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Bosnia and Herzegovina



INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO



“Culture of Remembrance: Twilight or New Awakening”



International University of Sarajevo
12—13 April, 2014 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

Book of proceedings

I INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

*“Bosnia and Herzegovina – Culture of remembrance:
Twilight or new Awakening“*

Editors

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***“Bosnia and Herzegovina – Culture of remembrance:
Twilight or new Awakening“***

**I MEĐUNARODNI SIMPOZIJ
KULTURA SJEĆANJA**

***„Bosna i Hercegovina – Kultura sjećanja:
Sumrak ili Novo buđenje“***

**И МЕЂУНАРОДНИ СИМПОЗИЈ
КУЛТУРА СЈЕЋАЊА**

***„Босна и Херцеговина – Култура сјећања:
Сумрак или Ново буђење“***

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Interpretation and Point of View in Cinema: Bosnian Film from 1997 to 2013⁸

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Abstract

The persuasive character of films depends not solely on author's vision but the inherent feature of cinema and its most effective kinesthetic storytelling device – POV (point of view). Different types of characters' memory and reminiscences are made through the editing devices and the compatible POV if the author of the film. Inevitably memories of humans are changeable and they differ according to the individual background. Can objective memory of the camera contain the subcontexts that might be warped by different influences and stereotypes? Is fictional world liberated of the twisted memory and distorted truth of reality? The comparisons and contrasts between the POV of the conflict are to be discussed in the case studies: domestic, foreign and films from the region taking place in the war and after war Bosnian produced from 1997 to today. Some of the sample movies for the discussion are: *Gori vatra*, *Srpski film*, *Venuto al Mondo*, *The Hunting Party*, and *Halimin put*.

Keywords: Bosnian cinema, Bosnian conflict, stereotypes, POV, representation, identification, ideology.

Only human beings use symbols to denominate something that is not the prime significance of the sign thus forming the process of connotations. Human communication is of persuasive character, since the perspective to determine the difference between fact and opinion differ according to sociological and cultural backgrounds. Reality is perceived in groups of signs that we have societies' approval for. The artistic attempt to convey the reality or the author's vision of the reality can be reduced to the simple communication process between the creator of the strategic artistic idea or message aimed at emotions of the recipient. Manipulation with the impact of the art work results in the stereotyped values on the matter presented in the art work. Such impact is vividly evident in the motion pictures.

Ever since the beginning of the film exemplary influences of the film on its audience are enormous. Riccioto Canudo's manifest *The Birth of the Sixth Art* from 1911 for the first time argued and proclaimed cinema as the new art and the synthesis of the five ancient arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. Plato's mimetic art quality was immediately recognized among early film theorists (Stojanović, 1978). Realism as the main style was implemented immediately in this new art. The main feature of realism is to present the world as the real one, in which all the narrative elements (plot, situation, characters, conflicts, locations, etc.) stand on their own within the organized structure of the story conducted by that own world's rules. "Realism as a self-effacing form of storytelling draws on the general tendency in much art to hide the process of its

⁸ This essay is continuation on the series of texts on the same subject by the same author among which the first one is copyrighted article in the edited book by *Cities of Memory*, Queens University Belfast by the publisher Palgrave McMillan.

own making in favour of the impression that the world it represents exists on its own, autonomously” (Nichols, 2010, 177).

Even latter stylistic features in film, such as modernism and postmodernism, are relating to one simple quality of film: it has to be real to be convincing. The pioneer in documentary Dziga Vertov experimented with the leftovers film stock in the editing room, making the new document of the already documented reality on the film reel. For him, the camera and editing are equal in the process of filmmaking and by reformulation of the reality; a new, more perfect reality is born, seen through the cinematic, as well as human lenses of the creator of the film. His famous statement: “Life caught unawares” refers to the ability of film to be perfect as opposed to the imperfections of human eyesight (Cook, 2007). This cinema-eye perfection enables the creator to reinvent the perfect reality (or a new one) according to his own ideas and the messages that he wants the audience to be focused on. Nevertheless, everything in this process of cutting and editing reality depends on the point of view of the author. Whether it’s the fantasy world or the documentary, both of these genres are in the domain of mimetic and realistic qualities. The audience easily identifies with the reality on the screen. This reality can transfer the real reality, as the photograph does. The birth of cinema is characterized by this kind of mimesis.

Documentation of the train arrival to the station by brothers Lumière is copy pasting the real life. On the other hand *A Trip to the Moon* from 1902 makes its own reality. This first fantasy film, by George Méliès, draws the viewers into the fantasy travel to the space, but nonetheless very much real within its own made up narrative elements rules. This discrepancy between fantasy and realism is evident at the beginning of film, but also accurate and applicable today within the complex genre system of film storytelling. Both opposing styles have possibilities to be suggestive and persuasive, because both are real and we believe in them. The story of President Abraham Lincoln can be told in a realistic manner as was done by Steven Spielberg in an Oscar awarded film *Lincoln* from 2012. In the same year *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* a fantasy horror vampire movie was released, directed by Timur Bekmambetov and based on the novel by Seth Grahame-Smith. Both are indexical presentations of reality and mimetically interpret the made-up world of fiction based on the true events in history. One is a drama, and the other a vampire action. In both films we entrust our belief that the reality represented on screen is worth trusting and following. No other art has this trust issue with its recipients. For literature one does not need to trust, but imagine. When reading fiction or poetry imagination is the most important factor in the communication process. For paintings and fine art, aesthetic components of admiration, not trust in the given reality, is what is important. For music, emotions and catharsis, but not trust, are the most inherent features of the artist – consumer process.

Ever since the beginnings of the film, influences of the celluloid narratives on its audience are registered and this new medium, at first considered nothing more than an entertainment tool, showed that the slights of hand can have considerable convincing power. After seeing, what’s considered to be the first film, brother Lumière’s *The arrival of the Train at La Ciotat* in 1895 people jumped out of their seats believing that the train will enter the screening room when approaching in the close up shot to the camera. Broadcasting of the H.G. Wells’s interpretation of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938 by Orson Wells, making people believe that the actual aliens are invading earth, caused mass hysteria in USA. Internal Revenue Service noted the increased tax payments in 1943, after the mass distribution of the cartoon by Walt Disney, in which the famous children’s character Donald Duck is portrayed as the conscious citizen and diligent tax payer. The summer film season in 1975 was marked by the box office success of *Jaws*, the film that is to be taken as one of the first blockbusters. The horror story of the giant shark attacking and killing swimmers and tourists at random in the quiet Amity Island, caused the same devastating effect in the real world of tourism. The summer season was nearly destroyed, because people were afraid to

swim in the ocean. The vividly real and palpable fear of the giant aquatic monster was masterly directed by Steven Spielberg, and to this day has gone through so many sequels and different interpretations such as the latest Piranha 3D movie in 2010 (Panjeta 2006). Brazilian newspaper headlines in December of 1992, covering the story of the murder of Daniela Perez revealed the shocking truth about the psychological process of actors' identification. The partner of this young actress brutally murdered her in real life, after staging and shooting a scene in the soap opera *De Corpo e Alma* produced by TV Globo. In the said love scene the character played by Daniela Perez states that she does not love her partner anymore. After the murder in real life, the actor surrendered himself claiming that he confused the reality and the fiction he was playing in. The production company was later announced to be the accomplice in this brutal act. (*Telenovelas: BBC*, 1995, Alexandre Valenti)

It is an inherent feature of film to be convincing, because if it is not, the audience does not believe the interpreted reality or identify with the story, and thus the communication process is not working properly. Truthfulness and verisimilitude are the immanent features of narrative in film language. When looking at the simple Jacobson's explanation of communication process, one finds that it can be reduced to the simple equation consisting of sender, receiver and the message (Jakobson, 1966). The creator or sender of the message puts the information he or she possesses into an action with the goal aimed at the receiver's or customer's response. This action produces the message that is received and perceived by the receiver based on his or hers cultural and social background and in doing so produces the reaction of the receiver. This reaction can be considered as immediate feedback to the sender, but also as a delayed outcome of the perceived information resulting in the receivers beliefs, stands, emotions, behaviour, etc. This simplification of the human communication indicates that it can be of persuasive nature, because in any information that is put into the action by the receiver, there is some kind of goal, purpose, hidden agenda or strategy. Whether it's a simple statement that the weather today is bleak or the enchanted advertisement for the new Chevrolet, the sender of the message is sending his or hers own perception of the world towards the receiver and waiting for the response, that can, but does not always have to, qualify as the desired and strategically formed outcome. The impact that the message produces can be anticipated and premeditated by the creator of the communication process. The accuracy in achieving the goals in this persuasive communication is measured by propaganda experts, marketing tools, media and advertisement industry criteria, etc. The sophisticated methods for the manipulation of the receiver's responses are within the realm of propaganda techniques, but it is not possible to neglect the basic principles of communication that can be of persuasive nature even if it is not conducted by propaganda experts.

Film is, therefore, mimetic interpretation of the creator's vision and presentation of some given reality. The story of Snow White is worldwide spread and known, and it can be interpreted like Disney's 1937 animation or 2012 gothic horror version of *Snow White and the Huntsmen*. But, in both versions the good guys and the bad guys are the same: wicked evil stepmother is the antagonist (the bad guy), and the beautiful, innocent Snow White is the protagonist (the good guy). Everything else can be interpreted according to the author's vision.

War is similar to fairy tales. It is a story of two different sides; good and bad. How to portray the war in the fiction, and stay true to the reality of good and bad, as well as the victims and aggressors point of view? There be both in the real life, but is there room for both interpretations on one screen? If so, how is then possible to transfer such reality on screen without taking sides and producing further conflict. Is it possible for film to not use the above described persuasive techniques (intentionally or not) and stay true to reality? Which or whose interpretation of reality?

The battle between good and evil is an essential narrative for films. After the devastating war in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995, no winner is official proclaimed. The Dayton Accord signed in December 1995 stopped the killings and that's how the massacres in the centre of Europe in the 20th century were ended. No winner. The International Court of Justice in The Haag in 2007 delivered the decision on Genocide (not ethnic cleansing) committed in Srebrenica. Two entities: Serbian and Bosnian-Croat were created, as those were major two the sides in the conflict. Bosnian history now has the story with no winner that will always be subjected to the future interests of power. Baring this in mind, can film communicate or transcend the reality? How is the reality interpreted in films? Can film replace and become a collective memory?

The persuasive tools for making strategic goals in creation of collective memory or other persuasive outcomes in the films based on the dramatic devices and film storytelling are as follows: plot (conflict), antagonist propagates the protagonists causes, character (actions, lines, opinions, emotions), set design, props, costumes, POV in narrative, camera position and cutting the reality, cultural stereotypes, and genre of the film. The features of cinematography (placing the camera for the point of view thus interpreting the reality and transgressing the author idea and or ideology) and storytelling (narrative on Enemies and Saviors), subjugated to the stereotypes along with the propaganda possibilities and impacts of film contents and contexts in reference to the war and after war reality are of great importance in the analysis of the persuasive and denominating character in the verisimilitude of the fiction film reality.

The truth caught in *Savršeni krug* shoot in real location just after the war is evident to the survivors. In the same way the fake set design of the fighting scene background in which the glass windows are intact can be easily detected in the 2011 *In the Land of Blood and Honey* by someone who has witnessed the siege of the European city at the end of 20th century. The film loses the viewers trust (especially survivors' attention) not just because the images aren't transcending the right message. The story is purely conceived as the romance between the victim of the rape and the rapist. It is rumoured that the film is inspired by the true story. The reality behind it is not questionable. The film reality is not holding well the strings and stretches of the narrative, performing and editing.

Foreign movies (American production especially) are in need to determine who started the war, whereas domestic, including the Serbian films, are harsher and more realistic in depicting the horrors of war but not focusing so much on the bad guy. They also do not openly state that everybody is equally to blame. The general idea can be drawn as a conclusion that the war is stupid, and we did not need it. As the good story needs the dichotomy of good and evil, foreign understanding of Bosnian conflict has to be simplified and stereotyped. It is often given as a justification of the political silence at first and then the humanitarian or military intervention.

That's why *The Hunting party*, directed by Richard Shepard in 2007, tells the story of the catching of the bad guy, the war criminal Radovan Karadžić. It is very clear who the good guys are. Although filled with stereotyped judgmental images, the impression of justification, remorse, and pay off for the actions international community and the USA were taking (not taking) concerning the war in Bosnia is the major idea behind the film. Opening scene shows the arrival of the plane to Sarajevo International Airport along with the collage of images associated with Bosnian. The background music is of oriental origin, as has nothing in common with the Bosnian musical heritage. The shoot of an old guy in the Old Town of Sarajevo that was constructed during the Ottoman rule in middle ages, shows the fez on his head that has not been worn in real life for a century. Incidentally that costume is also of the Ottoman origin, not Bosnian. The comparable referent this stereotyped image, would be if one expected a cowboy to greet him or her upon the arrival at the J.F. Kennedy Airport in USA. The final title card in the film justifies the international involvement in the conflict, pointing out the Bad guy:

“In theory, the official hunt for war criminals, in Bosnia continues to this day. However, the two most wanted men – Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić – continue to elude the US, the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, The Hague and all in the civilized world who claim to be looking for them. In the ten years, that Radovan Karadzic has been on the run, he has published two books and one play. Perhaps, if the International Community opened summer stock theatre...” (*The Hunting Party*, final title card)

One year later the war criminal was caught.

Opposing to this cinema of good and bad are the domestic comic interpretations of war. Almost grotesquely comic are the Muslim, Serbian, Croatian and Albanian characters in *Parada* from 2011. Ex war heroes (each on their own side) that are united as bodyguards of the gay pride procession in Belgrade against the almost neo fascist chauvinist youth. As much as the earlier work of Srdjan Dragojević can be considered ideological and provocative, this film is mocking the war conflict and even though the stereotypical characters are offensive cultural representation, the film ends in the bitter sentiment of the tragedy and absurdity of violence. The bad guys are defined, but do not bare the necessary mask of religion, ethnicity or nationality. Opposing to the bad guys in reality but also heroes of the film (war criminals) these violent filled with hatred antagonists are the really bad ones - ugly ones. This concept of someone outside being the Ugly one (international community or fate itself) is evident in the 2010 snuff Serbian film *Srpski film*. If the content of this film is reviewed as the metaphorical subtext, the context is connotative and applicable to the war and break off the Yugoslavia.

One of the best foreign movies about the war that are indexical and symbolic at the same time to the referencing reality of war is *Shoot through the Heart* from 1998. The twisted, almost surreal world of city during the siege and subtle explanatory features of the everyday life, are of the utmost importance for any study of the war. Good guys and bad guys are defined and their motives explained.

Savršeni krug, the first after war Bosnian film is a metaphor for the siege of Sarajevo in reality, but also the connotation of resistance and refusal to submit in the face of violence and surrender by dying. The idea of totally experiencing the opposing religions and multi culture by an individual becomes collective in the film reality. Shot on the locations devastated by the shelling; the set designs are ideological but also witnesses of documented reality, because they become the certain historical reality.

It is evident that so many Bosnian films are keeping and propagating this multiculturalism quality. Characters are of different national and religious backgrounds and not necessarily the bad guy is always the aggressor or soldier. Whether it is *Turneja*, a Serbian movie that describes the beginning of the war from the point of view of the theatre group from Belgrade that happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or Bosnian films *Ostavljeni* and *Grbavica*, stories about the post-war perspective of the younger generation, whose life is effected extremely by the past: all of these movies are not openly propagating either side in conflict, but rather sophisticated ideological opinions and views are subtly given through the characters' behaviours and actions. The bad guys are stated clearly, but not insisted upon. The memory of enemies and victims is changeable, in films as in reality, but one adamant position of authors of these films stands: war was unnecessary, there were no winners, and it was all for nothing.

The Bosnian understanding of what the war was like for a common citizen (ordinary film character) is best explained in the tragically ending comedy *Gori vatra* from 2003. Bosnian Muslim Hamdo and Bosnian Serb Stanko are having a drink and discussing the war and who started it referring to it

as a “screw up”. Raising their voices in the conclusion that the problems in the whole story were the outsiders who came to save “me and you”. The conversation ends bleakly stating that the separation to each of its own ethnical groups was unnecessary. The film is not negating the fact that the Serbs were the bad guys in the war, but also portrays some Bosnian Muslims in the post-war period as corruptive and morally devastated. The conflict between Hamdo and Stanko (the Bosnian pronunciation of the names sounds similar), both Caucasian, similarly dressed, visually from the shared social status, and judging by the eloquently delivered lines having the same background education, is an incomprehensible phenomenon to be solved unless one of them is on the side of evil completely.

Almost all the domestic film production in the ex-Yugoslav region inclines subtly to the ideological views of the country of origin. But, all the post-war films are coherent in one idea: the war was stupid and the consequences devastating. Subtle offensive characterizations in lines or action of the antagonist are noticeable, but not adamantly claiming the rights of the winner and hero. Twenty years after the war one would expect to find at least one feature movie in the James Bond style, or at least following the Yugoslav cinema tradition of partisan action films. But, of all the films made, every one of them is related to the war and after war experience; and none of them is made in the style of partisan propaganda style and genre. „Ideology describes the lens through which individuals see and understand how they fit into the social world around them... There is, in fact, no guarantee that a given work will have a specific effect or generate a given response“ (Nichols, 2010, 287). Film can be persuasion tool; a memory of the culture in time with great impact on the audience, but the outcomes of the film communication are not always predictable.

Film references:

Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, 2012, Timur Bekmambetov

A Trip to the Moon, 1902, George Méliès

De Corpo e Alma, 1992, TV Globo

Gori vatra, 2003, Pjer Žalica

Grbavica, 2006, Jasmila Žbanić

In the Land of Blood and Honey, 2011, Angelina Jolie

Jaws, 1975, Steven Spielberg

Lincoln, 2012, Steven Spielberg

Ostavljeni, 2010, Adis Bakrač

Parada, 2011, Srdjan Dragojević

Savršeni krug, 1997, Ademir Kenović

Shot through the Heart, 1998, David Attwood

Snow White and the Huntsmen, 2012, Rupert Sannders

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937, William Cottrell, David Hand, Wilfred Jackson, Larry

Morey, Perce Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen

Srpski film, 2010, Srdjan Spasojević

Telenovelas: BBC, 1995, Alexandre Valenti

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