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Nevena Daković

## THE TRAUMA OF THE OTHERS!?! YUGOSLAV HOLOCAUST FILMS OF THE 1960s

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to map the reconfiguration and displacement of the emerging trauma of the Holocaust in the cinematic narratives of SFR Yugoslavia. The analysis of three nearly forgotten Yugoslav films of the 1960s – *Killer on Leave (Mörder auf Urlaub/Ubica na odsustvu/Ubica je došao iz prošlosti, 1965, Boško Bošković)*, *Witness Out of Hell (Bittere Kräuter/Gorke trave, 1966, Žika Mitrović)* and *Smoke (Dim, 1967, Slobodan Kosovalić)* – follows Kansteiner's thesis about the changes of Holocaust memorial narratives in the films shown on German television in the 1970s. Accordingly, I claim that the analyzed films position the trauma of the Holocaust as a crime committed by others, over there, and then in the past. Further, they broaden the trauma to accommodate the diversified roles of victims, perpetrators, witnesses and bystanders, and help the Germans (and other Europeans as well) come to terms with the Nazi criminal legacy and their own role. The co-productional terms allow the films to balance the memory of the Holocaust as both anti-fascist (East Germany) and cosmopolitan, multidirectional (West Germany) within the real Yugoslav/German symbolic narrative space and its intrinsic poetics (e.g., memorialization and sacralization).

**KEYWORDS**

trauma, Holocaust, memory, Yugoslav films, other

Holocaust as the main theme of Yugoslav and post Yugoslav cinema(s) is limited to few frequently mentioned films but rarely analysed in depth – from theoretical and historical perspective. These liminal titles are, mainly, seen from the position of "grand theory" (Bordwell, Carroll 1998); as indicators of state defined politics of memory. Alongside well known titles such as *Ninth Circle (Deveti krug, 1960, France Štiglic)* or *Himmelkommando (Nebeski odred, 1961, Boško Bošković, Ilija Nikolić)*, focused on victims and concentration camps, several other half forgotten coproductions of the 1960s stand on the margins of Yugoslav film history: *Killer on the Leave (Mörder auf Urlaub / Ubica na odsustvu / Ubica je došao iz prošlosti, 1965, Boško Bošković)*, *Witness Out of*

*Hell* (*Bittere Kräuter / Gorke trave*, 1966, Žika Mitrović) and *Smoke* (*Dim*, 1967, Slobodan Kosovlić). These films offer comparative and alternative views of the Holocaust that happened “there and then”; of the trauma of the others who are equally perpetrators, victims, bystanders, witnesses and survivors. Moreover, due to their co-productional character, these films managed to capture the moment of change of Holocaust memory from (hi)story of the anti-fascist struggle (East Germany and Eastern Europe) to cosmopolitan (multidirectional) memory (Kanstainer 2019). Along the way, indirectly (*Killer on the Leave*, *Witness Out of Hell*) and directly (*Smoke*) they deconstruct the dominant figure of a passive and innocent bystander who acted as the (neutral) cover for the roles that Europeans and especially Germans pretended to play in the Holocaust (Kanstainer 2019).

On the one side, in post-Yugoslav cinema(s) as well as in world media and fiction the wars of the break-up of Yugoslavia are seen as the Holocaust-like-events (Alexander 2004) that sustain further already recognised and increasingly direct connection between the Holocaust and the Soviet terror in the Eastern block. The memory, the symbols, and the imagery of the Holocaust are appropriated to represent the crimes of communism. These are also accompanied by a profound influence on memory politics and legislation – all with the aim of providing „ontological security“ (Subotić 2019) to new states and nations. On the other side, the growing popularity and academic institutionalisation of Memory Studies – initiated, among other things, by the research of the Holocaust in the North-Atlantic cultural space – are reflected in the overall cinema production of the Holocaust and Yugoslav 1990s war films in post-Yugoslav and Balkan states.

## Reshaping the Cinematic Holocaust Memory

The evolution of Holocaust memory in Yugoslav and Serbian cinema is seen in three phases: 1960-1978; 1978-2005; 2005-today. It begins in 1960<sup>1</sup> with the film *The Ninth Circle*, a Bulgarian-East Germany coproduction, that bears uncanny resemblances with the film *Stars* (*Sterne*, Konrad Wolf, 1959). The explanation of the similarities that go far beyond the theme and the plot oblige us to look into the production context of *Stars*. Wolf’s film, is the first one in the Balkans and among the first in Eastern Europe – the space of intersecting, and frequently, opposed historical legacies – that introduced the Holocaust narrative as the one independent of mainstream heroic war stories of the

1 Of no less importance is the fact that these years (1959-1961) are the time of the appearance of key theories of the ethics and aesthetics of representation of the “civilizational trauma”. The polemics begins with a famous text of Jacques Rivette *De l’abjection* (*On Abjection*, 1961) – published in *Cahiers du cinéma* – about the film *Kapo* (Gillo Pontekrovo, 1960) and continues with the writings by Daney (1992), Didi Huberman (2003) and other theoreticians that define the film and the critical text as the axiom for judging the meanings and values of screen representations of the Shoah (Juillet, Leveratto 2016).

socialist block.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, *Stars* spoke out courageously<sup>3</sup> about the delicate issue of the solution of the “Jewish question” in Greater Bulgaria and on the „new territories“ (Ragaru 2020). The story follows a tragic and impossible love between a German soldier Walter (Jürgen Frohriep) and a beautiful Jewish girl Ruth (Sasha Krusharska) who is on the transport of death. Angel Wagenstein’s screenplay, based upon true events from his family’s and friends’ past, thus, established a model of fictionalisation of real events, history and documents.

At the same time, *Stars* is the key film that initiated coming to terms and confrontation of West Germans with the Nazi past through East European (especially East German) films. The micro-narratives of the Holocaust appeared from the shadow of the macro-narratives of the antifascist struggle. In that sense, excellent analysis of a famous Holocaust and Memory Studies scholar, Wulf Kansteiner, about the Holocaust on West German television, argues that in the 1970s in Germany, and broader in the world, television, has become “the main mean of research” of Nazism, totalitarianism and genocide because of broadcasting these early titles of the Holocaust cinema. With strong “self-critical” note, *Stars* remains a rather unusual place of memory in the Eastern European historical culture (Kansteiner 2019), talking less about the perpetrators and more questioning whether ordinary people could have done more to protect and save their neighbours and compatriots. Similarly, Nadege Ragaru (Ragaru 2020) concludes that the film leaves us with a feeling of deep sadness and painful awareness of what we could have done but did not.

In our film, Fascism does not appear only as Kurt. Fascism is presented, also, as 8.000 Greek Jews deported to Auschwitz [...] and only one woman who returned [...]. That is Fascism. If, during the war, people like Walter did not succeed to influence the happenings no more than Walter managed to stop the train that was because they have realised too late that the train had to be stopped before it actually began to move. It is not enough to wish something, you have to do something. (Ragaru 2020: 133)

The importance of the film for our “Bulgarian friends”, as Ragaru finds out, lies in the questions it raises about collaboration (embodied in the character of the Chief of police) and the principal responsibility for the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Well presented and documented story of the production – that went through real bureaucratic labyrinth – includes the transcripts of the debates about the script, political analysis etc. During one meeting about the screenplay, the participants debated why there were no Communists among the deported Jews and why the film dealt with Greek Jews? (Ragaru 2020: 143)

3 The fact that the director Konrad Wolf is the brother of Marcus Misha Wolf, legendary chief of STASI, largely explains the courage of tackling the subject of the Holocaust.

4 Wagenstein claims that the (re)education of the European and especially German audience began with the 1946 film *The Murders Are among Us* (*Die Mörder sind unter uns*, Wolfgang Staudte) as it “renewed our faith in a nation capable of self-reflection, of looking into the mirror and acknowledging its own guilt, of making a confession that very few nations would be able to make” (Brockmann 2010: 184–209).

The story of *The Ninth Circle* is also about a tragic and impossible love between a Jewish girl Ruth (Dušica Žegarac) and a Croatian young man Ivo (Boris Dvornik) in Zagreb – at the time capital of the fascist Independent State of Croatia. It is likewise based upon personal and family sufferings of the author of the novel and the screenplay, Zora Dirnbach. In a “biographical” key, *The Ninth Circle* shares the firstness with *Himmelkommando* – made after a brilliant, classic drama by Đorđe Lebović and Aleksandar Obrenović, above all recognised as a textual re-enactment of Lebović’s traumatic survival of Auschwitz (due to his camp number A-12759 that is also the number of the narrator). Differing from the drama,<sup>5</sup> through a number of interventions in the narration, the film successfully solves the issue of the true, real and reliable witness – for whom Primo Levi (Levi 1996) argues that has to be the one suffocated, drowned and never the survivor. In the last scene of the film we see volunteering for the new Himmelkommando group and we hear a voice off reciting the verses from a famous poem by Branko Miljković *Eulogy to the Fire* (*Pohvala vatri*). Uttered by a well-known Zeleni (Ljuba Tadić), already executed member of the previous Sonderkommando, the poem suggests that the entire story is told in retrospective by the witness, a homodiegetic narrator who narrates from the Heaven and the other side of life. Dead and mute Zeleni is resurrected and, thus, given back his voice which makes him a perfect embodiment of Levi’s (paradoxical) true witness.<sup>6</sup>

The second phase begins in 1978, with the world TV premiere of the mini series *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (1978, Marvin Chomsky, NBC) as the turning point in the representation of “absolute evil”. The regeneration of the Holocaust as cosmopolitan memory narrated as the family melodrama with the Hollywood immanent *happy end* and the triumph of the poetic justice was met with strong criticism. Elie Wiesel (Wiesel 1978) and others rightfully criticised the trivialisation/hollywoodisation that turned the Holocaust into something that it has never been in reality (imperative success story of the survivor).

Although the SFRY’s geopolitical situation allowed JRT (Yugoslav Radio Television) to import and broadcast programs from the West with negligible delay, the mini series has never been officially shown in former Yugoslavia.

5 For more about narration in *Himmelkommando* see Daković 2014: 1–9 and Daković 2014: 169–185. Zeleni is both a witness and a frame-narrator, not seen in the act of narration and thus given more reliability as the voice of the invisible (God like) authority.

6 To the films of the first phase also belongs *The Fed One* (*Hranjenik*, 1970, Vatroslav Mimica), again, based upon the true story from Auschwitz and the drama of Milan Grgić. Further, if we are to acknowledge the great overlapping of the films about the camps – not necessarily death camps but also labour camps, camps of the Red Cross, or POW camps – and Holocaust films then to this group are to be the added titles like *Red Flower* (*Crveni cvet*, Gustav Gavrin, 1950), *Blodveien* (*Krvavi put*, Kåre Bergstrøm, Radoš Novaković, 1955), *Three Quarters of the Sun* (*Tri četvrtine sunca*, Jože Babič, 1959), *Five Minutes of Paradise* (*Pet minuta raja*, Igor Pretnar, 1959), *Black Birds* (*Crne ptice*, Eduard Galić, 1967), and decades later came *Lager Niš* (Miomir Stamenković, 1987).

Despite that, Yugoslav press closely followed and commented upon its reception and reactions worldwide, and especially those of German audience. The phrases used in this coverage revealed that the politics of levelling still ruled in the country of “brotherhood and unity” with the aim “to repress a problematic aspect of the country’s recent history, namely the interethnic violence that occurred in Yugoslavia between 1941 and 1945” (Byford 2013: 526). In the democratic equating of the victims and the homogenisation of the war as the socialist revolution there was a place for the stories of the Jews as heroes of the antifascist struggle, but not for the stories about the passive and innocent Jewish victims accepting the destiny of being slaughtered in the concentration camps without any resistance.

A new impetus for the local narrativisation of the Holocaust came with the hugely popular war saga *The Winds of War* (1983, Dan Curtis, ABC) and *War and Remembrance*<sup>7</sup> (1988, Dan Curtis, ABC) – broadcasted in 1986 and 1990/1991 in primetime on the first channel of RTS. Only few months later, the world press and TV stations began to draw obvious and shattering parallels between the scenes pouring out from the war-torn Balkans and the archival footage of the Nazi persecutions. Holocaust memories and images, suppressed and re-framed under communism, were carefully manipulated and instrumentalised during the 1990s for a variety of purposes – namely, boosting ethnic hatred and intolerance, offering (comparative) explanations for the ongoing conflicts to the ignorant world audience, and identifying the roles assigned to the warring parties. However, all TV titles are barely comparable with the impact of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* as a carefully made (hi)story of the moral conversion of the hero saviour and the survivors from his list; eulogy to life when it is easier to survive than to go on living; and honour to six million Jewish victims.

The standstill in the Yugoslav cinema is disrupted only by war time comedy drama *Balkan Express*<sup>8</sup> (*Balkan ekspres*, 1983, Branko Baletić) about a small group of conmen who turn from self interested bystanders into accidental and reluctant heroes of the war. Trying to survive the war, a small group of petty thieves pretending to be musicians are playing on the terrace of the *Bel Epoque* pub while looking for the chance to escape from friendly Germans and energetic partisans, as well as from being obliged to make a choice and suffer the consequences. Tense, comical and dramatic plot (light irony and distance being the merits of Gordan Mihić’s screenplay) are accompanied by nostalgic music and popular chansons that hide the horrors of war. In the end, the Holocaust seen in few short scenes – rounding up of the Jews: the Jews who do not escape, although given the opportunity, from the train of death – become

7 The producer of the series, Branko Lustig – later awarded the Oscar for *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), was born in Osijek and was a survivor from Auschwitz. The second part of the series was partially shot on locations in Croatia.

8 However in the broader context of the films tackling the issue of the Holocaust through the stories of the WW2, it is necessary to mention Zafranovic’s masterpiece *Occupation in 26 Pictures* (*Okupacija u 26 slika*, 1978) or less than mediocre *Kraljevski voz* (Aleksandar Đorđević, 1981).

a more central theme when the ‘musicians’ find the atonement in hiding and saving a little Jewish girl (Lea/Hajdana Baletić).<sup>9</sup>

The last phase, from 2005 until today is marked by the battle for the “true” (multimedia) memorialisation of the Holocaust in Serbia and was initiated by the placement of a memorial plaque Topovske Šupe in the right place or by polemics about the plans for the Old Fairground (the monument was erected in 1995). In post-Yugoslav cinema(s), the last phase brings a set of mainly hollywoodised films like *Third Half-Time* (*Treće poluvreme*, Darko Mitrevski, 2012, Macedonia), *Lea and Daria* (*Lea i Darja*, Branko Ivanda, 2011, Croatia) and *When the Day Breaks* (*Kad svane dan*, Goran Paskaljević, 2012, Serbia) with the addition of other Balkan titles like: *Bulgarian Rhapsody* (Ivan Ničev, 2014, Bulgaria), *Grubers Journey* (*Calatoria lui Gruber*, Radu Gabreu, 2008, Romania) and *Cloudy Sunday* (Manousos Manousakis, 2015, Greece). The brilliant Oscar awarded *Son of Saul* (Laszlo Nemes, 2015, Hungary) precedes excellent and ironic *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (*Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari*, Radu Jude, 2018). In the best tradition of the comedy of the absurd, the film presents the tragedy of the Holocaust of the past and the present, a (black) comedy of the nation unable and unwilling to come to terms with the guilt and assimilate it into its national memory. In post-Yugoslav space, films like post-traumatic and modernist *Diary of Diana Budisavljević* (*Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević*, Dana Budisavljević, 2009, Croatia); *Dara of Jasenovac* (*Dara iz Jasenovca*, 2020, Predrag Antonijević, Serbia) filmed in a predictable genre way; and, so far, only announced *Children of Kozara* (*Djeca Kozare*, Lordan Zafranović, screenplay Arsen Diklić) reflect rival memories and rewriting of history such that they support new identities of the nation states. Two excellent films *The Load* (*Teret*, Ognjen Glavonić, 2018, Serbia) and *Quo Vadis Aida?* (Jasmila Žbanić, 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as *Košare* (Balša Đogo) and *Harvest* (*Žetva*, Paul Kampf) – in different stages of production – reveal that past resonates powerfully in the present and proves the persistence of cultural trauma in cinema through the Holocaust displaced and recognised in recent history happening in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

## Return from Oblivion

The neglected Holocaust films, although made successively in 1965, 1966 and 1967 – dealing with coming to terms with the crime and the trauma; bystanders becoming aware of having to accept the truth, responsibility and consequences and acknowledge their true identity in the past (Kanstainer 2019) – are rescued from oblivion only after being shown on Serbian television in the 2020s. The silver lining of the delayed premiere, comparable with the one of the German discovery of the Holocaust in the 1970s, confirm that in the new millennium

<sup>9</sup> In the end, Popeye (Dragan Nikolić), the charming *gamin* with the comic book name, turns into a mythical hero through death and sacrifice for Lea.



the „commercialised, fragmented, digitalised and globalised“ (Kansteiner 2019: 29) television persuasively speaks to the post-generations, decades removed from the historical events. Moreover, they reveal a change from “a predominant concern with a sense of control and distancing supported by the discursive aesthetics of ‘why’ to a persistent curiosity about sensing facets of trauma through simulative aesthetics of ‘how’” (Kansteiner 2019: 29).

*Killer on the Leave*<sup>10</sup> is another joint project of the authors of the *Himmelkommando* – director Boško Bošković<sup>11</sup> and writer Đorđe Lebović, who together with Egon Günther signs the screenplay. The story – of symptomatic Yugoslav title *The Killer from the Past* – is set on, at the time, worldly popular Adriatic resort Sveti Stefan. After the discovery of the dead body of the guest (Max Scheffler/Jiri Vrstála) on the beach reserved for the rich and famous, the chief inspector Korać (Vjekoslav Afrić), survivor from the Nazi camp, and his younger colleague Zoran Radić (Slobodan Cica Perović) come to investigate the crime. Soon, they realise that behind, a seemingly simple crime of love and passion there is a hidden, more complex case whose roots reach back to the WW2. The chief suspects are family members of the deceased: Jasseline – Paul Jasseline (Harry Studt), *pater familias* and successful Swiss businessman; his much younger and rich wife Therese (Christine Laszar); a cheerful and naive daughter from the first marriage, Seline (Doris Abeßer); his son Jacques (Helmut Schreiber); and Jacques’ unfaithful and debauched wife Valerie (Annekathrin Bürger) – full of secrets, lies and frustrations. Korać and Radić find the photos from the past (commanding German officers in a concentration camp) and the present (Valerie as a pin up girl) that lead them towards a number of suspects and hint at the possibility of new murders. The investigation emphasising modern forensic techniques employed by Yugoslav police and the deductive and lucid minds of the two inspectors reveals that the murder victim Scheffler was not only Valerie’s lover but also a fellow officer of Paul Jasseline. The discovery that at the time of WW2, Paul – then known as Maier – was the commander of the Nazi camp in Norway introduces a new motive for the crime – fear of the past which if revealed could cost him his name, financial wealth, honour, family... The intertwining of the crimes from the past and the present defines the dynamic repositioning of well-connected characters. Paul, Jacques and Therese bear the drama of passion and greed; Jacques, Max and Valerie of the adultery and failing marriage; while the tragedy of the WW2 is told by Paul, Korać and Max as victims and perpetrators at the same time. The diversification of the roles they had at the time of the Holocaust could be represented in a Greimas semiotic square: the perpetrators (Maier/Jasseline,

10 Moreover the similar plot is to be found in Borislav Pekić’s novel *How to Quiet a Vampire* (*Kako upokojiti vampira*, 1977) published ten years later. Pekić is also the author of the scenario for the film *Smoke*, analysed later in the text.

11 At the same time, for Bošković it is the beginning of the collaboration with DEFA – the serial of Winnetou and the film *White Wolf* (*Weisse Wölfe*, 1969) co-directed with Konard Petzold and co-produced by Bosna film and DEFA.

Max), victims (Korać, Jaseline, Valerie, Max), bystanders (Radić, Jacques) and witnesses (Seline, Max) being on the corner tops.<sup>12</sup>

In the conflict escalating between Korać and Radić about the priority in the investigation – to arrest the notorious war criminal Maier or Paul Jasseline, charged for the banal murder of Scheffler who is also a war criminal and blackmailer – it is inspector Korać who wins. He sets a perfect trap by “internationalising” the crime and acquiring the time for the arrival of the extradition paper from Norway. The film ends with Maier’s spectacular arrest while attempting to escape to Italy.

The film offers multiple and novel inscriptions and reflections of the Holocaust as memory, trauma and the bitemporal phenomenon (of the past and the present) – the point of divergence between generations and post-generations. Korać is haunted by the past; burdened by the trauma, atrocities and suffering he witnessed in the camp, while young Radić who – like post-war generations in Germany – is not concerned with and does not accept any links with the past. The outcome of the opposed attitudes is a certain, not yet tangibly present scepticism and a growing indifference towards the past, the truth and the responsibility. This is, maybe, best expressed in the words of a character in another Holocaust film and novel *Bittere Kräuter* (*Gorke trave* 2000)

I want to say: you are doing your duty as if you believe that the world will change and be saved if you punish several more war criminals... And what we are to do with new Nazis, here and in the world? What about new wars, genocides and the ever and everywhere present insanity, growing and spreading unstopably like weed? (Filipović 2000: 184)

The pan European remapping of the Holocaust in the story is the first step in the process of becoming cosmopolitan memory. The East German-Yugoslav film tells the tale about German camps in Norway; family Jasseline, under its new identity, leaves peacefully in idyllic and opulent Switzerland; Scheffler, as the embodiment of the rejected and erased Nazi past,<sup>13</sup> remains the eternal perpetrator – a mercenary who understood that one could live well from death and wars – wandering around from the Eastern front, a concentration camp in the Western Europe to the neocolonial wars in Korea and Congo (and new non-aligned countries). In the investigation, the photography of the Nazis camps circles from Yugoslavia to Norway, while on the sunny Adriatic coast,

12 Comp. Kansteiner 2019: 29–41 and the diversification of the roles of Germans in WW2 as not only perpetrators but also victims, bystanders and heroes. See also Vojnov 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Ubica%20na%20odsustvu> who criticises the extorted ethical diversification that leads to the disbalance of the plot due to the lack of the figure of the real and strong victim. I would like to thank, again, Dimirije Vojnov for valuable insights and useful comments about the film.

13 Scheffler speaks about denazification either with the „witnesses“ bribed with 20 DM in Dortmund or in more expensive option – organised by Paul – of the bought false obituary and new documents.



Korać in a dramatic and traumatically charged scene of the confrontation with Swiss/German Maier reveals the number tattooed on his arm.

SFR Yugoslavia is the ideal new setting for new Holocaust stories, being the country that has built its prestige, power and respect on its new place on the geopolitical map of the polarised world; on its role of the founder and leader of the Non-Aligned movement; and on the personal charisma of Tito.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, all the aforementioned make it a perfect mediator and modifier of the sensitive and traumatic past. Luxurious hotel-island, the beaches, the bars and the restaurants, reverberating with brilliant, modern music of Darko Kraljić are adequate decor for the Holocaust story, but this time told as a thriller, a murder mystery or East German detective story when the “colourless and without smell”, (Pinkert 2010: 265) drab style of DEFA is enlivened by Yugoslav vivid scenery and landscape of political freedom – on the other side of the Iron curtain but also outside the Western block. The coproductional character brought modernist tones to the, otherwise, grey eastern design. Summer vacation atmosphere is portrayed in the Mediterranean *blases* tones; inspector Radić in his smart and elegant suits looks as from the front pages of the first Yugoslav fashion magazines or from the film *Love and Fashion (Ljubav i moda, 1960, Ljubomir Radičević)*; scenes of leisure and entertainment portray the blooming consumer society. Amazingly, in this, as in other films, we find overt and recognisable reference to Hitchcock. It is the figure of spiral – like the one in the poster for *Vertigo* (1958) – appearing in the first and the last shot of the film; the trail of the boat driven by Scheffler with Valerie waterskiing behind and in Maier’s attempted escape. The spiral shape emblematically stands for, both, the vertigo of crime that sucks in everyone and for the moral vertigo of the fall into the past on both sides of the screen – of the characters and of the audience.

The second title, *Witness Out of Hell*, directed by Žika Mitrović, a famous director of action, war and generally “male” genre films with, when needed, emphasised romantic plot line is also made as a co-production with DEFA. It relates with the Holocaust trauma from the actual perspective of the first court trials (Frankfurt trials 1963-1965), organised by Germans (and not by the international community like the Nuremberg trials) against the perpetrators discovered hiding under the identities of peaceful German clerks and officials, once upon a time innocent bystanders of the Nazi era. The author of the novel and of the screenplay is Frida Filipović, a well known journalist, awarded translator and “prose writer of impeccable style and great literary skills” (Omeragić 2014).<sup>15</sup> The film’s direct thematisation of bitter memories of forced

14 Even more, Inspector Korać – played by Vjekoslav Afrić who in 1947 film *Živjeće ovaj narod* (Nikola Popović) already appeared in the role of Tito – really resembles the president of Yugoslavia (his hair, shape of the spectacles, rigid, uniform style of dressing).

15 There are many similarities between the family and personal (hi)stories of Zora Dirnbah and Frida Filipović. Also, in *The Ninth Circle* Ivo finds Ruth in the camp, in the group of women aimed for entertaining German officers.

prostitution and rape in a concentration camp is a Yugoslav response to first American films dealing with the theme – *The Prize* (Mark Robson, 1963) and *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1965).

The film recounts the destiny of a woman survivor, (Irena Papas) who, after twenty years, has to testify in the court trial against a war criminal. The eponymous novel – being a unique case in Yugoslav history in which the novel published thirty three years (2000) later – came to life as a symbiosis of the film’s screenplay and a short story “Villa *Hortensia*” (“Vila *Hortenzija*”). The added story of Sonia Hirsch – in the film renamed as Lea Weiss – written in lyrical, confessional tone with slight distance portrays Sonia’s life before the Holocaust, her marriage and her hiding in the guest house in Vrnjačka Banja (Villa Hortensia) during the first months of the war. The film’s screenplay – in which Bora Matic is, like Sonia/Lea, renamed as Bora Petrović (Daniel Gélin) – is made into the second chapter entitled “Witness Out of Hell”,<sup>16</sup> almost entirely set in Germany. Thus, the film skips the life before the war and in *medias res* chronicles Lea’s running away, hiding and refusal of appearing as the witness at the trial against Rudolf Berger (Hans Zesch-Ballot), her torturer and “protector” in the camp. Going after the trail of the published docu-fiction, newly appointed prosecutor (Heinz Drache) asks Bora to help him secure Lea’s testimony. The reunion of former lovers, Lea and Bora, puts in motion the multiple trauma of memory, guilt, fear and responsibility that makes Lea commit suicide, an act of the only possible escape from the brutal past that keeps haunting her.

*Witness Out of Hell* is the second<sup>17</sup> joint project of the authorial – and at that moment matrimonial, too – couple Filipović-Mitrović, expert storytellers of modern, European sensibility and Hollywood film *écriture*. While Frida Filipović goes for the psychological thriller with the investigators who connect strongly and deeply empathise with the victim, Mitrović through an array of focalisers – Lea, Bora, prosecutor and Berger/ victim, witness, bystander and perpetrator who could be set in a semantic square – moves beyond classical crime story.

Important, yet so far under-researched links with the genre of psychological thriller, identified in the scenes of Lea’s nightmares and hallucinations of being taken to the concentration camp as well as in the shot of her dead body lying on the glass roof, create the homage to Hitchcock. Beside elegant citations, Mitrović refers effortlessly to his previous oeuvre of rather different themes. The opening credits panning over the desecrated monuments on the Jewish cemetery are a nod towards the shots of graves and the epitaphs in the

<sup>16</sup> *Witness Out of Hell* is also the English title of the film and the title of the docu-fiction, documentary novel-within-the novel (and film). In the best manner of contemporary investigating journalism, the frame story puts together Sonia’s/Lea’s memories – written down by Bora in Belgrade, in the immediate aftermath of the war – documents, court notes and newly found data.

<sup>17</sup> The first one is *Look for Vanda Kos* (*Potraži Vandu Kos*, 1957).

film *March on Drina* (*Marš na Drinu*, 1964); Lea and Ivka (Merima Eminović, *Look for Vanda Kos*) are sisters by guilt and betrayal both trying to resist re-traumatisation; the war crimes haunt the post-times in the nocturnal urban-scapes<sup>18</sup> painted in the best tradition of *film noir*.

*Smoke*, the only “made in Yugoslavia” film is the story about Georg Anders (Milan Milošević) who returns to the unspecified, no name city somewhere in Germany (a provincial town that seems more like West Germany as the population goes to church without any inhibitions and prohibition). The day of his return is also the day of the early release of the convicted war criminal Siegfried Newermann (Janez Vrhovec), commander of the concentration camp in which the young man’s family perished. Tragedy of revenge that would wake up all characters from the peaceful sleep and “fantasy of innocence” (Kansteiner 2019) of bystanders develops mostly after the rules of ancient tragedy. Unity of time (24h), place (town) and action (revenge) are disrupted in a modernist manner by the young man’s traumatic flashbacks while he, as a bizarre flaneur, wanders through the streets waiting for the moment of revenge. The story begins and ends in a local restaurant/coffee shop owned by Gab/Gaben (Pavle Vuisić) – named after the famous French actor and in the spirit of poetic realism that envelops the town on a river bank. From the strands of fog and smoke – coming from the chimneys of the crematoriums in Georg’s mind and memory – floating around boat sirens and humming of their engines are heard. At night, the young man returns to Gab’s place where instead of a welcome and celebration party he finds Newermann’s dead body. Gab, talking with a man released from prison (I turned him into smoke... And children? Them also... little Jews grow to become big Jews...) Gab understands the truth about the Holocaust and the Germans’ responsibility. Gab, the bystander woken up from passivity, in an attempt of atonement and recuperation, kills Newermann with a poker (another thing related with fire). Yet, it is Georg who takes the guilt for the murder and phones the police. His false confession “I am the killer because he killed my family” announces the complexity of the guilt of (passive) survivors that is later to be found in literary master pieces by Aleksandar Tišma (*Knjiga o Blamu/The Book of Blam*, 1971) and Imre Kertesz (*Sorstalanság/Fatelessness*, 1975).

The memory potential of the cityscape is sustained by the symbolic switching between the present and the past since in the episodically structured story triggers for reliving the trauma are the places that Georg visits or the town streets he walks through; the encounters with the people whom he remembers but who do not recognise him. The places of associative topography (warehouses, the port, docs, construction sites, church, the apartment building in which Georg’s family lived) are poetic signals mapping the memoryscape and define the film’s editing cuts. The actual time-space (of the citizens, but metaphorically

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18 The film was shot in Belgrade, modern socialistic capital and Mitrović explains that he used “modern edifices of Belgrade (hotel Metropol, Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics) as contrast to the shadows of the dark past embodied in the NeoNacism” (Mitrović 2004, interview by Nedeljko Kovačić).

of the Germans and Europeans) is under the threat – expressed by prof. Leder (Viktor Starčić) “They come suddenly [...]” – of becoming the hellish memory-escape of traumas, Nazi crimes, the Holocaust and concentration camps. Only deceptively random, Georg’s walk – accompanied by the wonderful contemplative music score by Branimir Sakač<sup>19</sup> – evokes the episodes from the life in the camp: torture (young Neo-Nazis harass an elderly couple in the restaurant, blowing a cigarette smoke in their faces, yelling at them), rape (*The Girl* / Milena Dravić is raped at the construction site above which rises a construction crane like the crematorium’s chimney or the camp’s watchtower), suicide and desperation (Girl climbs up the church tower in a suicide attempt), raids and arrests (a family being evicted from their home). These scenes would, otherwise, stay invisible and unrecognised by contemporary citizens and institutions of power – police, church, school... Georg, being the passive survivor and bystander in the present, is the only one who sees them and through these visions he comes to know that one has to do something and “cannot be only a bystander”.

Indicatively, the ethical imperative that “We cannot be only bystanders” is delivered by Newermann’s mother (Desa Dugalić), an old lady in a wheelchair on the doorstep of the town’s cathedral. She goes to the church<sup>20</sup> to thank God for the release of her innocent son at the same time when the Girl goes to the top of the tower. The church attendant manages to prevent the suicide plan while the old lady points that out of respect for God, justice and moral we have to renounce the passivity of just watching and do something for the preservation of humanism and humanity. The church, as the place of moral epiphany, is also the space of the twofold sacralisation of the memory (past) and the ethics of memory of contemporary society (present).

The gestures, ordinary places and daily objects (mirror reflections, cigarette smoke, the game of dominoes, Alsatian dog sitting by Newermann’s side, cider) – like in *poetic realism* – become the places of metaphysical longing and existential *angoisse*, their symbolism underlined by the modernist *mise en scene* – in a vein of new Yugoslav cinema of Puriša Đorđević or Saša Petrović – which places the emphasis on the mental state of characters, intimate interiors whose claustrophobia spills over into the exteriors. Unexpectedly, the film features excellent use of the acousmatic point that makes the music, words and noises of the present echo in Georg’s head as Nazi hymns, humiliating orders in the camps or his mother’s panicked cries to run away and save himself.

Deterritorialisation that stresses the creation of multidirectional, cosmopolitan memory arises from the elements of different national provenance: the town is in Germany, the war criminal was the commander of the camp in Poland, the owner of the restaurant has a French name, the restaurant and the town feature emphasised poetic realism atmosphere, young people and hoodlums resemble those of late Italian neorealism (Fellini or Antonioni), the family name

19 Sakač also is the author of the films score of *Himmelkommando*.

20 Also in *Killer on the Leave*, the final chase and the trap are set around the church and the graveyard on the island.

of the Jews sounds Danish. Finally, there is a discreet reference to Hitchcock (in the way of *Nouvelle Vague*). At the beginning of the episode “Rape” there is a poster of *Marnie* (1964) on the wall of the shabby storehouse in the port.

The unorthodox film is complemented by strange destinies of the film’s authors that are the integral part of the story about the film. In 1967, Slobodan Kosovalić escaped to the USSR in search of a perfect communist state and continued his career in a modest way, directing the so called youth films about soviet patriotism and heroism in the WW2. Borislav Pekić emigrated to London as a famous dissident writer, in 1971. The same year, in Zagreb, Milan Milošević, well known because of the role of Sumenko in the famous TV series for children,<sup>21</sup> disappeared under mysterious circumstances never to be seen again. The film was entered in competition in Pula (Festival of Yugoslav cinema) but was withdrawn and never screened for unknown reasons. Perhaps, the producer, Avala film, decided that beside the Cannes laureate *I Have Even Met Happy Gypsies* (*Skupljači perja*, 1967, Saša Petrović) it did not need a small intimate film about almost invisible trauma. Since we do not know the exact time line of the events, we can only speculate that Kosovalić was, at the time, already on his way to the USSR and that the producer decided to prevent the scandal. Ultimately, the problem might have been something else – like state politics of Holocaust memory.

### **We Must Never Be Simply Bystanders!**

The conclusions that follow from the argument are multifold. The new narrative vectors (discovered true identities, chronotope, music, externalised mental state and memories as narrative motivation, existential *angoisse* of the present and the trauma of the past) sustained by modernist *mise en scene* (psychological thriller, citations, iconography of consumer society... ) turn three unusual and forgotten Yugoslav Holocaust films into a field of discursive exchange about trauma and memory where the detraumatization of the characters (and of society) develops through narrative confrontation with the past. In their quest for justice, revenge and atonement, discovering true identities hidden under the facade of innocent bystanders, the heroes are supported by the recognised essence of their existence – “It all comes down to a memory. And I remember nothing. We are all here because the history does not happen in the past“ (Sherwood 2017). The same thought resonates in the words of professor Leder “(You are mistaken, young man.) No one knows history well!” as the history keeps happening through our lives forcing us in the present to face the guilt from the past. The principle of the return to the place of primal trauma displaces the stories to Germany (*Witness Out of Hell*, *Smoke*) or to non-aligned Yugoslavia as the ideal place where to build Holocaust memory as cosmopolitan, pan-European and multidirectional (*Killer on the Leave*). Along these lines Georg and Gaben solve the trauma in the highly ethical act of revenge done by one and

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21 Milan Milošević appeared as Janko in *Bloodevein*.

with the guilt accepted by the other (*Smoke*). Lea commits suicide while Bora is left to tell the story (*Witness out of Hell*). Jasselines return to Switzerland having lost family honour and history (*Killer on the Leave*). Eventually, the re-shaped memory channelled in innovative genres, narratives and productions demands a new kind of complicity from the audience and induces a change in their concept of Holocaust memory.

In many ways Yugoslavia is a privileged place of different collective/European investments in memory: of (the production of) the Holocaust traumatic narrative confronting the (German) past; of the mediation between the anti-fascist narrative of the WW2 and the cosmopolitan memory; of the symbolic parallel of NAM and different memory paths. Along with other East European countries, non-aligned SFRY manages to reflect upon own Holocaust memory and contemporary politics of memory through displaced and covertly self-critical and introspective film narratives that testify about the turn of the concept of memory “from cultural to political”. Eventually, the thing that is more important for East Germany and less for SFRY is that the deconstructed identity of the (German) passive and innocent bystander who – after long resistance and ignorance – has to accept all the roles he truly played in the political fabrics of time. Everyone has to emotionally, ethically and actively position him or herself in relation to the Holocaust and none must never be a simple bystander. Even contemporary bystanders/passive voyeurs, film and TV audience, (Kansteiner 2019: 24–25) do not have the privilege and do not enjoy the protection of being at safe distance, but rather must define their stance towards the past and the role their nations played at the time. The Serbian/Yugoslav audience is finally able to see the Holocaust from the new/old *optique* opposed to the hollywoodised *mainstream* of the 2010s and, along the way, to re-evaluate the geopolitical position of SFRY from the point of view of a far smaller and rather insignificant Serbia of the post-time.

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Nevena Daković

## Trauma drugih!? Jugoslovenski filmovi o holokaustu iz 1960-ih godina

### Apstrakt

Cilj ovog rada je da mapira rekonfiguraciju i izmeštanje traume Holokausta u nastajanju u kinematografskim narativima SFR Jugoslavije. Analiza tri skoro zaboravljena jugoslovenska filma iz 1960-ih godina – *Ubica na odsustvu* (1965, Boško Bošković), *Svedok iz pakla* (1966, Mitrović) i *Dim* (1967, Slobodan Kosovalić) – prati Kanštajnerovu tezu o promenama memorijskih narativa Holokausta u filmovima prikazivanim na nemačkoj televiziji 1970-ih godina. Shodno tome, tvrdim da analizirani filmovi traumu Holokausta pozicioniraju kao zločin koji su počinili drugi, negde, a zatim u prošlosti. Dalje, oni proširuju traumu da bi se prilagodili raznovrsnim ulogama žrtava, počinilaca, svedoka i posmatrača, i pomažu Nemcima (i drugim

Evropljanima) da se pomire sa nacističkim zločinačkim nasleđem i sopstvenom ulogom. Ko-produkcijski termini omogućavaju filmovima da uravnoteže sećanje na Holokaust, kao i anti-fašističko (Istočna Nemačka) i kosmopolitsko, višesmerno (Zapadna Nemačka) u okviru stvarnog jugoslovenskog/nemačkog simboličkog narativnog prostora i njegove unutrašnje poetike (na primer, memorijalizacija i sakralizacija).

Ključne reči: trauma, holokaust, sećanje, jugoslovenski filmovi, drugo