

Preface

I was thirteen years old when the Bosnian war ended. My adolescence and adult life have been shaped by the post-war condition. Characterized by precarity, corruption, a prolonged waiting for a better life, for a more prosperous future to arrive, the post-war condition has made an everlasting imprint on my being. Luckily, my exposure to cinema began at an early age. First through a brief experience as a young film actress, then by watching films screened at the Sarajevo Film Festival. The festival was founded during the war as an act of civil resistance. It was there that I recognized film's potential to provide different perspectives on the war. The films helped me better understand my environment as I was learning to come to terms with my post-conflict confusion. Later, I was fortunate enough to turn my passion for films into an opportunity to work at the Sarajevo Film Festival. Through my work as a programmer, I realized that the ongoing transition from a single socialist society to a group of liberal states was a prevalent theme in the works of filmmakers from the region. The cultural and political idiosyncrasies of the unordinary state I had lived in made me want to better understand the complexity of my environment through film. It was at the University of Amsterdam, during my MA studies, that two encounters laid the foundation for what would become this book. Thanks to Patricia Pisters, I was introduced to the film philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and the huge potential that his concepts have for understanding films made in and about a post-war society. The other encounter relates to the denial of the historically established facts about the war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia. During one of my MA courses, one fellow student presented a famous still showing the imprisoned Fikret Alić and other men behind the barbed wire of a camp located in the Trnopolje region of northwest Bosnia in summer 1992. Adopted and broadcast by numerous media outlets, it stirred international political outrage. During the student presentation, the still was referred to as a photograph that was framed in such a way as to incite a strong emotional reaction and a prompt international military intervention. Its veracity was undoubtedly brought into question.

Back then, I knew that any understanding of a post-Yugoslav cinema would require a historically situated knowledge. Throughout the research for this book, it became clear that a post-war cinema of a multi-ethnic society could be read and understood through the lens of a detailed, nuanced, and ultimately available historical knowledge and the potential of non-representational strategies to account for it. As I am writing this preface,

conflicts are on the rise and truths are being contested over and over again. With the ongoing wars on Gaza and Ukraine, it is now more pertinent than ever to look into the possibilities and limitations of non-representational strategies to engage with the realities of what could be future post-conflict societies. It is my hope that with my reflections on the social implications of non-representational images of war, which are immanent to their aesthetic properties, I can provide a substantial contribution to the fields of film, media studies, and memory studies.

This book would not have come into being without Alexandra Schneider, who accompanied me at the early stages of my academic path, and Vinzenz Hediger, who encouraged me to conduct dedicated research on a delicate topic of political and aesthetic importance for southeast Europe and beyond at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. Without their steady encouragement and the generous *Promotionsförderung* of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the whole endeavour would have been impossible.

I am grateful for the meaningful and ever-resonating feedback from within the field of cultural memory studies that I received from Astrid Erll. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Nevenka Tromp, who provided me with her astute, up-to-date reflections on contested historical narratives of the causes of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. My appreciation goes to Emily Langston and Manuel Eising for hours spent discussing the state of international law and its application within the region of former Yugoslavia, the wars fought in the 1990s, and the lack of sincere reconciliation in their aftermath. The whole venture would not have been as enriching and exciting without Dijana Protić and Maša Guštin, who were there with their comments backed by a profound and detailed knowledge of post-Yugoslav cinema, its production and aesthetic properties, with their hearts and ears open, also when my spirits were low. Bronwyn Birdsdall and Daniel Hendrickson did a wonderful job proofreading my manuscript and giving me alternative solutions, words, sentence constructions, but also encouragement to carry on with my writing when I needed it most. My sincere thanks goes to my loving parents Volga and Bakir, and my brothers Timur and Dino for their enduring support and great company. And finally, my gratitude goes to my anchor, Christoph, without whom I would not be what I am today. I am eternally grateful for his patience, love, attention, and for our magnificent little family, which we have with our children Danijal and Tara.