

RESEARCH PAPER

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## THE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN FILM

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This paper focuses on the cultural stereotypes and various ethnic and sexual minorities in Croatian narrative film since 1990. Because 1990 marks a crucial break in the history of the Croatian cultural identity and the ethnicities of former Yugoslavia, the representation of minorities in the context of war and the postwar setting is an important indicator of transformation in the new society, and a gauge for observing its confrontation with a conflicted national heritage. The principal thesis establishes that the new society attempts to articulate its own identity through filmic representation, by negotiating diverse minority identities, which it ultimately conceives as a threat and a non-essential component, unable to be incorporated in the new social order. However, through exploring themes that were silenced prior to 2000, contemporary films give minorities a new voice and a strong visual path to recognition, which goes far beyond the previous stereotyped portrayals. In the period since 1990, a range of Croatian films has dealt with primarily ethnic/national minorities. Two trends are visible in this regard: an ethnic minority (particularly Serbian) that struggles for recognition in the context of war (e.g. in Vinko Brešan's 2003 film *Witnesses*) or other ethnic minorities in the postwar context (e.g. an Asian child in Ognjen Sviličić's 2004 film *Sorry for Kung Fu*). These two aspects often entwine, like in the film *Fine Dead Girls* (2002) by Dalibor Matanić, where a lesbian couple fights for recognition in a postwar Zagreb saturated with intolerance and war trauma.

**Key words:** contemporary Croatian film, 1990s–2000s, minority figures (ethnic/national/sexual/racial/cultural), ideology, stereotypes, war trauma, representational procedures, acculturation

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### INTRODUCTION

If we consider the historical perspective of Croatian cinema in different political and social contexts (from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary situation in the twenty-first century) we can observe that its visual, narrative, and ideological structure has been determined by several

ruptures. Although political, social, cultural, economic and technological contexts will influence the films of any national cinema throughout its history, these circumstances have affected Croatian cinema to a greater degree. Namely, every incidence of political or social turbulence has aesthetically and ideologically transformed Croatian cinema. This is especially true of the period from the 1940s to the present day.

Perhaps the most significant rupture occurred in 1990, when the Yugoslav state disintegrated into a bloody war. This rupture was well accentuated by most of the film scholars who dealt with Croatian and post-Yugoslav cinema. For example, Daniel Goulding observes that the “[v]iolent disintegration of Yugoslavia on five national states [...] marked the end of the complex and fruitful postwar experiment of building and maintaining one multinational film culture” (Goulding 2004: 194–195).<sup>1</sup> Marin Hirschfeld makes a similar point when he refers to Croatian film director and critic Petar Krelja’s claim that “the war deeply ruptured both the productive and creative infrastructure of the film industry in Croatia” (Hirschfeld 2011: 23). Croatian film scholar Nikica Gilić characterizes the transformation as a “post-Yugoslav cut” (Gilić 2010: 141), but this rupture was actually a symptom of much wider political and social turbulence throughout Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>2</sup> As Dina Iordanova argues, the “1990s can briefly be described as the period of post-Communist transition and transformation” (Iordanova 2003: 9).

Another two ruptures occurred after the war in Croatia ended in 1995, and in 2000 when the political (and consequently the social and cultural) climate changed again, enabling different filmic representations of the Croatian war and prewar (Yugoslav) situations, as well as the contemporary postwar one. All these transformations impacted the thematic and ideological focuses of contemporary Croatian cinema, particularly regarding the depiction of war, and films from the 1990s to 2000 were later labeled as *new* (Hribar 1999) or *young* (Škrabalo 1999) Croatian films.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging these political and social transformations is important, since it determines whether a certain film will be considered progressive (like Brešan’s *How*

<sup>1</sup> All subsequent translations from sources in Croatian are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Similar observations regarding Eastern and/or Balkan cinema can also be found in Iordanova 2001: 9, 11; Imre 2005: xi; Ravetto-Biagioli 2003: 455; and Horton 2000: 104.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed outline and description of these periods in Croatian cinematic history, see Gilić 2010: 141–162; Škrabalo 1998: 449–508; Škrabalo 2008: 167–270; and Turković and Majcen 2003: 42–44.

*the War Started on My Island and Witnesses*) or regressive (like *Madonna* by Hitrec, or *The Long Dark Night* by Vrdoljak) in terms of its representational procedures and attitude towards the national/ethnic question.

Even though film art in the new Croatian state did not have as much influence or was not considered as important as it was in the former Yugoslav state, it nevertheless proved its importance for reflecting the problems and ideological premises of contemporary Croatian society. Since filmic representations that dwell on these issues are marked by relational categories—meaning that a society’s situation, problems and identity can only be articulated through the representation of social figures that threaten to destabilize dominant positions—*minority figures* were especially important. The main thesis of this paper is that these figures, portrayed in more or less stereotypical terms, determine the ideological structure of the film in question, offering a convenient tool for establishing and criticizing different social values. The question of social stereotypes is especially important in this context, since it can tell us how the dominant culture sees other cultures, and how it sees itself mediated in cinematic terms. Since stereotypes include a reduction of the properties of a social group, thus generalizing its representation, the aim of this analysis is to provide a “critical dissection of repeated, ultimately pernicious constellations of character traits” (Stam 2000a: 275; Stam 2000b: 664). Whether the representation is pernicious or not, Lola Young maintains in her research on the question of race that “[i]n these studies it is assumed that stereotyping is an inherently negative practice” (Young 1996: 6).<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes using stereotypes can be a useful strategy for depicting the disintegration of a social body, and not representing a social (minority) group at all can be a form of (dominant) cultural repression.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, stereotypes are a complex issue, and can simultaneously include different aspects, such as the truthfulness of the representation, its positive or negative value, and its affirmative or negative impact. We must also bear in mind that dominant social groups are not spared these procedures. It is in this context that we must analyze the function of the minority figures

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<sup>4</sup> A similar and well developed argument can be found in Blum 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Even though there is no statistical research on the quantitative representation of minorities in contemporary Croatian fictional film, we can assume that it is a low percentage. However, there is some research into minority representation in other media, such as the internet and daily newspapers, which shows that, at least, they are not completely marginalized (see Župarić-Iljić 2011).

in question, and see what overall purpose they have in particular films and their narratives. For example, although the Roma character in Schmidt’s *The Melon Route* is stereotypically represented as nomadic, homeless, dirty, and officially unemployed but working in the illegal pirate CD trade, he is still depicted as a good and noble person, in the range of the “noble savage” stereotype. The implication of these character traits is not negative in itself, but has a negative (critical) impact in representing the destructed social body of postwar Croatia and Bosnia. A similar tendency is visible in the other examples of contemporary Croatian cinema that will be analyzed in this paper.<sup>6</sup>

But, since filmic representation in a national cinema context problematizes the values and self-images of the dominant culture more than those of the marginal one, minority figures are never represented as the origin or final destination of those representations. As Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang observes in the context of the representation of Chinese characters in Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Slovenian film, “[b]y using Chinese as a proxy for unrecognizable change, each film implicitly takes a stance on whether a society has the ability to reconcile its historically constructed identities with the contemporary realities of globalization and transition” (Rucker-Chang 2012: 201–202). Focusing on minority figures can thus be a useful device for explaining the transformations of Croatian cinema in recent years, and is a clear illustration of the emerging and shifting trend in studying (Eastern) European cinema and its neglected topics, as hinted by Mazierska (2010) and Dawson (2015).

This paper focuses on the changing political and social context in the 1990s, with special attention given to films made after the year 2000. The analysis includes a discussion of the social circumstances that determined the representation of minority figures in different films, and how they are related to the way dominant Croatian culture tackles issues of its own identity, conflicted past, transitional present, and pessimistic future. As Croatian film scholar Saša Vojković points out in the context of transforming subjectivity in contemporary Croatian cinema, “in Southeast Europe, notorious Balkan, redefining subjectivity, accepting the Other and undermining restricted ideological (often patriarchal) norms becomes a postwar and transitional

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<sup>6</sup> More on this can be found in Vidan 2013, who, in a similar fashion, focuses on “otherness” as a symptom of wider social tendencies and preoccupations in Croatian and other post-Yugoslav cinema.

necessity and reality” where “national, racial and ethnic identity, and the possibility of coexistence, is reconfigured” (Vojković 2006: 23).

The proposed analysis considers three types of representation: (1) representation of (ethnic) minorities in the war context; (2) representation of ethnic problems in the postwar context, where war trauma determines the meaning of the film in question; and (3) representation of (sexual and racial) minorities in the postwar context, deprived of the strong war trauma that is, nevertheless, important for the film’s narrative. The reason for choosing this paradigm is partly founded on thematic ground, since in each of the films analyzed these three topics determine the way minority figures are treated, and which social questions will be developed and problematized.

## 1. REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR: FROM CROATIAN SUFFERING TO A MORE CRITICAL APPROACH

As stated earlier, the 1990s post-Yugoslav rupture signified a considerable transformation of the organizational principles of Croatian cinema, and of its thematic focuses and representational practices. In the context of war and postwar trauma it is not unusual for the art of film to problematize society’s burning questions and set the filmic interest in one direction. This understandable orientation towards themes of war<sup>7</sup> was observed by Hirschfeld, who states that “[u]nsurprisingly, many Croatian films since 1990 have in some way featured the war for independence” (Hirschfeld 2011: 22). Dino Murtić similarly argues that “pictures whose central theme was the recent wars within the post-Yugoslav space came to the fore. The choice of topic(s) was hardly a surprise” (Murtić 2015: 78). And Škrabalo states that “it was expected that in the war years in Croatian film production the war topic would dominate” (Škrabalo 1999: 21).

Even though this orientation towards the war was not surprising, the general image of 1990s Croatian cinema was that it openly consisted of pure propaganda films. But Juraj Kukoč’s recent analysis reveals that only 50% of 1990s Croatian films were about the war for independence, while

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<sup>7</sup> In her “Introduction” to the collection of essays dealing with this topic in post-Yugoslav film, Dina Iordanova (2000:6) observes the same, and in the conclusion of her text she states surprisingly that “it is very likely that the year 2000 will mark the end of the series of films that dealt with the painful and traumatic Yugoslav break-up” (Iordanova 2006: 14).

only half of those were openly propagandistic. Since an orientation towards propaganda in films that try to convey the dominant ideology is a matter of degree, Kukoč argues that “the ratio of propagandistic films and films that deviate from [propaganda] is almost equal” (Kukoč 2016: 251).

Nevertheless, the dominant model of filmic self-representation and the representation of others (primarily distinguished by ethnic/national criteria) is what Croatian film scholar and critic Jurica Pavičić calls a model of *self-victimization* (Pavičić 2012: 51; Pavičić 2011: 111). This model includes a tendency for certain films to represent the war “as a simplified binary showcase in which naïve, well-intentioned Croats were stabbed in the back by their Serbian neighbors” and where “[c]haracters are black and white to the point of caricature, and divided almost exclusively along ethnic lines” (Pavičić 2012: 51). Films like *A Time For... (Vrijeme za..., 1993)* by Oja Kodar, *The Price of Life (Cijena života, 1994)* by Bogdan Žižić and *Madonna (Bogorodica, 1999)* by Neven Hitrec all perpetuate similar motifs of Croatian suffering and victimhood, colored by a simplistic polarization between of the disadvantaged Croats and the evil enemy (the Serbs), the latter being portrayed as inherently deviant and primitive. This is especially true in *Madonna*, which was characterized as an ideologically “regressive film” (Nenadić qtd. in Gilić 2014: 15), because of when it was produced. Hirschfeld (2011: 30) argues a similar thing of *The Long Dark Night (Duga mračna noć, 2004)*, directed by Antun Vrdoljak, as does Levi (2007: 114) of *Four by Four (Četverored, 1999)*, directed by Jakov Sedlar. Further, Träger argues that in *Madonna*, as in other films that deal with the war situation in a similar way, ethnic markers are always connected to religious ones. This is exemplified in *Madonna* in an extreme way, when the character Ana, representing the Virgin Mary is raped under a statue of the latter in a local catholic church (Träger 2014: 105–106). This strategy is understandable, considering the tight bond between nationalism and religion in Croatian social life and culture. In Träger’s words, “the most important ethnic marker is still religious denomination” (Träger 2014: 105), even when other non-religious elements come into play.

Some authors, like film historian Ivo Škrabalo in his earlier work, point out that these “films about the Homeland war were a prolongation of the film heritage from the earlier war” (Škrabalo 1996: 96), meaning that they were similar to the simplistic narrative universe of Yugoslav partisan films. However, this argument was later corrected by many film scholars, including Škrabalo himself. For example, in 1998 Škrabalo is more cautious, stating that these films were “conceived as replicas of previous partisan films”

(Škrabalo 1998: 488, emphasis mine), while Gilić is straightforward in his argument (in regard to Pavičić's work) that "Croatian films about the war have not produced anything similar to Yugoslav partisan films" (Gilić 2015: 155), even though "there are *some similarities* in film representation" (Gilić 2014: 17, emphasis mine). In a nutshell, Croatian war film lacked the action-based plot structure and active war heroes inherent to the partisan genre,<sup>8</sup> and was "not in the first place imposed as a genre" (Gilić 2010: 150). One film that did use the principle of ethnic polarization in the action-based war context is Stjepan Sabljak's independent (amateur) production *Surrounded* (*U okruženju*, 1998), a rare example of the explicit "genre", although it is considered primitive cinema (Gilić 2014: 18).

Regardless of this tendency towards depicting war settings, some films used different representational procedures, focusing instead on the psychological aspect of the war (even before it ended) without sentimental simplification or polarization. Examples of this are Lukas Nola's film *Each Time We Part* (*Svaki put kad se rastajemo*, 1994) and *Washed Out* (*Isprani*, 1995) by Zrinko Ogresta, who continued to work through war traumas in his mosaic-structured film *Here* (*Tu*, 2003). The latter is similar to Lukas Nola's highly modernist film *Celestial Body* (*Nebo sateliti*, 2000), which is a later example of a new approach to the questions raised by war.

In that context, the first truly critical film regarding the simplistic representation of ethnical/national distinction in the war context is Vinko Brešan's "black" comedy *How the War Started on My Island* (*Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku*, 1996), which is a comic subversion of traditional representational principles. As Gilić observes, this film was "recognized by the wider audience as a dramatic cut, a big change in the representation of war not only in regard to the first films about the topic, but also in regard to television, newspapers and other representations of war" (Gilić 2014: 14). Brešan's film represents the beginning of a conflict on a nameless Croatian island, where Aleksa, a Serbian officer in the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), is refusing to surrender the barracks where the weapons are kept without explicit instructions from a higher authority, and is threatening to blow it up. The simple narrative situation and conflict are complicated by the representational discrepancies that follow Aleksa, whose character is not

<sup>8</sup> Additional differences about this and related topics can be found in Murtić, while Aida Vidan accentuates the different usage of space in partisan and post-1990s war films in her article about the representation of spaces in South-Slavic films. See Murtić 2015: 79 and Vidan 2011, respectively.

reduced to the evil, primitive and inherently deviant enemy found in earlier films from the 1990s, or even in the context of the comedy genre conventions that would justify such a simplified and caricatured representation.

The representational subversion that this film offers is visible not only in the procedure of humanizing the enemy ethnic figure, but also in its comic relief, delivered while simultaneously dealing with extremely serious and real themes in the context of a recently ended war. Considering this context and the traumas that followed it, it might seem strange that such a comical depiction was so popular with the Croatian audience, and was commercially successful. But this is understandable if we take into account the success of comedies in general throughout the history of Croatian cinema, including the 1970 comedy *He Who Sings Means No Harm* (*Tko pjeva zlo ne misli*) by Krešo Golik, and the Croatian audience's general apprehension of serious (especially war or war related) films. One possible explanation for the positive reception of Brešan's film is offered by Crnković, who argues that "the film returns to laughter and comedy, which were sorely absent in the cultural landscape of the first half of the 1990s, affected as it was with the high drama of profound changes" (Crnković 2012: 176).

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Nevertheless, as in all war films from the 1990s, a period colored by nationalism, Brešan's film pays "tribute" to the almost transcendental nature of Croatian suffering. This is visible in the film's final scene, in which a minor character, a poet named Dante, is killed by chance while reciting Antun Gustav Matoš' poem "1909", thereby representing the symbolic death of Croatia.

Another important aspect of the representation of minorities in this film is its typical reduction of characters motivated and justified by comedy conventions. Since the Yugoslav National Army barracks represent a miniature model of the Yugoslav state, with its multiethnic and multinational structure, the characters inhabiting that place are also simplified representatives of each of the Yugoslav Republic's nationalities: the Croat, the Serb, the Bosnian, the Macedonian, the Montenegro, the Kosovar Albanian, and the Slovenian. Since he is incarcerated, the Croat is represented as a victim, but he is still very active, escaping from prison while, for example, the Montenegrin and Kosovar Albanian are represented only as sketches, that is in comical extremes. It is important to mention that the Slovenian character is actually a Croat, pretending to be a helper of the fictional colonel Kostadinović (also a Croat, trying to save his son from the barracks) who is representative of the ridiculous army officer enunciating the typical empty slogans that circulated throughout socialist society (e.g.



“the internal enemy never sleeps”). This strategy of ridiculing the Yugoslav army and the general myths of Yugoslav society is a direct consequence of the deterioration of the imposed values present in the old social system. In every act of the characters’ behavior, whether they are soldiers executing their duties, or pretending to be someone else (like colonel Kostadinović), they subvert the myth of “brotherhood and unity,” which “was the official motto of the Yugoslav Federation” and “a symbolic appeal for different nationalities to live in peace and coexistence” (Murtić 2015: 1).

Further, even though the army barracks *do* constitute a multiethnic space in a literal sense, the main difference between the soldiers and their superior Aleksa is that they are there out of necessity, while he truly believes in maintaining the old system. This is evident in the soldiers’ reluctance to obey Aleksa’s orders to shoot at civilians at the end of the film, and especially in their unserious attitude towards the situation as a whole, exemplified in an absurd scene where Kostadinović’s Slovene assistant convinces two soldiers (a Montenegrin and a Kosovar Albanian) to perform a sexual act. Pavle Levi interprets this scene in a symbolic manner, concluding that “the joke is thus symptomatic of the large-scale socio-cultural process taking place across Yugoslavia in the early 1990s [...] the process of *legitimation* of ethnophobic sentiments, which served as the backbone of the federation’s demise” (Levi 2007: 134). However, such an over-interpretation is unnecessary since, in the film’s narrative, the comical scene functions as a subversion of Aleksa’s serious intentions, and as comic relief and a parody of army myths. Actually, the comical attitude of this particular scene is part of Brešan’s overall treatment of the narrative. This is visible in other comical and absurd situations, in characters’ behavior, in the dialogue, and in the film’s visual configuration and use of close-ups, low angle framing and wide-angle shots that distort the perspective, making the characters look grotesque.

Another important aspect of this film’s treatment of the (ethnic) minority figure is its aforementioned humanization of the Serbian enemy. This is achieved through connecting Aleksa’s cultural and personal background with the local island community, since his wife is of Croatian ethnicity and active in local everyday life. First of all, Aleksa is not reduced to the stereotype of an inherently evil enemy, but “as imperfect, ordinary, often funny, and far from either inhuman or even unlikeable” (Crnković 2012: 177). The only stereotype imposed is that in the range of the army officer. Further, the conflict between Aleksa (the old system) and the local Croatian community (the new system) is made *private*, i.e. a matter of the personal relationship between Aleksa, his friends, his wife and his mistress. The privatization

of conflict is a strategy distributed in the classical narrative double plot structure, in which Aleksa's reluctance to surrender is realistically motivated by his fear of his wife, and by his stubbornness and sense of military duty. His hatred of Croats is implicit and marginal, and verbalized only once during the film as a form of coping with an intense emotional situation (see Figure 1). A similar privatization of conflict is visible in the character of Kostadinović/Blaž Gajski, whose only motivation to engage in events is to save his imprisoned son and remove him from the conflict.

All this points towards Brešan's different treatment of the war situation, where conflict and death is more a matter of chance and complex interpersonal relationships than the result of a metaphysical hatred. Or, as Crnković rightly claims, "the film is interesting because of a subtle subversion of the more general paradigm of seeing history as a result of a chain of necessities," that is, "Brešan's film repeatedly emphasizes the role of contingencies through its own unpredictable twists of plot and the characters' own unforeseeable 'changes of heart'" (Crnković 2012: 177, 178).

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Figure 1. Brešan's *How the War Started on My Island* (1996). The enemy is represented as simultaneously emotional and ridiculous.

Even though Brešan's film offers a different perspective on the contemporary problems of Croatian society, it is still blind to more provocative themes that might open a new approach to inter-ethnic conflict.

The films *Witnesses* (*Svjedoci*, 2003), also directed by Vinko Brešan, and *The Blacks* (*Crnci*, 2009), codirected by Goran Dević and Zvonimir Jurić, achieve this new approach by representing the highly controversial theme of Croatian war crimes inflicted on Serbian civilians. Addressing this previously silenced topic was made possible by the changed political circumstances of 2000. Twin ruptures were caused by the death of the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman, and by the victory of the Social Democratic Party (which was anti-nationalistically oriented) in the national elections, which opened the space to ideological transformation. Prior to that time it was undesirable

to consider that the Croatian Army could have committed war crimes in a conflict that was considered defensive and justified.

Brešan's *Witnesses* was the first film to come to grips with such a politically controversial topic. Or, as Škrabalo points out, "it was the first time that war crimes executed by the Croatian side against Serbian civilians was thematized" (Škrabalo 2008: 236). The film focuses on the investigation of the murder of Serbian civilian Jovan Vasić, and the disappearance of his little daughter, who is considered to be a witness to the crime. The narrative is set in wartime Karlovac, and depicts the efforts of a small community to cover up and justify the crime. Even though Brešan's film opens a space for the recognition of criminal treatment toward the Serbian minority during the so-called Homeland War (*Domovinski rat*), it nevertheless attempts to justify the murder in the narrative's logic, because the Serbian civilian is stereotypically qualified as a criminal (he is a loan shark and a war profiteer). Further, the community's justification for participating in the cover-up of the crime and the kidnapping of its only witness (a little girl) is additionally motivated by wartime hysteria and ethnic intolerance, amplified by the fact that the father of Joško (the murderer, and also a Croatian soldier) was killed by the Serbian army. In the ethnic warfare context, this motif is considered to be enough to justify revenge, even though the two events are not directly connected.

The paranoia of the war setting and the crime motif are additionally marked by the false perspective of the characters involved in the murder, who start to see even their good neighbors as a potential threat. This motif was also present in the war context, in which yesterday's friends became enemies because of their different ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 2). And even though, for example, Hirschfeld observes that "[w]hile openly criticizing the Tudman-era denial and cover-up of Croatian war crimes, *Witnesses* also attempts to chart the traumatizing and tragic events that led the young men to commit such atrocities, but without aiming to exempt them of their culpability" (Hirschfeld 2011: 33), there are some indications, mainly in the film's narrative characterization, that say the opposite. Like the characterization of the Serb Jovan Vasić used to justify his death, the justification of the murderer Joško comes in the form of his inherently flawed character, and not by his nationality or his hatred of the Serbs—a procedure that serves as a tool for evading any wrongdoing in the context of direct Croatian national intolerance. That is, the murderer Joško is characterized as a person who had a history of deviant behavior prior to the war and, as shown in later parts of the film, is indirectly responsible for

his brother Krešo's war injury. Through this kind of qualification the film gives the viewer a reason to exculpate Joško of his guilt. A similar narrative strategy is executed to depict the motif of Joško and Krešo's mother (played by Serbian actress Mirjana Karanović), who lost her husband in the war. Again, as in Brešan's *How the War Started on My Island*, we have an implicit *private* narrative plot and realistic motivation as a foundation for character behavior and moral justification; one of the reasons their mother participates in the cover-up is her wish to preserve the rest of her nuclear family. On the other hand, though, her active persuasion to kill the only witness (the innocent girl) is motivated by pure revenge for her husband's death.

Nevertheless, Brešan's attitude towards the war crime motif is more nuanced, since the characterizations described within are not the main focus of the film. As many scholars observe with regard to the film's complex structure and multiple points of view, "the film's narrative structure in itself suggests the complexity of the issue of Croatian complicity in war crimes" (Hirschfeld 2011: 33) and "develops complex relationships and connections among the townspeople that suggest their multiple levels of complicity" (Mihailović 2012: 199) while it simultaneously "draws us into a guessing game, judgments and – most importantly – successive radical revisions of those judgments and attendant facing up to our own presuppositions which shaped those previous judgments, now shown to be wrong" (Crnković 2012: 194).

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Figure 2. Brešan's *Witnesses* (2003). The subjective point of view shots offer a false perspective in interpreting the event as threatening. It serves as an indication of war hysteria, in which everyone is seen as an enemy.

Dević and Jurić's film *Blacks* goes a step further in depicting the topic of war crimes. Like *Witnesses*, it is difficult to talk about the representation of minority figures in this film at first glance, since the extreme elliptical presentation prevents us from ever seeing the Serbian characters. But the whole point of the *Blacks* is to problematize the nature of war crimes, its motivations, and its consequences for the Croatian characters. This focus and representational strategy is not unusual, since the film is concerned

more with atmosphere and psychology than action. The contrast between the opening scene and later parts highlights the anguished chamber-like atmosphere of the narrative, accentuating the nuanced (im)possibility for the Croatian characters to morally and personally deal with the situation. Or as others have observed about this contrast, "bucolic images, however, will become the site of the starkly contrasting visual and ethical weight to become apparent in the subsequent shocking sequences" (Mortimer 2012: 206), and "with each subsequent shot, the cracks in the soldiers' logic, loyalty, preparedness, purpose and motivation become more apparent" (Vidan 2011: 185).

Unlike in Brešan's film, here the justification through characterization is non-existent, since the film represents a small paramilitary army division (the *HOS* – Croatian Defense Forces) that tortures an unknown group of Serbian civilians in an abandoned building (based on the real case known as "the garage"). Considering that the aesthetic orientation of this film centers on creating a dark, highly sickening atmosphere through *chiaroscuro* lighting, and character psychology and narrative fragmentation accompanied by a large number of visual ellipses, the real torture is never wholly present, eliminating the possibility of giving the victims a true voice. A shot at the end of the film attempts to represent the unconceivable action, but is reduced to its consequences. An empty room is covered in blood suggesting the un-representational nature of events, filtered through one of the characters (known only as "the New One"). This un-representational nature is further emphasized in the film by the other characters who participate in the torture, who refer to the torture-room and the events that take place within as *it*, thus verbally defending themselves from an adequate qualification of their actions, and silencing the ethnic, national or other subjectivity of their victims (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3. Dević and Jurić's *Blacks* (2009). Torture is represented through visual ellipsis.

This verbal impotence to name the victims and articulate the true nature of the torture is by no means a strategy to diminish their victim status or

silence the atrocities of the crime. Quite the contrary: the verbal, visual and narrative exclusion of the crime motif functions as an absent structuring force on the soldiers' psychology, and as a constant and evolving deterioration of their personhood and mutual relations, ending in death when they are trapped in a minefield. In this context, the film's fatalism only accentuates the inevitability of punishment for the crimes committed.

## 2. REPRESENTATION OF POSTWAR TRAUMAS AND THE QUESTION OF AN ETHNICAL/NATIONAL POLARIZATION

Another type of filmic representation that deals with minority/majority ethnic polarization falls under the category of films that analyze this conflict in the postwar setting, and where war trauma determines the whole narrative and ideological universe of the film in question. Although local ethnic polarization does not have to be an exclusive paradigm for this kind of representation, it seems to be the dominant one.

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One such example is Arsen Anton Ostojić's film *Nobody's Son* (*Ničiji sin*, 2008), which represents the topic of ethnic polarization filtered through the main character Ivan, a Croatian war veteran who lost both legs during his service. This film, along with *Witnesses* and *Blacks*, represents a new type of Croatian cinematic practice that Jurica Pavičić calls the *cinema of normalization/consolidation* (Pavičić 2012: 55; Pavičić 2011: 185; Pavičić 2010: 48). This type of cinema deviates from the prevalent self-victimization routine of 1990s cinema, and opens the possibility for a more critical and complex view on the topic of ethnic polarization and the origins, structure and consequences of the war. In Pavičić's view, this type of film offers "minimalistic dramas set in unexotic urban settings, dealing with active, western-like heroes who actively seek to change their destiny" (Pavičić 2012: 55) and "deal with characters who try to cope with the post-war reality" (Pavičić 2010: 47). The main premise of the film is the ethnic conflict that arises within the main character (Ivan), regarding his national and religious identity. During the narrative, Ivan discovers that, besides being a Croatian war veteran, who by definition has a negative image of the Serbian opposition, he is also a biological Serb. Ivan is the son of former secret police officer Simo Aleksić, who was (during the Yugoslav period) responsible for the incarceration of his present, non-biological father (politician Dr. Izidor Burić, a highly nationalistic and hypocritical Croatian figure).

The identity conflict that arises between Ivan's Serbian biological heritage and his participation in the Croatian cultural uprising causes a complete destruction of his self-image. This conflict takes a grotesque form when Ivan starts to sing a Serbian war song amongst other Croatian war veterans, who are intolerant to that kind of provocation. On one hand, this ethnic conflict within the character's identity is a destruction and deconstruction of the influential myth about the *genetic purity* of the Croatian national identity, which is still prevalent in parts of the Croatian national culture today. As Renate Hansen-Kokoruš argues in relation to this film, there is a "simultaneous unmasking of the nationalistic myth about 'pure' ethnic background and the image of a national past as a lie and forgery" (Hansen-Kokoruš 2014: 207). On the other hand, the purpose of Ivan's sung provocation is rooted in its connection to the religious motif. That is, the narrative and personal motivation for this kind of behavior is rooted in his *catholic* background, since singing a Serbian song in front of Croatian veterans functions as a tool both for his death (the veterans kill him because they cannot bear the sound and lyrics of the song), and for escaping carnal sin (Ivan wants to kill himself, but the Roman Catholic Church denounces suicide).

The most extreme articulation of this biological/cultural identity conflict is present in a statement from the hero that encapsulates the whole ethnic problem: "Tell me, which part of my body did I lose, Croatian or Serbian?" This statement directly accentuates the hysteria of pure national identity, filtered through Ivan's physical body, which no longer has fixed ground on which to stand (see Figure 4). As Träger observes: the "film impressively shows how constructed and arbitrary ethno-national identity really is" (Träger 2014: 110).

The interplay between this ethnic/national identity, religious motif and war trauma is filtered through the main character's figure, which includes his physical body and his cultural self-image. Unlike the situation in Dević and Jurić's *Blacks*, where the space of the other (Serbian victims) is externalized, in Ostojić's film the same space of interethnic conflict is internalized through Ivan's psyche. The psychic space of his cultural, national and religious identity, with its direct effect on his body (the physical trauma of his lost legs confirms his veteran status), is thus called into question while transposing itself on the physical level. In this sense his incomplete body functions as a reflection of his split national foundation. As in the fatalist ending in *Blacks*, Ivan's destructed psyche, which cannot integrate the Serbian identity into his preconceived Croatian identity, also ends in death as a final solution to this insurmountable conflict.



Figure 4. Ostojić's *Nobody's Son* (2008). The contradiction of the character's ethnic identity takes a grotesque form, through a collision of Ustasha and Chetnick songs.

Another example of this kind of representational procedure, although lacking the local ethnic polarization, is Branko Schmidt's *The Melon Route* (*Put lubenica*, 2006). This film focuses on war veteran Mirko, in the context of a postwar transitional Croatia marred by deviant values. This time the postwar trauma functions as a subtext and narrative background for the depiction of the character's destructed psyche, and society in general. Accordingly, the deviant context of the new society, presumably caused by the war, is filtered through two other minority figures directly connected to Mirko's life and part of his marginalized social position. One such figure is a Chinese emigrant, who tries to cross the Croatian border in search of a better life in the EU, and the other is a Roma boy who befriends Mirko. Both these characters are emblematic of the marginalized, oppressed and invisible part of society, where the corrupt and lawless values of a new transitional society flourish.

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But, even though the representation of these minority figures points to the way the transitional society treats them (without acknowledging their ethnic identity and without ever naming them), the main purpose of their representation in the film's narrative lies in the articulation of Mirko's social position: that of a traumatized anti-hero, whose war trauma contradicts the opportunism of the postwar situation, and whose unwanted position illustrates the archetypal image of a disadvantaged war veteran: an image still present in the Croatian national imagery (see Figure 5).

Several points are important to grasp in this context. First, the motivation of the intimate social relationship established between Mirko, the Chinese emigrant and the Roma boy. Their connection is made possible because they are all unwanted figures in a transitional society that has different reasons for marginalizing each of them. Mirko's marginalization is part of a strategy to exclude harmful war consequences from the contemporary situation, while the two other characters are excluded because of their ethnic backgrounds.



As a result, in Zhen Zhang’s review of the film he argues of the strong bond between Mirko and the Chinese woman that “[t]he main reason for their mutual attraction is not difficult to grasp” (Zhang 2012: 238).

On the other hand, the Chinese and Roma characters still function as representations of the deteriorating values of a post-war society, and not as the main interest of the film’s narrative. Accordingly, in relation to Schmidt’s film, Rucker-Chang maintains that

[w]hile *Melon Route* depicts a Chinese character who occupies more than one or two frames and who is certainly more of a round character than Chinese in other films, it still falls within the trope of using the Chinese to invoke ostracism, or the Other. Both the Chinese woman and the Croatian veteran are orphaned by circumstances beyond their control. (Rucker-Chang 2012: 212)

Both minority characters are stereotyped or reduced to certain properties attributed to them by the dominant culture. The Roma boy is part of the illegal CD trade, nomadic, homeless and dirty, but benevolent, while the Chinese woman is obedient, polite and perceived only as a source of income for the corrupt individuals of the transitional society.

Furthermore, since one of the key topics (besides war) in post-Yugoslav cinema is the integration of western values into these societies and states, as pointed out by Wayne (2002: 93), it is not surprising that *Melon Route* plays with that motif as well. Here, the image of the civilized West is accentuated by the motif of emigration to Germany, where the Roma and Chinese characters will, presumably, find prosperity and a more tolerant setting, while Mirko will be left behind. Even though this motif is not problematized but taken as a given in this film, other contemporary Croatian films focus on it in more detail and in a more critical manner. For example, Ognjen Sviličić’s film *Armin* (2007) depicts a German film production crew as colonialist, since they wrongly interpret the character Armin’s illness as a consequence of war trauma (which best suits their cinematic interests). Similarly, Tomislav Radić’s film *What Iva Recorded* (Što je Iva snimila 21. listopada 2003., 2005) shows the discrepancy between the main character Božo’s image of the civilized German businessman Hoffner, and Hoffner’s actual behavior, which does not fit this image at all.

Similar motifs are articulated in relation to the shifting image of the city of Zagreb in *Armin* and in Schmidt’s film *Metastases* (*Metastaze*, 2009) where Bosnian characters from the other side of the border qualify it as a western, civilized setting, while the true nature of the city depicted in these

films is anything but that. Pavičić (2010: 51) observes that one reason for this image of Zagreb is rooted in “the mythology of Yugoslavia” where it “had and still has the role of a contact zone with modernity”.



Figure 5. Schmidt’s *The Melon Route* (2006). The marginalized come together: a war veteran, a Chinese emigrant and a Roma boy.

Other films also fit into this representational category. For example, Goran Rušinić’s *Buick Riviera* (2008), which deals with the Serbian/Bosnian polarization; Vinko Brešan’s *This Is Not the End (Nije kraj)*, 2008), which portrays the Croatian/Serbian problem through the figure of the Roma narrator as an impartial observer; Dejan Šorak’s *Two Bench Players (Dva igrača s klupe)*, 2005), which inverts the Croat/Serb paradigm; and an early example of the Croatian/Yugoslav conflict in Krsto Papić’s *A Story from Croatia (Priča iz Hrvatske)*, 1991).

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### 3. REPRESENTATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION AND THE QUESTION OF MINORITY FIGURES

The third category of film representations in new Croatian cinema deals with minority figures in a postwar situation by placing emphasis on prejudices and the ideological (patriarchal, xenophobic or homophobic) configuration of contemporary society, instead of on war trauma.

The only film that puts sexual minorities in the foreground is Dalibor Matanić’s *Fine Dead Girls (Fine mrtve djevojke)*, 2002). This film depicts the life of lesbian couple Marija and Iva in the urban postwar setting of Zagreb, and is framed by a detective plot in which Iva’s son is kidnapped. Most of the film focuses on the representation of events that led to the kidnapping, articulating the intolerance of Croatian society toward this

lesbian couple that functions as an external threat to its dominant patriarchal, nationalistic and religious values. Since the apartment building where they live is inhabited by grotesque, hypocritical figures that represent Croatian society in miniature,<sup>9</sup> Iva and Marija’s sexual orientation is a destabilizing element that exceeds other more important deviant structures of the small community.

One significant objection that Croatian film critic Mima Simić (2006; 2010) raised in this regard is Matanić’s excessive emphasis on the dominant cultural values that see a lesbian relationship as an aberration, causing oppression of the pair and the death of one of them. This is why Simić, in her review of the film, poses the question: “Why did the first Croatian celluloid lesbians have to die?” As Simić reiterates in relation to Matanić’s film,

[a]s a vehicle for critique of the new militaristic, traditionalist, patriarchal, and nationalist discourses and practices, it symbolically sacrificed the woman/lesbian (and paradoxically) served to perpetuate the *identical* ideology and discourses it aimed to critique, ultimately preventing the establishment of the woman/lesbian *subject*. (Simić 2012: 95)

Consequently, it “represent[s] lesbians (and women) as victims, and a lesbian relationship as an impossibility, although it is not additionally presented as an aberration and a sexual anomaly” (Simić 2006: 64; see also Simić 2010: 213).

Furthermore, the practice that Matanić’s film presumably develops is explained in relation to the characterization of Marija and Iva where, in Simić’s words, “the dynamics of this lesbian relationship fit very well into the heterosexual matrix” (2006: 66). That is, the film does not show the full dynamics of a lesbian relationship, apart from through homophobic intolerance, and represents it in a stereotypical way by characterizing Iva as the feminine part of the couple (fragile woman) and Marija as the masculine (*butch*) part, thus placing them within the heteronormative paradigm “with strictly defined binary gender roles” (Tešija et al. 2014: 349).

<sup>9</sup> A similar strategy was developed in one of Matanić’s earlier films, *The Cashier Wants to Go to the Seaside* (*Blagajnica hoće ići na more*, 2000), but without sexual minority figures. Here the stereotyping is along regional lines, where the main male character (the owner of a small local shop) and his lover are represented as primitive, greedy, crude and uncultured (traits connected to their Herzegovinian heritage). As Knežević observes, the “gallery of characters in the film functions as a caricatured sum of the Croatian social pathology of the transitional period” (Knežević 2003: 6), and is thus very similar to the strategy in *Fine Dead Girls*.

Apart from this type of stereotyping, Jelena Tešija, Viktorija Car, and Josip Šipić, point to another stereotype that fits into the patriarchal paradigm, mainly the representation of the landlord Olga as “the monster mother of the rapist Danijel” (Tešija et al. 2014: 350). In this context, the portrayal of a mother character as a root of the intolerance and harmful actions towards the lesbian couple provides yet another negative stereotype and affirmation of the patriarchal social order. A similar argument could be made in relation to her husband Blaž (played by Ivica Vidović), who is represented as one aspect of the patriarchal stereotype: a passive, indifferent but benevolent man, who tries to avoid conflict and meddling in other peoples’ private lives. If stereotypical representation is addressed in relation to the film’s lesbian and female characters in general, it must be addressed in relation to its other characters too. Matanić’s narrative and visual strategy throughout the film is to represent all characters as caricatures, with the only difference that the representatives of the dominant patriarchal, nationalistic and religious values are depicted in a more negative and crude manner.<sup>10</sup>

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We must bear in mind that the main purpose of this film is to show a social deviance colored by hypocrisy, by selecting a specific minority group through which the true scope of this deviance can best be articulated to establish a clear distinction between standardized and non-standardized social matrices. This is achieved by through the wide range of characters who inhabit the apartment building, each of whom represents one distinctive aspect of the Croatian mentality. These characters are: Olga (a frustrated old matriarch, responsible for the deviance caused by patriarchal values); Danijel (her son, a “mummy’s boy,” strongly under Olga’s influence), who raped Iva, and is a member of the skinhead subculture; a Croatian war veteran who hates Serbs, goes to church on Sundays and beats his wife; an older, former communist who keeps his dead wife in his apartment; Marija’s father, who is an rigid catholic and uses the services of a prostitute named Lidija (who is the only decent character in the building); a doctor who performs illegal abortions and hates homosexuals; and a Roma who is almost killed by the skinhead gang and functions as an indicator of the culture of violence and intolerance toward minorities.

Such a caricatured depiction of all the characters in the film’s diegesis could also be interpreted as Iva’s subjective experience, since she is the story’s extradiegetic narrator. This is affirmed in the different visual treatment of

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Simić is reasonably charitable towards the stereotyping in Snježana Tribuson’s film *The Three men of Melita Žganjer* (*Tri muškarca Melite Žganjer*, 1998), but fails to acknowledge similar procedures in Matanić’s film (See Simić 2012: 93).

the framing story, and the hypodiegetic level on which most of the atrocities take place. In this context, the characters' excessive deviance could be the result of Iva's focalization, caused by trauma, and the lesbian relationship conceived in heteronormative terms could be interpreted as the perspective of the intolerant characters, filtered through Iva's focal point. Even the *butch* (active)/*femme* (fragile, passive) characterization is useful to the film's narrative, since it provides motivation for a series of actions. For example, Iva being raped rather than Marija is directly justified by Marija's "masculine" type behavior, which makes her unattractive to Danijel, but also causes her death at the film's climax, since, as Kevin Moss notes, "[a]s a butch partner, Mare also transgresses gender norms, so one might conclude that this is why she has to be eliminated" (Moss 2008: 129).

This brings us to another important point about Matanić's film: its repeated reference to the affirmation of the heteronormative paradigm throughout its narrative structure. Because in the end film places Iva in a heterosexual, matrimonial situation with her former boyfriend Dalibor and their kidnapped son, some authors, like Laćan, argue that "the finale of the film *celebrates heteronormativity* as it offers a scene of the happy reunion of Iva, her husband and their son" (Laćan 2015: 236, emphasis mine). Laćan goes further with this interpretation, offering a harsh critique of Matanić, arguing that Iva's "conversion thus signifies not only her submission to the patriarchal expectations of marriage and family, but also to those of the film's director" (Laćan 2015: 237).

I would not go so far as to assign this procedure to the real author (or the implicit one, for that matter), but in the logic of the film's narrative this heterosexual conversion is reasonably obvious. It is part of the *sanction* that has to be performed on this homosexual relationship, which does not fit the patriarchal paradigm. Even though Marija and Iva are unequally "punished" for their sexual transgression (Marija is killed, while Iva is raped, and marries in the end), we have to bear in mind that other characters are also sanctioned for their actions, including the negative characters who inflicted different types of violence on Iva and Marija. In the end, all the homophobic "villains" are dead, including Olga, her son Danijel, and Marija's father, who tried to break up the relationship. This is all part of the film's main interest to depict the deteriorating values of a post-war patriarchal Croatian society, which cannot deal with anything that does not fit its established norms.

A key element of the depiction of this ruined social structure is the film's focus on heterosexual "impotence" and displaced male gender roles (in tandem with the lesbian topic). As Moss maintains,

When *Fine mrtve djevojke* shows straight sex it is with a negative sign: Daniel’s rape of Iva, in which she lies passive and numb on the floor. This depiction is in keeping with the ethics of the film, in which enforcement of heterosexist order is consistently presented as negative. (Moss 2008: 131)<sup>11</sup>

Contrary to Simić, Dumančić observes that “*Fine Dead Girls* takes great pains to portray male heterosexual characters as chronically incapable of assuming patriarchal roles” and that “they are symbolically impotent to perform basic patriarchal duties” (Dumančić 2012: 156).

Hence, this micro-community tied to a single building offers a panoramic overview of postwar Croatian society, and its destruction (see Figure 6).



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Figure 6. Matanić’s *Fine Dead Girls* (2002). Characters react to the fact that the girls are lesbians. Reactions range from indifferent, to mild, to offensive, depending on characterization.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Muzur and Rinčić (2010: 150) fail to recognize this ethical dimension of the film, and argue that, because of the negative depiction, there is no space for empathy towards the characters, lesbian or otherwise.

Another contemporary example that raises similar questions about the traditional values of Croatian society in conflict with more liberal ones is Ognjen Sviličić's film *Sorry for Kung Fu* (*Oprosti za kung fu*, 2003), which focuses on the notion of race. The focal point is a pregnant woman who returns from Germany alone to the rural Dalmatian hinterland, to give birth to a child of Asian heritage. The unborn Asian child functions as an ideological (racial) excess that cannot be incorporated into the traditional, conservative values of the rural community, or into the worldview of Mira's father, who is a stereotypical representative of that paradigm. As previously argued in a similar context, "Mira and her child represent an *excess* in this social reality on at least two levels" (Lučić 2014: 125–126). On one hand, as unwanted excess in the context of patriarchal values (since she is unmarried) and on the other in the context of a more specific xenophobic paradigm, because of the child's racial and ethnic heritage. Unlike the situation in *Fine Dead Girls*, the main stereotype is reserved for Mira's father, as a necessary strategy for criticizing the restricted worldview of the primitive community. Or as Hana Jušić observes in her review of the film, "[o]n the surface of things the film depicts a specific mentality and its system of beliefs and values – which made Sviličić vulnerable to stereotyping and generalizations" (Jušić 2012: 170). Nevertheless, on another level this type of representation is useful for problematizing the ideological premises and attitudes of one part of Croatian society.

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It is worth noting that the Asian child's ethnic specification is never fully articulated, since other characters either refer to him as Chinese, or allude to his non-Caucasian heritage by performing kung-fu (martial arts) moves. This behavior is typical of a conservative, often dominant culture that cannot distinguish different non-white ethnicities,<sup>12</sup> and does not bother to try. Vojković best summarizes the paradox of this kung-fu motif, arguing that "kung-fu as a global cultural product in this context becomes a synonym for local containment, provinciality and xenophobia" (Vojković 2008: 182). A similar conflict between the provincial mentality and more open values is highlighted by Mira's brother, who likes rock music but is still part of the rural society.

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<sup>12</sup> This is common whenever the dominant culture tries to incorporate a minority figure into the film's narrative, and is part of larger representational tendencies. For example, it was also noticed (and criticized) with regard to the representation of Native Americans in classical American western movies (see Churchill 2000).

Since the function of the minority Asian figure is to appropriate dominant cultural values, it has to be subjected to the process of *acculturation* through exclusion and inclusion. Since the notion of acculturation “refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences” (Schwartz et al. 2010) the appropriation of an Asian figure into Croatian culture is a clear example of that procedure. This process is realized on multiple grounds, but its main goal is to stabilize the ideological realm of the rural community, not to offer a genuine identity to the child. As Vojković detects, “the fact that in the end Mira gives birth to a Croatian child of another race puts a pressure of extreme dimensions on the attribute ‘ours’, so that specific otherness is dislocated and thrown from all usual frames and determinations of intolerance” (Vojković 2006: 26). Parallel procedures of exclusion and inclusion along racial and ethnic lines are important for stabilizing the patriarchal family and community in general since, as Young argues,

differences are constructed through the process of creating distinct categorizations which assist in the production and maintenance of an illusory order in a chaotic and fragmented world. People who appear to disturb the boundaries of those categorizations represent a further threat and are doubly problematic. (Young 1996: 23)

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But paradoxically, the threat of a foreign entity functions as a tool for the affirmation of the existing national identity. This stabilization of the Croatian rural identity through acculturation involves several steps. For the patriarchal (grand)father it is important that the child is a Croat (not a Serb), that he is a male (not female), that he is not black and that he learns Croatian (or as the grandfather says: “that he knows *our* language/da zna *naški*”). This procedure also indicates “a hierarchy of xenophobia” (Rucker-Chang 2012: 210), under which for Mira’s parents there is a more favorable “other”; from their point of view, the Asian heritage is more compatible with their own ethnicity and race than an African heritage and a black race would be.

Apart from the objectification of the Asian child, there are other indicators of intolerance toward those who do not fit the dominant model. For example, one of Mira’s potential husbands is, according to her father, unacceptable because he is a Muslim. The desirable potential husband is an unusual Croatian deminer, who enables the family to get rid of the wartime minefield near their house. His unusualness is founded not only in his job (which nobody else is eager to do), but also in his childish behavior, verbal



incompetence and seemingly borderline intelligence. Even though he is an acceptable husband for Mira, he also functions as a figure that cannot be fully incorporated in the rural community, similar to Mira herself and her unwanted child (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Sviličić's *Sorry for Kung Fu* (2003). Mira's father reacts to the newborn.

A comparison of *Fine Dead Girls* and *Sorry for Kung Fu* reveals that in both cases the protagonists' true individuality and life choices are obscured and repressed because of the imposed values of the dominant culture and its rigidity.

The focus on minority figures in other Croatian films that are not central to this paper can also show how (when the war context is almost irrelevant) these figures play a role in depicting the troubles of contemporary society. For example, Ognjen Sviličić's film *Armin* (2007) discretely problematizes the question of the war and Balkan conception from the viewpoint of the West, when the German film crew interprets Armin's illness as a consequence of war trauma, while disregarding his Bosnian identity. Or Branko Schmidt's film *Metastases* (2009), which uses the Serbian character Dejo to connect the unexplained war trauma, extreme nationalism and violence of the character Krpa, and the general intolerance of the small group of football hooligans. The ethnic question is addressed in a different manner and a more marginal form in another of Schmidt's films, *Vegetarian Cannibal* (*Ljudožder vegetarijanac*, 2012), in which the greediness, intolerance and unscrupulous behavior of the main character, Dr. Babić, is channeled through the Jordanian Arab character, as an easy mark for society's intolerant tendencies.

These minority, ethnic, sexual and other issues can be mixed in an unconventional manner to reveal society's problematic questions, as addressed in other post-Yugoslav cinema. For example, the homophobic question is raised in Serbian director Srđan Dragojević's *Parade* (*Parada*, 2011); the question of guilt and war crimes is addressed in Srđan Golubović's *Circles* (*Krugovi*, 2013); the pre-1990s war situation and ethnic polarization

are depicted in Croatian film veteran Rajko Grlić's *Border Post* (*Karaula*, 2006); and the ethnic discrepancies of war are highlighted in Bosnian director Danis Tanović's *No Man's Land* (*Ničija zemlja*, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

256 The filmic representations of different ethnic, national, sexual, racial and cultural minorities in contemporary Croatian cinema from the 1990s and 2000s play a crucial role in the way the new, transitional society is transforming itself and dealing with its conflicted national heritage. This paper focuses on the function of these minority figures in the logics of the specific narrative worlds of the films analyzed, and points to some ideological practices that have affirmed or destabilized established social values. Three types of representation were addressed: that of ethnic minorities in the war and postwar context, and those of sexual and racial minorities in the postwar context, with special attention given to the dynamics of their evolution throughout the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. The analysis revealed that the dominant procedure in dealing with minority figures was that of instrumentalization: films use minority figures as a tool to depict the social tensions of Croatian society in war and postwar situations. In *How the War Started on My Island*, the humanization of the Serbian character and the privatization of the conflict was part of representing the war from another, non-victimized point of view. In a similar manner, the films *Witnesses* and *Blacks* offer a more critical viewpoint towards the controversial question of Croatian war crimes, and as a part of the tendency of contemporary Croatian cinema that Pavičić called the cinema of normalization (2010, 2011, 2012). These two films show that cinematic representations follow changes in society where, if nationalistic discourse weakens, problematic topics can be articulated.

The analysis of *Nobody's Son* and *The Melon Route* shows that ethnic polarization can be transposed onto a character's psychology and biological/cultural heritage, and also (in the latter example) onto the minority figures that function as a sign of normality in a corrupt transitional society. The final section of the paper reveals that while there is a certain local tendency to address the question of homosexuality and racial issues, *Fine Dead Girls* and *Sorry for Kung Fu* focus on criticizing the nationalistic, patriarchal and xenophobic paradigm of Croatian society through their representations of otherness. In the wider context of similar research on this topic, an analysis of

minority figures and ethnic, sexual, racial and national questions in these films could also reveal some central problems of different post-Yugoslav societies, and provide us with a better understanding of their artistic and social processes.

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