

I Post-Yugoslav Cinema in the Face of Post-War Culture

Abstract: The multi-faceted meaning of the adjectives “post-Yugoslav” and “post-war” are reflected in Chapter I. The notion of a “post-war” society assumes an inability to separate trauma and the legacy of the war from the present. “Post-Yugoslavia” implies the retrieval of once lost memories of living in the former federal state. The distinction between the “post-war” and the “post-Yugoslav” condition justifies the imperative to move beyond the “post-war” condition. In the context of filmmaking, overcoming “post-war” status assumes finding aesthetic means to convey memories of the war while avoiding the traps of representation. Chapter I introduces the notion of non-representational images of war. The conditions of their emergence are contextualized, and a model of implied spectatorship is introduced.

Keywords: post-Yugoslav, post-war condition, non-representational images of war

I will commence by tackling the multi-faceted meanings of both adjectives, *post-Yugoslav* and *post-war*. Generally speaking, one adjective may be mistaken for the other due to two processes that take place simultaneously. The first being the transition from the socialist-governed federal state of Yugoslavia to the liberal democracies of the newly formed nation-states, and the second being post-war recovery and reconciliation. Discussions about the wars in the former Yugoslavia and their aftermaths often leads to a discussion about the change of regimes. I will elaborate on how these two processes intertwine, but also on what grounds I believe that they diverge. First though, I will briefly reflect on the meaning of the prefix *post*.

In *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture*, editors Vlad Beronja and Stijn Vervaet make a reference to Marianne Hirsch's explanation

of the prefix *post* in *postmemory*. Postmemory is the idea of a traumatic legacy passed to following generations by way of narratives and media. According to Hirsch, the past is brought to the fore not by recall but by imaginative reconstruction. One is shaped by “traumatic fragments of past events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” (Hirsch 5). Events that took place in the past continue to have an impact in the present. Not unlike the *post* in postmodernism, *post* here implies a break, a gap, a discontinuity between the modern and postmodern, but also the lasting influence of the former on the latter as well as an intense relationship between the two. Beronja and Vervaeet suggest that in post-Yugoslavia, “‘post’ implies the (violent) break between socialist Yugoslavia and what came after it, as well as a certain continuity of its cultural, political, and social legacy” (Beronja and Vervaeet 5).

Making use of Hirsch’s understanding of postmemory, while taking into account Beronja and Vervaeet’s reflections on post-Yugoslavia, one notices parallel implications—one of rupture, a break between the time before the war (but also the time of socialist Yugoslavia) and the time after the war (but also the emergence of the national states following the break-up of Yugoslavia)—and the implication of the influence of the former on the latter. Considering post-Yugoslavia, the rupture is associated with the war, and the ongoing influence of the former on the latter is the idea of Yugoslavia that survives after its break-up. Using the same analogy when reflecting on the post-war condition, the rupture equals peace, and the legacy is that of the war on its aftermath. As could be seen, different breaks are implied: the war in the first case, peace in the second. On closer look, different types of influence of the former on the latter set the notion of post-Yugoslavia apart from the notion of a post-war condition. By different influences, I understand different stages that the notions of *Yugoslavia* and *war* have gone through. Following the break-up of Yugoslavia, the idea of Yugoslavia went through its negation and now is going through its reconsideration. This reconsideration should be understood merely as an attempt to regain lost memories about socialist Yugoslavia. At least three stages can be recognized: Yugoslavia, non-Yugoslavia, and post-Yugoslavia. With regard to the Bosnian 1992–95 war, in particular, two stages can be distinguished: the war and the post-war. I will elaborate on how the three-stage iteration of the notion of Yugoslavia differs from the two-stage iteration of the notion of war. I will draw out an explanation of what makes the post-war condition different from the post-Yugoslav condition. Before doing so, an answer is needed as to why the Bosnian 1992–95 war is taken as exemplary and should be acknowledged when the post-Yugoslav and the post-war conditions are addressed.

What singles the Bosnian 1992–95 war out among the five conflicts that followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia is not only its duration and degree of destruction, but also and particularly, its lack of resolution. As previously described, the American-led NATO bombing of the key positions held by Bosnian Serb forces led to the Dayton Peace Conference, which resulted in the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA). The agreement has stopped the violence and prevented further casualties; nevertheless, it has effectively divided the country into two parts—the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina; and Republika Srpska. No party was defeated, and no party won the war. Instead, all three sides were supposed to gain something, even the international community. The international presence that emerged from the DPA includes the Office of the High Representative, EUFOR and NATO in particular. The international factor still remains crucial to the country's development (Bennett 16). According to Christopher Bennett, the DPA did not resolve the Bosnian Question. The drafters of the DPA were under no illusion about its settlement. They were aware that the agreement was being used as a means to end the war but in no way represents a permanent solution to the Bosnian Question. The Bosnian Question comes down to two matters. The first is how some 2.2 million Bosniaks can live amid 4.5 million Croats and 8.5 million Serbs in the former Yugoslavia. And the second, how some 750,000 Croats and 1.3 million Serbs can live together with 1.9 million Bosniaks within Bosnia itself:

Depending on where the borders are drawn and whether or not they are respected, Bosniaks either form a minority squeezed between two more powerful ethno-nationalist groups or they comprise a relative majority in a territory shared by two large minority communities, both of whom generally consider the neighboring states of Croatia and Serbia their mother countries. (Bennett 15)

For Sarajevo-based sociologist Dino Abazović, the root of the problem is in the DPA itself. The agreement rests on profound contradictions: it declares a unified state of Bosnia and Herzegovina while acknowledging two antagonistic entities, it asserts democracy while establishing ethnically based institutions, it endorses individual rights while validating ethnic majoritarianism. In his view, the concept of so-called “power-sharing” does not function within the restriction of ethnic representation and instead of “positive consensus on cooperation to rebuild institutions, there is a negative consensus, which is manifested through the systemic blockage on the implementation of decisions necessary for restoration, social reconstruction,

and political reconciliation" (Abazović 36). Annex IV of the DPA, which to date is considered the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, acknowledges the existence of two separate, antagonistic entities. The impossibility of reaching commonly shared solutions is what halts Bosnia and Herzegovina from progress and keeps it deeply entrenched in its wartime past. As a result, Bosnia is a malfunctioning state, underperforming economically, epitomized by a perpetual crisis. The crisis enables the accumulation of power by the ethno-nationalist elites and halts its progress towards EU membership, which is broadly regarded as the final stop on the transitional journey towards democracy (Abazović 35).

Bennett considers democratization a failure as far as Bosnia is concerned. Even though elections take place regularly, with minimal fraud, the democratic process has failed to build stability or facilitate reconciliation in Bosnia. Moreover, it has reinforced ethno-national divisions. Bennett sees the reason for this in foreign policy-makers, who "have focused on 'what should be' in a Western liberal democracy, rather than 'what is' in a country where concerns about ethno-national security and survival are paramount" (Bennett 248).

For Abazović, the implementation of peace over the past thirty years has brought an "absence of war" rather than peace. Interestingly, historian Tony Judt uses the same formulation in his book *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. Bennett makes a similar remark in his book with the curious title *Bosnia's Paralyzed Peace*. He writes that Bosnia is not at war but, nevertheless, the absence of war is not peace (Bennett 266). The absence of war rather than peace is what epitomizes the Bosnian present. That is why it is possible to distinguish between two phases only: the war and the post-war. With regard to the Bosnian 1992–95 war, there has never been an interim phase, a non-war. Even though actual shootings and further destruction were effectively stopped, the underlying tensions have remained. The implementation of peace, thirty years on, appears to be a permanent ceasefire. In general terms, all three sides, all three ethnicities, feel equally disadvantaged. Bosnian Muslims consider the DPA unjust because it has awarded military gains by aggressors and has effectively divided the country along ethnic lines. Bosnian Serbs are unhappy because Republika Srpska is not an independent state but only an entity within the Bosnian state, while Bosnian Croats feel disadvantaged for not having their own, third entity. This equally shared and ever-growing dissatisfaction does not appear to be resolvable any time soon.

Now that I have explained what singles out the Bosnian 1992–95 war and what makes the Bosnian post-war present particularly agonizing and

remarkable at the same time, I will touch upon differences between the enduring legacies of the war and Yugoslavia. It seems plausible to distinguish between Yugoslavia, non-Yugoslavia, and post-Yugoslavia, yet the Bosnian war can be discussed only in relation to its post-war condition. Non-war as the interim phase between the war and the post-war is non-existent. Before I delve into the differences between the two legacies, I will reflect on the concept of non-Yugoslavia.

The Rule of *non-Yugoslavia*

According to aesthetician and art theorist Miško Šuvaković, as quoted by the philosopher Nikola Dedić, non-Yugoslavia stands for nationalist ideas and identities formed in the wake of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is the belief that Yugoslavia is impossible, and that with the wars, it has completely ended (Dedić 169). The idea of non-Yugoslavia, understood as negation, the total cancellation of Yugoslavia, finds its echo in the writings of Dubravka Ugrešić. A renowned Zagreb-born writer who, for the past two-and-a-half decades, lived and worked in the Netherlands, wrote about the “confiscation of memories” in her book *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays*. She wrote that not only property, but also the whole country and its memory have been confiscated from the people of former Yugoslavia. The confiscation of Yugoslav collective memories started with the dissolution of the multinational state and was replaced by the construct of national memories. Ugrešić claims that the war has only accelerated the whole process and radicalized its measures. One memory was erased to make room for the other (Ugrešić 1998). Precisely the cancellation of Yugoslavia or the confiscation of collective memories about Yugoslavia has been forced by the transition from socialist state to liberal democracies. And, according to philosopher Boris Buden, this shift from one system to the other has turned citizens, political subjects, into “children of communism.” Only yesterday they were the protagonists and victors of the democratic revolutions and yet today they must “assert themselves before their new self-declared masters as their obedient pupils.”¹ The new self-declared masters, guardians, or tutors are, in Buden’s view, western bystanders who did not actively participate in the democratic revolutions of 1989–90: “Children of communism’ is not a

1 The article “Children of Communism” was first published as “Als die Freiheit Kinder brauchte,” in Buden, 2009, 34–51. The English translation is by the author and can be found online at: www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/children-of-postcommunism. Accessed Apr. 17, 2025.

metaphor but a figure of submission to the new form of 'historical necessity' that initiates and controls the process of the postcommunist transition."²

The final destination of this transition is democracy and a free society. The question of the future is already answered, whereas the question of the past no longer appears to make sense. As "children of communism," political subjects are not expected to have critical memories of the communist past. They have been made into children in order not to remember the past. Buden's children of communism have no memories, but also no responsibilities, not for crimes committed through privatization, not for the impoverishment of the masses, not for former war crimes, not even for genocide. As children, they are dependent. They must be guided and patronized by adults. This makes them all the more suitable to serve the new historical order, which in turn does not make them free at all. Buden goes on to claim that the "children of communism" are "marionettes in a historical process that takes place independently of their will and drags them with it to a better future."³ Growing up with the logic of historical determinism, which made promises of a better, classless future by means of class struggle, the "children of communism" are all too familiar with the concept of transition. The new, post-communist transition replaced the old one, but "the absolute certainty and the pre-given necessity of the historical development have remained the constant of the transition."⁴ Buden's point is clear: the citizens may have been granted freedom, but since when does freedom (or newly acquired democracy) need children as its political subjects?

The key feature of the so-called post-communist condition is the "repressive infantilization" of the societies that have recently liberated themselves from communism. The confiscation of collective memories, followed by the construction of national memories, has infantilized the citizens of the former Yugoslavia. One can certainly agree with Buden, however, in asking what else could have been possible for Yugoslavia, following the fall of communism elsewhere. As previously mentioned, Yugoslavia was a federal state with a huge debt, on the verge of economic collapse. Slovenia and Croatia, the economically more powerful and progressive states of the north, were unhappy about generating money for the poorer and perceived lazier southern states. Both states recognized the particular danger in the uneven distribution of economic performance among the states, in

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Slobodan Milošević's politics of centralizing power in Serbia, with huge expenditures over administration. The state was marked by inflation. Instead of borrowing even more foreign money, as was the case with Warsaw and Budapest, in Belgrade they turned to printing more and more of their own money (Judt 671). When Ante Marković came up with his reforms and helped solve the problem of inflation, it was already too late for the federal state of Yugoslavia. The economic aspect as a relevant cause in the break-up of Yugoslavia has been minimized over the years to make place for ethnic feuds as the preferred argument for a possible cause of the Yugoslav wars. The economic cause has been dismissed to serve a particular viewpoint, the so-called Orientalization of the Balkans, whether that be an outside gaze Orientalizing the Balkans or the insiders' adoption or interiorization of that outsider's gaze. I will return to this matter later, but here it is relevant to bring to awareness this crucial economic aspect. Clearly, poor economic prospects facilitated the destabilization of the country. They were, however, happily married with the concrete hegemonic ambition of Slobodan Milošević. The increasing unpopularity of socialism following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the economic hardship of the federal state and one man's opportunist venture into nationalism were all it took for the Yugoslav disintegration wars to unfold.

Ugrešić and Buden rightly blame the transition from a single socialist society to a group of liberal democracies for the "confiscation" of memories and for the infantilization of the post-communist societies. The concept of non-Yugoslavia that seeks to obliterate any kind of historical memory about the former state goes hand in hand with nationalist ideas. It has been a dominant public and political discourse ever since the wars ended. However, non-Yugoslavia or nationalist erasures of memories of solidarity, multiculturalism and Tito's Non-Aligned Movement urge a counter-argument. I believe this should not be a foreseeable retreat to Yugonostalgia, which is understood as "nostalgia for the phantasies associated with a country, the SFRJ, which existed from 1945 to 1991" (Lindstrom 233), where nostalgia denotes longing for the past that cannot exist (Starobinski 81–103). To the best of my knowledge, Yugonostalgia implies an attempt to attain what is unattainable. By commemorating Yugoslavia in a way in which citizens of former Yugoslavia are drawn to their past, it removes any possibility of leaving their past behind. Rather than finding solace and the encouragement to move forward, they lament over the lost past, over once living the Yugoslav maxim of brotherhood and unity. They opt to inhabit the uninhabitable time-space. Yugonostalgia, understood in this way, has similarities with a concept of restorative Yugonostalgia, as understood by political scholar

Nicole Lindstrom. Lindstrom draws on Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative Yugonostalgia is an "expression of longing for an essential Yugoslav past" and looks back towards a somewhat fixed time and space, whereas reflective Yugonostalgia "relies on a self-consciously ambivalent, politically engaged, and critical frame in indulging fantasies of this past" and is open to imagining possibilities for the future (Lindstrom 233). In Lindstrom's view, reflective Yugonostalgia is a reaction to nationalist nostalgia as well as to Yugonostalgia as a pejorative marker in the contemporary political discourse about the formal Yugoslavia. Reflective Yugonostalgia may be an adequate response to non-Yugoslavia, as it critically and politically engages with the fantasies of the past in former Yugoslavia. I must add, however, that I use the term reluctantly due to the weight that the word *nostalgia* carries. Fantasies about the past, with sentimentality attached to it, might not properly counteract nationalist erasures of memories about "brotherhood and unity" as once lived values in former Yugoslavia.

The Occurrence of Post-Yugoslavia

In this context, post-Yugoslavia may be a more persuasive counter-argument. According to Šuvaković, post-Yugoslavia is represented by the efforts of cultural activists gathered around the PRELOM Collective to build a network between the countries of former Yugoslavia "as a space for discussion, for presenting the idea of Yugoslavia in a historical sense" (Stijn and Vervaeke 169).

Efforts in preserving the historical experience of Yugoslavia confirm the previous existence of Yugoslavia. They make possible a revitalization of formerly belittled, denied, and abolished memories of Yugoslavia. They imply an option for the common future as well. The idea of post-Yugoslavia, which comes after the "cancellation" of Yugoslavia, and lives through different artistic projects, essays and cultural studies across the territories of former Yugoslavia, emerges as a reaffirmation, as retrieval of once lost memories.

In comparison with the situation in Yugoslavia, the Bosnian war has never gone through the same kind of negation. As previously noted, the war did not stop by itself. Instead, the foreign-intervention-backed peace settlement halted further destruction and killings. The agreement marks an abrupt break, a rupture in the relation between the war and the post-war. It has separated the war from its post-war condition. Nevertheless, the underlying tensions have survived and continued to exist in the post-war era. Not only because the war did not exhaust itself until one side claimed victory (as if

there were such a thing as victory in a war?), but also because the DPA did not offer any solutions to the problems that led to the war. The concept of post-war suggests a strong attachment, a persistent connection to the idea of war. Post-Yugoslavia insinuates legacy, but at the same time detachment, independence from the notion of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia, as a federal state or a socialist ideology, will probably not come into existence again. But the collective memories of living in the former country could be restored after they have been rejected. Post-Yugoslavia implies how important that is for the prospect of a common future. Post-Yugoslavia seems to function as a kind of *Post-it Note*, as an afterthought, disconnected from its source, in the way that Rosalind Morris understands it, as quoted by memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch:

“post” functions like a Post-it that adheres to the surface of texts and concepts, adding to them and thereby also transforming them in the form of a Derridean supplement. Post-its, of course, often hold afterthoughts that can easily become unglued and disconnected from their source. If a Post-it falls off, the post-concept must persist on its own, and in that precarious position it can also acquire its own independent qualities. (Hirsch 15)

I am convinced that *post-Yugoslavia*, in time, may persist on its own, as a separate entity and a gentle reminder of antifascism, multiculturalism, and solidarity, once deeply shared values among south-Slavic people. The notion of *post-war* has different implications. It assumes an inability to detach from the war, to separate trauma and the legacy of the war from the present. This inability to start a new chapter makes the *post-war* condition a far more negative experience. It perpetuates the status quo, the experience of living in a swamp, where nothing ever moves or changes. If *non-Yugoslavia* is experienced as the confiscation of the collective memories of socialist Yugoslavia, then the *post-war* condition expresses itself through the glorification of victimhood, through the projection of desired memories of past sufferings. Nationally constructed memories, carefully selected to glorify one ethno-religious group at the expense of the other, has been a dominant mode of remembrance in all the newly formed states of the former Yugoslavia. Remembrance of the war with all the complexities that it entails, with the critical reflection about individual and collective guilt and responsibility, has never really been sought in the newly formed states. I believe that an inability to disengage from the daily politics and the version of the past that has been constructed, imposed, and perpetuated by the

ethno-nationalist establishment from the beginning of the war onwards has, in large part, amounted to the failure of remembrance. A critical distance from this forced, dividing, and overdramatized version of the past is still required, but in no way provided. An ultimate peace, a non-war, a genuine distance from the war has been missing over the past three decades. By comparison, non-Yugoslavia as a prevailing public discourse may even have facilitated the emergence of post-Yugoslavia. A stark negation of Yugoslav identity and memories of the Yugoslav past is best exemplified in the trend of renaming streets and squares named after Josip Broz Tito, the president of former Yugoslavia, like in Zagreb; in the acts of devastation of partisan cemeteries, like in Mostar; or in the vandalism of antifascist monuments, like in Split in recent years.⁵ For the past thirty years, powerless populations have been served daily doses of toxic and divisive rhetoric, based on spreading fears and threats about the ethnic other. To illustrate my point, I refer to the public statement by Dragan Čović from February 6, 2018. At the time the statement was issued, Čović served as the Croat member of the three-person Bosnian-Herzegovinian rotating presidency that I will explain in more detail later: "I respect those who want a civic state, but today to say 'civic state' in Bosnia and Herzegovina means classical Unitarianism, and in some form, theoretically, it basically means an Islamic state."⁶

One of the highest-ranking state officials equates the model of a civic state with that of an Islamic state. This equation prompts two questions. First, on what grounds can the two models be equated? Second, given the existing equation, the "civic state," if applied to the Bosnian case, could solely pose a threat to the society, so where does this reasoning originate from? It must be acknowledged that the antithesis to the existing ethnic politics in Bosnia is the civic state. It is precisely a model that is aspired to by critics of the existing and failing DPA-grounded model of "consociational" or "power-sharing" governing:⁷

5 For more information about the recent demolition of a monument in Split, see "Croatian Man Breaks Leg Vandalising Anti-fascist Monument." *The Guardian*, Nov. 8, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/08/croatian-man-breaks-leg-vandalising-anti-fascist-monument. Accessed Apr. 17, 2025.

6 Čović's statement in the original: "Poštujem one koji žele građansku državu, samo danas u BiH reči građanska država to znači klasičan unitarizam, u nekoj formi, u teoretskom obliku, a to vam znači u osnovi islamsku državu," can be found here: www.balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2018/2/6/covic-u-zagrebu-gradanska-bih-znaci-islamska-drzava.

7 Consociational or "power-sharing" is a model used for managing conflicts in divided societies. However, its prospects for contributing to peace and democracy in the long run are slimmer. More information about this model and its application to Bosnian society can be

A civic state is based on civic nationalism, which creates a sense of belonging to the state based on the principle of citizenship, i.e. inclusion of all members of a given society into a political union of individuals who enjoy equal rights and are bound by state laws. (Šelo Šabić 36)

As is evident, a civic model implies state laws and guaranteed individual rights. How then can the concept of an Islamic state, presumably resting on the rule of Islamic or *Sharia* law, be equated with the civic state? Sarajevo-based philosopher and sociologist Asim Mujkić details an interpretation of Čović's claim. In Mujkić's words, critics of the civic state option find it impossible to apply the universalist nature of civic society to the Bosnian case, to the specific three-constituent-peoples context. They find its universalism incompatible with the Bosnian case. If applied in Bosnia, it would be modelled into a standard "nation-state," where Bosniaks, who form the most numerous constituent people—by exceeding 50 per cent of the population, according to the 2013 Census—would become the "host-nation" (Mujkić 22). In this role, they would act as a majority and therefore impose their political will on the other constituent peoples, minorities, either in the entire state, or at least in the entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Having in mind that an overwhelming majority of Bosniaks is of Muslim religious background, the comparison of civic state with "Islamic" state by the Bosnian Croat HDZ⁸ party chief Dragan Čović certainly adds cultural, clash-of-civilizations-type of flavour to an already complex inter-ethnic problem. (Mujkić 22)

The fear of being an ethnic minority governed by an ethnic majority serves Čović well to re-activate and perpetuate the old Orientalist narrative while issuing an over-the-top warning about Islamism gaining ground. In the words of Marion Kraske, the former director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Sarajevo, this narrative is "suitable for vitalising enemy-images which can be used for one's own politics, one's own radicalisation" (Kraske 4). It can hardly

found in Senada Šelo Šabić, "Transcending Consociationalism: In Support of Civic Bosnia and Herzegovina," 34–39.

8 HDZ stands for Hrvatska demokratska zajednica or Croatian Democratic Union. Together with SDA (Stranka demokratske akcije/The Party of Democratic Action) and SDS (Srpska demokratska stranka/The Serbian Democratic Party) it forms the three ethnic parties that challenged the dominance of the secular Communist Party of Yugoslavia. All three, with the former Communist Party, now called the Social Democratic Party (SDP; Socijademokratska partija), form the contemporary party system in Bosnia alongside minor parties.

be a coincidence that Čović gave his statement, which multiple regional media outlets broadcast, while he was on his official visit to Zagreb prior to the Bosnian October elections, in which, once again, he was a presidential candidate.

Ethno-nationalist political leaders and officials have been exercising the same derogatory rhetoric over the past two-and-a-half decades as a means to maintain their power while diverting citizens' attention from profound socio-economic problems. These problems were caused not only by the war's destruction of industries, but also by the heavy corruption that came with the privatization of state-owned property. In terms of the overall employment rate, Bosnia and Herzegovina is ranked 187th out of 218 countries in the world, it has a declining population (3.72 million in 2010 to 3.52 million in 2016), and the highest youth unemployment rate in the world at 62.3%.⁹ Based on different polls and research methods,¹⁰ inhabitants primarily identify unemployment, corruption, and poverty as the top three problems. And politicians are perceived to be the most corrupt. Given these statistics, it comes as no surprise that citizens have grown embittered, resentful, and distrustful. Deprived of any prospects for their future, they have been slow but determined to acknowledge the values that they once shared with other citizens of the former Yugoslavia. Accordingly, the growing resentment of impoverished and disillusioned people has activated a post-Yugoslav sentiment.

As I have demonstrated thus far, a lack of an interim phase, the non-phase, makes two potentially similar conditions—the post-war and the post-Yugoslav conditions—rather dissimilar. Another distinction that sets them apart is based on a relation between the inside and the outside perspective. Post-Yugoslavia is an idea primarily relevant for the citizens of the former states of Yugoslavia, for insiders, who share memories of togetherness, solidarity, and so forth. Post-war is an idea that, nevertheless, implies a gaze from the outside, be that an imaginary outsider in Europe, the European Union, the west or, generally speaking, the international community. It feeds on a continuous need for outside approval.

If we look back at the periods before, during, and after the war, the need for foreign help has always been present. International intervention was required before the break-up of Yugoslavia, during the transition from a socialist state to liberal societies. Internationally mediated peace plans—the Lord Carrington Peace Plan and the Vance Peace Plan in particular—were

9 The statistics provided can be found in Šabić, 2018, 34–39.

10 A variety of polls and research methods by Transparency International and Center for the Study of Democracy are included in the article mentioned above.

intended to keep Yugoslavia loosely together. Peace plans and maps that followed were created to negotiate the advances of the Bosnian Serb army on the territories of Bosnia. During wartime, all three leading actors—the presidents of Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia—were mindful of the spotlight that they were under from the international community. Seemingly fully aware of the international attention that he was receiving, Slobodan Milošević projected the image of himself as the guardian of the Yugoslav borders, even when his politics resulted in claiming the Serb-populated territories in Croatia and ethnically cleansing dominantly Muslim-populated areas in Bosnia and forcing the alteration of existing borders. Once it became clear that he had been running quite different politics from what he was representing in public, and when the economic sanctions against Serbia took their toll, he found himself in a more reconciliatory mood, especially during the Dayton Peace Conference. After Dayton, Milošević readily entered another war, in and over Kosovo. Tudman had similar ambitions with regard to his project *Herceg-Bosna*, claiming territories inhabited by Bosnian Croats. Once the Washington Peace Agreement was signed, and with the knowledge that he would get full support from the United States if the Croats reconstituted their alliance with Bosnian Muslims against the Serbs, he abandoned his expansionist ideas. From the beginning of the war, Alija Izetbegović was pushing for and relying on foreign intervention. Bosnia had entered the war unprepared, unarmed, essentially too weak to combat aggressors. In the post-war era, reliance on international help appears to be more problematic. The DPA contributed to creating political deadlocks. And the existing political problems obviously cannot be resolved from within the state, democratically, with a consensus reached by all three ethnicities. No matter how sound the demand for international intervention has been since the beginning of the political crisis in the former Yugoslavia, it has also served as an excuse for political inaction.

Beyond a Post-War Condition

The post-war condition suggests a constant delay in reaching political decisions that would serve the common good. Reluctance and inability to engage with the past so as to close the chapter and move forward are implied. Memories of past sufferings are constantly reawakened and bargained for the sympathy of the imaginary outsider, who is expected to authenticate them. The post-war condition implies a gesture of keeping oneself on a global map of interest for as long as possible, thus preserving a state of dependency while acquiring continuous humanitarian aid. The post-war condition is

also implicated in the daily rhetoric of the ethno-nationalist establishment. This rhetoric relies on and takes the full advantage of the wartime past, primarily as a tool of appropriating and maintaining victim status. To illustrate my point, I hereby refer to several occasions on which war crimes were honoured as heroic deeds. First, a minute of silence in the Parliament in Zagreb in honour of Slobodan Praljak, the Bosnian Croat General, found guilty of war crimes against the Bosnian Muslim population by the Hague Tribunal. Second, the award of honour for the convicted war criminals Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, former president of Republika Srpska, and Momčilo Krajišnik, the former First Speaker of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. Third, the warm welcome to Vladimir Lazarević, the Serbian general convicted of war crimes against Albanian civilians in Kosovo, by the state officials and church dignitaries upon his return to Belgrade, followed by an invitation to share his knowledge with students at the Military Academy in Belgrade. These acts of honour for indicted war criminals can only be explained within the context of serious and deliberate neglect of the ICTY findings with the sole purpose of creating desirable narratives about the victimhood and martyrdom of one's own collective. Self-victimization can be also recognized in the tendency of the Bosniak establishment to manipulate the numbers of citizens killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina by publicly presenting higher numbers than the actual ones. In 2007, the Research and Documentation Centre, a Sarajevo-based, independent NGO, published *The Bosnian Book of the Dead* with 97,207 listed and named killed Bosnians, thereby debunking publicly circulated numbers of 200,000 or even 300,000 dead citizens.¹¹

As can be seen, the post-war condition is implicated in various forms of self-victimization, which are inseparable from the daily political discourse in the former Yugoslavia. It remains unclear, however, what the implications of the post-war condition are for the actual survivors of atrocities. My assumption is that survivors caught in the post-war condition are deprived of their dignity and agency. They are objectified and turned into helpless victims. Examples that come to mind are the widely broadcast reactions by members of the NGO Mothers of Srebrenica to the Hague verdicts of war criminals. I believe that questions as to whether they find a verdict fair or a sentence high enough do not help them regain their agency, considering that prolonged victimhood may equal a prolonged dependency. And this is what makes the post-war condition in the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular an endless and agonizing experience.

11 More information about this research can be found in Rujević, "The Crimes of Others."

In an interview, philosopher and sociologist Tarik Haverić emphasizes that the collapse of communism and democratization are historical processes, which could not and should not have been avoided. However, they have not materialized everywhere in the same way. In his opinion, western democracies, which started and aided these processes, have naively equated transition from socialism to liberalism with the introduction of multi-party elections. By doing so, they have enabled racists and ethno-nationalists to come into power as democratically legitimate candidates. Haverić concludes that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with two major problems: it is a post-conflict society and a society with an unfinished transition. The political parties in power are the same ones that produced the conflicts and took part in them. They obstruct the transition, which is why assistance from abroad is still very much needed.¹²

Troublesome for the insider, the post-war condition therefore draws the continuous attention of the outsider. The adjective *post-war* has a bitter taste due to its overuse in public discourse, in Bosnia in particular. In time it has become an empty signifier, which provokes impatience and annoyance. It barely adds any new layer of meaning and leads nowhere.

Now that I have illustrated where I see the major differences between the post-war and post-Yugoslav conditions, I will reflect on what I mean by moving beyond the post-war condition. Drawing on earlier remarks, what is at stake here is bringing an enduring and un-reflected legacy of the war to an end—making the post-war condition an afterthought, disconnected from the war as its source. As a separate entity, with its own, independent qualities, it invites further reflection. The implication is a coming to terms with painful and contradictory memories of the war, while criticizing a status quo that is experienced as an unchangeable and cemented legacy of the war but also as a habit of turning a blind eye to post-war conundrums, such as corruption and massive poverty.

Beyond Post-War Cinema

In the context of filmmaking, overcoming post-war status assumes finding aesthetic means to convey memories of the war while avoiding the

12 The full interview with Tarik Haverić is available here: Asaf Bečirović, "Intervju sa Tarikom Haverićem: Gladan čovjek spremno prodaje svoj glas na izborima zbog čega ostaje gladan naredne četiri godine." *Start Online*, Oct. 16, 2018. www.startbih.ba/clanak/tarik-haveric-gladan-covjek-spremno-prodaje-svoj-glas-na-izborima-zbog-cega-ostaje-gladan-naredne-cetiri-godine/100753. Accessed Apr. 17, 2025.

traps of representation. 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. 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 conflicting experiences, and are open to multiple layers of meaning.

Broadly speaking, conventional representation can corroborate the official state narrative. In the context of the former Yugoslavia, the latter implies exclusionary ethno-nationalist narratives, which rest on erasures of the collective memories of living in the former multinational federal state of Yugoslavia. The clearest illustration of such interventions are the destructions of monuments celebrating antifascist values in the 1990s followed by the renaming of streets, squares, and public institutions, and creating new commemoration practices across the former Yugoslav states.¹³ As memory-studies scholar Tamara Banjeglav emphasizes that these acts of violence do not contribute to revalorizing the past as much as they firmly negate antifascist values that were the basis of the former society (Banjeglav 99). She goes on to quote Benedict Anderson, who points out that what post-conflict societies and political establishments consider politically suitable does not necessarily correspond with what really happened in the past. Their considerations do not necessarily include commemorating victims from all sides or contributing to a dialogue about the past. They may as well revolve around the establishment of a national identity in a public sphere, ranging from that of a victim to that of a hero (Banjeglav 124). Film scholar Jurica Pavičić's famous tripartite categorization of post-Yugoslav film—films of self-victimization, films of self-Balkanization, and films of normalization—helped me critically reassess existing correlations between dominant, nevertheless distinctive ideologies of post-war Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, and their corresponding film representations, which is something that I elaborate on further below. For now, I claim that conventional representation of the experience of the Yugoslav disintegration wars often results in an extended promotion of pain and self-victimhood. Non-representation suggests an alternative that encompasses a tireless search for artistic practices that capture present-day, post-war realities, expressed through states of apathy, hopelessness, and disorientation. While

13 More details on the topic in Tamara Banjeglav, "Sjećanje na rat ili rat sjećanja? Promjene u politikama sjećanja u Hrvatskoj od 1990. godine do danas."

armed conflicts have been permanently contained, the political situation remains contentious and memories of the wars contested. Twenty-six years after the last Yugoslav war, competing narratives and adjoining political stances and policies keep separating communities and creating tensions. Subsequently, future goals are kept at bay, and hopes for the full recovery of a political system almost diminished. With the ongoing post-war and post-socialist transitions, hopelessness, aimlessness, and apathy constitute prevailing states of the present-day realities.

A range of films, such as Jasmila Žbanić's *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* (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 *The Blacks* (2009), and Namik Kabil's *Interrogation* (2007) with its follow-up film *Inside* (2013) provide spectators with non-representational images that, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, offer innovative approaches to the collective past, while simultaneously reframing contemporary experience. What I propose 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 forming 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? To answer this question, I propose to examine the emergence of non-representational images of war within post-Yugoslav contemporary cinema in the period 2000–18. In particular, I want to investigate how contemporary images of war shape the film aesthetics and the 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.

Before I provide a detailed account into what post-Yugoslav cinema could possibly mean in the face of post-war culture, I need to reflect on a relation between non-representation and representation.

Non-Representation and Representation

In his seminal book *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze reflected on problems of generality. Generality implies that one term may be exchanged or substituted for another. Repetition, by contrast, implies non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities (Deleuze, 1994, 1). In Deleuze's view, ideas or

problems are singularities, affirmed multiplicities and differentiated positivities. As such, they are contrasted with fixed identities of concepts (Deleuze, 1994, 288). Deleuze reminds us that representation is defined, hence restricted by its four “iron collars”: identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgement, resemblance in perception (1994, 29). Generality and representation suggest fixed positions, rigidity, absence of movement, whereas repetition implies an affirmed difference and movement of ideas.

With respect to movement, Deleuze regarded Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as philosophers who brought new means of expression to philosophy. In their work, the emphasis is placed on movement, and they criticize Hegel for not going beyond “false movement—in other words, the abstract logical movement of ‘mediation.’ They want to put metaphysics in motion, in action” (Deleuze, 1994, 8). Following their lead, Deleuze wrote about movement as that which implies multiple centres and superposition of points of view, as opposed to representation, which has a single centre, a unique perspective and as a result a false depth. Deleuze saw in theatre a figure that captures the nature of movement. He reminds us that:

structuralism is so often accompanied by calls for a new theatre, or a new (non-Aristotelian) interpretation of the theatre: a theatre of multiplicities opposed in every respect to the theatre of representation, which leaves intact neither the identity of the thing represented, nor author, nor spectator, nor character, nor representation which, through the vicissitudes of the play, can become the production of knowledge or final recognition. Instead, a theatre of problems and always open questions which draws spectator, setting and characters into the real movement of an apprenticeship of the entire unconscious, the final elements of which remain the problems themselves. (Deleuze, 1994, 192)

The richness of Deleuzian philosophy is in its affirmation of ideas or problems that resist being restricted by reason and keep on returning with a degree of difference. When translated into the field of cinema, ideas and problems can be termed non-representational images. These images are open to different interpretations and persistently escape the logic and coherence of narrative cinema. They pose questions, invite viewers to affective encounters, and, if we follow Deleuze, they can stir political awakenings. Why do they appear and matter in the first place?

In the context of post-Yugoslav films, non-representational images emerge as a response to film representations of war traumas, but also as a reaction to the agony of living in a disillusioned and apathetic post-war

and post-socialist society, as Bobo Jelčić's film *A Stranger* and Aida Begić's film *Children of Sarajevo* suggest.

Children of Sarajevo deals with the topic of war orphans in the capital city, young adults abandoned by the state who are in need of care and protection and who rely on themselves only. The film revolves around a young woman who struggles to make ends meet while taking care of her teenage delinquent brother. The use of home-video and news footage from the war, accompanied by shots made by a shaky camera that films the protagonist from the back or from the side, as well as the use of ambiguous sounds implying either war explosions or fireworks, render the underlying tension of living in the present-day city of Sarajevo. *Children of Sarajevo* offers a mirror image to the "postcard" image of Sarajevo.

Similarly, *A Stranger* offers an unconventional view on Mostar. Instead of bringing forward images of the Herzegovinian town with the old bridge bathing under the sun, signifying unity, brotherhood, resistance, and hope, the film offers images that suggest an atmosphere of a deeply divided, fractured city, entirely reflected in the fractured mind of the film's protagonist. *A Stranger* revolves around the protagonist Slavko's attendance of the funeral of his close friend Đulaga. Slavko is a Bosnian Croat and his dead friend Đulaga was a Bosnian Muslim. Both—one alive, the other dead—share the political context of Mostar. A simple social obligation has the potential to get Slavko in all sorts of trouble. Torn between family obligations and emotions on one side and loyalty to the ideology on the other, Slavko is on the brink of exploding at any moment throughout the film. *A Stranger* presents us with a day in the life of an ordinary man, a day in which nothing exceptional, yet everything fundamental happens. A shaky camera follows Slavko as he anxiously moves around his flat, around a waiting room at the office of a local man in power, whom Slavko somehow depends on, and around the streets of Mostar. Long takes are often interrupted with quick, sudden shots, outbursts of Slavko's madness. Providing sound and image to the invisible tensions of living in today's corrupted Sarajevo and ethnically fragmented Mostar, both films break away from conventional representations of present-day Bosnian society.

Similar to the time-image, which, according to Deleuze, emerged after the Second World War in French and Italian cinema as a response to the unimaginable war destruction and the loss of an organic link between man and the world, the non-representational images I discuss here emerged to reflect memories of the wars that keep returning and haunting survivors. In the immediate aftermath of the war, an indication of the recovery and prosperity of the former Yugoslav states, along with the awakening of

national identities, was soon replaced by a state of general apathy, caused by widespread corruption and massive poverty. To a certain degree, contemporary post-Yugoslav cinema engages with this sense of apathy through strategies of non-representation.

Deleuze's ideas about difference and repetition prove useful not only by offering a way out of the conventional representation of war experience, but for helping us understand how a current state of apathy in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which promises no resolution in the near future, can be approached and presented in film.

Even though Deleuze's critique of representation is inviting and open, scholars of postcolonial studies and political philosophy have heavily contested some of his notions. In her book *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture*, film studies scholar Patricia Pisters summarizes these contestations. Her conclusion is that Deleuze's ideas are difficult to address within the existing frameworks of political representation, as they require a "framework capable of perceiving and affirming the reality of both the virtual and the actual rather than a framework that critiques the opposition between reality and ideological representation" (Pisters, 2012, 261).

One of the most direct criticisms of non-representation comes from postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak in her reaction to the text "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze." I have selected her text "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to offer a contrasting view to Foucault's and Deleuze's ideas about non-representation. Spivak expresses her concern over the philosophers' indifference to ideology and their rejection of representation. In their conversation, Foucault and Deleuze place emphasis on struggle as an action, a revolutionary act against the existing power structures. Prisoners, women, conscripted soldiers, homosexuals, and hospital patients are regarded as those "who act and struggle." Foucault and Deleuze denounce representation, which in the given context implies a centralism of a power structure, a hierarchy with a clear sense of domination. In his address, Deleuze makes a distinction between re-presentation as *darstellen* and representation as *vertreten*:

A theorising intellectual, for us, is no longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness. Those who act and struggle are no longer represented, either by a group or a union that appropriates the right to stand as their conscience.¹⁴

14 This is quoted from the transcript of a 1972 conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. This transcript first appeared in English in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*:

Foucault conflates both usages of the same term when he discusses the historical role of an intellectual before 1848, before the Commune and before 1940, who:

spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth: he was conscience, consciousness, and eloquence. In the most recent upheaval¹⁵ the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves.¹⁶

In her critique, Spivak suggests that Deleuze and Foucault run both senses of representation together. *Darstellen* or “to speak the truth,” understood as subject-predication and signification, as in arts or philosophy, is considered to be representation in an economic context. *Vertreten* or “in the name of” is regarded as representation in a political context, within state formation and law, with a stronger implication of substitution (Spivak, 2013, 70).

According to Spivak, *darstellen* and *vertreten* imply related, nevertheless discontinuous senses of representations. They correspond with Marx’s model of a divided and dislocated subject, whose parts, individual and collective agency, are neither continuous nor coherent (Spivak 72). Conflating both usages of representation would not be a major problem if the philosophers did not suggest that beyond representation is where oppressed subjects speak, act and know, which, according to Spivak, leads to “an essentialist, utopian politics” (71).

Spivak’s critique is well grounded considering the position she speaks from. She addresses the problem and the need for the self-determination of the suppressed, the others of Europe, colonized subaltern subjects, who are at the receiving end of the imperialist exploitation chain. Leaving the representation out and ignoring the economic aspect certainly provokes scepticism of the Foucault/Deleuze project. How can the workers’ struggle

Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, and it was published in a special issue of *L’Arc* (No. 49, pp. 3–10), dedicated to Gilles Deleuze, which can be found reprinted here: “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze—Transcript,” submitted by Joseph Kay, *libcom.org*, Sept. 9, 2006, www.libcom.org/article/intellectuals-and-power-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze. Accessed Apr. 17, 2025.

¹⁵ Ibid. Note: the upheaval mentioned here is related to the May 1968 demonstrations as provided by the editor of *L’Arc*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

against institutionalized oppression be assumed without the necessary framework, without organized political parties or workers' unions? How can the oppressed self-determine if they are deprived of the tools, or as Spivak suggests, "textual ingredients," to do so? How is it possible to voice concerns without making claims? To me, these appear to be insurmountable difficulties.

Nevertheless, denouncing the entire Foucault/Deleuze project under the label "epistemic violence" for supposedly constituting the other of Europe as "the self's shadow" by denying him/her rights for self-determination by process of "denegation" (Spivak 75) and finding both philosophers complicit in securing "a new balance of hegemonic relations" for putting the economic aspect "under erasure" (Spivak 75) requires more detailed scrutiny.

Deleuze and Foucault make two relevant remarks that are not raised by Spivak. The first is their critique of representation as *vertreten* or "speaking for," when they criticize unions and political parties as organized social groups, which at first are required and may serve the interests of the workers who struggle, but in time may appropriate the same representative forms of centralism and hierarchical structures that they struggle against, leaving the oppressed under a double oppression. The second, consequential problem is related to what they refer to as the workings of "desire." Deleuze clearly points out that he does not find satisfying the explanation in Marxism, where power structures are perceived in terms of interests ("power is held by ruling class defined by its interests"). In his view, this definition does not engage with "investments of desire," which underlie power structures, which are not immediately recognized as the interests of the ruling elites, and which make power structures sometimes obvious, sometimes less so.¹⁷

Foucault goes on to illustrate Deleuze's point in the following way:

Moreover, the desire for power establishes a singular relationship between power and interest. It may happen that the masses, during fascist periods, desire that certain people assume power, people with whom they are unable to identify since these individuals exert power against the masses and at their expense, to the extreme of their death, their sacrifice, their massacre. Nevertheless, they desire this particular power; they want it to be exercised.¹⁸

17 This is quoted from the transcript of the same, earlier referenced, 1972 conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

18 The quote is from the same conversation between Foucault and Deleuze.

In their conversation, Foucault and Deleuze dismiss the idea that the masses, during fascist periods, were simply deceived, that they were caught in the trap of ideology. At no point, however, do they claim that “desire” should be understood in opposition to “interest.” On the contrary, as Foucault emphasizes, “we never desire against our interests, because interest always follows and finds itself where desire has placed it.”¹⁹ Spivak fails to recognize that for Foucault and Deleuze “interest” and “desire” correspond to the Bergsonian actual/virtual distinction. According to Bergson and Deleuze, “the actual” and “the virtual” are not in antagonism with each other. They are both considered to be real, “as opposed to the conception of distinguishing the mental/imaginary/etc. as unreal from the physical/factual as real” (Pisters, 1998, 104). Spivak, therefore, fails to recognize that “the virtual” encompasses knowledge, memory, visions, ideas, and is real insofar it has an effect on us. “The actual” and “the virtual” are not in antagonism but in a dynamic relation of co-dependence and are both equally political as they help shift our perception of reality. By claiming that Foucault and Deleuze oppose the notion of “desire” to the notion of “interest,” Spivak relegates “desire” as “para-subjective matrix, cross-hatched with heterogeneity” (69), in other words as unreal and irrelevant. With the same determination with which Deleuze and Foucault dismiss the notion of representation (understood as both, *vertreten* and *darstellen*), Spivak refuses to engage with their understanding of “desire” while recognizing “interest” in a dynamic economic situation as the single pertinent argument for discussing the struggle of the oppressed.

Foucault and Deleuze’s claim for (political) action appears to be rather disturbing for Spivak. She asks how their indifference to ideology and rejection of representation can be political. And how asubjectivity can claim any political relevance. Failing to engage deeper with possible meanings of asubjectivity, which implies an escape from established codes, hence assumes political relevance, Spivak rejects Deleuze and Foucault’s notions as unhelpful and turns to deconstructivist Jacques Derrida instead.

Derrida suggests that “thought is ... the blank part of the text.” In Spivak’s understanding, even if it is blank, it is still a thought and is still in the text. And this inaccessible blankness within interpretable text should be allocated to the Other (the subject) of history and should be the place of production of theory (Spivak 89).

As can be noticed, subject, self-formation, representation, and (critique of) ideology are crucial categories for Spivak in her engagement with

19 Ibid.

injustices and voicing of the unprivileged, silenced, and marginalized Other of Europe. Spivak refers to subaltern subjects within the context of colonial production, to “men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (78). What is at stake is to articulate the need for their representation by postcolonial intellectuals, on one side, and the need, logic, means and ways of their organization into groups, led by representatives, necessary to confront the imperialist system and colonial chain of production, on the other side. Deleuze and Foucault isolate the problem of struggle as an action, a revolutionary act against the existing power structures, whereby prisoners, women, conscripted soldiers, homosexuals, and hospital patients are listed as “those who act and struggle” and never as the oppressed ones. They also look into how workers’ struggle, while assuming that its clearer shape through representative bodies of syndicates and political parties allows for, borrowing Foucault’s words, “a new disposition of the same power” to settle in. This observation leads them to introduce the notion of desire, which, while informing new power structures, complicates the existing relationship between interest and power. Taking into account the three historically isolated upheavals mentioned earlier, they conclude that resistance against the dominating system now takes place in multiple centres, in the network of localized, counter-tactics, rather than in centralized hierarchical power structures.

All three scholars passionately argue for issues that prove equally pertinent for my engagement with post-war and post-Yugoslav societies. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, which resulted in several wars, was initiated by Milošević’s nationalist politics. An institutionalized call for the independence of seceding states and the self-determination of oppressed national and religious groups came as a necessary and understandable reaction to his way of governing the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the years that followed, however, an over-representation of the constituent ethnicities of each national state has taken place. As for Bosnians (Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Muslims), Croats and Serbs, their institutionalized over-representation and domination over other nationalities and ethnicities in various contexts has been, ever since the wars ended, in dire need of being toned down. Spivak’s notions prove helpful when addressing the first part of given historical experience (declarations of independence by the seceding states amid the Yugoslav wars). Deleuze and Foucault’s ideas are a necessary supplement when attending to the second part of historical experience (the rise of ethno-nationalism in a time of the absence of war, pervasive corruption in all post-Yugoslav states).

Deleuze, Foucault, Spivak, and Derrida's views on representation and non-representation are crucial for addressing the multi-faceted meaning of non-representational images.

Non-Representational Images

Non-representational images are ideas and affirmed differentialities in the Deleuzian sense. They cause disruption to existing representation, which always comes from within. Representation can be understood as a linear, straightforward film narrative.

If I restrict its use to mean only that, it is because post-Yugoslav cinema is mostly experienced or takes the form of a linear, conventional, stereotypical narrative. Otherwise, there are examples of realist, observational cinema that, to a degree, follow the same logic of a cause-and-effect sequencing of events. As I will demonstrate in the third chapter, the films *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Underground* are informed by postmodern aesthetics, although the excess thematized in both films cannot be termed carnivalesque in Bakhtinian sense as it is not short-lived, episodic disruption, but presupposes narrative continuity. And this type of continuity proves concomitant and supportive of the division along ethno-religious lines. Rather than restricting representation to a sense of linear and causative storytelling, I suggest that it be associated with a sense of narrative continuity, which, as some films from the former Yugoslavia indicate, can be supportive of damaging ethno-religious stereotyping. In those instances, the narrative continuity proves to be aligned with exclusionary ethno-nationalist narratives, which rest on erasures of collective memories of living in the former multinational federal state of Yugoslavia. These narratives are best understood as historical memories, which flow into historiographies that are later captured by intellectual elites. The narrative continuity, which reflects and reinstates the convenient and useful historiography, implies doubt about the possibility of truthfully conveying collective trauma. The post-war condition is implicated in various forms of self-victimization, which are inseparable from daily political discourse in the former Yugoslavia. The self-serving, exclusionary ethno-nationalist narratives imply the notion of a resolvable past, the coherence of a narrative continuity, in need of being challenged.

Non-representational images express the simultaneous impossibilities of representing and obliterating war traumas. They present rather than represent war traumas in their belatedness. They provide a glimpse into the

agony of living in the permanent post-war condition. Non-representational images express reluctance to swing easily into film narrative, to connect with other images and produce clear-cut meanings that would corroborate official state narratives. By refusing to make up a coherent, self-evident film narrative, non-representational images open this narrative up to unassimilable heterogeneity. In the following chapters, by means of comparative analysis, I will detail specific strategies of non-representation in post-Yugoslav film. For the moment, I claim that in this operation non-representational images refer back to themselves, but at the same time require a specific type of spectatorial engagement.

To further ground the term non-representational image by providing details on film spectatorship, I make use of Bergson's understanding of the image. Laura U. Marks's book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and Darlene Pursley's article "Moving in Time: Chantal Akerman's *Toute une nuit*" have inspired me to consider Bergson's notion of perception. Bergson perceives the image not "simply (as) the visual image, but the complex of all sense impressions that a perceived object conveys to a perceiver at a given context" (Marks 73). According to Bergson, perception is always partial and interested as it is located in a specific perceiver. It is multisensory, embodied, and contingent (Marks 73). Marks reminds us of two aspects, which were already implicit in Bergson, but were undervalued. The first being the carnality of memory, the second being the communal or cultural experience that feeds into embodied memory. They were undervalued because Bergson estimated that "pure memory" could be easily actualized or called upon in the body without taking into consideration individual and cultural prohibitions on the actualization of memory (Marks 73). Bergson defines "pure memory" by comparing it with perception or sensation; he sees it not as simply different in degree, as a "weakened perception," but as radically different in kind (Bergson 180). He describes the present as "my attitude with regard to the immediate future" (Bergson 181), as sensory-motor, as "a perception of the immediate past," hence a sensation, and as "determination of the immediate future," thus an action or a movement (Bergson 178). The past, on the contrary, is pure from sensations, unattached to the present, essentially powerless. It may, though, actualize in an image, subsequently a sensation, which can extend into an action, a movement, make itself useful and cease to be pure memory (Bergson 181). For the time being, Bergson's notion of pure memory should be taken into account as I will return to it later in the text.

Marks reminds us that phenomenology did in fact inherit and expand Bergson's implication of perception in the body and may act as a bridge

in explaining how a viewer experiences images. The matter of dispute between phenomenology and Deleuze's cinema theory arises over consciousness or subjectivity. Deleuze sees cinematic images emerging from action-reaction encounters rather than from a perceiving subject situated in the space, casting a light upon them. Inspired by Bergson's claim, "Yet, the brain is only an image among other images" (4), Deleuze famously declared that:

the brain is nothing but this—an interval, a gap between an action and a reaction. The brain is certainly not a center of images from which one could begin, but itself constitutes one special image among the others. It constitutes a center of indetermination in the acentred universe of images. (Deleuze, 2011, 65)

Consciousness, for Deleuze, is within images, which like other things are "luminous by themselves without anything illuminating them" (Deleuze, 2011, 62). Images constitute an "infinite set of images," which he calls a "plane of immanence," and perceives as an ongoing movement "between the parts of each system (of images) and between one system and another" (Deleuze, 2011, 61). By opting for movement and not for immobile and instantaneous sections while describing the plane of immanence, Deleuze expresses his preference for temporal categories, for affect and memory.

At this point a brief digression is needed. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze reminds us that Bergson criticizes the cinema for the same reason that he criticizes perception, intellect, and language; that is, for misconceiving the movement, or in Bergson's words, for taking "snapshots, as it were, of passing reality" (Deleuze, 2011, 59). Furthermore, he claims that Bergson would not have criticized cinema if he had witnessed its evolution. If Bergson were to analyse the cinema, Deleuze asserts, he would have never used perception as a model, "rather a state of things which would constantly change, a flowing matter in which no point of anchorage nor centre of reference would be assignable" (Deleuze, 2011, 61).

Darlene Pursley points out that it is precisely here in the text that Deleuze forces his own reading of the cinema on Bergson to argue against the phenomenological approach (Pursley 1159). Bergson and Deleuze are certainly united in their remark that perception is subtractive for not revealing entirety, but only that which serves the interests of the perceiver (Bergson 35; Deleuze, 2010, 19). This commonly held view does not, however, validate Deleuze's claim that Bergson would not have chosen perception as a model if he had analysed the cinema. The following paragraph from *Matter and*

Memory reveals a somewhat different understanding of consciousness and perception:

But if consciousness is but the characteristic note of the present, that is to say of the actuality lived, in short of the active, then that which does not act may cease to belong to consciousness without therefore ceasing to exist in some manner. (Bergson 182)

As can be seen, consciousness is associated with the actuality lived. What's more, Bergson argues for the equal footing of that which is and which is not available to consciousness. If one carefully reads the beginning of the paragraph, "but if consciousness is but the characteristic note of the present," and recalls his earlier claim, "yet, the brain is only an image among other images," it becomes apparent that, for Bergson, consciousness is not only a feature of the actuality lived, but also an interval between perception and reaction. Consciousness, therefore, subsumes a duality of the spatial and temporal modes of existence, which is a point that Darlene Pursley brings up in her reading of Bergson. Bergson summarizes this view in the following way:

But we have to take into account the fact that our body is not a mathematical point in space, that its virtual actions are complicated by and impregnated with real actions, or, in other words, that there is no perception without affection. (Bergson 62)

With this claim in mind, Bergson's understanding of consciousness appears somewhat broader and more encompassing than what Deleuze's observation would have us believe. When compared, the latter sees consciousness emerging within images, within a constantly moving and changing plane of immanence.

By contrast, film scholar Vivian Sobchack, drawing on phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, perceives consciousness as anchored in the spectator's lived-body situation. Sobchack uses Merleau-Ponty's notion of "lived-body," built in part on Husserl's notion of "intentionality," to help her elaborate on the embodiment of film and spectator alike:

It is the lived-body that actualizes intentionality in the very gesture of being active in and present to the world and others. The lived-body

articulates intentionality as “flesh,” that is, as dynamic, concrete, situated and both materially and historically finite. (Sobchack, 1992, 39)

In addition to being embodied, cinema and spectatorship are clearly grounded in spatial terms:

It is not time, but space—the significant space lived as and through the objective body-subject, the historical space of situation—that grounds the response to those questions of cinematic signification in this present study. (Sobchack 31)

Perceiving cinema and spectatorship as embodied and spatially embedded enables Sobchack to criticize Deleuze for detaching consciousness from the anchoring of the subject and from the horizon of the world, thereby for risking the disembodiment of both the spectator and the film (Sobchack 31). Laura U. Marks is even more explicit in her critique, asserting that Deleuzian film philosophy is not a theory of spectatorship: “To talk about the states, histories and circumstances of the individual people experiencing cinema, we need a phenomenology of individual experience” (Marks 150).

In this context, Marks’s critique of phenomenology, that it posits all experience to be available to consciousness and the only requirement is to be present and perceiving, should not be overlooked either (151). On closer inspection, the past understood in Bergsonian terms is nowhere to be found in Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye*. Sobchack’s key concept “the address of the eye” presupposes that film and a spectator manage to:

transcend the immanence of their immediate bodily experience, generalizing and using their lived-bodies and concrete situations in the world to imaginatively prospect the horizon for future projects and possible situations and to re-member experience retrospectively. (Sobchack 261)

Remembrance and future envisionment are enabled by the present bodily situations of film and spectator alike. The spatial situations of bodies, in Sobchack’s view, act as unifying, synchronizing centres for “discrete, discontinuous, and incoherent experiences of consciousness” (210) but also as origins of memories and future visions. Temporality, which Sobchack equates with the consciousness of experience, is derivative of its spatial pre-reflective embodiment. In other words, time appears to be internal to embodied subjects, as opposed to Deleuze’s view, inspired by Bergson,

which perceives time as “the interiority in which we move, live and change” (Deleuze, 2010, 80).

As suggested earlier, the most obvious difference between Deleuzian and phenomenological thought is their view of consciousness. Deleuze insists on a (temporal) plane of immanence, thereby risking the disembodiment of the film spectator, whereas Sobchack insists on (spatially) embodied experience, thereby risking disregarding what remains unavailable to the consciousness.

Leonard Lawlor’s article “The End of Phenomenology: Expressionism in Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty” proves helpful for enquiring whether Deleuzian and phenomenological thought can be reconciled on the basis of what they have in common. According to Lawlor, Deleuze poses a double challenge to phenomenology. The first is what he calls the challenge of immanence, and the second is the challenge of difference. The challenge of immanence implies that “there is no two-world ontology, that being is said in only one way, that essence does not lie outside of appearance; in short, the challenge of immanence eliminates transcendence: God is dead” (Lawlor, 1998, 15).

Lawlor reminds us that the challenge is the same as the one already taken by phenomenology to oppose traditional metaphysics. Anything transcendent is reduced to phenomena, it arrives at a plane of immanence, or, in other words, it comes to be located within an experience. The preposition *within* implies the so-called transcendental ground. In Deleuze’s view, the relation between the ground and what it grounds, or between the expression and what is expressed, should be paradoxical. This implies that the ground of experience must remain within experience, yet the ground should be different from what it grounds (Lawlor, 2012, 103). This brings us to what Lawlor refers to as the challenge of difference, which finds its inspiration in Heidegger’s ontological intuition, wherein difference “must be articulation and connection in itself; it must relate different to different without any mediation whatsoever by the identical, the similar, analogous or the opposed” (Lawlor, 1998, 16).

Deleuze argues that the problem with phenomenology is that it “reinstates a dative: it relates the plane of immanence back to a subject that constitutes the given” (Lawlor, 1998, 15). By reinstating a dative, by turning immanence into immanence of a subject, phenomenology “wanted to renew our concepts by giving us perceptions and affections that would make us give birth to the world” (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 16). For Deleuze, the problem lies in formed opinions, which draw clichés from new perceptions and affections. A way to reclaim independence to immanence and preserve the difference between the ground and the grounded is to bring forward Sartre’s notion of

an “impersonal transcendental field,” which is expressed in “das Man,” the “they,” the “one,” and which, according to Deleuze, consists of singularities or anti-generalities (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 19). Deleuze makes use of Husserl’s notion of eidetic singularities to put forward that singularity equals the expressed in an expression or the perceived in a perception; to sum up, it is a sense (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 19). And expression is equal to his earlier introduced notion of “the plane of immanence.”

Lawlor argues that Merleau-Ponty respects Deleuze’s principle of difference between the ground and the grounded in two ways that correspond to two aspects of the transcendental field, one being “creative operation,” the other “facticity of the unreflective.” According to Lawlor, the creative process of sense-bestowal is, for Merleau-Ponty, “derivative and secondary in relation to the facticity of the unreflective” (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 22). Like Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty follows Sartre’s requirement and considers this passive aspect of the transcendental field to be prepersonal and anonymous. Unlike Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty perceives the field as consisting of generalities, which, on the one hand, differ from rule, law, and concept, and, on the other hand, cannot be abstracted from experience, and have what he calls a trace of an “originary past” (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 23). Lawlor reminds us that, for Merleau-Ponty, “originary past” equals the unreflective; it is “an origin” or the basis on which expression creates. Expression in Deleuze is regarded as actualization of the virtual, whereas Merleau-Ponty perceives it as effectuation (Lawlor, 1998, 26). According to Merleau-Ponty, the originary past is caused by the present, but not dependent on it, which makes the past appear as repetition without original. In this regard, it should be added that Lawlor argues at length that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “the sense of the past” is equivalent to Bergson’s notion of “pure memory” as elaborated in his *Matter and Memory*. As previously mentioned, this conception sees the past as radically different from the present, as essentially independent from the present and perception. Following Lawlor’s remark, it can be concluded that Merleau-Ponty’s exposé on the originary past and his concept of “the sense of the past” feed well into Bergson’s idea of “pure memory,” which in turn is used by Deleuze to help him elaborate on his concept of “the plane of immanence.” However, it should not be neglected that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in *Phenomenology of Perception* is “a study of the appearance of being to consciousness” (as quoted in Lawlor, 1998, 17), which as such shaped Sobchack’s seminal book *The Address of the Eye*. As Lawlor points out, Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* does not free itself from subjectivity, but his latter writing, like *The Visible and the Invisible* can

answer the question of whether phenomenology can sustain the Deleuzian double challenge.

Considering the existing unresolvedness of the dispute over consciousness and subjectivity between Deleuzian and phenomenological thought (in its part), Bergson's notions on matter and memory seem worth reconsidering. Moreover, a return to Bergson's notion of attentive recognition proves rewarding when reflecting on non-representational images of war, especially while taking into account the shortcomings of both, Deleuze and Sobchack's, models of spectatorship. This concept implies that the "perceiver oscillates between seeing the object, recalling the virtual images that it brings to memory, and comparing the created object with the one before us" (Marks 48).

The Bergsonian model of spectatorship is participatory by default and has a political potential. It does not take place only in the phenomenological present, but also relies on engagement with individual and cultural memory. Importantly, as Darlene Pursley reminds us, it implies a dualism of spatial and temporal spectatorship. Certain "mental flexibility" is indeed required for a notion of the spectator oscillating between the spatial and temporal modes of spectatorship, between "space as narrative continuity and physical sensation and time as affect and memory" (Pursley 1192).

When reflecting on non-representational images and the implied spectator, I must add that I am not strictly following neither Deleuze's nor Sobchack's lead. For non-representational images of war, I find Bergson's notion of the image and attentive recognition more gratifying: first, due to his emphasis on visuality, not narration; second, due to the implied dualism of temporal and spatial engagement; and third, due to insistence on the embodied spectator that is culturally informed by memory. Historical experience is not simply ignored or bypassed but relevantly inscribed in the body of the spectator.

Non-representational images certainly share some of the features of Deleuze's time-image cinema, like the optical image or the optical situation. Nevertheless, they rarely constitute the time-image type of cinema. They appear mainly as an exception rather than the rule, as a trace rather than the whole, as a ghostly presence rather than the obvious. They emerge as interruptions within the narrative continuity. They question the logic of representation by acting within representation.

Now that I have elaborated on the difference between representation and non-representation, and introduced the term non-representational images, I will contextualize the conditions of their emergence within the contemporary, post-Yugoslav context. Post-Yugoslav cinema in the face of

post-war culture can be perceived in two ways: literally or chronologically, and metaphorically or critically.

Post-Yugoslav Cinema in the Post-War Culture

Croatian film critic and scholar Jurica Pavičić made a chronological overview of post-Yugoslav cinema in *Postjugoslovenski film: Stil i ideologija* (*Post-Yugoslav Film: Style and Ideology*). His categorization of films provides an insight into stylistic features, conditioned on the ruling ideologies following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and across its former states. His three categories are: films of self-victimization; films of self-Balkanization; and films of normalization. The first two relate to the immediate post-war period, to the 1990s, whereas the third indicates the period from the 2000s onwards. Films of self-victimization were produced mainly in Croatia, whereas films of self-Balkanization were made mainly in Serbia. Films of normalization were produced across all the former states of Yugoslavia; however, the most notable titles originate from Bosnia.

Drawing on Pavičić's categorization, and departing from his third model—films of normalization—I attempt to reflect on a critical stance that post-Yugoslav cinema takes on its surrounding culture, a post-war one. If Pavičić is more interested in the chronology of post-Yugoslav cinema, in the gradual change of stylistic paradigms in the post-war era—ranging from films of self-victimization, over films of self-Balkanization to films of normalization—then I am more interested in what post-Yugoslav cinema means despite the post-war condition—what happens when post-Yugoslav cinema no longer fits any of the categories suggested.

To the best of my understanding of Pavičić's categorization, films of self-victimization can be grouped around the following thought: we are victims, they are oppressors; whereas films of self-Balkanization share the motto: every side is to blame²⁰ or the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Finally, films of normalization offer a more nuanced view of the wartime past. The larger the distance from the war, the more critical and objective

20 In his book *Raspad Jugoslavije na filmu* (*Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema*), Pavle Levi writes in detail about the transformation of the discourse of responsibility in 1990s Serbia, which included a movement away from blaming the ethnic other (Slovenes, Croats, Muslims) to blaming everyone. In his view, this is "the specific form of simulation of a socio-cultural transformation in Serbia: the supposed movement away from the militant ethnochauvinism was achieved by means of an arrogant instant-relativization of war crimes" (Levi 104).

is the view over the past. In my view, in his categorization, Pavičić misses recognizing the pervasive sense of post-war apathy and disillusionment, which manages to generate interruptions into the somewhat stable narratives of what he calls films of normalization. And precisely this gap opens up a space for my research on the non-representational images of war.

Films of self-victimization are, according to Pavičić, grouped around a stylistic tendency characteristic for societies that, during the war, considered themselves victims. This prevailing sensation has constituted a film narrative that is characterized by propaganda, black-and-white characterization of characters, the use of ethno-stereotypes, hate speech, elements of epic and melodramatic storytelling, including a series of recognizable topoi (Pavičić, 2011, 21). The films of self-victimization, produced largely in Croatia, during the Tuđman era are considered wartime state-building films. Pavičić shares his belief that these films were not intended for the public, but for the state, ministries, and the imaginary outsider who should be informed about the “real” truth in Croatia (Pavičić 124). During the Tuđman era, these films were massively unpopular among the public in Croatia, and once the political system changed in Croatia, they were no longer produced, as there was no need for them. According to Pavičić, their drop in popularity had less to do with the propaganda they promoted or a lack of artistic achievement, and more to do with the departure from the norm of the classic narrative film whose imperative is an active protagonist. These films were especially unpopular among war veterans, whose expectations were bound to their experiences of western and Partisan films. To their despair, the passive characters that populate films of self-victimization are never shown as active heroes, revengeful combatants, even though the film narratives are premised on the warmongering rhetoric and irreconcilable differences between us and them. Unlike Partisan films, these films are confronted with a taboo. They must not show “our” side being active, resisting, or taking revenge. They must always represent Croatian people as suffering, helpless victims, but nevertheless moral heroes. Why did this stylistic paradigm not occur in Bosnian post-war cinema? As previously mentioned, the Bosnian 1992–95 war was by far the most ruinous of all the Yugoslav disintegration wars and resulted in the highest number of casualties. Pavičić provides one possible explanation: the Bosniak population, which experienced the biggest loss of all the former Yugoslav populations, was not interested in projecting a self-image of victimhood that would be predicated on the degradation of the ethnic other. In contrast, the Croatian and the Kosovo/Albanian ideologies centre on “the motif of perpetuated national martyrdom, there is a tacit understanding that ‘they have always oppressed us,’ that ‘they

are impossible to live with' and that is why we must part ways (even if this means using force)."²¹

This "motif of perpetuated national martyrdom," the impossibility of living next to the "other," in Pavičić's view, has never been at the core of Bosniak or the Unitary-Bosnian national programme. These belonged primarily to the secessionist Croat and Serb national programmes. Of all three ethno-national groups, Pavičić claims, Bosniaks have the greatest interest in the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They emphasize inter-religious harmony, a balanced life of togetherness. That is why films of self-victimization contradicted the ideology and the official self-image of Sarajevo. Pavičić concludes by saying that films that were premised on eternal hatred, irreconcilable differences, and the collective demonization of the ethnic other undermine the idea of a multi-ethnic Sarajevo. Apart from *Go West* (2005), Ahmed Imamović's feature debut film, there are no records of films of self-victimization produced in Bosnia. Later, I will return to a film that, according to Pavičić, shares all the major characteristics of films of self-victimization.

Pavičić makes a valid point to a certain degree. Sarajevo has cultivated a self-image based on multi-ethnicity and inter-confessional harmony. And the Bosniak political establishment has never propagated secessionism as a political programme. Alija Izetbegović favoured the idea of all three ethnicities living next to one another in the unified Bosnia. A major difference between the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, the president of former Yugoslavia, and Izetbegović is that for Tito, being a Yugoslav was an imperative, an overarching and unifying factor for all nationalities and ethnicities of the former Yugoslavia, a primary identity, whereas for Izetbegović, especially for the future followers and implementers of his politics, being a Bosniak is deemed more important than being a Bosnian.²² The DPA, which consolidated the advances of the Bosnian Serb army and acknowledged a division along ethnic lines, reinforced the idea of a strong belonging to an ethnicity. The DPA have facilitated the rise of ethno-nationalism by suggesting that

21 This is the English translation of Pavičić's text on the films of self-victimization and has been made by Nikolina Jovanović, supported by Croatian Audiovisual Centre, and can be found here: www.moveast.eu/103/post-yugoslav-film-style-and-ideology.

22 As of 1971 Muslims were recognised as a nation within the former Yugoslavia, alongside Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Slovenes. Albanians were considered a national minority, even though, by number they exceeded Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Slovenians in the former Yugoslavia. More information can be found in Bennett, 2016, 34. As of 1993, the term Bosniak, denoting Bosnian Muslim, has been officially adopted. Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats are the three constitutive peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

only a Bosniak, a Croat, and a Serb can be candidates for a three-member presidency.²³

The programme of Unitary Bosnia and multi-ethnic Sarajevo may have been the self-image the Bosniak political elite is inclined to, but this very image also presupposes a strong representation of one ethnicity, which is a contradiction in itself. The multi-ethnic self-image of Sarajevo has, however, prevailed up until today. For that reason, films of self-victimization have never really constituted a trend in Bosnia.

Films of self-Balkanization are, in Pavičić's view, based on grotesque caricature, and involve elements of slapstick and the logic of animated films. They interiorize the western view of the Balkans in the way that they include hyperbolic cultural stereotypes about the Balkans. This stylistic paradigm includes films by world-renowned authors such as Milčo Mančevski, Srđan Dragojević, and Emir Kusturica. According to Pavičić, these films culturalize war and social crisis and present it as an eternal and irreparable Balkan condition (Pavičić 21). He goes on to specify that these films negotiate war and political crisis by resorting to a postmodern play with quotation, self-reflexivity, anti-realism, reliance on exaggeration, elements of slapstick comedy, animation, etc. Other strategies include restating a trope of a full circle—as predestined repetitiveness—on a dramaturgical and a declarative level, and other totalizing, global metaphors (for instance, tunnel, basement, hole, etc.), around which these film narratives are mostly organized (Pavičić 174).

While portraying ecstatic, irrational characters, an overabundance of violence, and using hyperbole as a strategy, these films manage to cement the same colonial view about "Balkan wild men." By doing so, they succeed in redistributing guilt for committed war crimes away from concrete, historically specific political elites to a cycle of recurring violence, age-old ethnic feuds, as well as to an irreparable, corrupted Balkan soul or mind. By de-historicizing and de-politicizing the causes of war, these films endorse isolationism ("They all are crazy anyway, they better be left alone"), and by doing so become political acts of performativity (Pavičić 175).

Both the films of self-victimization and the films of self-Balkanization are made with the imaginary outside onlooker in mind. The first type, marked

23 A three-member presidency is made up of one Bosniak and one Croat, both elected from the Federation, and one Serb, elected from Republika Srpska. If at census one opts to declare oneself primarily as a Bosnian, secondarily as an atheist or a Muslim, thereby, rejects the existing tripartite, Bosniak-Croat-Serb representation, one's chances to run for presidency are non-existent. At census, a Bosnian is allocated as the "other."

by extensive use of explanatory rhetoric, claims to offer a real truth about Croatian suffering and necessitates a foreign stamp of authentication. The second type, marked by reliance on postmodern collage, slapstick comedy, animation and hyperbolic use of stereotypes, claims to play with the western notion of the Balkans as its underbelly, populated with wild, bloodthirsty, revengeful, and irrational people.

Balkanism, Balkanization, Self-Balkanization

At this point, a brief overview of the scholarship on Balkanism and Balkanization is needed. Historians Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff, religious studies scholar Milica Bakić-Hayden, and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek offer valuable interpretations of Eastern Europe and the Balkans as they engage with the complexity of the east/west dichotomy that grounded scholarship on Orientalism, a concept coined and developed by literary scholar Edward Said. As already known, Orientalism implies inventing the East (“the Orient”) as a different, exotic, backward, uncivilized, potentially dangerous, but nevertheless complimentary “other” half of the West by the West (Said 2003).

Wolff reminds us that the east-west division is the late invention of eighteenth-century philosophy—the Enlightenment. A new division with different overtones was borrowed from the belief in evolution and progress:

Because the geographic east of Europe and the world situated to the east was lagging behind Europe primarily in economic performance, East came to be identified more often, and often exclusively, with industrial backwardness, lack of advanced social relations and institutions typical for the developed capitalist West, irrational and superstitious culture unmatched by Western Enlightenment. (Todorova 11)

For Wolff, the project Inventing Eastern Europe²⁴ converges with both Orientalism and Balkanism, but is effectively “an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization” (Wolff 7). Similarly, Bakić-Hayden sees Balkanism as a “variation on the Orientalist theme” (Bakić-Hayden 920), as a part of the larger Orientalist context, with which it shares inner logic and rhetoric. In her influential article “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” Bakić-Hayden addresses the problem of essentialism, by which

24 The project was thoroughly explored in Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*.

cultures and ideologies assume a valorized dichotomy between east and west and incorporate various “essences” into patterns of representation used to describe them. By essentialism it is implied that determinate natures inhere in and govern humans and their social and cultural institutions in the same way in which they are supposed to inhere in the entities of the natural world (Bakić-Hayden 917). Accordingly, Eastern Europe is reduced to “backwardness,” the Balkans is analogous with “violence,” and India associated with “mysticism,” whereas the west is self-described as “the civilized.” The Orient, as known from Said’s writing, is not physically locatable, and precisely due to its fleeting nature the Balkans acts as a prominent spot in the process of “the gradation of Orients” (Bakić-Hayden 918). In this pattern of reproducing the original binary upon which Orientalism was premised: “Asia is more ‘East’ or ‘other’ than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe itself, this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most ‘eastern’; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies” (Bakić-Hayden 918).

Žižek similarly argues that very indeterminate and shifting geographies limitations assume the spectral status of the Balkans. They appear to be always somewhere else, a little bit more towards the southeast:

For Serbs, they begin *down there*, in Kosovo or in Bosnia, and they defend the Christian civilization against this Europe’s Other; for the Croats, they begin in orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values; for Slovenes they begin in Croatia, and we are the last bulwark of the peaceful *Mitteleuropa*; for many Italians and Austrians they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes; for many Germans, Austria itself, because of its historical links, is already tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency; for many North Germans, Bavaria, with its provincial *flair*, is not free of a Balkan contamination; many arrogant Frenchmen associate Germany itself with an Eastern Balkan brutality entirely foreign to French *finesse*, and this brings us to the last link in this chain: to some conservative British opponents of the European Union, for whom—implicitly, at least—the whole of continental Europe functions today as a new version of the Balkan Turkish Empire, with Brussels as the new Istanbul, a voracious despotic centre which threatens British freedom and sovereignty. (Žižek 1)

In contrast to Bakić-Hayden and Wolff, Todorova sees “Balkanism” as an autonomous and particular rhetorical paradigm, not “merely a sub-species

of orientalism" (Todorova 7). As elaborated in her seminal book *Imagining the Balkans*, Orientalism and Balkanism are only seemingly identical. The Balkans are said to imply unimaginative historical and geographical concreteness, savagery that is rooted in masculinity, unlike the Orient, which suggests intangibility, femininity, and sensuality (Todorova 10). A total lack of wealth, a straightforward attitude, mostly negative, hardly nuanced, characterizes the Balkans, whereas the Orient implies an escape from civilization, an imaginary realm, home of legends and fairy tales. Todorova claims that in practically all descriptions of the Balkans, their transitory status was a central characteristic. The Balkans evoke the image of a bridge or crossroads where the west and the east, usually incompatible, yet completed entities, two "antiworlds" meet (Todorova 15).

Todorova shares her conviction that Balkanism evolved independently from Orientalism and in part even against it. The first reason is geopolitics—the Balkans as a strategic sphere were treated differently from the Near or Middle East within the complex history of the Eastern question. The second is the absence of colonial legacy. The third point of divergence is that Balkanism emerged as a response to the disappointments of the western Europeans' classical expectations in the Balkans. Disappointments were, however, within its paradigm, hence separate from the Oriental. The final distinction is to be recognized in the Balkans' predominantly Christian character, which "fed for a long time the crusading potential of Christianity against Islam" (Todorova 19). Even though there were numerous attempts to classify (Orthodox) Christianity under the label of "Oriental despotism," thus inherently non-European or non-western, the existing boundary between Islam and Christianity continued to be the central one (Todorova 20).

While the creation of Europe was premised on the binary opposition between the civilized west and the uncivilized east, the rhetoric on Balkanism was additionally infused with the idea of inevitable violence, a stereotype that, according to Todorova, set its ground in the twentieth century. "Balkanization," mainly used to signify "the process of nationalist fragmentation of former geographic and political units into new and problematically viable small states" (Todorova 32), entered the vocabulary of journalists and politicians at the end of the First World War, "when the disintegration of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires into a proliferation of small states reminded them of the secession of the Balkan countries from the Ottoman polity that had begun much earlier" (Todorova 34). At that time, the Balkans attained their political, utterly negative connotation implying a "break up (of) (a region, a group, etc.) into smaller and hostile

units.”²⁵ A second round of popular, derogatory use of the term Balkanization coincided with the beginning of decolonization after the Second World War (Todorova 34) and the third wave of its use came at the end of the Cold War (Todorova 136).

The Balkans, understood either as imagined or concrete geography, have a predominantly pejorative meaning. They denote the embarrassing, impulsive, and savage other, distinct and further from the rational, spirited, and calm European. Film historian Dina Iordanova suggests that many of the stereotypes about the Balkans are uncritically and willingly adopted, repeated and perpetuated by many Balkan intellectuals (Iordanova 56). In her view, the so-called Orientalization of the Balkans cannot be declared a purely western project as “it is a process that has been embraced, internalized and partially carried out by many consenting Balkan intellectuals” (Iordanova 56). The result is a specific, intentional self-exoticism, which is the preferred mode of self-representation for many Balkan filmmakers.

A travelogue as a type of narrative structure is characteristic of a large number of “Balkan” films. In Iordanova’s view, most Balkan filmmakers submissively accept instead of “challenging a narrative structure which inevitably positions and constructs them as objects of the Western traveller’s gaze” (56). While addressing the current troubles of the region, most of these films cater to traditional stereotypes. Balkan individuals in this type of film travelogues “are represented as flamboyant and excitingly dismissive of the restrictive norms of Western civilisation” (Iordanova 60). In Iordanova’s view, one way to approach messy historical affairs in the Balkans is either through a particular national narrative or through narratives that acknowledge the conditionality of all narratives. And the reconciliation of all these different narratives is possible only if built on relativity. An intentionally fragmented and often frivolous picture of history appears as a result (Iordanova 89). According to Iordanova, a way to tell history as a post-modern collage, by superimposing multiple stories and times, makes Balkan history a dynamic entity. Her major points of reference are films made by Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik, Lordan Zafranović, and Theo Angelopoulos. In the following chapter, Iordanova’s references include Kusturica’s and Dragojević’s 1990s films. Later in the text I will return to why, in the given context of the relation between history and post-modern collage, I find this ordering of film references problematic.

25 This definition is offered in the Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/balkanize. Accessed Apr. 17, 2025.

One way to express Balkan history as a dynamic entity is through the use of postmodern collage, as Iordanova reminds us. The Balkan history has always been messy, and consensus over numerous historical narratives is anyway impossible. Based on this assumption, Iordanova argues for postmodern pastiche as a way to preserve historical affairs as messy as they are.

What Iordanova fails to recognize, and what Pavičić emphasizes in his writing, is that self-exoticism has been elaborated in even more complex structures than linear travelogues, in postmodern collage films such as Kusturica's *Underground* (1995) and Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996). And the postmodern character of these films, as well as hyperbole that both films cater to, do not exempt them from self-exoticism nor from their engagement with political propaganda. True, the propaganda may not be as straightforward and obvious as in Pavičić's films of self-victimization, and may have been overlooked by foreign film reception, but it does not mean that the ideological underpinning of both films is simply bypassed by way of expressing politically complex history in the form of intriguing, highly aesthetic, and self-reflexive postmodern pastiche.

Exaggerated self-exoticism or self-Balkanization expressed through postmodern collage as a preferred film structure may be the reason why both films were so well received internationally. I am not sure how the deployment of hyperbole can prevent *Underground* and *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* from championing derogatory stereotypes about Balkan wild men and from further perpetuating nesting Orientalisms, Balkanism, and self-Balkanism.

In the third chapter I will return to this matter and reflect on both the values and limitations of both films that received critical acclaim, had successful circulation at film festivals, and had theatrical releases abroad.

Normalization

Pavičić's third category—films of normalization—relates to films produced from 2000 onwards that denote a period following the end of the Yugoslav wars and changes in the political regimes of Serbia and Croatia. Films of normalization or consolidation are characterized by a significant shift from the style of films of self-Balkanization. According to Pavičić, minimalist realism takes over the grotesque, a type of hero capable of catharsis and change replaces the type of the "Balkan wild man" that is characteristic for films of self-Balkanization. A dramaturgy of the passive hero of films

of self-victimization is replaced by a dramaturgy of the active hero. This return to classic narrative style includes heroes who actively solve problems (Pavičić 22).

One of the main characteristics of films of normalization, according to Pavičić, is the change in the representation of war. From the 2000s, the war in post-Yugoslav film is no longer portrayed as exotic and culturally specific. The war becomes less of a spectacle characterized by large-scale unmotivated, irrational killings. Instead, it is depicted as an anonymous, emotionally detached activity, almost industrial. The war loses its local colour, its supposed Balkan specificity. As films of normalization favour minimalist realism, the ambience loses its cultural specificity and is usually rendered as a depressive, everyday space of the socialist legacy, the unfinished modernization. Film protagonists are neither portrayed as exceptionally passive victims, nor as erratic, combative, and peculiar individuals. They appear as resolute individuals, ready to confront their past and restore their damaged lives. Protagonists' confrontations with burdening pasts, with private or family traumas, imply their readiness to find solutions, but also to change and evolve if necessary. The way to solve a problem finds its dramaturgical expression in a classic three-act narrative. Films of normalization, in Pavičić's understanding, imply a return to this model. The classic narrative, with occasional excursions into genre filmmaking, the active hero, ready for catharsis, are symptomatic of the new values of a newly dominant ideology of liberal capitalism (Pavičić 212). Entrepreneurship, activism and gender emancipation are values embodied by many characters in the films of normalization. The problem with Pavičić's categorization is that some of the films he regards as films of normalization, such as Vladimir Perišić's *Ordinary People* (2009) or Goran Dević and Zvonimir Jurić's *The Blacks* (2009), have neither self-determined characters nor are organized in a classic three-act film structure.

Drawing on actual war crimes committed by Serb and Croat forces in the former Yugoslavia, *Ordinary People* and *The Blacks* take "ordinary people" as their protagonists, who, once drafted into the army or special squads, end up killing male civilians. In both films, the action takes place outside towns, in remote, abandoned premises, in the narrow, direct surrounding of the protagonists, within a twenty-four-hour time frame. Minimalist in their expressions, characterized by long takes, both films reveal the war in its dullness. Exposing soldiers' boredom and endless waiting for orders, revealing their killings in a mechanically repetitive fashion, *Ordinary People* and *The Blacks* aim at breaking away from the glorification of the war and war heroism in general.

Ordinary People and *The Blacks* certainly suggest a major shift from the way that war was represented in films of self-Balkanization. However, the protagonists, ready to confront their traumas, past burdens, obstacles and change, do not populate these film worlds. The characters in both films are caught in wartime situations and neither have the willingness, power nor real opportunities to confront the system, as embodied by their superior army officials. They do not cast doubt upon actions they take part in. They do not produce a needed change. Blind acceptance of military duties makes their actions devoid of any emotional engagement, unlike heroes of films of self-Balkanization, who are full of temperament, rage, and at any time ready to enter bloody confrontations. The characters of *Ordinary People* and *The Blacks* suggest a doubt in the world of resolute protagonists, capable of removing obstacles that they come across and determinedly embracing their futures.

These problems of Pavičić's third category—films of normalization—as well as of some other film titles, which in my view in no way fit this category, drove me to come up with another possible categorization, according to which post-Yugoslav films could be grouped.

Post-Yugoslav Cinema Despite the Post-War Culture

Instead of looking into how an ideology dictates a style within post-Yugoslav cinema I propose a categorization based on the degree of representation of war and post-war realities that post-Yugoslav cinema submits to. Instead of constantly re-affirming post-war status to post-Yugoslav cinema, I ask: what is post-Yugoslav cinema in spite of the post-war condition? I suggest thinking in slightly different terms and call for considering three other categories: films of representation; films of over-representation; and films of non-representation.

Films of representation would be the closest to what Pavičić terms films of normalization. Rejection of the Balkan stereotypes or de-exoticism, a preference for minimalist realism over grotesque, a type of self-determined hero, ready to face challenges, find closure and evolve if necessary, would find expression in the dramaturgy of a linear, cause-and-effect, three-act classical or genre filmmaking, more often than not with a happy ending.

Films of over-representation would encompass films of self-victimization and films of self-Balkanization. The first could be grouped around the motto "we are victims, they are perpetrators," and the second around the maxim "the truth is somewhere in the middle or all sides are guilty." One

characteristic that these two stylistic paradigms have in common is the inclination towards excess and overabundance.

As previously mentioned, films of self-victimization are characterized by propaganda, black-and-white characterization, oversimplification, and passive heroes, who stand in contradiction with the narrative that presupposes revenge and action, as well as recurring ethno-stereotypes and motifs. And films of self-Balkanization, generally better-crafted films, imply a conscious adoption and exaggeration of existing westerners' stereotypes about the Balkans. In either case, stereotypes of passive victims or erratic perpetrators dominate the film narratives, which often result in kitschy antirealism, as opposed to observational realism. The major difference is that the overabundance in films of self-victimization is mostly a result of unfortunate binary oppositions between good victims and bad perpetrators, and more often than not poor execution, whereas the overabundance in films of self-Balkanization is a conscious, self-reflective choice, a goal in itself. One could say films of self-Balkanization are marked by a higher degree of self-reflection and irony. With films of self-victimization, viewers are exposed to war films with both epic and melodramatic elements, many recognizable topoi, while with films of self-Balkanization, viewers mainly engage with postmodern pastiche and anachronistic structures. Exceptionally passive victims inhabit one setting and extremely energetic perpetrators populate the other. The passivity of the characters in films of self-victimization stems from a strong moral imperative, from defending the right to a victim status, premised on degrading the ethnic other, an eternally cruel perpetrator. The vigorous behaviour of the characters in the films of self-Balkanization finds its premise in rejecting official narratives that either celebrate or condemn war heroes, depending on what side of the war is being discussed. The unfortunate logic derived from the latter films is relativism: it does not matter who committed what crimes, war is an ugly thing; hence, all sides are equally guilty. Their view of an equal share of guilt, accompanied by exaggerated self-exoticism, which is elaborated through derogatory stereotypes in their depiction of war violence, makes these films politically problematic.

Finally, films of non-representation comprise a separate category that does not entirely match any of Pavičić's three categories; nevertheless, it includes some of elements of the films of normalization. Their style is closer to minimalist realism than to melodrama or burlesque, though characters are not active and self-confident as are Pavičić's characters in the films of normalization. Instead, they appear as anxious, doubtful, withdrawn, and most of the time double traumatized, first by their war past and second

by their post-war present. Films of non-representation do not presuppose a straightforward, linear, three-act arc, premised on strong characters, integrated around their beliefs, words and actions, which reflect one another. They are characterized by an atmosphere of long takes, observational style, the use of shaky camera, reliance on other sources of footage, archival and private, as well as on an exploration of various possibilities of image and sound, experienced through contradiction within their relationship. As I will demonstrate in my comparative analysis of seventeen films in the following three chapters, non-representational images affect, shock, and incite disbelief. They encourage the viewer to detach from his/her preconceived ideas about the typically passive victims in films of self-victimization or the predictably erratic heroes in films of self-Balkanization. What is more, they cast suspicion upon the self-assured and determined agents in films of normalization. The withdrawn and reluctant characters in films of non-representation elicit the viewer's doubt in any of the existing representations. Like Deleuzian differentialities, many of the characters appear as ideas that keep returning with a degree of difference; they question the viewer's preconceived notions about characters in post-Yugoslav cinema. They question stereotypical appearances in what I term films of over-representation as much as they bring suspicion upon resolute and goal-oriented characters that populate films of representation.

Prior to embarking on the analysis of the selected films, it is relevant to reiterate that the corpus comprises fourteen films that, to a certain degree, follow non-representational logic. As specified in the Introduction, the earliest production is from 2007 and the latest from 2018. Comparisons will be made with three other films, which were added at a later stage of the research and date from the middle and end of the 1990s. All selected films engage with the historical experience of the Yugoslav disintegration wars and were made by filmmakers from the former Yugoslavia.

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