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Bosnia Beyond Good and Evil: (De)Constructing the Enemy in Western and Post-Yugoslav Films about the 1992–1995 War

For those old enough to remember its global media coverage, the horrors of the Bosnian War are condensed in a series of vivid images: bodies ripped apart by bombs and sniper fire, burning villages, columns of desperate refugees. What caused the conflict is much less clear – after all, the Bosnian War, which raged from the spring of 1992 until late 1995, is a massively over-determined event – although a few contributing factors are worth mentioning here by way of introduction. By the late 1980s, Yugoslavia was in dire economic distress, caused in part by its obligations to a savage International Monetary Fund 're-structuring.' Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian Muslim nationalisms had been growing for decades, exacerbating tensions in what had been, for most of the post-war period, a relatively peaceful multi-ethnic country. However, the break-up of Yugoslavia was also precipitated by the world's great powers. Germany, and especially Austria, encouraged the secession of Croatia and Slovenia in 1991, and there are strong suggestions that in the spring of 1992 the US encouraged Bosnia's president, Alija Izetbegović, to reject the Lisbon Agreement, a plan for the partition of Bosnia that might have prevented war (Tucker and Hendrickson 1993; Gibbs 2009: 108–112). Once the war had started, Western and other global powers defied a UN arms embargo by supplying arms to their regional client states. Indeed, the common claim that the great powers passively 'looked on' as the Bosnian War raged is largely mistaken. The US actively supported Bosnia as its client in the region, allowing arms to flow from Iran to Bosnia via Croatia and officially denied 'Black Flights' carrying arms and ammunition to Tuzla (NIOD Appendix II 2002: 145–174), although it was not until November 1994 that the US officially lifted its arms embargo. There is evidence that Britain also supplied arms covertly to Croatian and Bosnian troops (Curtis 2010: 211). The Bosnian Serbs, meanwhile, received Russian and possibly Romanian, Greek and Israeli arms via Serbia throughout the war (NIOD Appendix II 2002: 174–181). This was, in short, a complex, multi-sided conflict.

This chapter argues that screen fictions have tended to ignore this complexity, reinforcing the one-sided view of the war propagated by many Western journalists. It examines some of the best-known cinematic reconstructions of the war

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110591217-019

in both the West and the Balkans from the last twenty years, arguing that in both the East and the West the cinema of the Bosnian War, like Western news media accounts of the conflict, is heavily compromised by nationalism and racism and is strongly invested in the creation of enemy 'Others.' The chapter ends on a more optimistic note, however, discussing some less partisan treatments of the conflict that have emerged recently, especially from the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

1 The Construction of the Enemy in Western News Media

Responsibility for the myth of Western passivity lies partly with the news media. As Yugoslavia disintegrated into nationalist madness, a "paranoid public sphere" (as described by Adorno and Horkheimer 1972) arose in each of the country's former republics. News bulletins collapsed into absurd and crude propaganda. Western journalists, meanwhile, were mostly confined to their Sarajevo hotels, unable to report from the field and disastrously over-reliant on government propaganda. The conflict was a three-sided civil war, albeit an uneven one, the Serbs possessing more firepower than the Croats and Muslims and perpetrating hideous atrocities, from the brutal siege of Sarajevo to the Srebrenica massacre. But as the US tilted towards its client, the Bosnian government, the conflict was increasingly presented by Western journalists as a one-sided war of aggression waged by Serbs against Bosnian Muslims. The Western press transformed Serbian president Slobodan Milošević into a modern-day Hitler (Seymour 2008: 194), when in fact he was arguably less nationalistic than his opposite numbers in Croatia and Bosnia. Holocaust analogies became common, notably in the summer of 1992, when ITN's images of the 'thin man,' Fikret Alić, in the Serb-run detention camp at Trnopolje were exaggeratedly interpreted in the Western media as evidence of Nazi-style death camps. To be sure, these camps were places of real horror, violence and sometimes death; yet Western media virtually ignored Croat- and Muslim-run camps, although the Muslims ran twelve camps, the Serbs eight and the Croats five (Klaehn 2010: 56). As the Srebrenica massacre indicates only too well, the Bosnian Serb army was the best equipped force in Bosnia throughout the conflict and was thus capable of devastating atrocities against the civilian population; nevertheless, as Janine Clark reminds us, "terrible crimes were also committed *against* the Serbs – in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo" (2008: 675).

When the US and its NATO allies launched a devastating campaign to push back the Serbs in 1995, most of the Western news media condoned the attack, despite the thousands of refugees and deaths it created. Western journalists – even, and perhaps especially those of a liberal persuasion – were thus responsible for what Ed Herman and David Peterson call a "tsunami of lies and misrepresentations" (2007: 1). These misrepresentations were often justified by recourse to what British journalist Martin Bell called the "journalism of attachment," an allegedly new mode of affective reportage that aimed at infusing a suspect 'neutral' journalism with a proper sense of moral outrage, but which in fact became a license for over-simplification and one-sided reporting. As the BBC correspondent John Simpson noted, "a climate was created in which everything came to be seen through the filter of the Holocaust" (1999: 444–445), a situation that made criticism of the Bosnian government very difficult. A simplistic narrative emerged in which Serbs were cast as the sole villains of the war and Muslims its only victims, a framing that paved the way for NATO's eventual military intervention, and which has often been reflected, as I argue below, in even the most ideologically liberal films about the war.

2 Humanitarianism and Its Others: Liberal Filmmakers and the Bosnian War

Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* was released two years after the end of the Bosnian War and has become the definitive Hollywood treatment of the conflict. Based on the memoir of British foreign correspondent Michael Nicholson (1994), it focuses on the experiences of journalists in Sarajevo and in particular the quest of one of them, Michael Henderson, to evacuate a young girl from a Bosnian orphanage. The film has a documentaristic quality. Dramatic reconstructions of civilian suffering, including bloodied bodies strewn across the pavements of Sarajevo, are intercut with real television news footage, suturing Henderson's reports into the 'real world' of the Yugoslav wars. The children in the orphanage are presented to the viewer as part of Nicholson's news reports, speaking directly to camera with Nicholson's voiceover translation. It is an engaging technique that interpellates the audience as witnesses to the horrors of war through a cinematic rendering of the "journalism of attachment."

Nevertheless, *Welcome to Sarajevo*'s inclusion of actual news footage also reinforces hegemonic framings of the conflict that emphasize Serb villainy. There is a clip, for example, of one of Bill Clinton's public statements about the war: "history has shown us that you can't allow the mass extermination of people and just

sit by and watch it happen." Later, television images of the Serb commander Radovan Karadžić are intercut with a speech delivered by George Bush, in which the former president asserts: "you can't negotiate with a terrorist." As the inclusion of soundbites from both Clinton and Bush suggests, the film reproduces the dominant US media-political script of the war. Serbs are depicted throughout the film as the war's sole aggressors – as raving psychopaths, in fact. There are also some striking reversals of historical fact: the Serb victims of the 1992 Sarajevo wedding massacre become, in the film, Croatians, while the rescued girl, in reality a Croat, becomes, in the film, a Muslim (Gocić 2001: 42–43). Throughout *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Muslims are the innocent victims of the war, Serbs are its villains, and journalists such as Henderson stand for the civilized values of multicultural Europe. This lionization of the Western journalist who goes beyond the call of duty is combined with an explicit endorsement of Western 'humanitarian intervention' when Henderson's flamboyant American colleague Flynn apologizes to his translator Risto on behalf of the US for "failing to deliver on those airstrikes." In *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Westerners are thus depicted as the actual or at least potential saviours of Yugoslavia.

In 1999, the BBC broadcast a two-part drama, *Warriors*, which follows the fortunes of British soldiers sent to Bosnia as UN 'peacekeepers' and which has become one of the most respected portrayals of the Western peacekeeping experience. It was written by Leigh Jackson and directed by Peter Kosminsky. As in many other Kosminsky dramas – *No Child of Mine* (1997), *The Project* (2002), *The Government Inspector* (2005) and *Britz* (2007) – a key theme is the betrayal of trust in authority. The drama's central thesis is that the UN's non-combat remit prevented the blue helmets from protecting the victims of the war and in many scenes, the soldiers can only look on in frustration as civilians are shelled or displaced.

The screenplay of *Warriors* is based on the transcripts of interviews conducted with more than 90 British soldiers and their families. In fact, the drama's depiction of war is considered so authentic that the film has been used in army training programmes to illustrate the dilemmas and challenges of peacekeeping. The television critics, meanwhile, went wild. *The Times*' Paul Hoggart, for instance, wrote that *Warriors* "was, quite simply, stunning – gut-wrenching, soul-searing, heart-rending, thought-provoking, sensitive, powerful, deeply disturbing and dripping authenticity" (1999: 12). Yet the drama's representational politics are problematic. Drawing comparisons between the Bosnian conflict and the Second World War, a Muslim woman, Almira Zec, advises Lieutenant Feeley that some form of Western intervention is required to prevent a repeat of the 1940s; "history is screaming at us," she tells him. But the use of WWII analogies to justify military intervention in Bosnia rests on two dubious assump-

tions: first, that Western military intervention is benevolent; and second, that WWII was a just war against fascism – a proposition that has been challenged by several scholars in recent years (Pauwels 2002; Baker 2008; Heartfield 2012) – and one which is unlikely to find favour in Dresden or Hiroshima. Nor is the drama's historical authenticity beyond question. Muslims here appear only as victims; this is especially problematic since *Warriors* is set in Vitez – an area of central Bosnia in which most of the fighting between 1992 and 1994 involved Muslim and Croat forces. The omni-presence of a slimy, racist Serb commander is also an historical distortion, since Serb forces were not active in the area (Žarkov 2014: 184). Kosminsky's productions have often been subjected to political censure for their radical challenge to establishment narratives; that *Warriors* drew no such attacks perhaps indicates how little it departs from the dominant narrative of the war.

Such one-sided representations of the war are not exclusive to Western productions. The most extensive treatment of the UN mission in Bosnia is *Alpha Bravo Charlie*, an epic fourteen-part TV drama about the Bosnian War directed by the acclaimed Shoaib Mansoor and broadcast by Pakistan Television to record-breaking audiences in 1998. The military-themed production was facilitated by Pakistan's ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations), a body responsible for producing dramas and documentaries about the country's armed forces (Ansari 2011: 8). *Alpha Bravo Charlie*'s principal character is mild-mannered Gulsher Khan, a captain who is sent to Bosnia a few days after his marriage. Khan's unit is respectfully received by the Bosnian community, as rebuilding projects are begun and medicines, food and money are distributed. As in *Warriors*, the Pakistani soldiers form close bonds with the locals, especially their Bosnian translators, and Khan's burgeoning friendship with his translator Sandra is one of the drama's key storylines.

In one of *Alpha Bravo Charlie*'s emotionally most intense scenes Sandra reveals to Khan her family secret. As the camera slowly zooms in on her face, Sandra explains that her original name had been Selma, but that this was changed at the insistence of her stepfather, a Serb, who abandoned the family to join the army. Later, Sandra tells Khan a second story about her former boyfriend – also a Serb – who deserted her at the outbreak of the war but later returned to slaughter her entire village with a rifle. Having revealed the truth about her suffering at the hands of Serb men, Sandra becomes psychically emancipated and soon falls in love with Khan. She further tells Khan that the war is a "blessing in disguise" because "it has given us our identity; we had forgotten who we were. But now things will change, *inshallah*." The war – and specifically the Pakistani UN presence in it – enhances Sandra's sense of ethno-religious belonging. Sandra's only complaint is that the UN mandate does not allow arms. "Please don't give us

food," she implores Khan, "it keeps us alive so that we can be killed by Serbs tomorrow." Instead, Sandra asks for weapons (Pakistan did in fact covertly provide arms to the Bosnian government during the war (NIOD Appendix II: 172; Haqqani 2005: 292)). Captured by Serb forces later in the series, Khan is shot dead in the second of two escape attempts, becoming a fondly remembered martyr in the drama's patriotic ending. *Alpha Bravo Charlie* thus celebrates the legacy of the Pakistani UN presence in Bosnia, casting the soldiers as heroic protectors of the global *ummah*.

All three of the productions discussed above reflect the mainstream 'Western' narrative of the Bosnian War. And it is important to note that their directors are all political liberals. Shaoib Mansoor's 2007 film *Khuda Kay Liye* depicts the wrongful detention and torture of a Pakistani terror suspect and strongly condemns the US war on terror. Winterbottom and Kosminsky are also liberal filmmakers who have been very critical of Western foreign policy since 2001. Winterbottom's docudrama *Road to Guantánamo* (2005) and Kosminsky's dramas *The Government Inspector* (2005) and *Britz* (2007) questioned the grounds for Britain's invasion of Iraq and the effects of the 'war on terror' on British citizens. In fact, all three directors have elsewhere demonstrated an anti-imperialist sensibility that is lacking from their films about Bosnia. Whether consciously or not, it seems that liberal filmmakers in the 1990s, like liberal journalists, helped to reproduce normative understandings of the war, reinforcing hegemonic definitions of the enemy 'Other.'

More recently, a Bosnian War drama has been made by Angelina Jolie – another prominent liberal public figure with a background in humanitarian work and a strong concern for the suffering of Bosnian women. Jolie's first foray into directing, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011), is an award-winning film about a Muslim woman, Ajla, and a Serb policeman, Danijel, who date each other before the outbreak of the war, their friendship illustrating the multicultural harmony of pre-war Sarajevo. During the war, however, Ajla is transported with other Muslim women to a barracks where Danijel is a captain and where the women are repeatedly raped and reduced to 'bare life.' Danijel seems more kindly than his fellow soldiers, at least initially – but nevertheless confines Ajla to his quarters, where he rapes her. At the end of the film, seemingly tortured by his conscience, Danijel gives himself up at a UN checkpoint, confessing that he is a "criminal of war." That Danijel will be punished for his crimes is one of the film's progressive points; after all, in US cinema rape is often punished by vigilante reprisals rather than legal means, or not punished at all (Bufkin and Eschholtz 2000), and rapists are seldom shamed in films about rape in the Bosnian War (Bertolucci 2015).

Nevertheless, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* is deeply embedded within what James Der Derian (2001) calls the "military-industrial-media-entertainment network" (MIME-NET), and Jolie consulted with Wesley Clarke and Richard Holbrooke when researching the film. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given these associations, Jolie's film is strongly invested in establishing war guilt. Here again, Muslims are heroic resistance fighters and Serbs are cardboard cut-out villains; the regional Serb commander, Danijel's father Nebojša, is a blood and soil nationalist who smashes wine glasses as he pontificates about Serb greatness. Jolie even reconstructs ITN's infamous detention camp images in a scene where Danijel is driving through Sarajevo. Although the scene is meant to take place in the winter of 1994, Danijel drives past semi-naked prisoners resembling those featured in the 1992 Trnopolje footage and Jolie's camera lingers on one prisoner who bears a strong resemblance to Fikret Alić. By reviving an image that was widely interpreted as evidence of a fascist resurgence in Europe, Jolie draws an equivalence between Serbs and Nazis, exploiting the best-known image of the war for an ideological rewriting of history. Like the other screen dramas discussed above, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* may be a well-intentioned drama that expresses a broadly humanitarian ethos, but it tends to reproduce a simplified and stereotyped view of Muslim innocence and Serb villainy.

3 Hollywood Action Cinema: Masculinism, Militarism and the Psychopathic Serb

Action films about the Bosnian War have also played a role in enemy-construction, although often this has not gone much beyond using Serbs as episodic villains. Curiously, in Hollywood, this vilification has often taken a quite specific form, with Serbs depicted as pornography-obsessed sexual perverts. In Michael Bay's *The Rock* (1996), a box supposedly holding aid for Bosnian refugees turns out to be a Serb booby trap containing pornographic magazines and an explosive toy doll that spews sarin gas – a detail that inverts a real-life story from the same year, in which NATO officers found booby-trapped toys in a Bosnian Muslim training camp (Pomfret 1996: 25). Gustavo Graef-Marino's *Diplomatic Siege* (1999), meanwhile, depicts the invasion of the US Embassy in Bucharest by dead-eyed Serb terrorists, one of whom displays a penchant for pornographic gay magazines. And in John Irvin's *The Fourth Angel* (2001), Serb terrorists watch pornographic videos. These details revive a longstanding occidental association of the Balkans with sexual excess (think of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*); but they also

serve the propaganda function of enemy construction, linking Serbs – and Serbs alone – with sexual depravity.

Other Hollywood actioners go further. John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) merits particular scrutiny as one of the few Hollywood action films to be set during the war itself. The film stars Owen Wilson as Lieutenant Chris Burnett, an American naval flight officer frustrated by the lack of opportunity for combat action. Eventually airborne on a reconnaissance mission over Bosnia, he deviates from his flightpath and is shot down in a demilitarized zone along with his pilot Stackhouse after photographing mass graves. The film's fetishization of the Americans' sophisticated surveillance technologies (Burnett refers to his aircraft's "shiny new digital camera") reinforces the pre-eminence of US high-tech, immersing the viewer in what Graham Dawson calls the "pleasure culture of war" (1994: 233–258). Burnett's photographs reveal that the local Bosnian Serb Army commander, General Miroslav Lokar, is conducting a secret genocidal campaign against the local population. Pursued by the Serbs in enemy territory, Burnett is eventually rescued through the belated efforts of Reigart – no thanks to Reigart's NATO superior, Admiral Piquet, an uptight Frenchman who represents pettifogging 'European' bureaucracy.

Piquet, who criticizes US unilateralism, is increasingly identified as the film's villain (Weber 2006: 62). The Serb soldiers, meanwhile, are heavily racialized "mono-dimensional demons" (Watson 2008: 55) who must be vanquished by angelic American forces. Cowardly and merciless and curiously unable to speak Serbo-Croat, the Serbs execute Stackhouse by shooting him in the back. And unlike the 'cool' white Americans and the Americanized, clean-looking Muslim youths who help Burnett during his ordeal, the Serbs are portrayed as "minstrels of mud and dirt" (Miskovic 2006: 450).

Burnett is successful in his mission and his photographic evidence results in Lokar appearing at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to face justice for his crimes. As in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, constructed news bulletins reinforce a pro-American perspective on the action. At an affective level, meanwhile, a high-octane rock music soundtrack shores up the assertion of US cultural hegemony. By these means, *Behind Enemy Lines* promotes a Manichean worldview in which US military masculinity, freed from "the constraints of multilateralism and diplomacy" (Ó Tuathail 2005: 361), guarantees moral clarity. It is therefore unsurprising that the film, although made before 9/11, was rush-released after the Twin Towers attack.

Serb screen villains often exhibit a backwardness and a desire to 'return' to the war, or to carry it on by other means, in order to avenge past humiliations. A well-known example is Victor Drazen, the chief villain of the first season of the Fox television series *24* (2001–2010), a Serb ethnic cleanser whose wife and

child were killed during an undercover CIA operation. Yet a desire for revenge is not entirely the preserve of atavistic Serb villains. The heroes of male action melodramas are themselves typically wounded (and thus, etymologically, traumatized) figures (see Rehling 2009: 55 – 82) and the Western soldiers and journalists who return to Bosnia have their own grievances to avenge, even if they do so under the civilized pretext of bringing war criminals to justice.

From the late 1990s, as Western bounty hunters charged into the Balkans in search of war criminals, Western film and television dramas began to reflect their experiences in a series of 'back to Bosnia' narratives. The most high-profile of these, Richard Shepard's film *The Hunting Party* (2007), is set five years after the Bosnian War. It is based on an *Esquire* article by Scott K. Anderson (2000) about three journalists who hatch an unconventional plan to spend their holidays finding and arresting Radovan Karadžić ("It's payback time for that fuck," as one of the reporters declares). The posse of journalists ventures into what one of them calls "the heart of this Balkan madness" in order to track down "the most wanted war criminal in Bosnia," Dr Radoslav Boghdanović, also known as The Fox, and his bloodthirsty bodyguard Srđan.

The Hunting Party's central protagonist, Simon Hunt (Richard Gere), is an American TV journalist whose Bosnian girlfriend was raped and murdered by Boghdanović in 1994. Like Flynn in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Hunt is a fearless journalist, stopping in the heat of battle to smoke cigarettes to a rock music soundtrack. But Hunt loses his composure – and consequently his job – during a live TV interview from Bosnia with his channel's veteran news anchor, Franklin. When Franklin, during a discussion of a massacre of Bosnian Muslims, tries to raise the question of Muslim responsibility for violence, Hunt explodes: "These people were butchered. Women were raped. Children were murdered. Come on, Franklin!" Hunt's outburst reveals his commitment to the "journalism of attachment." By contrast, the older anchorman Franklin embodies the conservatism of a compromised establishment and his vacillations compel Hunt to seek justice on his own terms. Like *Behind Enemy Lines*, then, *The Hunting Party* has a distinctly Oedipal subtext: the failure of paternal authority pushes Hunt, like Chris Burnett, to 'go rogue' and restore moral order by force.

The Fox and his bodyguard, meanwhile, are presented as Balkan Wild Men, animalistic avatars of a "volatile masculinity gone mad" (Longinović 2005: 38). The journalists eventually capture The Fox – no thanks to a laughably ineffectual UN police bureaucrat. Indeed, as in *Behind Enemy Lines*, US unilateralism trumps slow-moving, corrupt European diplomacy. That this unilateralism is covert and possibly illegal aligns the film with other Bosnian War thrillers, such as Mimi Leder's *The Peacemaker* (1999) and John Irvin's *The Fourth Angel* (2001),

and reflects what Ross Douthat (2008) calls the "paranoid style" of post-9/11 Hollywood.

Although it is set in the US, Mark Steven Johnson's film *Killing Season* (2013) also focuses on the settling of old scores from the Bosnian War. Here Robert de Niro plays Benjamin Ford, a US Bosnian War veteran who has retreated to the Appalachian mountains in order to forget his wartime experiences. Ford is tracked down, however, by Emil Kovač, a sadistic Serb soldier who had been shot by Ford during the war and now seeks revenge on the American. Most of the screen time in *The Killing Season* is devoted to the brutal to-and-fro combat between the two men as they chase, torture and occasionally speechify to one another in a battle for physical and moral supremacy.

Critically maligned and a commercial flop, *The Killing Season* has incurred widespread ridicule for its raft of cultural solecisms (Kovač's un-Serbian name and incongruously Islamic beard being the favourite targets of the film's online detractors). More troublingly, Balkanist stereotyping abounds. As Dina Iordanova notes, the Balkans have often been viewed by Westerners as a place of "face-to-face sadistic fervour involving blood, spilled guts, severed limbs, tortured and mutilated bodies" (2001: 162). Kovač brings this savagery to America, his preference for a bow and arrow marking him as a pre-modern savage.

Also problematic is the film's opening depiction of the Bosnian War, which is provided by way of backstory. Purporting to depict the final stages of the conflict, the film shows the liberation of a Serb-run concentration camp – complete with Trnopolje-style barbed wire fence – as part of an American ground operation in which US infantry fight a close range battle with the Serbs. This 'Trnopolje liberation' scene is, of course, an invention: US ground troops did not enter Bosnia in 1995, let alone 'liberate the camps,' which in any case had been closed down by the end of 1992. Rather, the scene re-stages the Bosnian War for the purpose of establishing American heroism and Serb depravity. The allusions here to the liberation of the Nazi death camps (notably, a US soldier's discovery of a freight train carriage stuffed with corpses) also serve to re-temporalize the action: 1995 becomes 1945.

4 Constructing the National Enemy in Post-Yugoslav Cinema

Most Western films about the war have a superegoic character, calling for action to restore political and moral order in the Balkans. By contrast, Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav productions – especially Serbian films – often display a dark

sense of humour and fatalism, exploring the nature of war in more ironic and allusive modes. The apparent elevation of poetics over politics in these Dionysian films (Gocić 2009) complicates and often confounds critical analysis. Interpretation is further complicated by the generic diversity of these films, which move beyond the drama and action genres favoured by Western directors to encompass satire, comedy and horror.

Unfortunately – and perhaps unsurprisingly – many directors from the former Yugoslavia have bent Hollywood's anti-Serb stick in the other direction, demonizing or at least marginalising Bosnian Muslim and other non-Serb identities. As several critics have argued, the cinema of the former Yugoslavia's most celebrated director, Emir Kusturica, betrays strong pro-Serb political sympathies. In the 1940s storyline in Kusturica's *Podzemlje* (*Underground*) (1995) – a film "supported and endorsed by government-controlled cultural institutions of Milošević's Yugoslavia" (Iordanova 2001: 122) – the heroes Marko and Crni "fight on relentlessly in occupied Belgrade, while the Slovenes and the Croats welcome Nazi troops, [and] Muslims and Croats steal weapons and money from the resistance fighters" (Magala 2005: 195). Nor does Kusturica, either here or in his subsequent Bosnian War film *Život je čudo* (*Life Is a Miracle*) (2004), acknowledge Serb atrocities in the 1990s. A great deal has already been written about Kusturica's nationalist affiliations, so here I shall only say that I agree with the majority of critics that Kusturica's films are as compromised by political bias as any Hollywood production.

A rather more complicated case is presented by Serb director Srđan Dragojević's tour-de-force *Lepa sela lepo gore* (*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*) (1996) – the Urtext of Bosnian War cinema. Rich in symbolism and dripping in irony, this is arguably the most sophisticated film about the war. It is set in the Višegrad tunnel (also known as the Brotherhood and Unity Tunnel) in 1992, where a Serbian fighter, Milan, is trapped with his comrades, surrounded by Muslim soldiers. The film regularly flashes back to Milan's happy adventures with his childhood friend Halil, one of the Muslims now outside the tunnel; many of these adventures take place near the tunnel, which the boys will not enter, convinced that an ogre dwells there. The film also jumps forward to Milan's post-war experiences in hospital, where, consumed with thoughts of vengeance for the murder of his mother, he determines to kill a young Muslim patient. Milan's journey from amity to animosity illustrates the poisonous power of nationalism. Dragojević also shows the depravity of the Serbs, as they drunkenly loot and burn Muslim villages, proudly sporting the *kokarda*. Milja Radović (2009: 195) is therefore right to argue that the film highlights the idiocies of Serb nationalism; this is no doubt why the production was treated with suspicion by the Serbian elite and ran into significant problems with the authorities.

On the other hand, *Lepa sela lepo gore* also delivers a riposte to Western ways of seeing, expressing "frustration with the Western representation of the war, of Serbs and the Balkans in general" (Radović 2014: 51). This revisionist perspective is embodied by the figure of an American journalist who finds herself in the tunnel with the Serbs: blinded by Western stereotypes, she is initially horrified by the men; but her antipathy towards them lessens with familiarity. Elsewhere Dragojević goes even further, seeming to justify or at least minimize the scale of Serb atrocities. The film's only visible Muslim victim appears in a scene in which the Serbs loot a home, the dead body of its owner, Ćamil, appearing in the background of the shot. As Pavle Levi points out, Dragojević's camera only briefly shows Ćamil, eventually refocusing on the Serb soldier in the foreground and blurring out the victim behind him (2007: 148–149). It might be added that Ćamil appears not only in the background of this shot, but through a window, a distantiating framing that positions Ćamil as a mere 'representation' existing outside the Serbs' – and perhaps the viewers' – sphere of interest. Also problematic in *Lepa sela lepo gore* is the dismissive presentation of the effete anti-war demonstrators who protest in front of the military hospital, risibly chanting John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance." Ultimately, then, *Lepa sela lepo gore* is an ambiguous text that criticizes some aspects of Serb nationalism while marginalizing Muslim suffering and the aspirations of the peace movement.

Many scholars of post-Yugoslav cinema regard *Ničija zemlja* (*No Man's Land*) (2001), directed by the Bosnian Muslim Danis Tanović, as an exemplary anti-war film that overcomes the sectarianism of other cinematic treatments of the war; but even here there are suggestions of nationalism. The film focuses on two combatants from opposing sides of the conflict – Čiki, a Muslim, and Nino, a Serb – who find themselves trapped between the Serb and Muslim front lines, as piranha-like international reporters seek to exploit the men's predicament and UN officials uselessly look on. Despite its welcome satire on the pretensions of Western journalism, however, *Ničija zemlja* frames the war and the trench-bound duo quite conventionally. The action in the trench is interspersed with a British TV news programme showing Radovan Karadžić threatening the Bosnian Muslims, and an argument between the film's two protagonists about the origins of the war identifies the Serbs as the only aggressors. The film's presentation of the unlikely trenchmates, meanwhile, is far from even-handed. The Bosnian Muslim, Čiki, is coded as the compassionate hero and his Rolling Stones tee-shirt reminds the audience that Muslims represent liberal, Western values. His Serb counterpart, on the other hand, is neurotic and duplicitous, attempting at one point to stab Čiki with his own knife. Notwithstanding the widespread critical assessment of *Ničija zemlja* as an anti-war film, then, Tanović, I would

suggest, tends to present the Bosnian War as a morality tale of good Muslim and bad Serb.

5 Beyond Good and Evil: Deconstructing the Enemy in Post-Yugoslav Cinema

Where then to turn for an unpatriotic imagining of the Bosnian War in which enmity is overcome and the dividing lines between enemy and friend are dissolved, or at least de-emphasized? Here we might discuss three post-Yugoslav films about the Bosnian War that are very different to one another in tone yet which indicate potential lines of flight away from ethno-nationalism. Notably, some of the most sensitive films about the Bosnian War, such as Aida Begić's *Snijeg* (*Snow*) (2008) and Juanita Wilson's *As If I Am Not There* (2010), were directed by women and depict women's suffering during and after the war. The film that has attracted most international attention for its depiction of the after-effects of war trauma on Bosnian women is *Grbavica* (*Esma's Secret*) (2006). Written and directed by Bosnian Jasmila Žbanić, *Grbavica* is, along with *Ničija zemlja*, the most watched film in post-war Bosnia (Zajec 2013: 200) and its success led to the Bosnian government belatedly agreeing to provide financial support for the war's rape victims. A "film with very few men" (Pavičić 2010: 49), it tells the story of a working class single mother, Esma, and her wayward daughter Sara, who was conceived when Esma was raped during the war, but who has been brought up to believe that her father was a *šehid*, or war hero. The film alludes subtly to the nature of Esma's experiences during the war and critiques the sexist social norms of post-war Bosnia: Esma works as a waitress in a nightclub, and her abhorrence of the crass philandering of its patrons, together with her unease when in close proximity to men, hint at the nature of her prison camp ordeal and suggest that gender relations have barely changed in Bosnia since the war.

Unlike Angelina Jolie's film about war rape, *Grbavica* shows little interest in political demonization. The film's quiet social realism constitutes an implicit critique of the wild, self-Balkanizing cinema of Kusturica and Dragojević (Pavičić 2010: 48), as does Žbanić's distinctive use of cinematic space. In Kusturica's *Podzemlje*, the above ground/below ground dichotomy symbolizes the discrepancy between Yugoslavia's Communist superstratum and the deceived masses who live under its auspices. In *Grbavica*, this topography is reversed: Esma and Sara are often presented in hilltop spaces overlooking the Bosnian capital city from which Sara derives her name. In contrast with Kusturica's and Dragojević's

enclosed spaces (basements, tunnels and graveyards), these locales convey a sense of possibility; and unlike the doomed, irredeemable characters of Kusturica and Dragojević, Esma and Sara are capable of change (Pavičić 49). Once Sara is apprised of her mother's secret, mother and daughter may begin a new life together.

Some other impressive post-Yugoslav films about the war focus on soldiers' as well as civilians' experiences of trauma. Kristijan Milić's *Živi i mrtvi* (*The Living and the Dead*) (2007), a Croatian-Bosnian co-production, follows Croat HVO soldiers fighting in the Croat-Muslim war of 1993. These scenes are intercut, however, with flashbacks to a previous generation of Ustaše-led soldiers fighting the Partisans in the Bosnian countryside during the Second World War. As the soldiers in the 1993 storyline stalk their Muslim enemies, they one by one lose their lives (sometimes to each other), all the while remarking upon the irony that they are now killing men with whom they went to school. This situation is mirrored in the Second World War scenes; in fact, some actors appear in both of the storylines, suggesting the essential commonality of soldierly experience across temporal and ethnic boundaries and invoking a 'hauntological' perspective on Yugoslavia's twentieth-century wars in which the dividing lines between past and present, friend and enemy become increasingly indistinguishable.

Somewhat similar in its downbeat atmosphere is *Neprijatelj* (*The Enemy*) (2011), directed by Serb Dejan Zečević and co-produced between Serbia, Republika Srpska and Croatia. *Neprijatelj* is a supernatural, allegorical drama with a distinctly Tarkovskian tone. Set in the immediate aftermath of the war, it begins with Serb soldiers, under the supervision of American IFOR troops, removing mines that they themselves had laid several years before. All of the men are damaged – whether by fear, aggression, or excessive religiosity – becoming increasingly abusive and eventually murderous towards one another. Searching a factory, the soldiers unearth a strange figure with the diabolical name of Daba, who has been walled into the building and who, disconcertingly, feels no cold, hunger or thirst. Initially, the chthonic Daba seems to be implicated in the violence, especially when the soldiers discover a mass grave underneath the factory, and at several points various frightened soldiers try – and fail – to kill him. Yet Daba tells the men that he deplores the killing of the war, remarking cryptically: "I am one of you." Indeed, as the film progresses it becomes clear that Daba is not the source of the growing tension among the men, but rather what Slavoj Žižek (1999: 121) calls an 'Id-machine,' an uncanny externalization of the soldiers' hostile proclivities. Craving an enemy, even after the end of the war, the soldiers have collectively conjured one up.

Daba epitomizes Zygmunt Bauman's figure of the Stranger: a liminal, 'undecidable' figure who is neither a friend nor an enemy and thus poses a threat

"more horrifying than that which one can expect from the enemy" (1991: 55). For the soldiers, Daba is terrifying not because he is an enemy (enemies, after all, can simply be killed), but because his uncertain identity unsettles the binary categories of good and evil, friend and foe, that still define the soldiers' world. Like *Lepa sela lepo gore*, in which the Bosnian War is attributed to a malevolent ogre in a tunnel, *Neprijatelj* could be accused of supernaturalizing and thereby depoliticizing the war. Nevertheless, the film does offer a memorable philosophical deconstruction of sectarianism.

Conclusion

Through a critical textual analysis of an indicative selection of Bosnian War films, this chapter has argued that both Western and post-Yugoslav cinematic representations of the Bosnian War have tended to engage in enemy construction and political distortion. Hollywood and Bosnian films about the conflict, notwithstanding the often impeccably liberal credentials of their directors, have often reproduced images of Serb villainy and psychopathy. Such images draw their force from the international demonization of Serbs and Serbia in the 1990s. They also resonate with the longstanding stereotypes of Balkanist irrationality and turmoil described in the work of Maria Todorova (1997) and, in the case of Hollywood cinema, draw upon an American tradition of representing Slavs as coarse, drunken and violent (Golab 1980: 138 – 140). At the geopolitical level, meanwhile, the foregrounding of these images serves to elide the complexities of Yugoslavia's civil war, recasting the conflict as a one-sided war of Serb aggression – a characterisation that has been, and continues to be widely propagated in Western news media. On the other hand, filmmakers including Kusturica and Dragojević have elaborated their own tendentious and pro-Serb versions of the Bosnian War, the former going so far as to demonize non-Serb identities. Given this state of affairs, it is hardly surprising that many Bosnian War films have provoked angry and emotional responses from audiences and critics. Predictably, these responses have tended to bifurcate according to national/regional identity: Angelina's Jolie's *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, for example, has been praised by Western and Bosnian critics, but excoriated in the Serbian press; Kusturica's films, meanwhile, have often been lauded in Serbia but damned by Western critics. A quarter of a century after the end of the conflict, then, it cannot be said that the cinema of the Bosnian War has contributed greatly to processes of historical understanding or post-conflict reconciliation.

While there is no mechanical link between the creative personnel or production contexts of cinema, on the one hand, and representational politics, on the

other, we might tentatively suggest that the films showing most resistance to the political demonology and geopolitical biases of Bosnian War cinema have some shared characteristics. Notwithstanding the problems with Angelina Jolie's *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, films with woman directors, such as *Grbavica*, have shown relatively little interest in apportioning national blame for the conflict and have focused primarily on the suffering caused by war, especially to its female victims. And although Kusturica's highly problematic international co-production *Podzemlje* might serve as a counter example, the anti-nationalist perspective of films such as the Serbian-Croatian *Neprijatelj* and the Croatian-Bosnian *Živi i mrtvi* perhaps suggest that the process of co-production can overcome the tendency to nationalist bias in the war film. At all events, the existence of such films shows that the cinema of the Bosnian War is capable of moving beyond the simple reversal of Western stereotypes and of challenging the sectarian discourses that have for so long disfigured both the region and its cultural representation.

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