II Beyond Self-Victimization

Abstract: Chapter II revolves around the portrayal of a victim, which varies from film to film, depending on the degree of representation each film submits to. The emphasis is placed on the shift from representation to non-representational strategies. Non-representational images of war can deviate from the cause-and-effect narrative but remain supportive of the film's overarching optimism. They can appear as inserted home videos or news footage and challenge the coherence of the narrative. Alternatively, the cause-and-effect narrative can be left behind and new temporalities can emerge with new sound/image arrangements. The objectification of victims and escaping the convention of representation in order to restore dignity to victims are questions that are addressed here. Limits of representation are carefully analysed.

Keywords: victim, objectification, dignity, home videos, news footage, limits of representation

The distinction between the post-war and the post-Yugoslav condition, as outlined in the first chapter, justifies the imperative to move beyond the post-war condition. In the context of filmmaking, uplifting the post-war status assumes finding aesthetic means to convey memories of war while avoiding the traps of representation. A closer look into problems of representation, as Gilles Deleuze explores it, helped me to ground the concept of non-representational images. Contextualizing the conditions of the emergence of non-representational images showed that post-Yugoslav cinema in the face of post-war culture can be perceived literally, chronologically, metaphorically, or critically. The chronological approach reaffirms time and again the post-war status of post-Yugoslav cinema, whereas the critical approach asks what post-Yugoslav cinema *is* beyond the post-war condition. Drawing on the latter approach, I suggest a different kind of categorization of films that is based on varying degrees of representation of war memories/trauma and includes films of representation, films of over-representation, and films of

Makarević, A. *Post-Yugoslav Cinema and the Shadows of War: A Study of Non-Representation in Film*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025.

DOI: 10.5117/9789048559572_CH02

non-representation. Instead of exploring the particularities of each model chapter by chapter, I have decided to build the chapters differently. This chapter revolves around the portrayal of a victim that varies from film to film, depending on the degree of representation that each film selected submits to. Emphasis is placed on the shift from representation to non-representational strategies. And this shift is partly reflected in the change of register within the oeuvre of the same filmmaker. My hope is that, by placing emphasis on the shift from one type of filmmaking to another rather than elaborating on a single type, my analysis will reflect a dynamic relationship between the past and the present, between individual and collective memories, as they are approached and treated in each film discussed. The objectification of victims, on one side, and escaping the convention of representation in order to restore dignity to victims, on the other, are questions that are addressed here. The second chapter includes a selection of films of over-representation, films of representation and films of non-representation, most of which were shown at the Sarajevo Film Festival. The films analysed are as follows: Neven Hitrec's *Bogorodica/Madonna* (1999), Aida Begić's *Snijeg/Snow* (2008) and *Djeca/Children of Sarajevo* (2012), Jasmila Žbanić's *Grbavica/Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams* or *Esma's Secret*[1] (2006) and *Za one koji ne mogu da govore/For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* (2013), Ognjen Glavonić's *Dubina dva/Depth Two* (2016), and Šejla Kamerić's *1395 dana bez crvene/1395 Days Without Red* (2011).

Madonna: Over-Representation of War

Neven Hitrec's film *Madonna* is a film that illustrates all the key elements of Pavičić's stylistic model films of self-victimization. As elaborated earlier, these film narratives are characterized by propaganda, black-and-white characterization, the use of ethno-stereotypes, hate speech, elements of epic and melodramatic storytelling, including a series of recognizable topoi (Pavičić 21). Before I detail how propaganda is particularized in this film, I will provide a short plot summary.

Neven Hitrec's *Madonna* is framed as a revenge story. It starts with a meeting of two dispirited men in a dark church. One offers a gun to the other, who refuses, saying he has his own.

The action moves back in time, to a typical Slavonian[2] sun-drenched village, depicted with yellow wheat, rows of houses, a flock of geese, horses,

1 There are two English translations of the title of Žbanić's film.

2 Slavonia is Croatia's northeast province, bordering Serbia.

a river, and a church. The bright colours of the exterior shots appear in stark contrast to the setting in the framing scene. At the beginning, it appears as if it would be yet another film about a love triangle. The young, violent Đuka and the mature amateur sculptor Kuzma Glavan compete for the attention of Ana, a young schoolteacher. Ana opts for Kuzma, and they start a family. These events coincide with the rise of political tensions in what appears to be an ethnically mixed village: a schoolboy refuses to write in Latin script; a couple of Serb villagers prevent Kuzma and his friend, Croat co-villagers, from bringing a hurt boy to a doctor in a nearby town; a Serb officer furiously spits at the local celebration of Croatian independence. Tensions deteriorate into war and mass violence. The bookkeeper Rade, a Serb employed at Kuzma's carpentry shop, takes Ana's child away and rapes Ana.

After the climax of mass destruction and suffering, the film returns to the opening scene. The war is over, and the former contenders in the love story have become co-combatants and now allies. Kuzma searches for Rade to take revenge for having destroyed his family. He finds him in a Serbian village, across the Danube River, settled with his pregnant wife. Kuzma captures Rade in the shed, ties him to a table, and places a booby trap, without a clear indication of what might happen. This is where *Madonna* ends.

Even though the film is clearly framed as a revenge story, revenge never takes place. A revenge story presupposes an active protagonist, resolute in carrying out his mission. However, the film's protagonist does not display the required determination, instead embodying passivity. Pavičić provides a possible explanation for the apparent illogic. The imperative of the film's dramatic structure seems to be in contradiction with the imperative of dominant ideology in Croatia at the end of the 1990s. By the time the film was made, Pavičić asserts, Croats generally perceived themselves as the sole victims of Serb aggression. As one way to convey this perception abroad, to authenticate the truth about their suffering, the film implied that Croats should not be depicted as active combatants, as the ones carrying out offensive actions against perpetrators. This self-imposed taboo can also be seen prominently in Croatian television in the 1990s (Pavičić 111). Nenad Puhovski, a renowned documentary filmmaker, claims that "a demagogic interpretation … of victimized groups or the whole community … seen as the victim in their entirety is one of the essential characteristics of post-Yugoslav war propaganda" (quoted in Pavičić 111).

Pavičić recognizes that propagandistic lecturing, understood according to Puhovski's terms, is a characteristic of films of self-victimization and occurs on three levels: black-and-white characterization; explanatory discourse; and the repetition of typical motifs and dramatic structures (109).

If we take *Madonna* as an example, the black-and-white characterization firmly establishes a division along ethnic lines. Croat villagers are shown as goodhearted, tolerant, and somewhat naïve. The schoolteacher Vanja Lukač, whom Pavičić sees as a "kind of ideologue of the nationally awakened Croats" (119), brags about how he taught a Serb schoolboy to write in Cyrillic script. Kuzma employs and provides a living for Rade, who later turns out to be the destroyer of his family. Even the erratic and violent Đuka, only depicted negatively, goes through a transformation after joining the Croat army, thereby erasing the earlier disparities in character between himself and Kuzma.

Serbs by contrast are seen as treacherous, unscrupulous, dirty, and greasy, ready to betray and slaughter at any time, all the while drinking *schnapps*. At the beginning of the film, Rade is shown as a loyal worker. Later, he appears to mediate between two warring sides, even as he is essentially setting Kuzma and his friends up. The subsequent war turns him into a rapist. Another example involves a Serb police officer who at first appears to be loyal to the new police forces. When the opportunity presents itself, however, he slits the throat of his Croat colleague on duty and lets his Serb co-villagers know that the Croat police are on their way. Another ethno-stereotype shows a Serb father teaching his teenage son to hate Croats. All other Serb characters in the film are depicted as evil without any redeeming qualities.

Explanatory discourse, which Pavičić refers to as the second level on which propaganda occurs, is symptomatic of these earlier films of self-victimization. In *Madonna*, it manifests itself when Rade explains to Kuzma and to the viewer alike that the murder of the schoolteacher Lukač is a part of a bigger plan, and there is little Rade and Kuzma can do to change that. A local, isolated event is deprived of its specificity and consigned to the domain of a greater conspiracy.

Film motifs, which tend to explain the origin and development of the conflict, kept reoccurring in Croatian cinema throughout the 1990s. Pavičić singles out seven motifs: "Serb duplicity," "Croat naiveté," "wise Croats warn," "denial of reality," "military attack," "refugee life," and "religious rites" (111). Pavičić argues that in *Madonna*, these motifs reappear unchanged. The motif of "Serb duplicity" manifests itself through scenes that revolve around Rade's treachery. There is a scene revealing that Rade had published an advertisement for Kuzma's carpentry shop in Cyrillic script; another scene discloses that he no longer reads the Croatian newspaper, rather now the Serbian one; and another in which he only pretends to mediate between two warring sides. The motif of "Croat naiveté" occurs when Kuzma mentions that the Kosovo crisis has nothing to do with them, as Kosovo is far away.

There are few other scenes in which "wise Croats warn," like the one in which Lukač comments on the political situation while watching television at an inn, or one in which Kuzma's mother reminisces about the events of the Second World War and mentions that Kuzma's father was killed by the same people who are now invading. She warns about the impending destruction by relegating contemporary events to the cycle of Serbs' perpetual violence against Croats. When Rade disappears from the village, Ana dismisses a political explanation for his disappearance, supposing that he may have found the love of his life. The given example of the Croat "denial of reality" dramaturgically anticipates a well-orchestrated "military attack." The way the attack is directed, with dynamic camera movement, the use of various angles and fast-paced editing combined with slow-motion imply a level of technical mastery that previously produced films of self-victimization did not have. Madonna lacks the motif of "refugee life."

Further illustration of self-victimization occurs, however, in the form of "religious rites." This is first seen during the "military attack" of the funeral site, then during what appears as the crucifixion of Ana and her child in the church. Pavičić reminds us that by the time the film was made, the dominant ideology with its major features—anti-communism and clericalism—had been firmly grounded, and also "much clearer dramaturgical links between institutionalized Roman Catholicism and the nation" had been established (120). On a closer look, the renewal of the church parallels not only the national renewal but also the creation of Kuzma's family. Kuzma's son is born on the eve of the local celebration of Croatian independence. Kuzma sculpts a statue of the *Madonna*, modelled on his wife Ana, for the newly refurbished church. Pavičić emphasizes that Serb aggression of the Croatian state leads to the inevitable desecration of the village/church/family (121).

At the beginning of the film, Kuzma and Đuka are depicted as diametrically opposite in nature. Following the war, under the sign of national and religious awakening, disparities between the former rivals diminish. They become united in their hatred of the ethnic other. This hatred never actualizes in revenge, even though the dramatic structure of the film is premised on revenge. Instead, following the ideological, self-imposed taboo of never presenting the Croat side as the active, combative one, the film finishes with an open ending. It remains unknown whether Kuzma took revenge or not. Throughout the film, the only undertaking he appears committed to is sculpting the statue of the *Madonna*. As Pavičić emphasizes, his investment in symbolic and religious acts prevails over his partaking in social, political, or any other issues (121). As could be seen, the passivity of Kuzma and other characters on the righteous side of the spectrum stems from a

strong moral imperative, from defending the right to victim status, premised on the degradation of the ethnic other, an eternally cruel perpetrator. The unchangeable passivity of characters is enabled and built upon the presumed and fixed aggressiveness of the ethnic other.

The unfortunate binary opposition between poor victims and cruel perpetrators does not allow for more complex characters to evolve, nor for experimentation with narrative structure and imagery to occur. This opposition allows for imagined categories, based on ethnic belonging, to take on mythic proportions more than it enables the construction of characters who are capable of furthering or actualizing the plot. The film motifs, black-and-white characterization, topoi, and related hate speech lead to an overabundance of elements of melodrama, which allow me to allocate *Madonna* to the category of films of over-representation. The term *melodrama* as used here draws on the definition provided by literary critic Peter Brooks in his book *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*:

> The connotations of the word are probably similar for us all. They include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety. (Brooks 11)

Brooks's observations are significant for highlighting how common understanding of melodrama as a soap opera "need not decrease its usefulness" as there is a range from high to low examples in any literary field (11). As in any art with high and low examples, "the low is attempting less, risking less, is more conventional and less self-conscious" (Brooks 12). Brooks claims that attending to the most successful melodrama as a coherent mode, be it in its literal or "extrapolated" form, rewards our attention. He suggests that readers should not be deceived into looking for the psychological structures of melodrama's characters, their interior depth, because melodrama exteriorizes psychological conflict and turns binaries into pure integral concepts (Brooks 35). Melodrama's typical figures are hyperbole, antithesis, and oxymoron "that evidence a refusal of nuance and the insistence on dealing in pure, integral concepts" (Brooks 40). One can certainly accept Brooks's invitation and approach characters in *Madonna* as the ones typifying good and bad, virtue and evil, thereby avoiding looking for their interior depth and psychological complexity. It proves difficult, however, to accept that

the film's antagonists, with associated hyperbole, are a result of a conscious refusal of nuance and insistence to deal in pure, integral concepts. Their excessiveness comes across more as an effect of failure to accomplish a well-plotted revenge story with an active protagonist due to the film's submission to the ideological self-imposed taboo of never showing the Croat side as the aggressive one in the war. Regardless of the intention, the resulting stark moral polarization positions the film firmly in the domain of films of over-representation. One way to bring this category closer to understanding is by comparing films of over-representation with what I refer to as films of representation. Before I outline the key features of the latter category, I believe an analysis of Aida Begić's debut feature film *Snow* would serve as an appropriate contrast.

Snow—Beyond Over-Representation

Snow follows a week in the lives of returnees to the eastern Bosnian village Slavno in 1997. The returnees are composed of several women and girls, an elderly man and a boy. Early in the film, it becomes clear that most of the characters' (male) family members have either been killed or gone missing. The genocide in Srebrenica in 1995 is clearly evoked. The film's protagonist is the young widow Alma, determined to contribute to the survival of her community by selling homemade plum jam and other fruit and vegetable produce. One day, she and Nadija, a woman who helps her produce and sell the products, meet the young lorry-driver Hamza, who offers to come on Wednesday, buy their goods and sell them at a market in a nearby city. He does not show up as agreed. The village is remote and, with the first snow, it risks complete isolation from the outer world. Miro, a local Serb, and Marc, a foreign businessman, unexpectedly visit the village and propose to buy the whole area for 70,000 Bosnian marks. The villagers face a dilemma: should they accept the offer and leave the village for good, or should they stay and try to rebuild their lives against all odds? A sudden storm traps the men in Slavno. Miro gets injured and reveals to the villagers that the bodies of their lost family members are hidden in the nearby Blue Cave. The villagers go to the cave to find the remains. The following day the first snow falls, and Hamza's car drives into the village. One year later, a cluster of graves is visible right outside the village. *Snow* ends on a hopeful note. In the final shot, Hamza's car is seen parked outside the houses, next to construction material, where a couple of children are seen playing.

As can be seen in the summary, the film centres on a young woman's efforts to rebuild her village in the immediate post-war period. Her experience of wartime loss did not make her an embittered, self-pitying and passive widow, the way that Kuzma's tragedy shaped his character in *Madonna*. Alma is an active protagonist, her beliefs, words, and actions are highly integrated, with one reflected in the other. In an interview,[3] Begić explains why she finds this particular profile of women interesting. In their twenties, women like Alma found themselves torn between their wishes to start families and the circumstances that prevented them from doing so. They spent what Begić regards as their best years mourning in an environment that was not supportive of their development. The given constraints gave birth to their particular strength and determination, traits clearly embodied in Alma's character.

Alma's religiousness, set against a patriarchal environment—in which most patriarchs have gone missing or are dead—adds to the complexity of her character. Her choice to wear a headscarf has provoked a range of interpretations. Film critic Mima Simić criticizes the film's "re-patriarchalization" through the protagonist's choice to wear a headscarf (quoted in Jelača 97). Film scholar Dijana Jelača finds this critique problematic because the headscarf in *Snow* cannot be perceived "inherently and inalienably, (as) a tool of women's submission under patriarchy, an external sign that she has internalized her oppression" (98). Jelača's observation is plausible considering that most other female characters do not wear a headscarf, which implies that they have the freedom to decide between covering and not covering their heads. Jelača perceives Alma's headscarf as her "externalized and self-imposed mechanism of coping, most pronounced in her recurring dream" (98). According to film scholars Faruk Lončarević and Jurica Pavičić, the visualization of Alma's dream bears the influence of Iranian cinema (Lončarević 173; Pavičić 197). Drawing on the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makmalbaf, and Majid Majidi, Pavičić goes on to equate the lyrical aestheticization of Islamic spirituality with that of a simple rural life in *Snow* (Pavičić 197).

I must add that the suggested equation does not entirely convince me. Islamic spirituality, as embraced by Alma and externalized through her wearing of a headscarf, is visually highlighted in the scenes with a recurring dream, wherein the colourful headscarf playfully reveals and disguises Alma's face. To the best of my understanding, these scenes convey

3 Begić's words are paraphrased from the interview I conducted with her for the December 2008 edition of the INB&H Airlines magazine.

a sense of comfort that Alma finds in religion more than they support the idealization of simple village life. The viewer gets to see Alma alone, at ease, moving at a slower pace than usual, being calmed by the ritual washing of body parts (*abdest*) ahead of the morning prayer, where she joins a man, possibly her deceased husband. The recurring scene of a dream exemplifies a change within the narrative, a shift from representational to non-representational logic by introducing dynamic camera movement that intermittently alternates with slow motion, by emphasizing the colours of the protagonist's headscarf in close-up, by showing Alma's ritual in detail and by introducing music where an explanation or dialogue is expected. This change helps move the viewer away from the everyday to a place of solace, where wartime trauma loses its sharp edges. The act of ritual preparation for religious practice as visualized here appears to shield Alma from her traumatic loss and everyday struggle. As the film reveals, Alma's struggle derives not only from habitual, hard work, but also from sharing the same household with her mother-in-law Safija. Safija's bitter comments aim to discourage Alma from doing household chores, from meeting and setting up a business with Hamza, from gaining control over her life. Safija's role can be conceptualized under the following: she acts as a pillar of the patriarchal order. In line with this insight, I find it hard to agree with Mima Simić's critique of re-patriarchalization in the film based on the protagonist's choice to wear a headscarf. Alma's expressed religiousness, in my view, is not merely concomitant with the patriarchal order. Dino Murtić's observation in *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining* grounds my point:

> Perhaps, in *Snow*, Begić successfully shows Islamic feminism whose objective is, according to Balibar (2011 19), to challenge from the inside the cultural structures of patriarchal domination within this particular form of monotheism. The gender-liberating aspect of Begić's film is an example showing that the spiritual (religious) is not always opposed to the secular. The struggle for dignity and equality for the other may have several paths. (Murtić 169)

Patriarchal domination in *Snow* is undoubtedly challenged, first by the ironical turn of events that left most patriarchs dead or missing, and second by what Murtić calls Islamic feminism, or what I would refer to as Alma's way of being. As insinuated earlier, the complexity of her character rests on contradictions: she is young and in charge, religious, but against patriarchal order, traumatized, yet determined, widowed, still ready to embrace life and love. What adds to the complexity of her character is her inclination

towards entrepreneurship against the film's pronounced criticism of capitalist culture. By the end of the film, Alma and other villagers reject foreign investors and choose to rebuild their community by making it financially sustainable. They assume entrepreneurial roles amid expressed disapproval of entrepreneurship. Pavičić draws attention to this contradiction by claiming that the "former Serbian soldier is an agent of capital that in *Snow* produces an unusual chimeric other: west with the face of an ethnically opposed neighbour" (197). The film's antagonist is certainly represented by both, in the former Serbian soldier Miro and the foreign investor Marc. Compared to Alma and most other female characters, Miro and Marc are composed with less detail, which, on the narrative level, allows for easier integration of their characters into the film's linear plot. Both characters generate obstacles that need to be overcome for the plot to progress. Miro's character creates an obstacle to finding the truth about the missing family members of Slavno. Even though the film reveals that Miro did not execute the male villagers of Slavno, it is widely assumed that, as a Serb soldier from a nearby village, he had to know what had happened to them. Several women in the film do not see past his ethnic identity as they come to associate him with an entire ethno-religious group, which by default "must be" in possession of valuable knowledge about the missing villagers of Slavno. The underlying assumption moulds him into a character, comparable to the black-and-white characters of *Madonna*. Marc, as a source of money and power, generates an obstacle to the future life of the village. Once the truth is revealed and the sale of the land rejected, it is possible to bury the past and anticipate the future. The film's goal can be realized.

This conclusion resonates well with Jelača's remarks about the film's "attainable optimism" that "marks the possibility of resolving melancholia into mourning" (90). A way to resolve melancholia into mourning translates into keeping the distinction between absence and loss as opposed to conflating or contrasting one with another, as historian Dominick LaCapra would suggest. Absence is rooted in melancholia, a pathological state of mourning for an abstraction, while the loss is rooted in the process of mourning for something concrete. Absence implies an unresolvable state and is associated with the process of acting-out, wherein "the past is performatively regenerated or relieved as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription" (LaCapra, 716). Loss is historically specific, determinable and associated with the process of working-through. In other words, its relation to the past "involves recognizing its difference from the present—simultaneously remembering and taking leave or actively forgetting it, thereby allowing for critical judgement and a reinvestment in life" (LaCapra 716).

Resolving melancholia into mourning in the context of *Snow* translates into obtaining knowledge about missing relatives, assigning a location to their remains, thus enabling their burial. In this regard, it is useful to draw on two additional remarks that LaCapra makes in his writing. The first is that locating a specific object of anxiety creates a hope that anxiety can be overcome (LaCapra 707), the second is that the process of mourning, accompanied by a symbolic burial, may assist in restoring dignity to victims that was previously taken by their victimizers (LaCapra 700). Learning about what happened to the missing family members of Slavno aids in resolving communally shared anxiety. Subsequent mourning over concrete losses helps to restore dignity to survivors. Both are necessary preconditions for reinvesting life with all the social demands and responsibilities it requires.

Jelača points out that the film "does not approach representation of trauma through a decidedly realist register the way that *Grbavica* does, and it contains several notable instances of magical realism" (91). Later in the text I will return to Jasmila Žbanić's feature debut *Grbavica*, at this point I would add that instances of magical realism in *Snow* give rise to non-representational images of war that act as digressions and meanderings within the linear narrative. Jelača singles out two instances of magical realism. The first involves the orphaned boy Ali's growing hair (Jelača 91) and the second includes a rug, made by the old grandma Fatima (Jelača 94). Ali's hair starts to grow every time he gets frightened. In one scene in the film, Ali's eyes meet Miro's eyes, which triggers him to run away in the field. The non-representational image introduces a change within the narrative. Static shots are replaced with dynamic ones, capturing the boy while running, his hair growing and weather changing with clouds turning into rain. Narrative details of his past trauma are left out.

His recurring condition does not leave villagers shocked nor surprised, which allows Jelača to call the scene an instance of magical realism. To the villagers, his growing hair is merely a sign that Ali got frightened again. One way to understand the origin of his fear is, as Jelača suggests, by connecting his growing hair with the fact of his survival, that he was not taken by Bosnian Serb soldiers because he was mistaken for a girl. In an interview, Begić herself reveals that the "motif of gender misidentification as a way of survival was inspired by the real-life story of her friend who survived precisely because of his long hair" (as quoted in Jelača 92). Ali's hair implies, as Jelača suggests, that trauma is lodged in Ali's body. It could be added that his hair acts as the material extension of his trauma. And his trauma derives not only from the fact of his survival, but also from the sense of leaving others, who could not be rescued, behind.

The second instance of magical realism includes the hand-made rug. Near the end of the film, there is a scene in which Fatima is shown at night, sparsely lit, spreading her woven rug over the stream. Her rug makes a little bridge for unsurprised villagers to the Blue Cave. In the given context, their way of facing loss is rendered as fantastical, thereby enabling non-representation. The viewer's subsequent access to the Blue Cave is deliberately denied, indicating the film's resolution not to capitalize on explicit images of atrocities.

The rug made me consider several other objects that reappear in the film, such as a broken pair of glasses, an old, used razor, photographs showing Alma with her husband or the missing sons of one of the women. These objects come to materialize the unbearable absence. On the narrative level, they provide cues by insinuating the particularities of missing family members, but also by indicating how characters in the film may be related to another. They function as material substitutes, which counter the gaps in the narrative about the missing father, the husband, and children.

The recurring scenes of Alma's dream, Ali's growing hair, or Fatima's rug do not necessarily advance the plot. As non-representational images, they delineate from the linear narrative, nevertheless remaining supportive of the narrative's overarching optimism. In their recurrence, the absence of the villagers of Slavno is more strongly felt, yet the viewer is reminded of the film's optimistic goal, which is rebuilding community life in the post-war reality of rural Bosnia against all odds. The film's optimism is made possible or attainable, as Jelača would propose, on the condition that melancholia is resolved into mourning and absence distinguished from loss, as LaCapra would suggest.

Based on the analyses of *Madonna* and *Snow*, several conclusions can be drawn. The unfortunate binary opposition between poor victims and cruel perpetrators in *Madonna* allows for imagined categories, based on ethnic belonging, to gain mythic proportions more than enabling a construction of characters, capable of furthering or actualizing the plot. Stated film motifs, black-and-white characterization, topoi, and related hate speech lead to an overabundance of melodramatic elements, which allow me to allocate *Madonna* to a category films of over-representation. By comparison, *Snow* revolves around a resolute, yet complex protagonist, ready to face her loss and restore her and her community's damaged lives. Her confrontation with her patriarchal surroundings and the present-day challenges concerning the sale of the land implies her readiness to find solutions. The way to solve a problem finds its dramaturgical expression in the three-act narrative filmmaking, which allows Pavičić to label the film as a film of

normalization. The goal-oriented protagonist and the linear plot prove to be constitutive of each other. Indicated, recurring non-representational images delineate from the linear narrative, nevertheless remain supportive of the narrative's overarching optimism. With the hindsight of drawn conclusions and problems of over-representation as exemplified in *Madonna*, *Snow* can be categorized as a film of representation.

Another way to bring this category closer to understanding is by comparing *Snow* with Begić's second feature film *Children of Sarajevo*, and by outlining the shift from representational to non-representational logic, from the former to the latter film. In an interview,[4] Begić made it explicit that *Snow* evolved out of an idea about the Bosnian dream. The action of the film takes place in 1996, right after the war, when belief in the reconstruction of the state system was still palpable and collectively shared. However cruel the past may have been, the viewer of the film gets a sense there is a bright future awaiting the characters. Begić reveals that when she started developing her second feature film, she asked herself what happened to the Bosnian dream. She realized that people's dreams had been replaced by memories. The ongoing transition from one political system to the next has eradicated a sense of hope in reconstructing the system. I argue that, by extension of this reasoning, the indication of a loss of belief in the system is well reflected through the emergence of non-representational images of war, which happens to challenge the narrative structure of *Children of Sarajevo*.

Children of Sarajevo: Towards Non-Representation

Children of Sarajevo deals with the topic of orphans of the war, young adults, abandoned by the state, who rely on themselves only. The film follows Rahima, who struggles to make ends meet while taking care of her delinquent teenage brother Hamza. Rahima works as a cook in a restaurant, and her hectic, daily routine is divided between the spaces of her work and her home. A series of problems unfold when Hamza is accused of assaulting his schoolmate, the son of a crooked local minister Melić, and breaking his iPhone. Rahima gradually discovers that Hamza has drifted back into trouble and is now involved in various criminal activities. She tries to solve the mounting problems not only by confronting the criminals, who introduced Hamza to their dodgy schemes, but also by confronting Melić. Rahima

4 The interview is available here: "Cineuropa: Interview with Aida Begić: Children of Sarajevo." *Cineuropa*, www.cineuropa.org/en/video/223729/. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

refuses to buy his son a new iPhone, the cost of which is three of her monthly salaries. This confrontation does not end well for her, as Melić sends police officers to search her and Hamza's apartment.

The conflict addresses new class configurations that came about in the aftermath of war. As an affluent, high-ranking politician, Melić is deeply embedded in the institutionalized structures of power; hence, he is firmly positioned on top of the new social hierarchy. As orphans, Rahima and Hamza are at its lower end. In addition to Rahima's encounter with Melić, other encounters with a social worker, the school headmaster, and police officers do not produce the necessary solutions. The failure of these encounters is best perceived in light of the institutionalized structures of power that these characters represent. Diligence and determination are features that Rahima shares with Alma's character in *Snow*. The existing milieu of *Children of Sarajevo*, however, proves less responsive to her proactive, solution-driven approach. Her failed attempts to change the situation for the better attests to the newly formed class she speaks and acts from and is consistently reminded of. The impression of hopelessness and entrapment is best conveyed by the film's camerawork. A shoulder-mounted camera follows Rahima a short distance away in her hectic, yet repetitive and somewhat monotonous moving from one place to another, back and forth, resulting in a series of continuous tracking shots.

The linear progression of the narrative is challenged by the futility of the protagonists' attempts to resolve situations, which in effect creates a gulf between the protagonist and her surroundings. Borrowing from Begić, the unfulfilled dreams and unreached goals make room for wartime memories, and by extension, enable a shift from representation to non-representational strategies.

Before I single out non-representational strategies, by which fragments from the wartime past are incorporated into the film's fabric, I should mention that Rahima and Hamza's past remains virtually unknown to the viewer. A few exchanges, like the one between Rahima and police officers, or the one between Rahima and the social worker, who regularly comes to check whether Rahima is taking good care of her brother, merely reveal that Rahima had a problematic youth and that most of it changed for Hamza and her when she became old enough to start working, when she adopted the veil and when they left the orphanage.

Regardless of the scarcity of information about Rahima and Hamza's childhood, the narrative of *Children of Sarajevo* is interspersed with non-representational images of war, which take the form of home videos and news footage. The home videos are composed of predominantly static shots and

portray children at play, whereas news footage, shot on hand-held cameras, deliver blurry images, snippets of life-threatening situations. Both types of footage document daily life in the besieged city of Sarajevo.

Jelača and Begić both regard these shots as Rahima's flashbacks (Jelača 214; Begić).[5] I am reluctant to make the same reference due to my understanding of what constitutes a protagonist's flashback. I make use of three different interpretations of flashback to ground my argument.

The first, broader definition is taken from the glossary of Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Walles's *Film: A Critical Introduction* and sees flashback as "the non-chronological insertion of events from the past into the present day of the story world" (Pramaggiore 453). The second definition, provided by Ruth Leys, a historian of trauma studies, is more elaborate:

> In recent years the term flashback has come to be used to describe the daytime reexperiences or reenactments of the traumatic event, reexperiences that are held to be a characteristic symptom of PTSD. The flashback takes the form of recurrent, intrusive images or sensations associated with the traumatic event, or of a sudden feeling that the traumatic event is literally happening all over again. The victim feels as if he has returned to the perceptual reality of the traumatic situation, and it has become orthodox to interpret such flashback experience as the literal return of dissociated memories of the event. The term flashback implies the cinematic possibility of literally reproducing or cutting back to a scene from the past and hence expresses the idea that the trauma victim's experiences are exact "reruns" or "replays" of the traumatic incident. (Leys, 2000, 241)

As can be seen, the first definition sees the flashback as a past event inserted into the present-day narrative, as opposed to the second, which regards it as an experience of moving back in time, from the present to the past. The latter definition stresses the visual potential of a flashback, wherein the flashback is regarded as an image or a sensation related to the past traumatic event. Non-representational images of war are shots inserted in the narrative of *Children of Sarajevo* without prior indication or latter narrative explanation. They leave an impression of immediacy and emergency, and in that sense are closer to the definition of a flashback provided by Leys.

5 Begić refers to Rahima's flashbacks in the same, earlier referenced interview, "Cineuropa: Interview with Aida Begić: Children of Sarajevo."

The opening VHS shot offers a view of a children's performance in the relative safety of the building's stairways. The second one shows a little girl making mud cakes in a dugout trench used by civilians as their sheltered passage from one safe spot to another. In the final shot, a children's choir performs a lullaby to an audience of children in front of a ruined building. Inserted fragments of news footage deliver snippets of life-threatening situations. The first shows the interior of a bus, with blood spilled on the floor, a few moments after shelling. The second offers a view of civilians under gunfire, crossing streets in panic.

All these shots, particularly the fragmented news footage, make no direct connection to other non-representational images, or to the narrative in general. They strongly communicate the notion of a flashback as a cinematic possibility of literally reproducing an event from the past. Their literalness is underlined by the use of documentary material in an otherwise fictional film. The definition offered by Leys appears fitting at first, but it does not help answer the question of who re-experiences trauma in *Children of Sarajevo*. Jelača and Begić's assertion that the subject in question was Rahima proves simplistic. Most non-representational images are framed in a way in which they suggest that these were indeed Rahima's reminiscences. They are introduced through the use of ambiguous, diegetic sounds. In a couple of scenes, the sound of fireworks from Rahima's present-day situation transforms into the sound of gunfire from the past, seconds before the viewer gets to see images corresponding to the latter. It appears as if the sound of fireworks has triggered Rahima's wartime memories. The tension of living in the present-day, war-scarred city of Sarajevo is certainly underlined by this strategy. Nevertheless, documentary type footage prevents the viewer from identifying the experiences as Rahima's. As much as it is challenging to recognize the point of view offered here as her subjective one, it is equally impossible to identify Rahima or Hamza as children in any of the non-representational images of war.

A closer look into Deleuze's notions of flashback and recollection-image helped me realize this and reassess my previous assumption:

> But we know very well that the flashback is a conventional, extrinsic device: it is generally indicated by a dissolve-link, and the images that it introduces are often superimposed or meshed. It is like a sign with the words: "Watch out, recollection!" It can, therefore, indicate, by convention, a causality, which is psychological, but still analogous to a sensory-motor determinism, and, despite its circuits, only confirms the progression of a linear narration. The question of flashback is this: it has to be justified

> from elsewhere, just as recollection-images must be given the internal mark of the past from elsewhere. (Deleuze, 2010, 46)[6]

According to Deleuze, the flashback comes to the fore as the so-called recollection-image, a closed circuit between the actual or perception image and its virtual image.

At this point it is useful to touch briefly upon Bergson's actual/virtual distinction, which inspired much of Deleuze's writing. The difference between the actual and the virtual is a difference in time. The present that passes defines the actual, whereas the virtual is defined by the past that conserves itself. According to Bergson, memory is a virtual image, which co-exists with the actual perception of the object. Memory is a "virtual image contemporary with the actual object, its double, its 'mirror image'" (Deleuze and Parnet 150).

An actual image does not extend into generic movement, but connects with a virtual image, with which it forms a circuit. The circuit goes from the present to the past and back to the present. And the recollection-image occupies this circuit (Deleuze 45). Even though the past in flashback appears as contrasted with the present, Deleuze regards it as "former present" rather than the pure past in the Bergsonian sense (52). The flashback is, therefore, analogous with sensory-motor schema. Despite its interruption of the narrative flow, it adds to the progression of linear narration.

Non-representational images of war in *Children of Sarajevo* are not introduced by a dissolve-link. They are neither superimposed nor meshed images. Borrowing Deleuze's terminology, the actual images do not extend into the narrative of *Children of Sarajevo*, but neither do they connect with their virtual counterparts. None of the children performing the theatre play or singing a lullaby can firmly be identified as Rahima and Hamza, nor can it be said to represent the children remembered by Rahima. For the reasons stated above, the inserted shots cannot be regarded merely as Rahima's flashbacks or recollection-images in the Deleuzian sense. Rather, they convey free indirect vision, which is a concept Pier Paolo Pasolini grounded on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of free indirect discourse. As Deleuze reminds us, the latter is "an assemblage of enunciation, carrying out two inseparable acts of subjectivation simultaneously, one of which constitutes

6 Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* was reprinted in 2010, but the existing English edition, published by Continuum, was available already in 2005. I reference the year of reprinting to distinguish it from *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, which was likewise published by Continuum in 2005, and reprinted in 2011.

a character in the first person, but the other which is present at his birth and brings him on the scene" (Deleuze, 2011, 75).

Free indirect vision is summarized in the following way:

> A character acts on the screen, and is assumed to see his world, from another point of view, which thinks, reflects and transforms the viewpoint of the character … But the camera does not simply give us the vision of the character and of the world; it imposes another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected. This subdivision is what Pasolini calls a "free indirect subjective." (Deleuze, 2011, 75)

This subdivision establishes a new correlation between an actual or perception-image and what Deleuze regards as camera-consciousness, which transforms the image and acquires "a taste for 'making the camera felt'" (Deleuze, 2011, 76).

With this hindsight on Bakhtin's and Pasolini's concepts, the VHS shots of children at play in *Children of Sarajevo* may be said to convey a kind of semi-subjectivity. They produce free indirect vision in a way in which the protagonist observes a childhood version of herself. Rahima's past appears as foreign to the spectator as it is foreign to her, as if Rahima were the spectator of a past that has been estranged from her. Her past is observed through other, VHS lenses. The "haptic"[7] quality of grainy images attests to camera-self-consciousness. Another way to explain the insertion of documentary news footage and home videos into the narrative is to claim that they are used in place of more adequate, nevertheless missing images of personal memories. Consequentially, prosthetic memories resurface. According to memory studies scholar Allison Landsberg, prosthetic memories "originate outside a person's lived experience and yet are taken on and worn by that person through mass cultural technologies of memories" (Landsberg 19). By definition, prosthetic memories are "transportable and hence not susceptible to biological and ethnic claims of ownership" (Landsberg 19). Wartime memories in *Children of Sarajevo* therefore serve a prosthetic function through their form of mass media footage from during the war. Materialized as partly alien to Rahima, these memories call for an active

7 The term used here draws on Laura U. Marks's notion of "haptic visuality" that privileges the material presence of the image rather than its representational power. This type of visuality implies a closer engagement on the side of the viewer, who is encouraged to contemplate rather than just rationalize images. A more elaborate account of the concept can be found in Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 127–93.

Fig. 1. *Children of Sarajevo* [Djeca], directed by Aida Begić, 2012.

participation on the side of the viewer, who may have directly or indirectly experienced the war.

Inserted documentary footage, especially home videos, composed of mostly static shots, appear staged, whereas the fictional, narrative part, which is conveyed by long shots, taken with a shoulder-mounted camera, leaves an impression of *cinéma vérité*. Due to the dizzying camera movement, the narrative part is perceived as messy and chaotic. In contrast, static shots of home videos make the factual part appear as more peaceful and contemplative. Paradoxically and as compared to some wartime memories, Rahima's present-day struggles occur as the more unsettling ones. This observation resonates with Begić's earlier statement that the future and hope in the reconstruction of the system has been gradually replaced by memories.

If the attainable optimism of the narrative of *Snow* corresponds with LaCapra's therapeutic memory model of working through, distinguishing absence from loss, then the restlessness expressed by *Children of Sarajevo* is associated with Cathy Caruth's antimimetic model of trauma. In her writings on the genealogy of trauma, historian Ruth Leys differentiates the mimetic model of trauma from its parallel and concurrent, antimimetic one.

The mimetic model owes its name to *mimesis*, "an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification" (Leys 8), which suggests that trauma is internal to a victim, as opposed to the antimimetic model, wherein a victim is "essentially aloof from the traumatic experience, in the sense that she remains a spectator of the traumatic scene, which she can therefore see and represent to herself and others" (Leys 299).

The antimimetic model sees trauma as external to a victim, thereby avoiding the Freudian concept of the unconscious. Notions taken from cognitively oriented scientists are used instead, such as Bessel Van der Kolk, who theorizes the mind in neurophysiological terms (Leys 244). Cathy Caruth conceptualizes trauma as inaccessible and essentially non-representable (Caruth 91). Her insistence on trauma's inherent latency, where the trauma is experienced only after the traumatic event, when it returns to haunt the survivor, makes no promise of resolution or therapeutic closure in the LaCaprian sense. Deferrals, repetition and anti-closure, features of the antimimetic model of trauma, can be found in Begić's films. These features are more strongly articulated in *Children of Sarajevo*, where the non-representational images of war challenge the narrative structure, as compared to *Snow*, where their occurrence is harmonized with the narrative's overarching optimism and goal orientation.

Jasmila Žbanić's work is similarly marked by the shift from representational to non-representational strategies, from her feature debut film *Grbavica* to her later film *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*. Both films engage with the after-effects of rape as a war crime.[8] The first revolves around attempts to keep an individual traumatic experience a secret, whereas the latter thematizes systematic denial of rape as a wartime atrocity.

Grbavica: Beyond Self-Victimization and Limits of Representation

Set in Sarajevo's district of Grbavica, the film centres on Esma and her daughter Sara, whose father was killed while defending Sarajevo and is therefore considered a martyr (*shaheed*). The price of Sara's school trip could be considerably discounted if she could provide a certificate that would confirm that her father had died as a martyr. Esma finds a job as a

8 The United Nations Security Resolution 820 from 1993 states that the use of rape in Bosnia was "massive, organized and systematic" (2). From then on, as Dino Murtić reminds us, the public debate led to the conclusion that the rape of Bosnian women was planned by Serbian leadership as a way to humiliate the whole Bosnian nation. Parallel to the attempts to document these crimes for legal and humanitarian purposes, the estimated number served political purposes as well. The European Union, for instance, estimated that 20,000 women were raped, whereas the Bosnian Ministry of the Interior claimed the figure was 50,000. Victims and perpetrators came from all sides in the conflict; however, "most reports underline the fact that the majority of perpetrators were members of Serb regular and irregular forces and that most of victims were Bosnian-Muslim women" (as quoted in Murtić 104).

waitress in a nightclub, owned by a local criminal, and looks for ways to scrape together €200 to cover the total cost of Sara's trip. Running out of excuses as to why she has not obtained the certificate yet, she gets into a quarrel with Sara, who demands to know the circumstances of her father's death. In a climactic scene near the end of the film, Esma reveals that she was interned in a camp and that Sara's father was not a heroic defender of Sarajevo but rather an unknown Bosnian Serb soldier, one of many who raped her. The film ends with Sara leaving for the longed-for school trip and waving at Esma, who replies with a smile.

The film addresses the consequences of wartime trauma that are of equal concern for Esma and Sara. The original title of the film denotes a district of Sarajevo that was controlled by Bosnian Serb forces between 1992–95. The etymology of *grbavica* is "a woman with a hump." As the title insinuates and the film discloses, the post-war fates of the city district and the film's protagonist intertwine in many ways.

Grbavica shares similarities with Aida Begić's film *Snow* in its focus on a woman, a survivor of the war, and its linear, three-act narrative. In both films, protagonists are surrounded by a group of women, engaged in mutual support. In *Snow*, these women are the villagers of Slavno; in *Grbavica*, they are members of a support group for war-traumatized victims and shoe-factory workers. Both films postulate that coping with past trauma is a way to anticipate the future, regardless of its bleak prospects.

The major difference between the two films is that *Grbavica*'s register is decidedly realist, whereas *Snow* has instances of magical realism, which in turn makes non-representational images of war easier to isolate and describe. The opening sequence in *Grbavica* is a panning shot, which glides over traditional, colourful Bosnian carpet, women's faces and bodies leaning on each other, before it arrives at Esma's face. This visual journey exposes women reflecting in silence, and is accompanied by the seemingly extra-diegetic sound of *Ilahi songs*.[9] The sequence ends with Esma opening her eyes, looking directly into the camera, before the screen turns white. This shot contains the previously detailed characteristics of non-representational images of war: visuality emphasized at the expense of narrative coherence, and quietism in obvious and stark contrast with the rest of the narrative with its numerous exchanges. Borrowing Deleuze's terminology, the sequence could be said to carry out a temporalization of the image. Only later in the film

9 Ilahi (or in Bosnian: ilahija) is "a Muslim religious song which content primarily magnifies the power of God. Ilahi lyrics also offer the unconditional love for God on behalf of the performer/singer" (as quoted in Murtić 182)

does the viewer learn that these women are survivors of the war, who gather in group-counselling sessions to share and listen to each other's traumatic accounts. The opening shot is abruptly cut with a scene introducing the seedy nightclub, a space of highly sexualized group dancing to loud beats of turbo folk[10] music, but also Esma's future workplace. The latter scene adopts a more conventional mode of storytelling that continues throughout the film. *Grbavica*'s decidedly realist register is interlaced with non-representational images of war that prove more difficult to isolate than was the case with the opening sequence. These images are not as differentiated from the narrative as the scenes of Alma's recurring dream in *Snow* or as sequences, inserted fragments of wartime footage in *Children of Sarajevo*. They do not divide the past from the present the way that flashback does, but rather assimilate the past into the present. Literary and film scholar Gordana Crnković regards them as "visual echoes" or reminders of Esma's past (Crnković 148–49) and Jelača perceives them as "disorienting breaks in the narrative flow" (81). Both serve as accurate descriptions of non-representational images of war, which materialize in the following scenes.

One of the introductory scenes shows Sara joyously playing with Esma in their apartment. After a pillow fight, the daughter sits on top of her mother and holds her hands down on the floor. Esma reacts by forcibly pushing Sara aside. In another scene, Esma travels on a crowded bus, when an unknown man with a hairy chest and golden necklace comes near her. At first, she freezes in panic, then quickly gets off the bus. More obvious examples include a scene in the nightclub, in which a drunken German soldier, a member of the peacekeeping forces, is seen dancing with the Ukrainian "animator" Jabolka. She lets him pour beer over her breasts, which he licks, she shrieks and together they move in a way as to suggest they are having sex in the middle of the cheering crowd. Esma reacts by running away. Her traumatic past is visibly echoed in these scenes, with the difference that in the present she can do something to change the flow of events resembling the past ones. Specified non-representational images of war in *Grbavica* are neither scenes in their totality nor sequence-shots, but rather shots of

10 Turbo folk music combines traditional folk songs from the Western Balkans and fast, computer-produced beats. "Its popularity peaked during the 1990s, when it came to represent a lifestyle that many envied but few could attain … Amid conflict, inflation and international sanctions, turbo-folk gave Serbs a vision of untainted love and unbridled luxury." (Andrić, "Turbo Folk Keeps Pace with New Rivals," *Balkaninsight*, Jun. 15, 2011, www.balkaninsight.com/2011/06/15/turbo-folk-keeps-pace-with-new-rivals. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025). Turbo folk music is commonly associated with the 1990s Yugoslav wars, machismo, and criminals. It is equally and presently popular in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia.

past behaviour superimposed on the present context. By integrating the past into the present in the way indicated, non-representational images do not challenge the narrative (as was the case with *Children of Sarajevo*) but slightly deviate from its linear progression (as in *Snow*).

In addition to the opening sequence and specified shots, another dramaturgically relevant scene in the film functions as a non-representational image of war. The climactic encounter between Esma and Sara, in which the daughter points a gun at her mother and demands that she reveal the truth about her father, dramaturgically anticipates the scene, which takes place at the women's support centre, where Esma opens up about the details of Sara's coming into the world. The latter scene is intercut with another, in which Sara is seen shaving her head. The cause for this action is to be found in an earlier scene, in which Sara asks her mother which parts of her body resemble her father the most; to which Esma replies, her hair. As Jelača points out, Sara's act of shaving her head can be perceived in two ways. First, as a rebellious act of cutting ties with the violent act of her conception, and second, as a visual counterpart to the missing fragments of Esma's account (Jelača 86).

With regard to the first point, an intertextual parallel can be drawn between growing/cutting hair in *Snow* and *Grbavica*. If Ali's hair was a material extension of his trauma, then Sara's hair could be seen as an extension of her postmemory. Coined by memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch, postmemory "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (Hirsch 22). Postmemories are derivative of traumatic experiences of the previous generation, in this case Esma's generation, which was directly shaped by the war. The act of cutting hair equals cutting off traumatic injury, while also rejecting what Jelača describes as "a coherent personal history inscribed in the normative ethno-national frameworks of fathers as war heroes" (88).

Regarding the second point and on closer inspection of the scene in the women's support centre, it becomes clear that Esma's account begins and ends with Sara. As the film unfolds, Esma's personal trauma remains largely inaccessible to the viewer and recurs occasionally, in the form of non-representational images. In the given dramaturgical sequencing, the scene with Sara shaving her head also functions as a visual counterpart to the absence in Esma's narrative about her experience as a detainee in one of the camps. In that sense, it qualifies as the non-representational image of war.

Interestingly, in his text "Paradoxes and Parapraxes: On (the Limits of) Cinematic Representation in Post-Conflict Situations," film scholar Thomas Elsaesser references the same scene as a "media image of human suffering."

> Media images of human suffering especially have a way of being appropriated by either side, in order to solicit our attention, or even to traumatize us by their shocking immediacy. Such appropriation can generate a different kind of agency, a new potency in which an image is like a palimpsest, letting us see other images, either intended or unintended, either fitting or inappropriate: an effect also subsumable under the term "parapractic." The sequence in *Grbavica* of Sara shaving her head, for instance, cannot but recall the images of French women who collaborated during with German troops being publicly shaven as a mark of shame after the liberation in 1945. When Sara subsequently wears a headscarf, she invariably recalls the "girl" with the headscarf in the boxcar headed for Auschwitz, from the Westerbook footage used in *Night and Fog* / *Nuit et brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1955, Fr., 32 min.), and properly identified by Aad Wagenaar only in 1992. One can also cite the photos of emaciated Bosnian men behind barbed wire, supposedly held by Serb militia, which were meant to recall Nazi concentration camp. The pictures' wide circulation was said to have persuaded the Clinton administration to intervene and bomb Milošević's Serbia into submission, but they were later claimed to have been a staged fake, until a counter-claim reasserted their veracity … If we cast back our minds to these and other images that came to us from the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, then much of what happened, or rather, what we were given to see as happening, stood under the sign of this third gaze, for whose benefit, however this 'benefit' might be defined, the various competing image-narratives were being fashioned, reconstructed or orchestrated by the warring sides and factions. (Elsaesser, 2016, 20)

This paragraph contains a few problems that I find relevant to address. The most glaring problem is that the scene is referred to as an example of a "media image of human suffering" despite the fact that the film does not rely on the use of flashback, avoids visualizing and narrativizing Esma's rape and avoids representing her rapists. The less obvious, but more problematic point derives from the description of the third media image, evoked by the scene with Sara shaving her head, acting as a "palimpsest" image. Elsaesser's description lacks details of the context of making the image, of the parties involved in the dispute over its veracity in the aftermath of its publishing. It also contains a few speculations and inaccuracies.

The image in question shows Fikret Alić and other non-Serb prisoners of a camp, located in the Trnopolje region of northwest Bosnia, opened and held by the Bosnian Serb wartime regime. As photography scholar David Campbell emphasizes, the image did not exist in isolation, but was a still

image taken from two longer items of news coverage on the Omarska and Trnopolje concentration camps[11] made by journalists Penny Marshall and Ian Williams for Britain's Independent Television News (ITN) in August 1992 (Campbell 145). The still was adopted and broadcast by numerous media outlets and stirred international political outrage. As Campbell summarizes:

> it evidenced the Bosnian Serb authorities' ethnic-cleansing strategy that lay at the heart of the war. The image of Alić also drew the ire of those who saw it as an example of the demonization of the entire Serbian people by the Western media, for the purposes of making US military intervention necessary and inevitable. (143)

At the forefront of the latter group was Thomas Deichmann, who wrote an article "The Picture that Fooled the World," which was published by *LM* (formerly known as *Living Marxism*) in 1997, and in which he maintained that Marshall and Williams had fabricated the image so as to link the situation in Bosnia with the Nazi Holocaust.[12] In the article, Deichmann asserted that there was no barbed wire around Trnopolje, which was a collection centre for refugees, not a prison, certainly not a concentration camp, and that the barbed wire was around the ITN news crew who were filming from a compound close to Trnopolje. ITN sued *LM* for libel and won the

11 Omarska, Trnopolje, Keraterm, and Manjača were concentration camps in the Prijedor region. The term "concentration camp" used here follows the logic of its deployment by the *Guardian* journalist Ed Vulliamy, who joined the ITN crew on their visits of Omarska and Trnopolje camps, and the photography scholar David Campbell. Vulliamy and Campbell refer to the original meaning of the word dating from the Boer wars in Africa when, as Vulliamy suggests, concentration camps meant "places where civilians, not prisoners of war, were concentrated on the basis of their ethnic background, and where many where killed, tortured, raped and then forcedly deported" (Vulliamy 13). "As the indictments for genocide issued against the Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadžić, Momčilo Krajišnik and Ratko Mladić by the ICTY prosecutors make clear, the operation of 'camps and detention facilities,' in which 'tens of thousands' of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats were held, was integral to the strategy of creating 'impossible conditions of life, involving persecution and terror tactics, that would have the effect of encouraging non-Serbs to leave … the deportation of those who were reluctant to leave; and the liquidation of others' (ICTY 2000a,b 25)" (Campbell 155). The camps mentioned were certainly not industrial death camps with gas chambers attached, like those during Nazi regime, but they did form a network, a system, which enforced the clear political and military strategy mentioned above. More about a related discussion on the functioning and naming of the Bosnian camps in the Prijedor region can be found in Campbell 143–72, and in Vulliamy book *The War is Dead, Long Live the War*, originally published by Vintage, 2013.

12 Deichmann's article "The Picture that Fooled the World" is available here: www.slobodan-milosevic.org/fooled.htm.

case in March 2000 (Campbell 143). At the end of the two-week trial, the London-based High Court jury found that Deichmann's article "was wrong to claim that the image of Mr Alic was deliberately misrepresented by the reporters."[13] This decision, however, did not prevent supporters of *LM* and its argument from continuing to propagate the view that the ITN reports were incorrect.[14]

The wide broadcast of the image pressured the Bosnian Serb forces to step back, which led to the closure of the two camps in November 1992. Taking into account the chronology of the Bosnian and the Kosovo war, however, it is naïve to claim that the image could have played a role in persuading the United States to intervene and bomb Serbia into submission, given that the NATO bombing of Bosnian Serb military positions took place in August and September 1995, three years after the publication of the image, a month after the Srebrenica massacres, and two days after the bombing of Markale, Sarajevo's central market place. The NATO bombardment of Serbia took place from March to June 1999, two months after the massacre of Kosovo Albanians in the village of Račak, and seven years after the publication of the image of Alić.

The omissions in Elsaesser's description of the context surrounding the Alić image leave an impression that for a western viewer, the third gaze implied that it is quite hard to tell, to envisage what exactly happened in Bosnia during the war, given that "the various competing image-narratives were being fashioned, reconstructed or orchestrated by the warring sides and factions" (Elsaesser, 2016, 20). Interestingly, competing narratives in the given example do not belong to the warring sides in Bosnia, but to *LM*, which is implicated in the form of historical negationism for doubting the existence of the Trnopolje concentration camp and propagating this view despite numerous, contrary pieces of evidence available, and ITN, which tried to reclaim the veracity of the images and to win back damaged trust. At the core of this conflict is the conflict over the definition of war. For the former, the Bosnian war is defined as a civil war, with shared culpability between warring sides. In this version, the atrocities committed were

13 For more details about *ITN vs. LM*, see Hartley-Brewer, "ITN in £375,000 Libel Victory." *The Guardian*, Mar. 15, 2000, www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/15/medialaw.media2. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

14 More about the prominent intellectuals who signed the statement in support of *LM* that was issued by the magazine Novo, edited by Thomas Deichmann, under the banner of freedom of speech, and those who continued propagating the *LM*'s defamatory claims can be found in Campbell 143–72, and in Vulliamy 172–79 (in Bosnian translation, the chapter "Laž," in the original "Lie").

horrific, but since they were committed in equal measure by both sides, they are rendered as less distinctive. For the latter, the Bosnian Serb authorities' ethnic-cleansing strategy lies at the core of the Bosnian war.

Another problem within the paragraph is a hurried conflation of the fictional image of Sara's shaven head, readily perceived as the example of a media image of human suffering, with the factual image of the imprisoned Alić that the former image evokes. The non-representational image associative of Esma's trauma and Sara's postmemory is blended with the factual image of Alić's imprisonment for having the same, post-Yugoslav country of origin, and for being targeted at the imaginary outsider.

Elsaesser's assertion that the sequence of Sara shaving her head is an example of a "media image of human suffering" can also be read as a continuation of his earlier claim that the film itself is an example of melodrama, the preferred territory of which is victimhood, "long recognized as a strong subject position" (17).

At this point, a brief digression is needed. In his 1991 essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," Elsaesser developed the concept of "sophisticated family melodrama," based on an analysis of selected 1940s and 1950s films by Douglas Sirk, Nicholas Ray, and Vincente Minnelli. As film historian Barbara Klinger summarizes, "this label defined the potential of some melodramas to surpass the genre's cathartic aims and reactionary tendencies to achieve aesthetic complexities and social commentary" (Klinger 8).

The key features of "sophisticated family melodrama" include "heightened visual expressiveness, the psychic and social foundations of its *mise en scène* and its 'double-levelled' meaning" (Klinger 16). The social and sexual repression of the 1950s Eisenhower era, with the frame of decency so sharply defined, were referred to as posing limitations to a range of characters' strong actions:

> The tellingly impotent gesture, the social gaffe, the hysterical outburst replaces any more directly liberating or self-annihilating action, and the cathartic violence of a shoot-out or a chase becomes an inner violence, often the one which the characters turn against themselves. The dramatic configuration, the pattern of the plot makes them, regardless of attempts to break free, constantly look inwards, at each other and themselves. (Elsaesser, 1991, 79)

Characters in "sophisticated family melodrama" are regarded as victims, as being acted upon, essentially incapable of shaping the future flow of events,

of influencing their emotional environment or changing the existing milieu. Similar to Peter Brooks, Elsaesser saw melodrama's polarization as an already accomplished exteriorization of inner conflict, which is why one should not be tempted to look for psychological complexity within characters:

> One of the characteristic features of melodrama in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present *all* the characters convincingly as victims. The critique—the questions of "evil," of responsibility—is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualised psychology. That is why the melodrama, at its most accomplished, seems capable of reproducing more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society, especially the relation between psychology, morality and class-consciousness, by emphasizing so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressively inward, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents. (Elsaesser, 1991, 86)

As could be read from this paragraph, and with a degree of difference when compared to Brooks's notions, "evil" is referred to as the question of (personal) responsibility allocated to a social and existential level. Protagonists of melodrama are victims of external repressive forces with which they conspire, hence ending up being their agents.

If we turn back to the film *Madonna*, we may notice that a way to approach Serb and Croat characters as black and white, evil and virtue, corresponds well with Brooks's notions about melodramatic polarization and the lack of interior depth, irrespective of those intentions that led to such a stark polarization in the first place. But, while keeping in mind Elsaesser's contribution to the topic, to extend the same logic and apply it to the characters of *Grbavica* would mean to take an argument to its extreme. This is chiefly because the film's protagonists, Esma and Sara, are neither virtuous nor helpless victims, as are, for instance, Kuzma and all other Croats in *Madonna*. Sara is fascinated with the gun of the boy with whom she once fought and then become a friend, she likes to throw snowballs at a cat and, when necessary, lies to her teacher about her mother having cancer to avoid answering for why Esma has not brought the certificate yet. Esma shows up at meetings of war-traumatized women on the days when the women receive financial support.

The characters' inner complexities are not listed here to support the claim that *Grbavica* does not submit to the melodramatic mode at any cost. Quite the contrary, there are elements of melodrama, like the climactic scene involving the mother, the daughter, and the gun, followed by Esma's emotionally charged account at the women's centre or the overall use of diegetic music to heighten the emotions. I would certainly argue that these elements are in service of the film's schematism. Esma tries to keep her secret, while Sara strives to unveil it. The daughter searches for a certificate as material validation that her father died as a martyr. She wishes to turn her father's absence into a concrete loss, to make up a coherent narrative, assimilable to hetero-normative, ethno-national narratives about fathers as fallen war heroes. For the linear plot to unfold, Esma's secret must be exposed and Sara's desired narrative must collapse. The film reviewer Ed Gonzalez observes that despite the lack of pretence in the film's style, which is analogous with Esma's emotional state, "*Grbavica* lacks for the poetry that has made Vittorio de Sica's great *Two Women* a cornerstone of neorealism."[15] In that sense, Gonzalez makes a valid point for perceiving Žbanić's approach as more televisual than cinematic. Pavičić sees *Grbavica* as a film of normalization *par excellence*, while I classify it as a film of representation.

As in *Children of Sarajevo*, the antagonists and villains in *Grbavica* are not former Bosnian Serb soldiers, perpetrators of war crimes, but representatives of the new wealthy elite in the aftermath of war. Šaran, the former war profiteer and present nightclub owner, and Puška ("rifle" in translation), the former Bosnian army commander and the present mafia guy in *Grbavica*, Rizo, the restaurant owner, and Melić, the crooked politician, in *Children of Sarajevo*. Šaran, Puška, and Rizo are equally loud, aggressive, irrational, they like to show money in public and are always surrounded by shady men. All three are drawn with less detail and precision compared to Esma, Rahima, and the other female characters in both films. It could be argued that the explicit critique of corrupted society associated with this, dependant on self-serving narratives about former war heroes, puts Esma in a far more humiliating, unfavourable, and victimizing situation than her past trauma, which remains hidden. Despite the bleak prospects, Esma manages to save enough money for Sara's excursion and influence the future flow of events. Likewise, in a rebellious act, Sara gives up on a desired hetero-normative

15 See Ed Gonzalez "Review: Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams." *Slant Magazine*, edited by Ed Gonzalez. Jan. 28, 2007, www.slantmagazine.com/film/grbavica-the-land-of-my-dreams/. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

narrative about fathers as fallen heroes. For all these reasons, one can argue that, as a film of representation, *Grbavica* has elements of melodrama. However, the characters' agencies and non-representational images should not be overlooked. Especially as the latter occasionally enable unspoken and un-shown war trauma to resurface.

Following Elsaesser's line of argument, the role of a victim (Sara or Esma?) in *Grbavica*, which he classifies as melodrama, resembles a victim in the media sphere (a television show). The latter's role is to produce affect and emotion, abstain from having an opinion and promote a political cause. Elsaesser assigns power as a negative agency to a victim in the media sphere, for "filling the slot of 'authenticity,' of righteousness and subjective truth" (Elsaesser, 2016, 17). In Elsaesser's view, this combination of victimhood and power makes post-conflict situations topical and of general interest, which is why they become topics fit for film. I agree with the point that the role of a victim in the media sphere is to elicit affect and emotion, and that it assumes abstaining from engaging in political thought. However, I am not sure how a survivor, restrained from having an opinion and reduced to the role of a victim, to an essentially powerless version of herself, can be attributed with power or negative agency. The only power one can relate to is the power by the implicated, a powerful other, ready to extend help to the one in need. This power is conditioned on the relationship between a dependant and a caregiver that grounds the state of dependency. It is certainly not an attribute of the victim, deprived of agency. Elsaesser makes a valid point for noticing that the victim discourse is typical of post-conflict situations where every side claims to be a victim. Victimhood narratives indeed complicate everyone's understanding of the historical context of conflicts. But for that reason, contextualizing—detailing and naming forms of oppression, historicizing and setting them apart from self-victimizing narratives, differentiating the factual from the fictional for that matter, telling a victim apart from its oppressor—is a prerequisite for our further dealings with image, memory and politics. This is preferable to collapsing all co-dependent categories together because they are indicative of post-conflict contexts, which happen to be remote, complex, and perceived through already framed media image-narratives.

Compared to Begić's films and as I have already noted, a similar tendency, a shift from representation to non-representation, marks Jasmila Žbanić's oeuvre, from *Grbavica* to *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*. Both films thematize the after-effects of rape as a war crime. The first revolves around attempts to keep an individual traumatic experience a secret, whereas the latter thematizes the systematic denial of rape as a wartime atrocity.

The denial of atrocities comes into focus in Ognjen Glavonić's *Depth Two*, which is why I have decided to analyse it by drawing a comparison with *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*. Relevant to this point is that *Depth Two* and Šejla Kamerić's *1395 Days Without Red* are included as objects of research because they, of all the films discussed here, demonstrate a comparably higher degree of non-representation regarding the portrayal of victim and victimhood, which is also why I analyse them at the end of this chapter.

Non-Representational Strategies in *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* and *Depth Two*

Both films engage with the subject of denying atrocities that took place more than twenty years ago. The process of excavation, digging through layers and layers of systematic erasures and silences, appears in both films not only with distance in time, but also and particularly with distance or a shift away from a conventional representation of trauma. I believe that these two distances are not coincidental and argue that proximity to the subject of denial is predicated on the distance from the conventional representation of war trauma in film. Now I will demonstrate how a shift from convention in terms of narrative and character construction, genre, chronology, and sound-image arrangement gives rise to non-representational images of war.

For Those Who Can Tell No Tales

For Those Who Can Tell No Tales starts by following Kym Vercoe, an Australian performance artist, on her first summer holiday in Bosnia. Inspired by the book *The Bridge on the Drina* by Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić, she visits the town of Višegrad in eastern Bosnia. She stays at the Vilina Vlas hotel as recommended in her guidebook. She spends a sleepless night in the hotel and upon returning home to Australia, she discovers that the hotel was used as a rape camp during the Bosnian 1992–95 war. Questions around the region's atrocities begin to trouble her, as does the question of why the guidebook, or the town itself, made no mention of the event. The ICTY testimonies that she later finds online oblige her to return to Višegrad and investigate this hidden history[16] for herself. *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* is

16 For more details about the present and recent past of Vilina Vlas hotel and Višegrad, see Emma Graham-Harrison, "Back on the Tourist Trail: the Hotel where Women were Raped and Tortured," *The Observer: Guardian*, Jan. 28, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/28/bosnia-hotel-rape-murder-war-crimes. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025. See also Julian Borger, "War is

a hybrid documentary fiction, based on a theatre play *Seven Kilometers North-East*, written and performed by Vercoe. The play itself was modelled on the impressions Vercoe recorded of her journey in Bosnia. The film was initially planned to be a documentary,[17] but only later it was decided that it should be a scripted film with professional actors.

The travelogue as a type of narrative structure is characteristic of a large number of "Balkan" films, claims film historian Dina Iordanova. In her view, most Balkan filmmakers submissively accept rather than "challeng[e] a narrative structure which inevitably positions and constructs them as objects of the Western traveller's gaze" (Iordanova, 2010, 56). While addressing the current troubles of the region, most of these films cater to traditional stereotypes. A typical plot, in Iordanova's view, involves a well-balanced Westerner, who ventures into the Balkans, longing for some kind of exposure to its madness. As the Balkans provide precisely what the visitor looks for, he/she gets rewarded. Most of the Balkan directors who engage in self-exoticism prefer to "present the events from a foreigner's point of view (seen as the only possible objective one), thus relegating the people whose lives they want to explain to the position of being watched (and judged) by strangers" (Iordanova 61).

Kym Vercoe's character embodies a shift away from this type of representation. Even though it is not clear whether she comes to Bosnia because she is attracted to the Balkans as to a faraway and exotic destination, her visit has little to do with her being attracted to the war past of the region or to the Balkan "madness."

Vercoe's first visit takes place in the sun-lit, crowded streets of Sarajevo and Višegrad. The light and optimistic soundtrack emphasizes her naivety and the excitement of a curious traveller. She spends most of the time on her own. Her return to a grey, cold, wintery Bosnia six months later colours her mature knowledge about the hidden history of Višegrad that urges her to pay tribute to the war's victims. Despite being interrogated by police officers about the motives for her stay in Višegrad, she takes a risk, revisits Vilina Vlas and leaves 200 dandelions for the 200 rape victims on a bed in one of the hotel rooms. Prior to that, she confronts the author of the

Over—Now Serbs and Bosniaks Fight to Win Control of a Brutal History," *The Guardian*, Mar. 23, 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/23/war-serbs-bosniaks-history-visegrad. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

17 More information about the genesis of the film can be found in Andreas Wiseman, "Interview with Jasmila Žbanić: For Those Who Can Tell No Tales." *Screendaily*, Sept. 7, 2013, www.screendaily.com/interviews/jasmila-zbanic-for-those-who-can-tell-no-tales/5060158.article. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

travel guidebook asking for clarification of why he had omitted information about the rape camp in his book. Her character in the film does not cater to "self-exoticism," which Iordanova refers to when she writes about the conventional representation of a Westerner, looking for amusement, getting rewarded, and then leaving the place unchanged. Instead, the role of a visitor allows for a sober, yet direct confrontation with the subject of denial. Furthermore, it leaves little space for any sort of engagement in ethno-nationalist categorizations and representations.

Coming from afar, Kym is permitted to raise questions that otherwise would have remained unaddressed. As a tourist, she makes a video diary of her journey. "The camera is like a buffer between me and Višegrad. Seeing Višegrad through the lens makes it digestible," she says at one point. The camera lens as a protective shield facilitates her distance from the horrific history of Višegrad. Curiously, at the same time, it provides proximity to the denied war crimes. Her video recordings introduce a different quality of the image in the film. Blurry images of the Vilina Vlas hotel, as well as of the famous Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge over the Drina River, appear over and over again. These images appear where flashbacks would have otherwise explained the history, where images of torture and mutilated bodies would have sufficed, where survivors' testimonies or accounts could have clarified the context. They appear against the predictable representation. Metonymically, Kym's personal video recordings of present-day Višegrad, the famous bridge over the Drina, the Vilina Vlas hotel, stand in for systematic erasures, for all those omitted images of massive atrocities in the area. At the same time, they commemorate places without plaques, places that still emanate trauma and affect their visitors. They embody a dynamic relationship between the present, marked by denial, and the past, in which atrocities took place. The "haptic" qualities of Kym's footage invite the viewer to engage differently, to stop for a moment and contemplate. Engaged in reconstructing bits and pieces of the hidden history of a place, based on the information provided by the film, the viewer is now encouraged to invest his or her resources of memory, knowledge and imagination to finalize these images. By doing so, the viewer takes one step away from rationalizing the narrative and one step closer to the "unexplained" images that one is supposed to assign meanings to. It could be said that Vilina Vlas and the bridge over the Drina are justly commemorated in the film. However, a ruined three-storey house[18] in the

18 A ruined three-storey house in the film is the house in Pionirska Street, "where 59 Muslim women, children and pensioners were locked into a single room and incinerated on 14 June 1992" (as quoted from Borger, "War is Over"). This information is not specified in the

opening scene does not connect so easily with other images in the narrative, nor does it connect with the viewer's knowledge or the viewer's repertoire of virtual images, as Deleuze might argue.

Faced with the lack of cues about the history of a ruined house in Višegrad, the viewer is invited to look up their own virtual images to make emotional sense of this image. Our inability to connect this with other images in the narrative establishes what is closest to Deleuze's notion of optical image.

Deleuze relates the period after the Second World War to the appearance of "any-spaces-whatever" and "situations, which we no longer know how to react to." The emergence of these situations is connected with the loosening of the sensory-motor schema, which led to the rise of "pure optical and sound situations" and a "new race of characters," whom he calls "seers," "wanderers," and "a kind of mutants" (Deleuze, 2010, xi).

The optical image is characteristic of time-image cinema and, as such, contrasted with the sensory-motor image of movement-image cinema, which, according to Deleuze, characterizes classical Hollywood cinema. A linear unfolding of events, a firm narrative structure and goal-oriented character behaviour are implicated in the movement-image. A non-linear, fragmented structure with reflexive wanderers as characters marks the time-image cinema.

Bergson's actual-virtual distinction paved the way for Deleuze's distinction between the movement-image and the time-image type of cinema. I am not suggesting that *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* should be classified as a time-image, but it certainly shares some of the features of this type of cinema, like the optical image or the optical situation. Non-representational images in this film appear as optical images in the Deleuzian sense. Nevertheless, they do not constitute the time-image type of cinema. They appear as an exception rather than a 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 from within the representation.

The act of connecting the optical with the virtual or the recollection-image is an act of Bergsonian attentive recognition.[19] The inability to connect the optical image of the three-story house in Višegrad with either a sensory-motor

film, but was revealed by Kym Vercoe at the press conference at San Sebastian Film Festival 2013. For more information, see "Press Conference 'For Those Who Can Tell No Tales' (Official Selection)." *YouTube*, uploaded by sansebastianfestival, Sept. 12, 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWdXMygMXYA&ab_channel=sansebastianfestival. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

19 Deleuze reinforces Bergson's notion of "attentive recognition." His elaboration on the concept can be found in Deleuze, 2010, 42–65.

image in the narrative or the viewer's virtual image informs the viewer about disruptions of memory and the failure in recognition.

It could be said that the viewer of *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* succeeds more than fails in the process of attentive recognition or in making emotional sense of optical situations they come across. The viewer of *Depth Two* is, however, confronted with greater challenges.

Depth Two

Depth Two begins with a recounting of dredging a lorry full of corpses from the Danube River in Serbia, at the border with Romania. No investigations were carried out. The year is 1999, the time of the NATO bombing of Serbia. Previously, in Suva Reka, Kosovo, the Serbian police committed mass atrocities against villagers, ethnic Albanians. Bodies ended up in remote mass graves near a police facility at Batajnica, in a suburb of Belgrade. One woman discloses the details of her survival. This documentary draws on thriller conventions to engage the viewer in reconstructing war crimes and cover-ups, which take place at several locations across Kosovo and Serbia. Testimonies of eyewitnesses, perpetrators and a victim are in fact audio recordings from the ICTY trials. Given in voice-over seventeen years after the initial crimes were committed, they are juxtaposed with the present-day images of desolate landscapes, some of which are the former sites of atrocities.

In *Depth Two*, as in *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*, the proximity to the subject of denial is predicated upon the distance from the conventional representation of war trauma. The film makes use of testimonies, archival footage, and official state documents. At the same time, documentary-film conventions, such as static shots of interview-based talking heads, are carefully avoided. Information about crimes and cover-ups are offered in fragments. Former sites of crimes re-appear throughout the film. All these elements add up to create a suspense thriller. Yet, over the course of the film, characters' faces are never revealed, and no direct confrontation between the characters is made possible, which in effect moves the viewer outside the conventions of a thriller film. In this hybrid documentary thriller, the only convention that is not betrayed is the film's immanent logic, grounded in the rule of non-representational images that open the film up to experimental cinema.

Testimonies appear as recorded, emotionless accounts of tragic events, given in achronological order. They belong to perpetrators of crimes and cover-ups, bystanders, and a victim. For the whole duration of the film, these testimonies never match the faces they belong to. Disengaged from

faces and bodies, testimonies block the viewer's moral judgement ("he looks like a perpetrator," "oh, look at her, poor victim") as they enable closer attention to each individual experience. Testimonies in voice-over are juxtaposed with images of abandoned premises or desolate landscapes, some of which bear memories of atrocities, like a destroyed pizzeria in Suva Reka, or to devastating findings, like the calm waters of the Danube or the mass grave in Batajnica,[20] and some not. The strategy of divorcing audio statements from facial appearances, followed by re-attaching them to sequences of desolate landscapes, where war crimes took place, leads to the creation of non-representational images. In this set-up, occurring optical and audio images retain their relative independence. At times they refer one to another, by way of comment or association, at times they are completely detached from one another. Audio images inform about atrocities, as they were executed and experienced in the past. Optical images partly expose former sites of atrocities that attest to erasures of war crimes and a failure of remembrance. The audio layer has a factual or documentarian grounding, whereas the optical layer is less indicative. The spectator is invited to engage in reconstructing crimes he/she hears about, in chronologizing the narrative on one side, and in colouring the images of deserted places with their own memories, knowledge, and imagination, on the other. In her book *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, film scholar Vivian Sobchack reflects on consciousness as anchored in the spectator's lived-body situation. By doing so, she roots cinema and spectatorship in its spatial terms. Deleuze, in contrast, sees cinematic images emerging from action-reaction encounters, rather than from a perceiving subject situated in space. For Deleuze, consciousness is within images and primacy is given to the sensation of time; hence, to affect and memory. As for *Depth Two*, it could be said that the spectator is encouraged to move between the spatial and temporal mode of spectatorship, between experiencing narrative continuity and physical sensation, and experiencing affect and memory.[21]

20 "Forty-eight residents of the Kosovo town of Suhareka/Suva Reka were killed on March 26, 1999 by Serbian forces" as stated in Ivana Nikolić, "Activists March to Kosovo Mass Grave in Belgrade." *Balkaninsight*, Mar. 26, 2016, www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbian-activists-remember-suhareka-victims-03-26-2016. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025. Testimonies in the film revealed that a) fifty-three (mostly) intact corpses and three heads were found in the lorry in the Danube River and were later transferred to Belgrade; and b) more than 700 bodies were relocated and buried in Batajnica, the mass grave discovered in 2001 and 2002.

21 Darlene Pursley's analysis "Moving in Time: Chantal Akerman's *Toute une nuit*" was insightful for summarizing similarities and accentuating differences between Sobchack's and Deleuze's mode of spectatorship and for introducing a possibility of engaging both modes within a single film. More detailed account of this discussion is available in the previous chapter.

Fig. 2. *Depth Two* [Dubina dva], directed by Ognjen Glavonić, 2016.

The temporal mode of spectatorship complements, rather than excludes the spatial mode of spectatorship.

In his book *The Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière refers to problems of representation as to the triple constraint of resemblances. The first constraint is a visibility of the speech act; the second is a relation between knowledge-effect and pathos-effect or the causal relation between not knowing and knowing; and the third is the regime of rationality, which subjects its speech acts to intrinsic criteria of verisimilitude and appropriateness (Rancière, 2009, 120).

The first constraint, according to Rancière, the visibility of the speech act, is contested in *Depth Two*. As already elaborated, the film offers two regimes of truth, the audio and the visual, which do not necessarily corroborate one another and are further entangled with two layers of time—the past and the present. The second constraint is defied by having the effect ahead of the cause, by which the viewer of *Depth Two* learns first about the lorry with bodies plunged into the river, and then about the massive killings, which preceded its discovery.

With the opening scene, which offers a view on the peaceful Danube while the accompanying audio recounts the discovery of a lorry with corpses, the topic of denial of mass atrocities is decidedly addressed. The massive killing of Kosovars poses one type of problem. A network of people of different ranks, engaged in cover-ups, from digging out, transporting to re-burying or setting 700 corpses on fire, is a problem of another kind. Silences and systematic erasures of war crimes get problematized with the elaborate mechanism of cover-ups. The film itself disguises many details about the

atrocities by offering optical images that seek to connect with the viewer's virtual images. This clearly establishes the film's relation to the outside—by outside, I mean outside of the film's apparent internal frame of reference. According to Deleuze, its relation to the outside constitutes one of the four principles of nomadism. Nomadism is a framework of thinking that involves artistic experimentation and has a political relevance for rendering the escape from established codes.[22]

The first principle, mixing of codes, has already been discussed in terms of combining different genres into making a new style—an experimental documentary thriller. The second principle, the relation with the outside has been created through the film's reduced style in dealing with the topic of denial. Interestingly, the relation to the outside opens up intensity, the third principle. Intensity, bound to the virtual, is contrasted with representation. The fourth principle is humour or laughter, which is the only principle that cannot be found in this film.

The political relevance of non-representational strategies in *Depth Two* and *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* lies in showing how the denial of past atrocities can be approached in the present without reinforcing divisions across ethno-nationalist lines that keep post-Yugoslav society locked in its post-war condition.

The last film to be analysed in this chapter is Šejla Kamerić's *1395 Days Without Red*, which displays the highest degree of non-representation compared to the films previously discussed.

1395 Days Without Red: Non-Representation of War

The title of the film *1395 Days Without Red*[23] refers to the days of the siege, in which the citizens of Sarajevo were advised not to wear bright colours when leaving their homes. This was a precautionary measure against getting shot by snipers from the surrounding hills.

Before I explore its non-representational strategies, here is a brief summary of the film:

22 More about nomadic thought in Gilles Deleuze's "Nomadic Thought," in *Desert Island and Other Texts: 1953–1974*, 252–62, and in Patricia Pisters's *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture*, "Divine Intervention: Micropolitics and Resistance," 243–70.

23 *1395 Days Without Red* was initiated, developed, and filmed as a collaborative project by Šejla Kamerić and Anri Sala, an Albanian visual artist. The project has given life to two separate films. In this chapter I reflect on Kamerić's film.

> An elegant young woman makes her way through an empty city. At every crossing she stops, looks and listens. Should she wait or should she run? Should she wait for others or take the risk on her own?
> The city is Sarajevo, and the route the woman takes became known as Sniper Alley during the siege of the city endured by its citizens for 1395 days between 1992 and 1996. The woman, played by Spanish actress Maribel Verdú, is reliving the experience of the trauma of the siege. It is her individual journey through the collective memory of the city.[24]

Elsewhere in the city, Sarajevo's Symphonic Orchestra rehearses passages from Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony, *Pathétique*. The woman walks, stops, and runs in the same manner in which the musicians play, pause, and rehearse different sections of the symphony. The music resounds in her head, encouraging her to carry on with her daily route.

The film attempts to reconstruct a daily life experience in besieged Sarajevo. It offers a view on an individual journey from the present perspective into the collective past. *1395 Days Without Red* is an artistic articulation of an individualized collective memory.

During the course of the film, the viewer follows the protagonist crossing one junction after another in geographical order. But, as Douglas Brennan, an art critic, suggests in his review, her journey does not progress in a chronologically linear fashion, it "jumps forwards and backwards in time."[25] He adds that our understanding of how time passes in the film is not shaped through the use of dialogue, because there is none. Instead, the film oscillates between the crossing and the rehearsal scenes:

> with the chronological position of the crossing relative to the part of Tchaikovsky's piece the orchestra are currently playing … whether they are rehearsing a part that comes before or after the last in the previous scene dictates whether we have pro-/regressed in time.[26]

The music therefore plays a crucial role in structuring the film's chronology. The relevance of Tchaikovsky's piece goes beyond organizing the time in *1395*

24 The summary of the film is quoted from the Artangel's official website. See "Art Angel: Project Description: 1395 Days without Red." *Artangel.org.uk*, www.artangel.org.uk/project/1395-days-without-red/. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

25 See Douglas Brennan, "Review 1395 Days Without Red." *Ceasefire Magazine*, edited by Hicham Yezza, Oct. 19, 2011, www.ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/new-in-ceasefire/review-1395-days-red. Accessed Apr. 18, 2025.

26 As quoted from the same Douglas Brennan review.

Days Without Red. The music sets the pace, mood and emotion within the film. Besides, as Brennan further suggests, "each (film) event has its musical counterpart, with the sentiment of one mirrored in the other."[27] Essentially, as he adds, rehearsed music segments are not always simultaneous to the "crossing streets" events, but function as an alternative to them. There is therefore a notion of a dialogue, an exchange between the "crossing streets" scenes and the "music rehearsal" scenes. These artistic strategies are significant because they position the film on the opposite end from a conventional, linear film narrative, the one that is, according to Laura U. Marks, aligned with official history (Marks, 2000, 26).

Non-representational strategies deployed in the film are the following: the non-linearity of film events mentioned above, the previously discussed "disagreement" between sound and visual image and the complete absence of dialogue. The last choice is politically significant, if we follow Marks' writing about intercultural cinema. It implies a certain doubt about the use of language. It is as if words cannot "truthfully" convey collective trauma from an individualized perspective. And quietism can. Suspicion may arise from all known, mass-mediated people's testimonies about their life in besieged Sarajevo. This type of official, historical representation easily establishes a notion of a victim in a politically destructive sense. In his text "Sarajevo, mon amour," art historian Anselm Wagner notes that Kamerić works against current clichés about victims (poor, desperate, submissively seeking help, etc.). These clichés "only serve to produce a permanent condition of dependency, so that the 'helpers' can extend their position of power" (Two Words 28).

Instead of offering a melodramatic portrayal of a victim in a condition of dependency, *1395 Days Without Red* confronts the viewer with a series of visual and sound images reduced to the protagonist's walking or running, accompanied by her breathing heavily or humming bits of music from the 6th Symphony. This strategy proves to be a rather simple, precise and effective way of reconstructing the protagonist's experience of crossing Sniper Alley. It isolates and magnifies her feeling of being under constant threat, of being exposed and observed. Kamerić's insistence on making a dialogue-free film, with the use of Tchaikovsky's music, the protagonist's accentuated humming and breathing, defamiliarizes the cliché about the victim. Throughout the film, the viewer is exposed to present-day Sarajevo, its empty streets without traffic jams. Present-day Sarajevo looks quite different from the way besieged Sarajevo looked. There are no large, protective

27 Ibid.

Fig. 3. *1395 Days without Red* [1395 dana bez crvene], directed by Šejla Kamerić, 2011.

sandbags, plastic folium-covered windows, sounds of gunfire, and screams of wounded people. None of the haunting news images from television and newspaper coverage from the 1990s that many people are more or less familiar with. Instead, *1395 Days Without Red* depicts citizens of Sarajevo (actual survivors of the war!), and the protagonist, crossing one junction after another. They are running, stopping, walking—crossing the city's junctions in a repetitive mode. This somewhat odd behaviour of the citizens is superimposed on the present-day image of the city. Again, the viewer is exposed to a type of non-representational image, which, like the Deleuzian optical image, forces him/her to draw upon his/her "subjective resources in order to complete the image" (Marks 42); in other words, to engage in Bergsonian attentive recognition. The film does not leave many cues for the viewer to connect its image with a private or mediated memory of the war.

1395 Days Without Red focuses on the non-representation of one single aspect of life in besieged Sarajevo. "The bigger picture is replaced by a snapshot, and the siege becomes more tangible," claims Brennan.[28] He adds that a viewer, "forced to focus on the minute details that comprise a simple and singular aspect of quotidian routine,"[29] is encouraged to draw parallels between the protagonist's feelings and their own. A parallel between the protagonist's and the viewer's daily routine potentially makes the film communicate well with its audience elsewhere. Paradoxically, the focus on a single aspect, a strange citizen's behaviour, makes the siege experience

28 As quoted from the same Douglas Brennan review.

29 Ibid.

graspable for today's audience. The viewer is not distracted by what, otherwise, might be an official, more "appropriate" representation of life in besieged Sarajevo. The viewer does not need to verify the legitimacy and "truthfulness" of depicted events, according to what they know about the siege of Sarajevo. Compared to *Depth Two*, this film leaves fewer cues for the viewer to connect its images with any accessible memory of the war. Nevertheless, by leaving the perpetrator and human suffering out of sight and sound, the film recuperates the dignity of survivors of the war that was previously eventually lost to conventionalized and mass mediated images of suffering.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the movement from over-representation and representation to diverse—and more or less strong, or sustained—forms of non-representation in post-Yugoslav film. This movement is partly reflected in the change of register within the oeuvre of the same filmmaker. As could be seen, non-representational images of war can deviate from the linear, cause-and-effect narrative, but remain supportive of the film's overarching optimism and related goals, as in *Grbavica* and *Snow*. They can appear as inserted home videos or news footage and thereby challenge the coherence of the narrative structure, as in *Children of Sarajevo* and *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*. Alternatively, the cause-and-effect narrative can be left behind, and new temporalities can emerge with new sound/image arrangements, as in the fully fledged films of non-representation *Depth Two* and *1395 Days without Red*.

An evoked traumatic past can be successfully mastered and integrated into the films' present, as the films of representation show. Alternatively, its assimilation into the film's narrative, which is marked by its predisposed goal orientation and overarching optimism, can be challenged, as evident in the films featuring a higher degree of non-representation. The inserted home videos and archival footage challenge the linearity of the film narrative while accounting for the persistence of trauma. As could be seen, this anti-mimetic form of trauma is associated with the process of belatedly acting out as opposed to working through. Its unresolvedness is implicated in the enduring post-war condition and its associated state of apathy. Given such prospects: under what circumstances does the non-representational image unfold its potential as a means of creating more sustainable forms of understanding and "doing" post-Yugoslav history and society, and creating productive forms of future thinking? The political relevance of non-representational

strategies analysed in this chapter lies in approaching the denial of past atrocities without reinforcing divisions across ethno-religious lines that keep post-Yugoslav society locked in its post-war condition, and in restoring the dignity of a survivor of the war that was potentially previously lost to mass media images of human suffering. A shift away from objectifying victims, on one side, and towards escaping the convention of representation in order to restore dignity to victims, on the other, are issues of political relevance that were addressed in this chapter.

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