film belongs to the Holocaust film category; at the same time, however, it is very much about today's troubles of ordinary people in Serbia (and elsewhere). Firstly, it talks about the fluid/hidden/despised identities that do not fit any mainstream framework. Secondly, it explores the questions of collective memory, which selects what to preserve/remember and what to forget. Finally, the film focuses on relationships between children and parents. This tendency of revealing fluid identities and national(ist) (in)difference embodies the concept of transnational cinema.

From *Third* (Yugoslav) Cinema to *Transnational* Post-Yugoslav Cinema

One of the examples of how transnational cinema studies have developed comes from the "national cinema/s concept" explored by the film and media researcher Stephen Crofts (1993) in his article *Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s.* Crofts later (1998) proposed an adequate definition of nation-state cinema instead of national cinema. He defines national/nation-state cinema as the director/auteur anti-Hollywood cinema that is not necessarily against Hollywood itself but instead looks for an alternative to address certain issues. This type of "alternative cinema" emerged with French New Wave and the other New Wave films[20] that sought to re-invent cinematic language and deal with social issues. According to media and cinema scholar Steven Rawle (2018, 2–3, 12), transnational cinema does not reject national cinema, but rather supplements it. The "trans-" prefix, together with hybridity, refers to cinema overcoming national boundaries. Furthermore, transnational cinema combats dominant narratives by discovering marginal stories and raises awareness about problems that matter both on local and regional, as well as global levels (Rawle 2018, 3, 17). Finally, it relates to international co-production and cinema cooperation (Rawle 2018, 16), and can be defined as cinema "below-global and above national" (Durovicová, 2009: x).

Crofts (1993) gives five general categories of international cinema: (1) European-model art cinemas, (2) "third cinema," (3) international commercial cinemas, (4) totalitarian cinema, (5) and regional cinema. These categories are yet to be refined, which is especially the case in the post-Yugoslav setting. In Crofts' later article (1998, 389), one can find a more developed table, which illustrates the varieties of nation-state cinema production. However, looking at the ways of production, distribution, exhibition, as well as investigating it from a conceptual angle, contemporary post-Yugoslav cinema (art cinema[s] and international co-productions that often overlap) navigates toward European-model art cinema. As large-scale Europeanization occurs in the region, cinema centers follow the European Union co-production funding mechanisms in ex-Yugoslav countries. On the other hand, one needs to be careful about specific definitions. For example, film critic Pavičić called more recent post-Yugoslav cinema's "dominant style" a cinema of

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

normalization.[21] However, the title of "normalization" itself ideologically refers to transition and "Euro-Atlantic integration" and, therefore, evokes colonialism, patronizing attitudes, and prejudice towards the Balkans and Eastern Europe, remarks film researcher Jovanović (2012b), who highly criticizes Pavičić. Although Pavičić's works (2010, 2011) are among newer efforts to explore post-Yugoslav film outside academia, they have received a lot of criticism from scholars (e.g., Jovanović) as they lack academic insights.[22] For example, Jovanović (2012b) strongly disagreed with Pavičić that post-Yugoslav film appears as a completely new cinematic phenomenon determined by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its socio-political consequences, rather than being the continuation of Yugoslav cinema tradition(s).

Possibly to avoid a Western approach, one of the most prominent scholars of post-structuralist narratology in the Balkans, Saša Vojković (2008a), proposed that historically Yugoslav cinema belonged to a "Third cinema," as Yugoslavia did not belong to the First World nor to the Second (i.e., Soviet sphere of influence). Vojković's approach contradicts Iordanova's (2001, 68) statements:

> No works of Balkan cinema can be deemed equivalent to the subversive masterpieces of Third Cinema …. The film-makers of Third Cinema had an alternative ideology to propose to counter the dominant Western model. They resisted it; they wanted to subvert it. All the Balkan film-makers seek, on the contrary, is to be admitted …. It would be a step too far to expect that the Balkan film-makers whose recent work was discussed here would engage in any sort of critical discourse aimed at "unthinking" Eurocentrism ….

Then Iordanova (2001, 69) concludes: "It seems more convenient to perpetuate the practice of consenting self-exoticism, which somehow seems to work better for them in times when dialogue is sought." While she is looking mainly at the 1990s, Vojković demonstrates that this is no longer the case. She highlights some contrary remarks that Yugoslav cinema was observed from an "exotic"- and "oriental" point of view. Although in the early 2000s, Croatia tried to become a part of Western cinema, it continued to attract a similar gaze of otherness as Yugoslav cinema did; however, this notion has transformed into self-orientalism: creating images of the self through the eyes of Westerners to be accepted and acknowledged (Vojković 2008a, 172–173). Nevertheless, in 2008, Vojković (2008a, 177) discovered a new emerging phase in Croatian film, marked by the complex combination of different experiences as post-communism, post-war trauma, and, above all, the transition to a new (capitalist) system. Vojković's research and the latest films reveal that post-Yugoslav cinema has shifted from self-orientalism to self-reflexivity.

Recent Croatian cinematography focuses on liquid identities and their interconnections rather than generating certain nationalistic prejudices or creating homogenization (Vojković 2011, 87). Most importantly, Vojković argues that current Croatian cinematography perceives Croatian cultural imagination through interdependence with the other. In particular, she examines three films where Croatian national identity is depicted through otherness: 1) in *Witnesses* (2003), Croatianness is portrayed through Serbianness as Serbian actress Mirjana Karanović plays a Croatian mother (Vojković 2011, 87); 2) in *Forgive Me for Kung Fu* (2004), pregnancy reveals otherness as an inseparable part of oneself because a Croatian woman expects a baby from a Chinese man (Vojković 2011, 89); 3) in *Armin* (2007), otherness arrives through Westerness as the film displays orientalized Western approaches towards non-Western people (Vojković 2011, 89–90). Vojković's (2011, 95) conclusion that the "Self is made visible with the help of the Other" may be applied to all contemporary post-Yugoslav cinema, not only Croatian. In addition, Vojković (2008a, 2008b, 2011) revealed the role of the individual and the functionality of the narratives investigating Croatian fiction films,[23] leaving behind non-fiction films exploring the dilemma of (ethnic) identity.

The interdependence between different countries in post-Yugoslav cinema is confirmed by the film narratives and by increasing regional cooperation. Regional co-productions create a possibility to circulate ideas, choose the most talented actors, exchange cinema equipment and contacts, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have a wider variety of filming locations; therefore, it allows production and distribution across national boundaries. However, transnational cinema is primarily funded by national film funds/cinema centers.[24] Cinema historian Tomislav Šakić[25] explains that co-production starts from one national film fund. Then other national film funds/centers make their additional contribution. Also, he points out the current tendentious scheme of minority co-productions in the region when another national film fund/center provides minor funding for the film. For example, contemporary Croatian films have been created as minority co-productions with Slovenia or Serbia (and vice versa). In general, cinematic co-productions remain very common in the EU[26] as well as in the Yugosphere, where cooperation becomes even more accessible because of similar language(s) and cultural history.[27]

(Ethnic) Identity: Imposed, Structured, or Chosen? The Case Study of *Srbenka*

> *One day, I asked my mom, I didn't know the word was 'Serb.' 'Mom, am I Srbenka?' I started crying because until the age of seven I considered myself a Croat…It confused me a lot. I didn't know what the others would think of me now…. Why didn't they tell me earlier? I wasn't glad… I've tried to find ways to show others I'm a Croat, not a Serb.*
>
> Nina Batinić plays herself in *Srbenka* (2018)[28]

Srbenka (2018) is a documentary about the new generation of Serbs born in Croatia after the so-called Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), which, together with the rest of the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001), reinforced ethnic division in the post-Yugoslav space. The film primarily explores the everyday public discourse toward Croatian citizens of other ethnicities – mainly Serbs, but also Roma and Jews – in present-day Croatia. It investigates the school bullying and peer violence toward people of different (Serbian) ethnicity in Croatia, increased after the war and still ongoing nowadays. Director Nebojša Slijepčević[29] tries to discover, understand, and depict how to be a part of the youth of another ethnicity born and raised in Croatia. Therefore, *Srbenka* is about the "aliens" of Serbian ethnicity and their feelings about life in contemporary Croatia.

Although the film runs a short 72 minutes, it offers a rich narrative that includes layers and different stories to follow. Firstly, *Srbenka* takes us to 2014, when theatre director Oliver Frljić is rehearsing his play *Aleksandra Zec*[30] about a 12-year-old Serbian girl and her family, slaughtered by Croatian militiamen in Zagreb in 1991.[31] The camera primarily follows the troupe's preparation works and discussions about the 1990s and present-day Croatia in the first storyline. Besides this plot, there is a storyline that follows the Croatian veterans' protests against Frljić's play. Here the focus is on the issue of war crimes remaining taboo in modern Croatia after more than two decades. The third storyline is the self-reflexive and personal stories of the actors and play director. Finally, these three storylines slowly bring the viewer to the fourth narrative level: the story of Nina Batinić, a 12-year-old girl of Serbian nationality born in Croatia after the war (in 2001), and represents the new generation that Slijepčević wanted to investigate. Taken together, these four storylines flow together and illustrate the issue from different perspectives: 1) the perspective of victims vis-à-vis perpetrators, 2) the perspective of empathy/ethnic hatred, 3) the perspective of the young generation that chooses to accept otherness or to discriminate following public discourse. Film critic Tina Poglajen (2020) pointedly remarks that "[*Srbenka*] is a skilful metatheatre that involves both the troupe's acting and sense of self as they work on their own memories." In addition, the film is divided into two realities: real-life / theatre; external world / internal space; real light / artificial light; and danger space / comfort zone. The film begins in the exterior, then the camera goes inside the theatre, and it ends up outside. The viewer gets a glimpse of the outer world when the actors reflect on real-life in the dressing rooms. The window brings natural, not artificial, light from outside, and noise comes from the street, bringing reality to the theatre before the spectator is returned to artificiality again. "[T]hat's basically what … this whole film [is] about … about safe and unsafe,

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

predictable and unpredictable … known and unknown … ",[32] concludes Slijepčević. These different segments and contrasts only enrich the narrative and reveal the complexity of the main subject.

The characters are mainly described through their monologues, during contemplation in the dressing rooms in the daylight. Theatre rehearsals also provide some information, but the separate interviews reveal more profound private lives and give a feeling of intimacy. It should be noted that Slijepčević never filmed those conversations directly – the spectator does not see the actor's face or Frljić as they talk about themselves. The only exception is in the prologue: the film and the lens open up with an interview of a young Serbian woman from the audience [Tatjana Dragićević], who witnessed peer violence and harassment back in primary school in Croatia. This touching testimony gives an idea that she might be from the same generation as Aleksandra Zec. However, it is the only direct conversation with the camera in the whole film. When it comes to the actors and Frljić, it never is shown as a face-to-face dialogue. Although Frljić witnesses his story in front of the actors, the viewer mainly observes actors' reactions, and only him talking to his crew for a couple of seconds. Frljić never talks to the camera. Once the actors start narrating their personal experiences, the dressing room set, where the actors are practicing, exercising, or taking a break, is soon being exchanged with various frames of the empty theatre spaces behind the scenes: metal structures, surfaces, lamps, even dust. This montage creates a strong impression of intimacy. The artificial theatre lighting – even the sound of the humming lamp or piano dings – engages the viewer and stimulates concentration in order to imagine each character's story. Indeed, those separate narratives are essential to form a unified whole. Frljić's team appears as a model of Croatian society as a whole because it involves actors of different ethnicities from the entirety of Croatia and beyond (so, different nationalities also) – Frljić himself comes from Bosnia, for example – so they share different experiences of the war and different approaches towards nation-building as well (Cineuropa, 2018). For instance, Frljić relates how it was to be a teenage Croat from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Croatia: he was given refugee status and not treated as a first-class citizen. Therefore Frljić was constantly threatened with deportation. Then, actor Nikola Nedić says that he used to change the name of his father Simo, adding a tick on the first letter into the name Šimo to make it sound more Croatian like Šime. Through these monologues, the spectator learns about the characters' backgrounds and attitudes towards the question of national identity.

Gradually, the documentary focuses more and more on Nina Batinić, exploring her identity and how she is dealing with it. Together with three other girls, Nina joined the crew as a student of a local drama school. Slijepčević is shown to remember that Nina was distant from the beginning of the rehearsals, and it seemed that something was bothering her (Milekic 2018). The viewer may observe that on screen Nina looks nervous. She is biting her lip, her gaze looks distracted; sometimes, it seems that she closes herself off. The close-up shots only strengthen the impression. Later, growing up in Croatia, Nina thought she was a Croat like most kids at school. Hence, the Croatian identity was given by the state and society, and that made her feel safe. However, at the age of seven, she discovered a new identity coming from the family that scared her. She realized that she was a Serb. She is *Srbenka:* small Nina used the invented/ mispronounced word *Srbenka* instead of *Srpkinja* – denoting a female of Serb ethnicity – because she was not fully aware of the word, yet immediately associated it with something "bad" in the society within which she lives. The word "Serb" may have negative connotations in contemporary Croatia: it might be used as an insult or as a pejorative word, not only at the football stadium but also in public discourse, as some politicians or public figures use it as a synonym for the enemy.[33] It is defined as the alien, the bad, the other. Nina consequently seems confused, but also scared of what her classmates (read: society) will think of her. She was also embarrassed that her parents did not inform her about this "hidden identity" prior to her finding out. She then decides to keep being a Croat (as the majority) and not a Serb (of minority) moving forward. So, both Slijepčević and Frljić learned about Nina's nationality only during the rehearsals. This discovery inspired and encouraged Slijepčević to focus on Nina and create *Srbenka*, placing her story at the front.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The theatre is essential, not only for creating the unique atmosphere and the contrast between comfort zone and dangerous space, but also for embodying the vital problem of *Srbenka.* The director suggests the metaphor of life as theater, which goes with the question of (ethnic) identity: is ethnic identity inherited? Or is it something to be accepted in the childhood? Or is it rather something that we decide? These are the questions that emerge following Nina and the troupe creating the conflict: the internal conflict, where Nina (as well as people of a different ethnicity) suffers inwardly, and external conflict caused by the political climate in Croatia, where the protagonist and the "aliens" find themselves in. The culmination is a powerful scene where the main protagonist Nina – an Frljić's actor but also a real person depicted in the documentary – can choose her ethnic identity in front of the theatre public. The dilemma is to be a Croat (as is acceptable in contemporary Croatia) or to accept her Serbian identity (and in a way become an enemy *other*). Nina feels scared. Nevertheless, she chooses the latter, so the "unpredictable" and "unsafe" option. It is worth mentioning that this is the only fragment of the theatre play that is on screen. Slijepčević deliberately choses not to film the play so that it would not be spoiled.[34] Later, the camera follows Nina leaving the theatre (read: comfort zone) and approaching reality and the unknown. Nina steps up the pace and disappears. So, Slijepčević asks: "Is it the role we play or something that we are? And again, you have theater and you have Nina, who's an actor on a stage. And she can choose her ethnicity …. But can she choose it? Or can['t she]? These are questions to ask ourselves …. I don't have the answers …."[35] He provides the various layers to demonstrate the complexity of the question and invites the audience to rethink the issue of identity and nationality.

Although *Srbenka* was surprisingly well received and Slijepčević "did not have any unpleasant experiences in Croatia,"[36] the right-wing media highly attacked Frljić's play. The reaction of nationalists and Croatian war veterans is one of *Srbenka*'s plotlines; the viewer observes protests against the play on Aleksandra Zec embodied with the posters like "When Will Croatian Victims Get a Theatre Performance?", "86 Kids from Vukovar," "Who Doesn't Know Aleksandra Zec? But Who Knows … <the list of Croatian children names>" and the pictures of Croatian children killed during the war, with special attention to the victims of the Vukovar's siege. The complete destruction of the Vukovar city with a massive assault on civilians is, indeed, one of the stigmas in Croatian society. Actor and character Igor Kovač also remembers how his family had to leave Vukovar because of the Yugoslav People's Army and Serb paramilitaries, who attacked the city. Moreover, Igor witnesses how "[h]e was indoctrinated into hating 'the other side' because of the crimes they committed" (Milekic 2018). No wonder that after the war, Vukovar became a martyr city.[37] The nationalists ask why Frljić's play investigates the crime of Aleksandra Zec (the alien, the other, the Serb) instead of depicting the tragedy of Vukovar, for which their children do not garner enough attention. Frljić's answer is simple: Aleksandra was killed in Croatia, and he would not like the history to repeat itself. During the theatre workshops, Frljić's troupe investigate the right-wing position. So, they simulate, provoke, and rethink the nationalist discourse to find the essence of such thinking and to open up the issue of ethnic hatred for the audience in a way that it can be considered earnestly. The film captures the moment then Frljić wants to change the introductory part of the play just before the performance, and we see him asking the actors to confront the audience from the stage, exposing nationalistic discourse and triggering the audience. Actors rebel, especially Jelena Lopatić; hence, Frljić gives the actors the freedom to decide how to approach the issue and what position they want to take on stage. Eventually, it is revealed that the actors follow Frljić's instructions, and the play is successful. *Aleksandra Zec* openly declares itself to be an anti-nationalist and anti-war play, which is why it gained so much attention and attracted threats from right-wing circles. *Srbenka* stands for the same values but it seems less radical, using different language. Slijepčević found a very delicate cinematic language to talk about the delicate subject, such as ethnic hatred, in such a way that critics struggled to attack the film. Moreover, if the play concentrates on the past, the film speaks about the current situation. Nevertheless, both creative works express a clear position toward ethnic hatred and extreme nationalism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Slijepčević makes no secret of the fact that *Srbenka* addressed those people exhibiting national indifference (he calls them "middle people/people in-between"): "I think that[,] … minorities are on the extremes. But … a large majority are people who're unsure of what's happening. So, they … can swing either way …. They aren't empathetic, but they're also afraid they could be persuaded to hate or to love. So … [a] majority of people …does not have strong … attitudes towards political questions." [38] This approach coincides with historian Tara Zahra's (2010, 104) claims that individuals "simply did not organize their lives or political allegiances according to nationalist priorities." Actor Igor's reflection discloses nationalistic efforts to differentiate people by their nationality (or ethnicity) and simplify the complexity of individuals: "I hate labeling people. 'This, you're that ….' It makes no sense to me. Someone could say, 'You're a Croat from Vukovar. You shouldn't be making a play about Aleksandra Zec.' The media could accuse me of that. If I do this play, then I'm what? Do I become a Serb because I'm acting in a play about a girl who got killed?" In other words, national indifference or national agnosticism appears as a negative category in the nationalist discourse (Zahra 2010). Because nationalism stands for stereotypes and frameworks, national indifference brings uncertainty and disorder, nor is it "memorialized with public monuments or celebrated with festivals, costumes, and songs" (Zahra 2010, 106). *Srbenka* stands for anyone who feels different, discriminated against, and rejected because of their identity.

Srbenka analyzes in depth the problems on the level of individuals (not collectives), their personal experiences, and their perceptions, rather than skimming the surface. First of all, the characters' monologues, as has already been mentioned, appear to be the film's body. Secondly, when the viewer can observe the play audience's reaction to the performance, it is also about the individuals. The camera finds a young Serbian woman [Tatjana Dragićević], interviewed at the beginning of the film, and focuses on her empathy for Aleksandra and Nina, since all of them have experienced peer violence, bullying and rejection. "She really experienced the play and the show personally [on a personal level] due to her own experience. She was born in 1991 and spent her childhood in Croatia shortly after the war, in an area that experienced [was affected by] it, so the situation was further polarised," clarifies Slijepčević (Milekic 2018). Finally, a similar approach applies to *Srbenka*'s audience as Slijepčević primarily thinks about individuals rather than the masses. "I can only think how it will influence you. I mean, one person who's watching it …. I want to make an experience for one member, for every member of the audience, I want to make an experience for them …. And I try to make this experience provocative, emotional, inspirational … changing in a way,"[39] he explains. By demonstrating how polarization and social constructs hurt specific individuals and exposing their stories and emotions, *Srbenka* masterfully fosters empathy towards the other.

Depicting Nationalization of Public and Private Life in post-Yugoslav Cinema

> *[Tell me what] has involved the nullification of complex identities by the terrible categorical simplicity of ascribed nationality. It has involved essentialist, demonizing characterizations of the national 'other,' characterizations that transform Serbs into Chetniks, Croats into Ustashas, Muslims into Fundamentalists.*
>
> Brubaker 1996, 20–21

Understanding the power of nationalism appears crucial when studying the nation as a practical category in public and private life (Brubaker 1996). *Srbenka* illustrates how the political sphere reaches the private one as a small girl, when Nikola's younger sister attacks her father: "Why did you have to be a Serb? I'm condemned because of it …. If you're Serbs, you could've gone to live in Serbia. Why come here?" From this discourse, it seems that even children started investigating the question of the nation state. *Srbenka* exposes serious issues of ethnic unmixing and expulsion: should people of a given ethnicity move to the country where they would constitute the majority (their "real homeland")? Should ethnic Serbs from Croatia move, or should they even be forced to

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

emigrate to Serbia where they "belong" (but have never lived)? It is worth mentioning that one may find a similar discourse (this time in the public sphere) in *The Imported Crows* (2004), a short 21-minute documentary by Goran Dević.[40] It explores the opinions of the inhabitants of Sisak concerning the increased presence of crows in their town, and how to deal with them. Sisak residents treat the crows as temporary and unwanted guests, as intruders. Therefore, Dević compares the execution of the crow "surplus" with the killing of people of a different ethnicity (in this case, the Serbs): "people in my hometown talk about birds, and they kill birds and talk about them … [using] the same language as [they] talk[ed] about Serbs during the war."[41] Dević thus focuses intensively on the discourse of *othering*. The viewer can also observe people climbing trees in order to destroy the crows' nests. In the film, the killers assure us that this act is one of business for them (they are being paid for killing the birds), and they would never kill of their own accord. That discourse highly reminds viewers of the war perpetrators and their justifications for being involved in conducting massacres. Tellingly, some respondents spontaneously create a story of crows having been imported, as they "are not typical for Sisak" in the same manner as nationalists make myths that Serbs do not belong in Croatia: "they are not *ours*. Just look at the wingspan, the size," declares the representative of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Nevertheless, some people protect the crows: "Go through Zagreb, London, Paris, a crow you'll find. Do they kill them there? In no other country do they do it, except here,"[42] says one of the respondents. Another person, an asylum seeker, compares destroying crows' nests to the demolition of his own house in Bosnia, which "is why I'm against these birds being killed," argues the man. One woman claims that she feels terrible seeing baby crows dead on the asphalt "but, if there is no other way, let them do it," excuses the respondent. The ends justify the means. It is very evident how the political discourse has crept into everyday life and how skillful filmmakers reveal this sensitive issue, aiming at the disarmament of ethnonationalism in post-Yugoslav space.

Anderson (1991) claims that media mobilizes the imagined communities, whereas Gagnon (2004) illustrates how ethnonationalist hostilities split the multi-national Yugoslav community apart and destroyed relationships as well as trust in its members with the help of the media, which in turn was controlled by the elites of the new nation-states. Film is the most lucrative industry in mass media and the most influential. Cinema is a type of media that has been abused for the sake of war and propaganda from its inception. Yugoslavia experienced a whole era of partisan films during the 1960s–1980s that heroized the Yugoslav Partisans fighting in World War II. Those partisan films contributed to creating Tito's official historical narrative and Yugoslav identity. Post-Yugoslav films seek to rethink (ethnic) identity and show its complexity, diversity, fluidity, and hybridity. *Srbenka* stands for hybridity in a way that mirrors the way that the theatre troupe's members share different identities: they are of different ethnicities and nationalities, come from various places and have contradicting attitudes; thus they argue with each other. Some characters display fluidity or national ambivalence, which is characterized by side-switching. For instance, Nina pretends to be a Croat after finding out that her parents are Serbs, and Nikola changes his father's name to sound more Croatian. They act in such a way in order to find themselves in a better position and belong to the majority. The complexity of identity is well depicted in the 45-minute documentary *After the War* (2006) by filmmaker Srđan Keča.[43] The film discloses the particularly evident hybrid identity of the Gorani, a small Islamic community of Slavic origin. The Gorani were strongly affected by the Kosovo war as they were perceived to have been fighting as a collective on Slobodan Milošević's side. In contemporary Kosovo they are considered the enemy *other* for this reason. Keča explores their undefined identities and the life of a small isolated mountain village that is far away from everything. The primary intention of Keča was to find a place untouched by the war: "to go there to make a film that was about a place that's above everything in the mountains … but then I found the exact opposite of that."[44] Moreover, the main protagonist, Sultan, claims to be a Četnik. Hence, he is in conflict with himself because he carries the unwanted name, associated with Muslim identity. Thus, he hates his father for choosing that name/identity for him. Today, Gorani do not fit any nation-state clichés; hence, they struggle to fit and remain detached. *Srbenka* charts how

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

national indifference became impossible after the 1990s and its consequences. At the same time, *After the War* resists the reified categories and depicts these people who "are not of interest" to any nation-state. In conclusion, both Keča and Slijepčević demonstrate how people can have different affiliations and identities, and how they do not neatly fit into the separate shelves defined by nationalist politicians.

But what if ordinary people/non-elites often feel indifferent to "political dramas"? And what if cultural and social historians exaggerate the issue of nationality? To answer these questions, historian Zahra (2010) has started a debate on national indifference. While analyzing the post-Yugoslav films, I wondered if *Srbenka* and other films could be discussed in light of this approach, as national indifference seems to be an essential category for director Slijepčević. Zahra (2010) challenged Anderson's (1991) imagined communities by proposing a definition of imagined non-communities that ignore national identity. One can notice that post-Yugoslav films treat characters simply as human beings; they do not put them into any category and recognize them as separate individuals. On the other hand, *Srbenka*, *After the War* and *Imported Crows* depict the current political climate and ethnic division in the post-war Yugosphere. It creates the impression that ethnonationalism merges and highly politicizes both public and private discourses. For example, *Srbenka* illustrates how private sphere discourse comes from the public. *Imported Crows* exposes the discourse within the public domain. Finally, *After the War* reveals how strong the sense of belonging can be, living in the middle of nowhere, whilst at the same time experiencing rejection from a nation-state that one fought for, resulting in feeling like an "alien." Zahra (2010, 93) suggests national indifference as a new "category of analysis in the history of modern central and eastern Europe," which was invisible in traditional historiography. Zahra's research is a valuable tool in historical research and a world where nations are yet to be or are in the process of forming, but does it work for social or interdisciplinary research? In contrast to Anderson (1991), Zahra (2010) focuses on individuals, remarking that historical research "became blind to individuals" (Zahra 2010, 96) and that this sometimes happens with the social sciences as well, especially when it comes to quantitative research. As mentioned, post-Yugoslav films highly focus on individuals, which fits Zahra's approach. I might note that Vojković (2008a, 2008b, 2011) also explored the role of individuals in Croatian cinema. Vojković paid great attention to "hybridity," while Zahra instead suggests using the concept of national indifference in transnational or migration studies. According to Zahra (2010, 116), "hybridity" "assume[s] preexisting national loyalties and coherent group identities." However, if one looks at *After the War,* it surely displays hybridity and not indifference. The director Keča expected to go to the mountains and find indifference, but instead found the exact opposite. On the other hand, the concept of national indifference seems to be a lot about particularity and uniqueness, which works for these films as they investigate very individual cases. Therefore, the concept of national indifference appears as the key to understanding *Srbenka*, *After the War*, and *Imported Crows.*

Srbenka was meant to be a local film ("[a] Croatian film for the Croatian audience, without worrying if anyone else would … understand the film"[45]); nevertheless, it attained substantial international success. "We thought it would be a very local film, but it's not," Slijepčević says. "People recognize this is not only a film about Serbs and Croats. This is a film about everybody who is different" (Vourlias 2018). Here, "national" and "transnational" cinema converge as Rawle (2018) predicted. Transnational cinema seems to be one step ahead of national cinema in the manner in which it manages to investigate the issues that make sense both locally and globally (such as hegemony, power, inequality, tensions between different ethnic groups, discrimination, peer violence, etc.). Therefore, *Srbenka* overcomes national boundaries. "Set against a backdrop of hate and xenophobic violence, 'Srbenka' feels perfectly in tune with the current global moment. But Slijepcevic admitted he has been caught off-guard by the emotional responses from viewers at foreign screenings," remarks journalist Vourlias (2018). Slijepčević primarily advocates for local films and claims that "the film industry tries to push only very international films … what's left behind are some stories that are locally very important but internationally uninteresting … so …

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they're not profitable internationally …. I think it's very important to make small local films dealing with … local topics without worrying if it will go to Cannes, Sundance …."[46] However, Crofts (1993) sees regional cinema under the umbrella of international cinema. It seems that a skillfully made film may be both local and transnational/international simultaneously, and *Srbenka* is an excellent example of that. Eventually, films often create a possibility of putting yourself in someone else's shoes and identifying with protagonists. This connection might be stronger than the specific context, which needs to be understood by the viewer.

Conclusions

This article showed how productively the other may be explored in film studies and how certain notions from nationalism studies can be applied to understand films. Ethnic hatred and othering is a sensitive issue in deeply divided post-Yugoslav societies; this topic therefore is of interest to many film directors from the region, including Slijepčević, Dević, and Keča. These three directors primarily portray individuals and their emotions rather than specific (ethnic) identities. Nevertheless, they choose to disclose vulnerable groups (Serbian minorities in Croatia, the isolated Gorani community) and their painful experiences in the societies they live. Documentary filmmakers Slijepčević and Keča find a suitable cinematic language to sensitively investigate the issue of not hurting their interviewees and fostering the viewer's empathy towards the other. The Post-Yugoslav films seem to follow Zahra's (2010, 118) suggestion to "assume indifference and investigate how and why people allied themselves politically, culturally, and socially from the ground up"; and Brubaker's (1996) advice that one should not ask "what is a nation" but rather explore how it works in practice.

Moreover, Slijepčević and Dević highly care about the discourse toward the *other* and provide proof for Brubaker's statements about ethnonationalism conquering both the public and private sphere. The filmmakers raise the dilemma of ethnic identity and hybrid identity, masterfully demonstrating the complexity and multiplicity of each personality. Films do not provide guidelines; however, they keep asking essential questions and require the viewer to participate. If propaganda films are used to form the identity and mobilize the majorities, this kind of cinema seems to unmake identity and focus on minorities or separate individuals. It depicts how disparities and inequality develop into othering, hostility, and hatred. Finally, the question of national indifference always remains in the air. These films teach that the most crucial thing should not be difference and exclusion, but empathy towards each other and inclusion.

Acknowledgments. This article would have been impossible without the goodwill of Goran Dević, Rajko Grlić, Srdan Keča, Goran Paskaljević, and Nebojša Slijepčević. I am grateful for sharing their ideas and giving me access to their films. I also thank cinema historians Tomislav Šakić and Nikica Gilić as well as cinema critic Jurica Pavičić for broadening my horizons in the cinema field. Above all, I express my most immense gratitude to Ana Dević, who stimulated my interest in (post-) Yugoslav cinema and never hesitated to assist. Also, I show appreciation to Tatiana Heise, who gave valuable insights and helped me structure this article. Finally, I thank my colleague Benjamin Leathley for revising this article and assisting in improving it.

Disclosures. None.

Notes

1 The filmography is provided on the last page.
2 Although the film directors are public figures, I decided not to include the complete list of directors' names for ethical reasons in order to ensure their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.
3 The documentaries *The Imported Crows* (2004) by Goran Dević and *After the War* (2006) by Srdan Keča that I investigate here have yet to be examined as far as I know. Only *Srbenka* (2018) was analyzed from the political taboo and cultural trauma point of view by Yago Paris (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

4 Cambridge Dictionary definition https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/art house. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)
5 The trends were discussed together with film critic Jurica Pavičić (interview by author by Skype, April 6, 2020) and sociologist Ana Dević by correspondence on Facebook (February 23, 2022).
6 Rajko Grlić, interviewed by the author via Skype, May 21, 2020.
7 Dana Budisavljević is a former Grlić student and a director that belongs to a young generation of post-Yugoslav cinema creators. *The Diary of Diana B.* (2019) appears as a biographical film about Diana Budisavljević, who saved thousands of Serbian children from Croatian Ustasha camps during the Second World War. Although this film takes the viewers back to the 40s, it explores the topic that is no less relevant today: ethnic hatred and people who become models of ethical behavior and try to find goodness in bad times despite the adverse historical circumstances.
8 Rajko Grlić, interviewed by the author via Skype, May 21, 2020.
9 Except Serbia, which releases various TV series based on history but rarely feature films.
10 Jurica Pavičić, interviewed by the author via Skype, April 6, 2020.
11 These are the phrases used in the film trailer of *Montevideo, Taste of a Dream* (2010).
12 Jurica Pavičić, interviewed by the author via Skype, April 6, 2020.
13 Jurica Pavičić, interviewed by the author via Skype, April 6, 2020.
14 Lordan Zafranović (b. 1944), Srđan Karanović (b. 1945), Goran Marković (b. 1946), Goran Paskaljević (1947–2020), Rajko Grlić (b. 1947) and Emir Kusturica (b. 1954), the youngest graduate often considered a part of the Prague film school.
15 Manuscript in English *Long Story Short* provided by Grlić.
16 Rajko Grlić, interviewed by the author via Skype, May 21, 2020.
17 Rajko Grlić, interviewed by the author via Skype, May 21, 2020.
18 I recommend reading Jovanović's (2012a) book chapter *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema, or, Why Emir Kusturica's Legacy is Worth Fighting for,* where he explores specific characteristics of Kusturica's film poetics.
19 Ana Dević's seminar "Coming to Terms with the Past in Post-Yugoslav Cinema" on January 22, 2019 at the University of Bologna.
20 For example, Yugoslavia has experienced the New Yugoslav film, also known by its derogatory name the Black wave (1960s–early 1970s), that used to criticize the Yugoslav society, showing its weaknesses of socialism expressed in backwardness and poverty of the marginal groups.
21 Also, Pavičić distinguished two styles typical for the 90s that are self-victimization (characteristic for Croatia, and Kosovo to some extent; and nowadays Vučić's Serbia – the last remark comes from my interview with Jurica Pavičić via Skype, April 6, 2020) and self-Balkanization (characteristic for Serbia), and the recent dominant style he calls cinema of normalization. Jovanović (2012b) argues about these "styles," highlighting that Pavičić does not understand them substantially but rather perceives them contextually and historicistically. Jovanović (2012b) admits that *the* author's self-victimization style is the best explored, although he does not find it as dominant as Pavičić perceives it. According to the critic, the self-Balkanization dispute appears much weaker than Levi's (2007) writing on the same topic, so it offers nothing new and is yet to be developed. In conclusion, Jovanović (2012b) is optimistic about the new edition of Pavičić's book *Postjugoslavenski film: stil i ideologija* (2011), where significant errors would be revised and stronger arguments given employing methods and theoretical approaches.
22 See previous footnote.
23 *Man Without a Mustache?* (2005), by Hrvoje Hribar; *Forgive Me for Kung Fu* (2004), and *Armin* (2007) by Ognjen Sviličić.
24 Some examples: Croatian Audio-Visual Centre (*Hrvatski audiovizualni centar),* Serbian national film fund (*Filmski centar Srbije*), Slovenian national film fund (*Filmski sklad Slovenije*), North Macedonia Film Agency (*Агенција за филм*), Film Centre of Montenegro (*Filmski centar Crne Gore*), and Kosovo Cinematography Center (*Kosova Cinematography Center*). Bosnia has

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

no cinema center. There is only a cinema fund, supported by the Ministry of Culture. It includes only one of the two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina but not Republika Srpska.

25 Šakić, email to the author explaining funding of post-Yugoslav films, July 10, 2020.

26 More information about EU funding may be found in this report: *Mapping of Film and Audiovisual Public Funding Criteria in the EU*, https://rm.coe.int/mapping-of-film-and-audiovisual-public-funding-criteria-in-the-eu/1680947b6c. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)

27 Šakić, email to the author explaining funding of post-Yugoslav films, July 10, 2020.

28 I recommend watching the *Srbenka*'s trailer: http://restarted.hr/en/movies.php?recordID=163. (Accessed July 8, 2022)

29 Neboja Slijepčević (b. 1973 in Zagreb, Croatia) is a scriptwriter and director. In 2005, he graduated Film Directing from the Academy of Drama and Art in Zagreb. He directed numerous TV documentaries and series (*Direkt*, *City Folk*…) and creative and author-driven documentaries (*Real Man's Film*, *In 4 Years*, *Of Cows and People*). He received awards from various festivals. Slijepčević is also the author of a short animated film *Dog / Rabbit*, short fiction *Boxed* and short fiction *Slap in the Face*, part of the fiction omnibus *Zagreb Stories*. In 2013, he finished his first feature documentary, international co-production *Gangster of Love*. The film was premiered in Zagreb Dox 2013, winning the audience award for the best film. The film's international premiere was at Hot Docs 2013 and European premiere at the documentary competition of Karlovy Vary IFF 2013. *Gangster of Love* was also one of Croatia's biggest box office successes. Nebojša is also an educator, mentoring and lecturing at the School of Documentary Film in Zagreb. He is living and working in Zagreb, Croatia. This biography was taken from Dafilms.com: https://dafilms.com/director/8942-nebojsa-slijepcevic. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)

30 The play of *Aleksandra Zec* became the departure point for the *Srbenka*. While Slijepčević was doing his visual research for the documentary, he found out that Frljić was working on the relevant topic of ethnic hatred and asked for permission to come to rehearsals and record them to continue his research and make a couple of scenes for fundraising. Back then, Slijepčević had no idea that meeting and filming Frljić, his crew, and Nina would become the film itself: "[T]he film was done in 28 days. So, it was just like a coincidence and luck … if you had asked me on the first day of shooting: "What will I have after 20 days', I would [have] sa[id]: "The trailer … ' So that's what I was thinking at that time … By the 15th day, I thought I'm having a 30-minute film … And a year later I was thinking I have a feature-length … So it was quite intuitive … a bit of luck, a bit of intuition, a bit of … coincidence …." Then Slijepčević let the footage rest for a few years. Meanwhile, he was holding a fundraiser with a short 10-minute film from the material. After the film got the funding, some additional shootings took place. In 2017, the footage was edited. Finally, *Srbenka* was premiered in 2018.

31 Although the perpetrators were known, they have never been punished.

32 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

33 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

34 "I'm like working offbeat," says Slijepčević because the viewer only sees the rehearsal discussions and the actors: their reactions while the others act; when they are alone in the dressing rooms taking a breath.

35 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

36 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

37 In addition, in 2020, the day of November 18 was officially institutionalized as Remembrance Day for All Victims of the Homeland War and Remembrance Day for the Victims of Vukovar and Skabrnja, and became a state holiday in Croatia.

38 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

39 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

40 Goran Dević was born in Sisak, Croatia, in 1971. He studied law, archaeology, and film art at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb, Croatia. His filmography includes several documentaries and short films; he is also the director and scriptwriter of one feature film. He is the founder of 15th Art Production (*Petnaesta umjetnost*) – a film production company. Dević teaches documentary film at the Academy of Dramatic Arts. He lives and works in Zagreb. This biography was taken from Dokweb.net: https://dokweb.net/database/persons/biography/4cad03ee-a620-4f34-b26f-39a54dea7a79/goran-devic. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)

41 Zvonimir Jurić and Goran Dević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, January 23, 2020.

42 *The Imported Crows / Uvozne vrane*, directed by Goran Dević, Croatia. 2004.

43 Srđan Keča is a filmmaker, visual artist and educator. After studying physics at the University of Belgrade, he moved on to documentary filmmaking at the Paris-based Ateliers Varan. He received his MA from the UK National Film and Television School (NFTS) in 2011. Keča's documentary films have consistently screened at leading festivals: IDFA, DOK Leipzig, Full Frame, Jihlava IDFF, etc., winning multiple awards and critical acclaim. In 2015, Keča joined the faculty at Stanford University Department of Art & Art History as Assistant Professor, teaching in the MFA Documentary Film & Video program. This biography was taken from Dafilms.com: https://dafilms.com/director/9320-srdjan-keca. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)

44 When documentary filmmakers start their research, they never know where it will take them. Interviews with film directors (e.g. Slijepčević, Keča, Žbanić) only confirm this thesis. For instance, Keča aimed to find a perfect place but faced the worst of the war.

45 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

46 Nebojša Slijepčević, interviewed by the author, Zagreb, February 5, 2020.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York: Verso.

Brubaker, Rogers, ed. 1996. Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event. In *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 13–22. Cambridge University Press.

Cineuropa. 2018. "Interview with Nebojša Slijepčević." Vimeo. https://cineuropa.org/video/358377/rdid/352695/. (Accessed July 8, 2022.)

Crofts, Stephen. 1993. "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14 (3): 49–67.

Crofts, Stephen. 1998. "Concepts of National Cinema." In *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, 385–93. New York: Oxford University Press.

Durovicová, Nataša, and Kathleen E. Newman, ed. 2009. *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Gagnon, V.P. (Chip) Jr, ed. 2004. "The Puzzle of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s." In *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*, 1–30. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Grlić, Rajko. 2018. *Neispričane priče*. Belgrade: Laguna.

Iordanova, Dina. 2001. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. London: British Film Institute.

Jaugaitė, Rimantė. 2021. "(Not) Dealing with War Crimes on Film: Post-Yugoslav Cinema as a Method of Fostering Reconciliation and Peace." *Southeastern Europe* 45 (3): 314–340.

Jovanović, Nebojša. 2012a. "Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema, or, Why Emir Kusturica's Legacy is Worth Fighting for." In *Retracing Images: Visual Culture after Yugoslavia*, edited by Daniel Šuber and Slobodan Karamanic, 149–169. Leiden: Brill.

Jovanović, Nebojša. 2012b. "Instant klasik za oprezno čitanje." Review of *Postjugoslavenski film: Stil i ideologija*, by Jurica Pavičić. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 70 (2012): 226–40.

Leiner, Martin. 2014. "Films about the Genocide in Rwanda 1994: An Example of the Moral Landscape Method (MLM) in Media Analysis." In *Societies in Transition. Sub-Saharan Africa between Conflict and Reconciliation*, edited by Martin Leiner, Maria Palme, and Peggy Stoeckner, 99–133. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Levi, Pavle. 2007. *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Milekic, Sven. 2018. "Film About Serb Girl Reveals the 'Other Croatia.'" *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/04/film-about-serb-girl-reveals-the-other-croatia-06-01-2018/. (Accessed January 4, 2022.)

Paris, Yago. 2020. "Imposing an ideology: cultural trauma and political taboo in Nebojša Slijepčević's *Srbenka*." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 12 (3): 260–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/2040350X.2020.1861753.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pavičić, Jurica. 2010. "Cinema of Normalization': Changes of Stylistic Model in Post-Yugoslav Cinema after the 1990s." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 1 (1): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1386/seec.1.1.43/1.
Pavičić, Jurica. 2011. *Postjugoslavenski film: stil i ideologija*. Zagreb: Hrvatski filmski savez.
Pavičić, Jurica. 2015. "PRAVO NA DOBRU YU POVIJEST Kako jugoslavenski mit 'prodati' novoj antikomunističkoj ideologiji." *Jutarnji list*, April 19. https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/pravo-na-dobru-yu-povijest-kako-jugoslavenski-mit-prodati-novoj-antikomunistickoj-ideologiji-377080. (Accessed January 4, 2022.)
Poglajen, Tina. 2020. "Award-Winner: An Identity Struggle That Never Ended." *Modern Times Review*. https://www.moderntimes.review/an-identity-struggle-that-never-ended/. (Accessed January 4, 2022.)
Rawle, Steven. 2018. *Transnational Cinema: An Introduction*. London: Palgrave.
Schierup, Carl-Ulrik. 1997. "Memorandum for Modernity? Socialist Modernisers, Re-Traditionalisation, and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism." In *Scramble for the Balkans: Nationalism, Globalism, and the Political Economy of Reconstruction*, edited by Carl-Ulrik Schierup, 47–80. London: Macmillan.
Vojković, Saša. 2008a. "(Hibridni) postmodernizam." Chap. 10 in *Filmski medij kao (trans)kulturalni spektakl: Hollywood, Europa*, Azija, 169–189. Zagreb: Hrvatski filmski savez.
Vojković, Saša. 2008b. "De/re-Construction of Subjectivity in Contemporary Croatian Cinema: Becoming European. " *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 6 (1): 83–95.
Vojković, Saša. 2011. "Interkulturalnost, transnacionalnost i noviji hrvatski film." *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 67: 81–89.
Vourlias, Christopher. 2018. "History Haunts Croatian Youth in "Srbenka." *Variety*, October 25. https://variety.com/2018/film/festivals/history-haunts-croatian-youth-srbenka-1202993833/. (Accessed January 4, 2022.)
Zahra, Tara. 2010. "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis." *Slavic Review* 69 (1): 93–119.

Filmography

Bajić, Darko, director. 2015. *We Will Be the World Champions / Bićemo prvaci sveta.* Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia. Intermedia Network, Kinorama, Perfo Production. 2 hr, 6 min. DVD.
Bjelogrlić, Dragan, producer. 2017–current. *Balkan Shadows / Senke nad Balkanom.* Serbia. Directed by Dragan Bjelogrlić. Cobra film, RTS, United Media.
Bjelogrlić, Dragan, director. 2010. *Montevideo, Taste of a Dream / Montevideo, Bog te video!* Serbia. City Records, 2010. 2 hr, 20 min. DVD.
Bjelogrlić, Dragan, director. 2014. *See You in Montevideo / Montevideo, vidimo se!* Serbia. Intermedia Network, 2014. 2 hr, 26 min. DVD.
Brešan, Vinko, director. 2003. *Witnesses / Svjedoci.* Croatia. Film Movement, 2004. 1 hr, 25 min. DVD.
Budisavljević, Dana, director. 2019. *The Diary of Diana B. / Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević.* Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia. Vimeo. 1 hr., 28 min.
Dević, Goran, director. 2004. *The Imported Crows / Uvozne vrane.* Croatia. Vimeo. 22 min.
Dragojević, Srđan, director. 1996. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame / Lepa sela lepo gore.* Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Cobra film, 1998. 2 hr, 7 min. DVD.
Grlić, Rajko, director. 2006. *The Border Post / Karaula.* Croatia, Serbia, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Republic of North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Austria. Refresh, 2006. 1 hr, 34 min. DVD.
Grlić, Rajko, director. 2016. *The Constitution / Ustav Republike Hrvatske.* Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Republic of North Macedonia. Vimeo. 1 hr, 33 min.
Keča, Srđan, director. 2006. *After the War / Posle Rata.* Serbia. Vimeo. 46 min.
Kusturica, Emir, director. 1995. *Underground / Podzemlje.* Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, United Kingdom, United States. BFI, 1995. 2 hr, 41 min. DVD.
Maloča, Ivan, producer. 2015–2021. *Black & White World / Crno-bijeli svijet.* Croatia. Directed by Goran Kulenović. Hrvatska radiotelevizija. 50 min. TV series.
Paskaljević, Goran, director. 2012. *When Day Breaks / Kad svane dan.* Serbia, France, Croatia. Vimeo. 1 hr, 30 min.
Pušić, Davor, producer. 2007–2021. *The Crazy, The Confused, The Normal / Lud, zbunjen, normalan.* Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia. Directed by Elmir Jukić. FIST Production, FTV, Nova TV series. 30–40 min. TV series.
Sedlar, Jakov, director. 1999. *Four by Four / Četverored.* Croatia. Croatia film, 1999. 2 hr, 16 min. DVD.
Sedlar, Jakov. director. 2016. *Jasenovac – The Truth / Jasenovac – istina.* Croatia. Tesla film, 2016. 1 hr. DVD.
Slijepčević, Nebojša, director. 2018. *Srbenka.* Croatia. Vimeo. 1 hr, 12 min.
Sviličić, Ognjen, director. 2004. *Forgive Me for Kung Fu / Oprosti za kung fu.* Croatia. Life Size Entertainment, 2006. 1 hr, 10 min. DVD.
Sviličić, Ognjen, director. 2007. *Armin.* Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany. Absolut Medien, 2009. 1 hr, 22 min. DVD.
Tanović, Danis, director. 2001. *No Man's Land / Ničija zemlja.* Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Slovenia, Italy, United Kingdom, Belgium. Santa Monica, MGM Home Entertainment, 2002. 1 hr, 38 min. DVD.
Vrdoljak, Antun, Goran Višnjić, Andrija Vrdoljak, Kazimir Bačić & Slaven Knezović, producers. 2019. *General.* Croatia. Directed by Antun Vrdoljak. Hrvatska radiotelevizija.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.63 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Zafranović, Lordan, director. 1978. *Occupation in 26 Pictures / Okupacija u 26 slika.* Yugoslavia. Cobra film, 2005. 1 hr. 56 min. DVD.

Žalica, Pjer, director. 2003. *Fuse / Gori vatra.* Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria, Turkey, France. Trigon-Film, 2003. 1 hr, 45 min. DVD.

Žbanić, Jasmila, director. 2006. *Grbavica - Esma's Secret / Grbavica.* Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Austria, Germany. Trigon-Film, 2006. 1 hr, 30 min. DVD.

Cite this article: Jaugaitė, R. 2024. The "Aliens" in Post-Yugoslav Cinema. *Nationalities Papers* 52: 22–39, doi:10.1017/nps.2022.63