

# Trauma and Memory in Post-Yugoslav Cinema

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REVIEW PAPER

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## TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN POST-YUGOSLAV CINEMA

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The article discusses cinematic representations of memory and trauma in post-Yugoslav documentary and feature films that depict political and social reality in the post-socialist period. Through different modes of representation, from retrospective and testimonial to self-reflexive, post-Yugoslav films address important issues related to recent violent past. Since 1990s coming to terms with the past has been a central topic in public discourses and the complex and powerful role of memory in the formation of national identities has become a common topic in almost all artistic and cultural practices. Memory has become increasingly important in the construction of both individual and collective identity. As such, it has also become a site of struggle and identification. Contemporary post-Yugoslav filmmakers courageously tackle various issues related to collective memory, offering their point of view concerning events and personalities from Yugoslav history and the impact they have had on contemporary society. Younger generation filmmakers do not seek to perpetuate the nationalist discourse on war that marked the film production in the first post-socialist decade. The approach to recent history in their movies is more self-critical; the filmmakers reject self-victimization and self-exoticization and focus more on war-related guilt and embarrassment for the crimes committed by all belligerent sides.

**Key words:** post-Yugoslav cinema, trauma and cinema, memory and cinema, post-socialist cinema, post-war cinema.

## INTRODUCTION

The formation of new nation-states within the area of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s was prompted by the need to form new and allegedly authentic national identities. This new geo-political area, meanwhile, was redefined through ideological, cultural, historical and national "revitalization". Cinema, media

and other cultural practices were mobilized in an attempt to deconstruct shared cultural memory and create new national identities that continue to be a point of contention in former Yugoslav republics. Transition is the most commonly used term for describing the sociopolitical context and the changes that occurred in Southeastern Europe in the period followed by the breakdown of the socialist and communist regimes. However, this term does not have a uniform meaning. Kolanović (2013: 13–14) argues that socialism and transition are not mutually exclusive terms and that boundaries between transition, post-socialism and post-communism are quite blurred. According to the author, even the term transition is problematic as its outcome is uncertain. Political and economic changes in the transition period brought about significant changes within the cultural fields in former Yugoslav countries. The process of defining new national identities was slightly different in former Yugoslav countries compared to other Eastern European countries. In the early 1990s the concept of supranational Yugoslav identity was first contested and the sense of belonging to a new nation was asserted in media and cinema. That was most evident in Croatia, seemingly characterized by an ambivalent and often hostile relationship to its Yugoslav past. Yugoslavia began to be perceived as an incomprehensible mixture of incompatible peoples, religions and cultures: Western and Balkan. Media and other cultural practices played a pivotal role in the nationalization processes in each republic giving space to a series of “invisible losses” (Ugrešić 1998: 79) such as removing and replacing monuments or changing street names, which helped to erase the sense of common Yugoslav identity. Unlike Eastern Europe, which had undergone a period of colonization by the Soviets, who were considered barbaric by many Eastern European nations, in former Yugoslavia ethnic and religious hatred was not a consequence of the colonialist experience of being controlled by a superior power, but rather by an “inferior” partner.<sup>1</sup> Vidulić indicates two patterns in practices aimed at erasing shared collective memory. The first one is the Yugo-nostalgic discourse that “mourns the destruction of the ‘natural’

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<sup>1</sup> Some ethnic groups, such as Slovenians and Croats, have had a sense of superiority in relation to other ethnic groups due to their historical legacies and cultural proximity to Italy and Austria as well as their economic development. During the communist period, Serbia, being the largest of the republics, hosted all institutions of power and was perceived by the other republics as a colonizer. This position was increasingly contested as Serbia was regarded as an inferior colonizer due to having a large rural population, few natural resources and no access to the sea (see Mazierska et al. 2014).

Yugoslav cultural space over ‘artificial’ division into ‘imagined’ national cultures” (2017: 29). The second one, “‘Yugo-allergic’ narrative celebrates the break-up of the ‘artificially forced’ Yugoslav cultural space in favor of liberated, newly born national culture, framed within a ‘natural’ nation-state” (Vidulić 2017: 29). Cinema has also contributed to the overall shift from the promotion of a supranational sense of Yugoslav identity to the more local forms of identification tied to ethnic and religious identity. The space of post-Yugoslav<sup>2</sup> cinema has, in the postwar period, proven to be a fruitful one for critical reflections of the past. Since 1990s coming to terms with the past has been a central topic in public discourses and the complex and powerful role of memory in the contemporary formation of national identities has become an essential problem in almost all artistic and cultural practices. The relations between former Yugoslav republics are still an inexhaustible source of controversy and the shared recent history is still an open battlefield of interpretations.

## MEMORY AND CINEMA

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Issues of memory, history and trauma are essential for understanding the process of nation-building in modern post-war Yugoslav republics. Memory has become increasingly important in the construction of both individual and collective identity. As such, it has also become a site of struggle and identification. As Antze and Lambek argue, “Memory becomes a locus of struggle over the boundary between the individual and the collective or between distinct interest groups in which power becomes the operative factor” (1996: xx). Interest in the representation of history in post-Yugoslav cinema raises questions about the relationship between history and memory. Unclear boundaries between the two terms are reflected in the proliferation of terminology that, according to Aleida Assmann (2011), encompasses political, social, cultural and individual memory. Historical memory is often understood as a collective or social memory and it has become essential for the self-identification of the individual and the society as a whole. Of

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<sup>2</sup> The use of “post” in this article does not barely indicate “after”; rather, I draw from Jelača’s notion of the term “post” that “implies the paradox of *exiled continuation* as a dislocated state where culture is sometimes produced in most illuminating ways” (2016: 29). It assumes a broader application of the concept; a shared cultural space particularly when addressing the traumas related to the same event.

no less importance is the fact that the boundary between individual and social memory is quite problematic. Memory is by definition subjective but is simultaneously structured by the society and its shared cultural norms. Personal recollections are also social and they simultaneously comprise both personal identity and the fabric of the society. Therefore, any attempt to use individual memory as a historical source should include both the personal and the social nature of memory. Distortion or re-interpretation of memory is usually caused by a series of external limitations that society imposes:

The images of events (in the form of cultural stereotypes, symbols, and myths) fixed in collective memory provide interpretive models that allow the individual and the social group to maneuver in the world and in specific life situations. Historical memory is viewed as a complex sociocultural phenomenon that ties into the conceptualization of historical events and historical experience (actual and/or imagined) and simultaneously as a product of mass consciousness's manipulation of channels of authority for political ends. More than socially differentiated, historical memory is also variable. (Repina 2017: 321)

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In his book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925)<sup>3</sup> French social scientist Maurice Halbwachs delineates social and collective dimensions of individual memory expanding the scope of history beyond facts and focusing on various forms of the establishment of official history. His analysis is dedicated to the ways in which memory is constructed, shaped and mediated in a broader social context and its importance for the construction of identity. He argues that history takes from the past only that which the present society is still interested in. "This is why society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other. It is also why society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the various conditions of its equilibrium" (Halbwachs 1992: 182–183). Thus, the history of remembering implies the history of forgetting. Therefore, collective memory is a product of cultural influences and struggles between social groups that tend to impose certain "truths" with greater force on other groups and establish agreed versions of the past. Cultural memory tends to be formalized and ritualized through conventional images and serves to stabilize the society's self-image. Individual memory, on the other hand, relies on the framework of social memory, and private

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes are taken from the English translation of the book, *On Collective Memory* (1992).

recollections are evaluated and shaped through continuous interchanges and confrontations with collective memory.

Many post-Yugoslav movies since 1990 have featured war either directly, focusing on events, or indirectly, addressing the consequences of the war in the transition society, such as violence, corruption and poverty. By focusing on questions of fight for national identity, some directors glorified the war and stressed the topic of nationhood, whereas others used the images of war and violence to perpetuate the clichéd portrayal of Balkan culture and peoples. In the first post-socialist decade, former Yugoslav cinemas were marked by similar aesthetics and topics influenced mainly by nationalist policies. Most films released at the beginning of the transition period were strongly ideologically charged. By creating a sense of fear and imminent threat from the Other, movies echoing nationalist narratives justified war and violence as an act of self-defense; they were used to justify political chauvinism and divert the attention of the audience from corruption, clientelism, economic and political problems, and non-transparent privatization of state-owned enterprises.<sup>4</sup> They were products of "the need to prove the inevitability of ethnic conflicts in the region" (Levi 2009: 176) and history was used as an essential ideological framework for enhancing hatred and ethnic intolerance towards the Other. The second type of movies that addressed the war complied with the simplified Western gaze of the area that reduced heterogeneous population to a single, stable identity. Such feature films released in the 1990s were labeled by some international film scholars as "Balkan cinema" (Iordanova 2001, 2003, 2006) or "Balkan film genre" (Daković 2008)<sup>5</sup> as they

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<sup>4</sup> Serbian film scholar Nevena Daković (2008) argues that the nationalist discourse in Serbia came to life through the "strategy of remembrance"; reinvention of the national history and revival of the myth of martyrdom, injustice and sacrifice. National discourse in Croatia was reinforced through the myth of victimhood and overtly stressed justification of the war for independence (e.g., Jakov Sedlar's movies *Gospa/Mother of God*, 1994 and *Četverored/ In Four Rows*, 1999). Unlike Croatian and Serbian cinema, new Bosnian cinema lacks in highly emotionally-charged nationalist movies (*Ničija zemlja/No Man's Land*, dir. Danis Tanović, 2001; *Kod amidže Idriza/Days and Hours*, dir. Pjer Žalica, 2004; *Snijeg/Snow*, dir. Aida Begić, 2008). In Bosnian post-war feature films "the enemy is often an eternal, mythical perpetrator or an unknown foreigner that destroys ancient, idyllic, pastoral image of the world, while the war is seen as a result of the cyclic exchange of good and bad times" (Ibrahimović 2008: 120).

<sup>5</sup> A number of scholars, including Maria Todorova (1997) and Thomas Elsaesser (2005), have noted that Western strategies of representation of Balkan cultures and people function in a similar way to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. Following the Western strategy of representation of the area, several international film scholars, specialized in the cinemas of the region, have grouped the cinemas of Southeastern Europe (former Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece,

perpetuated Western stereotypes on the Balkans representing this area as primitive, exotic and wild; a kind of Third World bordering the First World. In former Yugoslavia, "Balkanism can be seen as a culture of Orientalization, in which the Balkan nations construed each other as beneficiaries or victims of purported Orientalism" (Mazierska et al. 2014: 12). The trend of self-exoticism and the portrayal of Balkan culture as archaic, violent and barbaric was embraced by several internationally acclaimed local filmmakers (*Dom za vešanje/ Time of the Gypsies*, dir. Emir Kusturica, 1989; *Underground*, dir. Emir Kusturica, 1995; *Crna mačka, beli mačor/ Black Cat, White Cat*, dir. Emir Kusturica, 1998; *Bure baruta/ Cabaret Balkan*, dir. Goran Paskaljević, 1998; *Lepa sela lepo gore/ Pretty Villages Burn Nicely*, dir. Srđan Dragojević, 1996; *Rane/ Wounds*, dir. Srđan Dragojević, 1998; *Pred doždot/ Before the rain*, dir. Milčo Mančevski, 1994) that have developed their "aesthetics of violence".<sup>6</sup> "All these films emphasize violence and 'untamed', 'savage' nature of the Balkans by staging stories full of unmotivated violence, hatred, betrayal and cruel vengeance" (Pavičić 2010: 44), but they do not really address trauma on an individual or a collective level. The excessive presence of war in post-Yugoslav cinema might be seen as an attempt to comply with the trend of self-Balkanization but it was also a necessary exercise of coming to terms with the wartime traumas.

Nevertheless, a few Croatian directors in the 1990s expressed scepticism towards the alleged authenticity of national history and occupied themselves with the revision of history by representing previously forbidden historical events: Davor Žmegač's *Zlatne godine* (*The Golden Years*, 1993), an exciting story of the Croatian anti-Titoist student protests in 1971; Zrinko Ogresta's *Krbotine*

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Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) under the umbrella terms of "Balkan cinema" and "Balkan film genre", claiming that the post-communist movies share many stylistic and thematic affinities as well as cultural, geopolitical and historical realities. The problem with the transnational approach is the fact that the Balkans is a vague concept and some former Yugoslav countries, such as Slovenia and Croatia, have refused to acknowledge their cultural legacy with the Balkans since, historically, both countries were under Venetian and Austro-Hungarian rule, and they have had few or none Byzantine, Ottoman or Turkish influences. However, the image of the Balkans as a heterogeneous area offered to the Western audience is reduced to the shared imagery of landscape, people and architecture. By blurring the boundaries between different cultures and people, Western cinema and media have perpetuated a Eurocentric perception of the region.

<sup>6</sup> These movies are full of irrational violence among ordinary people and they reflect an Orientalist attitude towards the Balkans. According to Kronja, these movies "fail to provide the mechanism of social violence, to trace its origins and its cancer-like spread" and this failure is due to the fact that no "symbolic representation could match the real violence in the streets" (2006: 32).

(*Fragments*, 1991), a story about a family accused of supporting Croatian separatist forces; and the most controversial documentary of the decade, Lordan Zafranović's *Zalazak stoljeća: Testament Lordana Zafranovića* (*Decline of the Century: Testament of Lordan Zafranović*, 1993). Zafranović's controversial historical documentary about the Croatian fascist state during World War II, is also a personal statement, which is easily deduced from the title. The movie is made as a collage of the archival footage and newsreels on the fascist state and the scenes from the trial of one of the key Ustasha leaders, Andrija Artuković, who was already senile at the time of the filming. Historical materials are juxtaposed with excerpts from the director's earlier feature films on fascism, violence, power and historical memory. The movie is a director's journey through his own individual memory and the collective memory. Zafranović's movie examines critically the revisionist tendencies in the 1990s in a self-reflexive way by including archival materials and his older movies, and inviting the spectators to take part in his attempt to construct a causal link between the present-day Croatian nationalism and the World War II fascist marionette state. Unconventional fragmented narrative structure reflects the complexities of the last fifty years of national history and the director's struggle to come to terms with it. Nevertheless, the dogma of continuity dominates narrative time in *Testament* highlighting the provisionality of the discourses on ethnos and national identity nursed by collective memory in Croatia in the 1990s. The documentary resists traditional expository narrative structure typical of historical documentaries and adopts a more personal approach by narrating the past from the present point of view and suggesting a causal link between the present-day Yugoslav republics and past events. Zafranović addresses the process of collective memory and identity construction in relation to historical narratives stressing the role that media and cinema have had in the process, especially traditional documentaries supported by the Ministry of culture. As Zafranović has showed in his movie, historical narratives are, to a large extent, constructed by discourses on historical remembrance which are the basis for the formation of national identities. Therefore, the main topic of the documentary is not history as such but the manipulation of memory and the construction of historical discourse. Zafranović stresses the importance not only of remembering but also of forgetting by revealing the strategies with which the "culture of lies" was introduced. In her book *The Culture of Lies* (1998) Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić claims that a culture of lies was established during the war in the 1990s by the terror of remembering and the terror of forgetting. Forgetting was an indispensable prerequisite for



the creation of new national identity. Collective memory was deconstructed, rewritten and proclaimed politically correct or incorrect. It was a protective reaction that enabled people to quickly adopt the new identity rooted in nationalist discourse. Similarly to Ugrešić (1998: 227–228), Caruth argues that “history thus seems central to the functioning of the political world, both as its memory and as the ground upon which the political world builds a future” (2013: 40). As Zafranović’s movie shows, the denial of the historical acts is subordinated to particular political purposes. The lies regarding the role of the fascist state that were perpetuated in the 1990s were aimed at deceiving not only individuals but the whole society. This tendency was aimed “not at particular facts but at the entire framework of factuality as such” (Caruth 2013: 42).

First feature films that seriously addressed the war and violence came from a new generation of filmmakers in the period after the year 2000 when the cinema of self-Balkanization was replaced by the “cinema of normalization” (Pavičić 2010, 2011). The approach to recent history in their movies is more self-critical; the filmmakers reject self-victimization and self-exoticization and focus more on war-related guilt and embarrassment for the crimes committed by all belligerent sides. *Crnci* (*The Blacks*, dir. Goran Dević and Zvonimir Jurić, 2009) breaks with the self-perception of the Croats as victims of the war and admits the crimes committed by Croatian forces in the scenes that resemble the “Garage case” in which Serbian civilians were tortured and murdered in Osijek at the beginning of the war. *Svjedoci* (*Witnesses*, dir. Vinko Brešan, 2003), a movie about the murder of a Serbian civilian by three Croatian soldiers, openly criticizes the cover-up of Croatian war crimes and does not try to exempt Croatian soldiers from their culpability. The orientation to everyday matters and the focus on the present moment is a common topic in the movies of a new generation of filmmakers. The characters in these movies usually live in urban surroundings and try to make a living in an impoverished post-war society.<sup>7</sup> The filmmakers tackle courageously various

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<sup>7</sup> At the end of the 1990s a new group of directors emerged in Croatia. Film critics greeted with enthusiasm the birth of the so called “New Croatian Cinema” – a group of young filmmakers (Lukas Nola, Hrvoje Hribar, Goran Rušinović, Zrinko Ogresta, and Vinko Brešan) whose works were inspired by postmodern European and US cinema (see Gilić 2011). They addressed the war and its social, political and economic consequences in contemporary society (*Nebo sateliti*/*Celestial Body*, dir. Lukas Nola, 2000; *Tu/Here*, dir. Zrinko Ogresta, 2003). A new wave of Serbian filmmakers appeared immediately after the end of the war. Their movies reflected socio-economic conditions of contemporary Serbia: poverty, international isolation

issues related to collective memory, offering their point of view concerning events and personalities from Yugoslav history and the impact they have had on contemporary society. Younger generation filmmakers do not seek to perpetuate nationalist discourse on war and hatred that has divided the region. Besides socially engaged movies, another interesting phenomenon appeared in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's breakup; Yugo-nostalgic cinema. As Volčič argues, "Yugo-nostalgia can indeed be a vital tool in assisting former Yugoslavs to negotiate the historical tensions that all too often manifest themselves in contemporary conflicts" (2007: 27). It is not a simple and romanticized longing for the past but "a kind of longing for the desires and fantasies that were once possible" (Volčič 2007: 27.). It does not come as a surprise that several filmmakers decided to represent the cult of the former Yugoslav president Tito. These original works, mostly mockumentaries and comedies, do not simply call for the renewal of a shared sense of belonging to the Yugoslav community but they recall old memories, opening up many possibilities of coming to terms with the Yugoslav history. Surprisingly, comedies are first to be credited for making the films about war successful both locally and internationally. Vinko Brešan's debut comedy *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the War Started on my Island*, 1996), set in 1991 on an unnamed Dalmatian island where a Yugoslav National Army officer refuses to surrender the army base to Croatian forces, and the following movie *Marsal* (*Marshall Tito's Spirit*, 1999), set on another Dalmatian island where the ghost of Marshall Tito appears, are ironic attempts to construct the narrative of war. Reality-based comic tales build tension and laughter around stereotypes of patriotism and nationalism. In both films the director satirizes many aspects of contemporary Croatia. Two outspoken Serbian filmmakers and critics of Milošević's regime, Želimir Žilnik (*Tito po drugi put među Srbima* / *Tito Among the Serbs for the Second Time*, 1994) and Goran Marković (*Tito i ja* / *Tito and I*, 1992), question the role of Tito and the way that his image was perceived after Yugoslavia's breakup. All four films are intentionally provocative and sarcastic as they attempt to demonstrate the ambiguity of Yugoslav history as a politically conditioned

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and the spread of violence and crime. Nevena Daković (2008) lumps these movies under the term "urban neorealism" since they were set in New Belgrade and architecture played an important role in depicting moral, economic and social degradation (*Do koske* / *Rage*, dir. Boban Skerlić, 1998; *Apsolutnih sto* / *Absolute Hundred*, dir. Srđan Golubović, 2001; *Klopka* / *Trap*, dir. Srđan Golubović, 2007).

social and ideological construct. Želimir Žilnik's<sup>8</sup> *Tito po drugi put među Srbima* is a Serbian mockumentary starring Dragoljub Ljubičić, a well-known Tito impersonator, strolling on the streets of Belgrade dressed in the military uniform of the deceased Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. He brings on stage resurrected Marshall Tito that engages in informal talk with ordinary people on contemporary political and economic situation in post-socialist Yugoslavia. Žilnik's mockumentary questions Tito's cult of personality and the way ordinary people on the streets of Belgrade react to him more than a decade after his death. The film was shot during the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina but, interestingly, that fact is not mentioned in the movie. Witty and entertaining dialogues and improvised scenes are juxtaposed with the newsreels. The movie mocks the existing myths around Tito's personality in an ironic tone. People react spontaneously to fake Tito and the movie shows different points of views and emotional responses, thus informing the spectators about the conflicting views on the past and the present in post-socialist Serbia. Some still adore Tito while others are critical of his policy.

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The first seriously engaged movies on war and recent history were documentaries released in Serbia after 2000, Goran Marković's anti-regime documentary trilogy, comprising *Poludeli ljudi* (*Crazy People*, 1997), *Nevažni junaci* (*Ordinary Heroes*, 2000), *Srbija, godine nulte* (*Serbia, Year Zero*, 2001), is a direct account of the anti-regime protests that took place in Serbia in 1996 and again in 2000, the year of Milošević's abdication. Janko Baljak's suggestive documentaries *Anatomija bola I* and *II* (*Anatomy of Pain I*, 2000, and *II*, 2001) depicts personal traumas of the family members of the Serbian National Television employees that were killed in the NATO bombings. All the films are personalized accounts of historical moments in which the directors or main characters critically examine the complex relationship between the individual and collective experience of living under the severe Serbian nationalist regime. The documentaries were not government sponsored and, as such, provide rich resources for discussing the interaction of recent history, memory, trauma and identity in the post-Yugoslav countries. Because most of them were produced independently, the directors could express their views autonomously in regard to the state policy and they follow rather subversive

<sup>8</sup> Žilnik is one of the major figures of the Yugoslav Black Wave known for his socially engaged movies in the 1970s that were criticized and often banned by the establishment. In the 1990s he became an outspoken critic of Milošević's regime in Serbia (see Jončić 2002 and Tirnanić 2008).

approaches to recent historical events. These documentaries juxtapose official history with private memories of protagonists or directors, as it is the case with Goran Marković's documentary *Srbija, godine nulte*. In this documentary the process of self-narration is implicitly public and political; Marković situates the personal within the political and the political within the personal. He deconstructs the official memory and reveals the fissures in the iron-clad national narrative. This movie represents the filmmaker's ethical and political struggle to position himself critically in relation to the nationalist myths. *Srbija, godine nulte* covers the first decade after the breakup of Yugoslavia, from the rise to power through the dictatorship and the fall of Slobodan Milošević in 2000. The movie focuses on a single person (director) as he goes back into his personal history while looking back on the previous fifteen years in Serbia. The director's personal testimony alternates with the analysis of the situation in present-day Serbia. The splitting of the self is intrinsically embedded in the first-person documentary; when a filmmaker makes a film about himself, he is both the subject making the film and the object of the gaze. In his book *The Subject of Documentary* (2004) Michael Renov concludes the introduction by arguing that "the subject in documentary has, to a surprising degree, become the subject of documentary" (2004: xxiv). By freeing filmmakers to interrogate their personal position within the public sphere, first-person narration moves the audience from the realm of evidentiary truth to the instable realm of introspective discourse. The protagonist/director goes back into his personal history and by doing so he reflects on the history of his country, shifting the personal witnessing mode into the collective memory account. This is not a typical autobiographical documentary as the director's aim is not merely to reconstruct his life but to engage critically with personal and collective past and to question his responsibility and his role in the history of his country.

## TRAUMA AND CINEMA

Whereas the documentaries in the first post-socialist decade focused mainly on private and collective recollections of recent history, recent documentary films give a central place to trauma. In the 1990s documentaries memory was called upon to legitimate identity and to question social production and reproduction of memory discourses and its uses in collective cultural practices. Contemporary documentary filmmakers are interested in the relationship

of narrative and embodied forms of remembering. Audiovisual testimonial records from the 1990s Yugoslav war encompass a wide array of forms from unedited video recordings to documentary films, personal reminiscences or journalist reports. Increasingly, the memory that the movies released in the last fifteen years talk about is the memory of trauma. Three main tendencies can be outlined in the recent documentary production: historical documentaries aimed at deconstructing, reinterpreting and subverting nationalist historical narratives; autobiographical, self-reflexive and first-person documentaries that deal with personal or collective traumas; and testimonial documentaries. Historical documentaries aimed at re-thinking the past appeared immediately after the break-up of Yugoslavia, as can be seen in the previously mentioned documentaries by Marković, Baljak and Zafranović. Self-reflexive and testimonial documentaries will be analyzed further in the text. Recent documentaries do not call for an illusionary return to the unmediated past but they stress the process of (re)presentation and construction of private and collective memory; they do not only provide historical truths but they also address the process of remembering and forgetting from different angles. The very ideas of individual and collective discourses on memory and trauma come into play in both feature and documentary films. Recent self-reflexive documentaries make no pretension to perform simple recordings of reality. On the contrary, they filter their assertions about the world through fluctuating notions of complex subjectivities and skepticism towards prescribed aesthetic conventions of documentary filmmaking.

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Trauma has been studied in different disciplines; it is not only a psychological condition related to PTSD but its significance can be extended into the domain of literary, cultural and media texts. Contemporary trauma theory, as developed by scholars such as Felman and Laub (1992) and Caruth (1995), is concerned with the nature of traumatic memory and the crisis it poses for the understanding of historical narrative. According to Caruth, the past intrudes unexpectedly in the present without being assimilated with the linear narrative of our conscious memory; it often returns in the form of nightmares or flashbacks carrying both the truth of an event and the truth of its incomprehensibility (1995: 5–6). Trauma theory seeks to establish a link between the image, witnessing and trauma, and the ways in which media representations construct the past. Visual media have helped to create conditions in which trauma has assumed significance by extending our means of recording and remembering historical events. This does not imply that represented traumas provide an authentic link with the past as images

of violence can be manipulated through different audiovisual mediations of historical experience (digital manipulation of the image, cinematic dramatizations of history, reconstruction of past events in docufictions, etc.). Kaplan and Wang (2004) argue that the proliferation of spectacle and simulation has led to Disneyfication of history by corporate media and to distortion of trauma in narratives and images. In his essay "Postmodernism as Mourning Work" (2001), Elsaesser analyzes how the belated impact of remembered experience interacts with discursive mediations of historical events in visual media. Owing to new media, culture generates and circulates new forms of media history (2001: 198), it accommodates new narratives and mediated histories that replace earlier forms of historical narrative. Film embodies the paradox of trauma and its representation; it represents events with great immediacy although the traumas are located in remote space and time. There is an obvious parallel between displaced and delayed traumas and media representations without reference to any original context. This paradox is conditioned by the unreproducible nature of trauma whose "truth" is constantly contested. Similarly to trauma, that is authentic yet ultimately inaccessible experience, the image is displaced in relation to the event it represents. Therefore, the understanding of photographic or cinematic images as indexically-based realistic representations of the past is challenged since these images need to be situated in larger ideological and cultural frames to understand how trauma is articulated and how its visual representations shape our relation to history. Guerin and Hallas (2007) reject the presumption that moving images speak for themselves and argue that the claims to truth in documentary film must be shattered. They stress the shift that occurred in the early 1990s "from a narrow focus on questions of truth and referentiality in documentary film to a theoretical and historical concern with its complex discursive constructions" (2007: 5). Historical trauma in post-war societies can be understood not only in terms of bearing witness to specific events but also as an ongoing struggle over the representation of the past. Therefore, addressing the trauma plays an important role in that struggle. "Historical traumas are constructions of collective memories that cannot be verified through empirical research, or by ascribing an indexical relation between the image and the real" (Meek 2010: 1).

Recent research on trauma and media is concerned with visual evidence and testimony. Close ties between cinema and memory have been foregrounded by cinema's capacity to manipulate memory's divergences from linear temporality and to express memory's free associations. The shocking nature

of traumatic events causes disturbance of normal memory. Therefore, the representation of memory in cinema often involves experimenting with form and style, narrative temporality, cause and effect, elliptical, fragmented narratives. Some scholars, drawing from the theories of cinema not as representation but as a bodily experience (Shaviro 1993), suggest that trauma films can be a convenient platform to work out the memories and cinema can be conceived of as a mode of memory. Cinema has marked a distinctive shift in the exteriorization of memory by representing inner worlds and their complex web of meaning. "But the ways that these images are remembered and become woven into the texture of identity/memory is as much a question of the history of individual subjects as it is a question of films themselves" (Radstone 2010: 336). Our world is constituted of images that are positioned in our minds between the personal and the cultural memory. Situated within the mind, cinematic images are fused with the personal images and, with time, the boundaries between them become more and more blurred. The concept of personal and collective, individual and cultural, just like the boundaries between memory and cinema, have become inseparable. For the theorist Victor Burgin the bounding of the inner memories and cinematic images constitutes the "location of cultural experience" (qtd. in Radstone 2010: 337), which contributes to the formation and dissemination of commonly held beliefs and values and stresses the ambiguities of the terms "private" and "public" memory. Cinema shapes personal memory just like it constructs public memory; images become articulated with pre-existing images and narratives. Felman and Caruth stress the impossibility of adequately representing traumatic experience, whereas Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang propose different ways of relating to traumatic experience in film, ranging from traumatization, voyeurism, empathetic identification to witnessing (2004: 9–10).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kaplan and Wang are not interested in developing a new genre of trauma cinema but in discussing how trauma affects the viewer. They suggest four positions for the viewer according to different cinematic strategies. The first type of cinema has a comforting effect on the viewer and it is aimed at forgetting traumatic events (e.g., Hollywood melodramas). The second position is that of a traumatized viewer who is shocked by the movie (e.g., Holocaust movies). The third position of being a voyeur offers a sort of pleasure in catastrophic images (e.g., ethnic wars, catastrophes). The fourth position of being a witness opens up space for identification with the victims and allows the viewer to be there emotionally (e.g., *Hiroshima, mon amour*, dir. Alan Resnais, 1959).

Collective identification with the trauma and the relation to the past in post-Yugoslav societies have been defined to a large extent by visual media. Cinema has had a specific role in the (re)articulation and revision of cultural memory but it has also addressed intimate spheres of victimhood and human suffering and their affective relations to cinema as a domain in the field of cultural memory. National memories are best evoked, revised and negotiated in first-person documentaries<sup>10</sup> that meld both personal and collective memory of the war. In first-person documentaries the focus is not so much on the topic but on the mode of address that stresses the subjectivity of the author. As Alisa Lebow argues, “I is always social, always already in relation, and when it speaks, as these filmmakers do, in the first person, it may appear to be in the first person singular ‘I’ but ontologically speaking, it is always in effect, the first person plural ‘we’” (2012: 3). Despite the fact that first-person documentaries speak about personal experiences, they can also be understood as cinema of “we” as they also speak for the entire social body. In recent post-Yugoslav documentary cinema, there is a strong tendency to present past events as filtered by somebody’s memory. In Tiha Gudac’s documentary *Goli (Naked Island, 2014)* family photographs and archival footage are used to connect the present with the past and they form a collage that never fully replaces the missing picture of the director’s grandfather’s traumatic experience on Naked Island. Autobiographical sources are embedded in the history of the collective memory. They reveal traces of the “unspeakable” truth about the grandfather’s political imprisonment on the island. Instead of revealing the truth, the film ends without disclosing his story. The spectator is faced with the puzzling interviews with the director’s close family, who fail to fully reconstruct the grandfather’s story, and is left with the void at the end. This is not a historical documentary aimed at reconstructing or revising

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<sup>10</sup> Although subjectivity is not a new documentary modality, it has become a common practice in documentary film in the last three decades. This particular mode of representation in documentaries has destabilized the classical notion of documentary and has brought about an epistemological shift where the boundaries between knowledge and doubt blur. Nichols points that “the word *documentary* has suggested fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction” (1994: 1). This radical shift deconstructs the basic subjective/objective dichotomy that was the core of documentary film theory. First person documentaries raise further questions regarding the politics of knowledge production, the ethical side of the direct address, subjectivity and veracity of the testimony as well as its performative dimensions.



the story of *Naked Island*; it is a movie about the silenced parts of history and it addresses an important issue that was previously ignored in the official historical narrative. The movie also makes claims regarding the impossibility of accurately representing trauma and stresses the subjective voice of the director who struggles to understand her family's past. This documentary is not a nostalgic recollection of the family moments with the director's grandfather either. The grandfather's past stays incomplete and the movie is more about the troublesome process of re-telling and re-presenting personal and family memories. There is no closure in this documentary, it does not reveal anything, it leaves us with the sense of incompleteness. Self-reflexive documentaries, such as *Naked Island*, include the process of constructing and reconstructing history from remembered memories, showing that the memory of the past is continuously modified by the experience of the person who is remembering. The lack of closure is a direct invitation to the viewer to an engaged reception and further contemplation and interpretation. The movie calls upon the spectator to interact with the filmic text and to relate to the director's subjective reflections on private and collective history and to accept or reject her line of reasoning.

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When discussing memory and remembrance in testimonial documentaries we are instinctively urged to reflect on the construction of historical reality and the supposed authenticity of personal histories. In these movies not only the discourse around memory but its nature and representation are addressed. Talking heads witness their own experiences but they (re)construct collective memory through the stories remembered. They also explore the limits and potentialities of documentary films to serve for social advocacy, enact social change or gather tangible evidence. In testimonial documentaries we are often faced with individuals, or talking heads, who speak with more or less confidence and conviction about atrocities survived or witnessed. Testimonial documentaries, like Nenad Puhovski's documentary *Lora* (2004), combine evidentiary and confessional truth-claims. By combining testimonies of the former Serbian prisoners in a Croatian military base with the televised public hearings of the Croatian soldiers accused of having tortured and killed several Serbian civilians and soldiers, the director also reflects on distinct kinds of knowledge enabled by testimonies in various media forms. As we follow one-to-one reminiscences on the tortures Serbian prisoners were subjected to, the director moves the camera closer to the subjects and focuses on details of their bodies stressing the corporeal dimension of their testimonies. Each testimony also highlights the absence of those who are no longer present. Witnessing is

not only an act of speaking about a personal experience, it transgresses the limits of the personal and it becomes an act of speaking for others. As we witness corruption of the judges, lawyers and politicians who refuse to admit the violation of human rights and international war conventions by Croatian soldiers, documentary film becomes the only tool for the construction of civil society that can make sure that the sufferings will not be forgotten despite the collective amnesia of a society that is not ready to face its recent history and take responsibility for the war crimes against humanity. This documentary transcends the personal dimension of witnessing and stresses its collective side. The facts upon which the court has to pronounce its verdict are constantly questioned, subverted and reinterpreted by the perpetrators accused of having tortured and killed Serbian civilians. By juxtaposing the witnessing by victims with the false perpetrators' testimonies, the director reveals a traumatic crisis of truth. The point of this documentary is to produce a political understanding of violence and victimization and to demonstrate that the attempt to gain access to traumatic history "is a project of *critical* reading and listening precisely because there is an attempt to get beyond privileging the individual as the site of trauma" (Kilby 2007: 5).

Another similar testimonial documentary is *Tri* (*Three*, 2008) by Goran Dević. In this documentary people from opposing sides deliver on-camera attestations of shocking experiences of violence and abuse committed in the war. Unlike other testimonial documentaries, in this movie we follow the shift from the politics of victimhood to one of agency. Instead of victims who remember their traumatic experiences, here we witness different choice by three former enemy soldiers from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Whereas other documentaries stressed victimhood from an empathetic perspective, this movie stresses the desire of the protagonists to overcome adversity, go on with their lives, establish interethnic and intercultural dialogue that would secure a peaceful future for each community. Most of these accounts are aimed at transforming personal stories into powerful tools of social agency. During the conversations with the soldiers about their memories from the battles, the director does not focus so much on the social suffering damage but on the survivors' resolute decision to focus on the future and start a working-through process. In a self-reflexive interrogation of his act of witnessing, a protagonist in the movie says: "This is my revenge to the society". All three protagonists demonstrate that trauma is embedded in larger ideological formations and it is often manipulated. As we follow the three protagonists more than two decades after the war, we also witness that

“trauma produces new subjects” (Kaplan 2005: 1); it produces new identities based on different experiences of victimhood, shared suffering and witnessing:

In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. (Antze and Lambek 1996: xviii)

The emphasis here is on empathy and individual agency of the protagonists that cannot account adequately for the political violence. Traumatic memories are represented as physical embodiments of the historical real. Public recognition of their traumas legitimizes the existences of victims and entitles them to speak up and make their stories heard. Unfortunately, there have not been sufficient legal responses to collective violence in the area, aimed at providing reparation or apology. The director emphasizes that we cannot afford to repress past traumas through collective denial and he stresses the importance of reassessing history. In all three documentaries the process of narration is implicitly public and political; it is aimed at revealing fissures in the present and past iron-clad national narratives. They represent filmmakers’ struggle to position themselves critically in relation to historical myths. By juxtaposing different personal narratives, these movies foreground doubts and suspicions and are intended for further contemplation.

Although history and trauma were seriously addressed first in documentary films, a few feature films are worth mentioning too.<sup>11</sup> The first serious attempts

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<sup>11</sup> In the Bosnian movie *Muškarci ne plaču* (*Men Don’t Cry*, dir. Alen Drljević, 2017) we follow a group of war veterans from Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia in an extended group therapy session and their attempts to deal with PTSD and memories of the war. The process of reconciliation is not an easy one despite the fact that the veterans meet two decades after the end of the war. Constant battle between the veterans in the group, who contest each other’s recollection of the war, stress the fact that past is not fixed but it is a point of contest. Through their testimonies viewers can confront different interpretations of the past by the former soldiers from opposing sides. As we witness the inhumanity of the war crimes committed by themselves or somebody else, we also notice the resistance of war veterans to get rid of prejudices and their masculinity that prevents them from dealing with their violent past and forging a better future. Croatian film *Ničiji sin* (*No One’s Son*, dir. Arsen Antun Ostojić, 2009) is one of the first attempts to reassess Croatian history through private memory and trauma of the protagonist, a wheelchair-bound war veteran who discovers that his real father is Serbian. Confronted with an identity crisis and unable to accept that he belongs to the nation he had fought against in the war, the protagonist is provoked to commit suicide. The movie discusses not only the identity crisis but also post-war traumas of a disabled veteran who sings Chetnik songs in crowded bars in Croatia hoping that listeners might attempt to kill him and put him out of his misery. Serbian feature film *Krugovi* (*Circles*, dir. Srdan Golubović, 2013) unfolds around

in dealing with trauma in feature films came from two Bosnian female directors, Jasmila Žbanić and Aida Begić. Their first feature films (*Grbavica*,<sup>12</sup> *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*, Jasmila Žbanić, 2006 and *Snijeg, Snow*, Aida Begić, 2008) depict devastating physical and psychological consequences of war on women who were raped (Žbanić) or whose family members were killed in the war (Begić). The most disturbing effect is the loneliness of the protagonists who are ignored by the society and compelled to cope alone with their trauma.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis in both films is on unspeakability and unrepresentability of trauma and violence. The women's silence is an externally imposed one; it is a consequence of social censorship, silencing and denial. Female protagonists in *Snow* attempt to suppress their memories of violence and their silence is reflected in the narrative since their war traumas are left apart from the story. The story of *Snow* takes place in a small village in Eastern Bosnia, largely populated by women. As the spectators slowly discover, their sons and husbands were taken away during the war and were never heard from again. The movie unfolds around the daily lives of women in the village. Daily tasks might appear meaningless but they are essential for the survival of the protagonists and their community. By focusing on daily matters, this movie has marked a significant switch from the atrocities of war that had previously permeated the film production in the post-Yugoslav cinemas. Begić inserts elements of magic realism in approaching the trauma. The hair of Ali, the only boy in the village, grows long overnight every time it is cut short. Jelača argues that this occurrence is connected to his survival since he was not taken away by Serbian soldiers like other men in the village because he was mistaken for a girl but it is also a proof that "his trauma is lodged in his body and takes control of his physical appearance" (2016: 92). At the beginning of the movie the women's trauma is not so much related to

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the stories of several characters whose lives have been changed due to the wartime traumas in which some of them were victims and others perpetrators. We find the same characters and their families twelve years after the war in different places and life situations. Their stories intersect and, due to new circumstances, they are challenged to interact with each other and try to overcome the traumas of the past. The movie illustrates the challenges of overcoming the trauma and facing those who killed or saved their loved ones.

<sup>12</sup> The movie was released as *Esma's Secret* in UK and as *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams* in USA.

<sup>13</sup> Another first feature film by the Irish director Juanita Wilson, *Kao da me nema (As If I Am Not There)*, 2010) addresses female trauma. The movie, based on the novel of Slavenka Drakulić, is a story about a young Bosnian teacher who is imprisoned in a camp where she is repeatedly raped.

loss because the women do not know what happened to their beloved ones since their bodies have not been located. They remain hopeful for most of the movie until they find out from a Serb from the neighboring village that the men were killed. Emotional and psychological scars left by the tragic deaths of the women's husbands and sons are linked to their silence and attempts to restore the illusion of normality. The sound in the movie is for the most part diegetic, which further underscores the silence of the women. Their lives are permeated by mutual support and solidarity, sadness but also joy and humor. However, a certain optimism emerges at the end of the movie when the women decide to develop a small business and produce local products, thus refusing the position of victimhood and stressing their ability to make a self-sustainable living.

*Grbavica* is a story about Esmā, a Bosnian Muslim woman living in contemporary Sarajevo with her daughter, conceived after the rape. The female protagonist keeps the identity of her daughter's father secret even from the girl and does not talk about the rape until the end of the movie. There are no flashbacks of the war and the atrocity of violence is not represented. The protagonist and other female victims of the wartime rape are represented as victims of history living in a patriarchal society that has no interest in their stories. However, none of them seeks revenge and they try to cope silently with their repressed traumas. *Grbavica* is not only a movie about war traumas but it is also a movie that addresses the act of bearing witness and the difficult process of narrativising the event especially by silenced women. Women's disappointment and weariness at the fact that their voices and testimonies seem to have no importance in society is stressed from the first shot. We understand the fragility of the women's situation and their vulnerability through the visualization of slow close-up pan over their faces in the opening scene. At the beginning the storytelling is nonverbal, expressed through the tapestry, silence and serious faces of raped women. The sense of oppressiveness is created by high angle shots of the faces of women in the rape support group. "Moreover, the scene and its staging viscerally evoke the sense that, for many survivors of trauma, silence and reflection are often the most important modes of interaction, and that speaking up does not always have the necessary therapeutic effect that is often uncritically assigned to it" (Jelača 2016: 83). Throughout the movie we see the conflict within women between wanting to speak and longing to forget, and between the need to claim victimhood and the desire to cast off the victim mentality in order to heal their traumas. The women survivors keep silent till the end of the movie out

of shame and fear of stigmatization. They are aware that their experiences of wartime rape have been marginalized in the society. The director stresses the will to deny the trauma of raped women on a social as well as an individual level. For the female characters in the movie, the original trauma of rape is exacerbated by the additional trauma that came from the collective denial of their past. At the end of the movie the women grow more confident and demonstrate their ability to reclaim their voices and we see Esma speaking about the rape for the first time.

The two movies present similarities in their topics and main female character-building: these are stories of silent and diligent women with troublesome memories and traumas that have affected their bodies and consequently still affect their psyche. As Vidan argues, "In these films the violated and injured bodies serve as a site of cultural encoding and speak in place of the characters, some of whom have been silenced" (2018: 125). Their traumas are never clearly represented in the movies but their consequences are constantly being evoked through repeating visual elements such as tapestry in *Grbavica* and daily tasks in *Snow*. Begić and Žbanić were generally recognized as the first female post-Yugoslav directors to address the issue of female war traumas and the burden women carry after gender-based violence. Both movies address the idea of unspeakability and, thus, silence becomes a metaphor of gender difference in the very process of bearing witness. Post-Yugoslav female directors avoid historical narratives, they do not focus on big events in recent history but they shift their gaze to daily hardships in an oppressive patriarchal society. However, female directors eschew the narratives of victimization and employ a different strategy; female protagonists in both films take an active attitude to problems, trying to sort out a better future for themselves and their families. The two Bosnian directors broke with the tradition of representing women on screen. In (post)Yugoslav cinema women were often represented as silent, passive, deprived of their own will and objects of male lust. For Žbanić and Begić trauma is something that female characters try to work through, it is not a motive for vengeance. The female characters in these two movies appear silent because they need to go through their trauma in order to be able to face it and express it loudly. Žbanić's decision to avoid flashbacks to the violent past events proves that she does not want to accuse, ask for revenge or cry for justice. Contemporary female directors have left war atrocities aside and they turned to more intimate explorations of the women's domestic sphere and their attempts to contest forms of oppression in a patriarchal society. Although female protagonists

are mostly silent, they are not voiceless and at the end they find the strength to face and verbalize their traumas. Both directors deliberately avoid the excessive "Balkan film genre" aesthetics and they focus on the problems of women damaged by the war and promote a picture of women who take an active stance in solving their problems. These movies examine the ways in which gender roles position subjects as victims of trauma and how gender norms influence the ways in which trauma is first internalized and later externalized in the narrative.

## CONCLUSION

This article argues for an understanding of historical trauma as an open-ended approach to the violent legacies of the past. All the analyzed movies suggest that we are living in a trauma culture in which "extremity and survival are privileged markers of identity" (Luckhurst 2008: 2). Various cinematic responses to collective violence provide different narratives and frameworks to account for past events. The movies analyzed in this article may serve to illustrate the functions that a politics of memory can perform at the individual level by allowing or preventing the reinscription of personal memory and trauma in the social tissue. Post-Yugoslav filmmakers are engaging in alternative testimonial practices in an attempt to incorporate a diversity of voices and views on collective memory. Besides discussing private and collective memory, recent documentary and feature films also raise questions on bearing witness to traumatic events through the medium of film. Cultural reproductions of trauma suggest that traces of trauma can be preserved in visual representation, however unsatisfactory they might be. Trauma and memory may be used in cinema and popular media to proclaim victimhood, unresolved nostalgia for the past, nationalism or fake national pride, but they can also move to personal witnessing and reconciliation. Audiovisual media have become places in which trauma and history can be recognized but also reconfigured and negotiated. As this short overview of the post-Yugoslav movies on trauma demonstrates, cinema reflects different stages in the life of a society from the initial encounter with traumatic events to the assessment and development of the discourse of trauma. Cinema provides a language whose purpose is "to invoke a post-traumatic historical consciousness – a kind of textual compromise between the senselessness of the initial traumatic encounter and the sense-making apparatus of a fully

integrated historical narrative" (Hirsch 2004: 19). History is still an open field of interpretations in post-Yugoslav republics. As a consequence, there is a creative tension between the way in which traumatic events and stories are embedded in historical and political worlds and the way in which cinema has created or interpreted those worlds. Different representations of war traumas in the last thirty years demonstrate discursive shifts in the constructions of audiovisual texts and stress the importance of reading text and context in conjunction. As Felman and Laub argue, "issues of biography and history are neither simply represented nor simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text" (1992: xiv-xv). Recently produced documentary films stress the ambiguity embedded in the nature of trauma and stage its non-representability. Self-reflexive documentaries address this issue not only on the level of the content but also on the level of the form. Films such as *Naked* question how meaning is created and how filmic language and established representational modes in documentary filmmaking inflect the ways in which facts are being discovered. *What* becomes equally important as *how* and the directors do not refrain from revealing the process of filmmaking. This points to a contemporary shift where documentary has come to suggest incompleteness, subjective constructions and images of personal worlds. All of this is to say that audiovisual testimony of history and trauma – especially in documentary films – is performative with regard to the truths and memories of witnessing.

This article examines the application of trauma as an analytical tool to investigate the production of meaning-making within the social body and the intersections between trauma and filmic language. Filmic representations of trauma are analyzed in two genres, feature and documentary film, taking into consideration the capacity of filmic medium to re-enact, reproduce or represent traumatic situations and memories through different representational modes. The article traces the question of how feature films have communicated repressed traumatic inscriptions on the national level. Post-Yugoslav films dealing with wartime traumas are used to explore how trauma histories are incorporated into the official narration of history and national identities. Although this article does not analyze all the trauma movies produced in the last thirty years, it focuses on the ways in which aestheticized presentations of trauma undermine the official historical narratives and it demonstrates how diverse films negotiate historical trauma by using different aesthetic strategies; in some movies traumas are mirrored in the topics, plots and settings whereas in others the focus is on the sound, *mise-en-scène*, the modes of representation,



the act of witnessing. Cinema not only stores and replays trauma but it shapes and gives new meaning to it. From this perspective, the process of “turning” trauma into film becomes a productive moment in dealing with the past. As Caruth argues, this process involves the production of two different, but related, kinds of images: “those that change or distort the facts (the images disseminated by the mass media describing the war) and those that guide the war-making decisions themselves” (2013: 45). The movies analyzed in this article show the tensions between attempts to represent individual traumas and political instrumentalization of these experiences. The selected post-Yugoslav movies on trauma and memory destabilize homogenizing narratives of nationhood and imagined nations.

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