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SCREENING THE VICTIMHOOD, SCREENING THE SACRIFICE: DARA AND OTHER CHILDREN OF JASENOVAC

Abstract

The concern of this paper is the analysis of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav films about Jasenovac extermination camp as the multifold (hi)stories: of the Holocaust/genocide, cultural trauma and national victimhood narrative. The comparison of different cinematic narratives of Jasenovac – particularly, the film Dara of Jasenovac *(*Dara iz Jasenovca*, Predrag Antonijević, 2020) and the screenplay* The Children of Kozara *(*Djeca Kozare*, Arsen Diklic, 1986) – as the place of two genocides: the Holocaust and of Serbian ethnicity in Croatia, allows the authors to delineate different modes of screening national victimhood and the ways in which they play a part in contemporary political agenda(s). Although our comparison of the film* Dara *and the screenplay The Children may be unseemly, it is the result of the fact that the film (*Zlatni rez '42: Djeca Kozare / Golden Cut '42: The Children of Kozara*) and the eight-part TV series, both based on Diklic's screenplay and, both directed by Lordan Zafranovic are in post-production, without the set date for finalisation or possible screening. Bearing in mind probable differences between the screenplay and the film or the TV series – due to the dynamic changes on a daily basis during shooting – the only methodologically proper solution is the analysis of the narrative given in the screenplay.*

Keywords

victimhood narrative, sacrifice, Holocaust, Dara of Jasenovac*,* Golden Cut 42*:* Children of Kozara

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The dialogue, at the very beginning of the film *Dara of Jasenovac (Dara iz Jasenovca, P*redrag Antonijević, 2020*),* between Dara (Biljana Čekić) and her older brother Jovo (Marko Pipić) – who are in the group of people that Ustashas are marching to Jasenovac – *in medias res* defines the story's genre, ethnic and ethic profile. The Croats are the big other, villains and perpetrators while the Serbs are the small other, innocent victims. Indiscernible from Croats, except for "we cross like this", Serbs are perfect protagonists of the national victimhood narrative constructed around a concentration camp in the NDH (The Independent State of Croatia). Jasenovac is the place of the double encounter (Ahmed 2000) – with the different, other, as well as the one of the (hi)stories and discourses of Ustasha's atrocities, the Holocaust and the wars of the 1990s.

Since the debates (historical, political, ideological etc.) about Jasenovac as the controversial historical site, *lieux de mémoire, lieux de trauma*, date back to the 1950s, as expected, the critical reception of *Dara* became entangled with the ongoing disputes, thus creating even greater expectations for *The Children of Kozara* which received support from the Film Centre of Serbia in 2020 after being turned down three times by various selection committees. [3] The fact that the member of one of those committees was Predrag Antonijevic, who before that (in 2018) had received support for his film, *Dara of Jasenovac*, just fuelled the atmosphere of scandals and conflicts. Once *Dara* had its premiere screening and the screenplay of *The Children* became publicly available, the two revealed striking similarities. Although one can say that both are based on the same historical event and documents,[4] the similarities extend well beyond that. Namely, identical scenes, similar character names, and overlapping plots led to accusations of theft and plagiarism that are yet

3 The expectations are enhanced further by the director of the film and the TV series after Dikilic's scenario – Lordan Zafranovic. For Zafranovic, the project represents his life's achievement, something he dedicates his entire life to. It is both the *jewl in the crown* of his daring narratives of neglected and almost taboo stories of Ustasha's atrocities and of his personal traumatic memories. Finally, it is a part of the umbrella theme "evil in the time of fascism" that define his loose war trilogy (*Okupacija u 26 slika / Occupation in 26 Pictures*, 1978; *Pad Italije / The Fall of Italy*, 1981; *Večernja zvona / Evening Bells*, 1986), as well as two documentary films (*Blood and Ashes of Jasenovac / Krv i pepeo Jasenovca*, 1983; *The Testament L.Z / Zalazak stoljeća – Testament L.Z.*, 1994).

4 One of those common stories is the biography of Zora Skiba, *My Stolen Childhood / Djetinjstvo moje ukradeno*, written by Jovan Kesar (1983). Zora was only four years old when she was (as one of the 23,000 children of Kozara, out of whom 11,000 never returned) taken to Ustasha's camps. She was re-baptised three times, adopted by an Ustasha officer from Jasenovac, and forced to change her name twice. But she „managed to get away from that gospel of evil, to see through the crime hidden by the cape of mercy and to find her own way".

to have their court epilogue. However, the intricacy of similarities and differences is, for this research, a perfect basis that demonstrates the construction of diverse national victimhood narratives emerging from the same (hi)story.

In her excellent analysis, Biljana Srbljanovic concludes that "unlike Antonijevic's film, Zafranovic's and Diklic's script has the second and the third act." The story focuses on a young Serbian girl named Rada (an anagram of Dara)[5] and her two younger brothers Mico and Gojko. After the ethnic cleansing of their village, the children are taken to the Jasenovac camp where they are forcefully separated by the Ustashas. The youngest Gojko is saved from the camp by Dijana Budisavljavec and taken away, while Mico is transferred to an Ustasha orphanage where he is rebaptised and trained to become an Ustasha soldier. Rada remains in the camp, disguises herself as a boy in order to survive, and is determined to find her brothers. After managing to escape she is taken in by a family without children who give her shelter. After a while, her 'stepfather' takes her to Zagreb to look for Gojko who they learn was taken by Dijana Budisavljevic and also learn that Mico is in the orphanage. Rada decides to leave the family and be with Mico in the orphanage. She manages to get into the orphanage but her boy disguise is soon discovered and she is tortured and humiliated in the worst ways. In the meantime, Partisans are advancing and when they liberate the camp Rada and Mico join them. Partisans liberate Zagreb and Rada and Mico go to look for Gojko. They manage to locate him and learn that he was adopted by a Catholic Ustasha family named Bobinac (Mr. Bobinac is an Ustasha officer). After adoption, Gojko was given a new name – Frane, and he now calls himself Frane Bobinac. In the end, in liberated Zagreb, with Ustashas on the run and Bobinac killed on the spot, the children are reunited. The very ending shows the three children on the road to their village, the same road on which we saw them for the first time with their mother Smiljka when they were all being marched by Ustashas to the camps. Stammering Mica is mute and suffering from PTDS; Rada is coping with little Gojko who is crying for the only father he remembers (dead Bobinac) shouting that his name is Frane – the name he was given in the new family.

> I am Flane[6] ... Flane Bobinac
> I want mother!
> I want *my* mother!

5 In Zafranovic's film and TV series Zora Skiba's name is changed from Rada to Zora.

6 He cannot pronounce R and thus cries Flane instead of Frane.

Gojko's paradoxical cries and tears over the loss of his newly given identity which to him was his only known and the return to his former, lost national and family identity, considered by Rada as the ultimate victory and reason for happiness, mark the moment when the "great beast of nationalism" was born (ibid.). Eventually, the awakened monster would destroy Yugoslavia and continue to haunt post-Yugoslav nation states in their attempts to assert political nationhood and civic identity. Thus, the triumph of nationalism and the emotions of children who would some 40 years later become the perpetrators in the wars of the 1990s are at the core of a multi-layered tragedy written by one of the best scriptwriters and novelists Arsen Diklic.

Critical media discourse about the films argues Jasenovac as the constant of Serbian memoryscape; the new epicentre of national victimhood narrative; the highlight of the state's memory politics. Used to explain the national past, confront the nationalistic present and foresee future traumas, it becomes the new stronghold of nation building. Simultaneously, it is a stirring historical revisionism and competing memories in the region, while all this is being visible in the construes of nuancedly versatile national victimhood narratives.

Jasenovac (hi)story 1945–2021

Jasenovac was one of the most notorious concentration and extermination camps of WW2, and the only one not run by the Nazis, but by the Ustasha regime of the NDH. In the camp complex that operated from the summer of 1941 until the spring of 1945, the prisoners – mainly Serbs, Jews and Roma – were worked and starved to death; tortured; executed in the most savage ways; shot and buried in mass graves. The existence of the unique children camp within Jasenovac testifies to the extreme cruelty of this "Auschwitz of the Balkans" (Greif 2018).

The diversity of the cinematic narratives about Jasenovac reflects its shifting position in the national/Serbian perspective, one seriously downplayed in the SFRY, to the one foregrounded at the time of the dissolution of the country and the formation of post Yugoslav nation states. This shift is characterized by the intricate dynamics of ethnicization and de-ethnicization, regenrification, and by being nationally appropriated and (ab)used. (Sindbaek, 2013; Ćulibrk, 2014; Pavlaković, 2019).[7] In her book about Yugoslav usable history,

7 For related themes concerning competing memories that began to accommodate various and contradictory signifiers of national victimhood and regional history; national counter narratives;

Tea Sindbaek claims that in the immediate post war years and throughout the 1950s, Jasenovac was the subject of various official investigations that testified about the terror and inhumanity of the camp in a largely de-ethnicized way. The victims of the revolution, including those killed in concentration camps, did not have national identity but the one which they fought for – that of Yugoslavs, communists and human beings. On the other hand, the Ustashas as bestial perpetrators were only fascists and by no means Croat nationalists. The 1960s and 1970s – marked by raised voices of critique, disappointment and discontent with the socialist state – brought the first signs of the "ethno-nationalisation of Yugoslav historiography" which began to reconfigure memory and history of WWII. From "one of the main symbols, or stock references, of wartime history in general" Jasenovac is redefined as authentic, autonomous Ustasha project and the emblem of their unique crimes which even shocked the Nazis. Tito's public acknowledgment (in 1972) that WWII in Yugoslavia was also "a civil war between communists and anti-communists, who were often widely supported by the people" (Sindbaek 2013: 44–77) marked the breakthrough in the politics of levelling that ruled in the country of "brotherhood and unity" with the aim " to repress a problematic aspect of the country's recent history, namely the interethnic violence that occurred in Yugoslavia between 1941 and 1945". (Byford 2013:526)[8]

The 1980s and the loss of control by the state following the death of Josip Broz Tito helped the "memory boom" of the Holocaust and opened the floodgates to other historical traumas in literature and cinema. These new, emotionally charged and heavily ethnicised, narratives became the strategic and symbolic cornerstones of nation building which were themselves prerequisites for the emergence of the post-Yugoslav nation states. More importantly, central to the process was the fight over the exclusive (national) identity of the victim, which placed the nation above any reproach and unquestionably labelled the other side in the conflict as the sole perpetrator. The ethnic victims of Jasenovac made the camp "a main focus of Serbian genocide history (...) (Sindbaek 116)" and of the eternal conflict of Serbian and Croatian nationalists. Moreover, the portrayal of Serbian victimhood in Croatia as equal to Jewish in the

divergence and convergence of history, and of the (a)symmetry of the Holocaust and the Red Terror see also Karačić, Banjeglav and Govedarica 2012. Moreover, the opposed attitudes toward Jasenovac are comparable with Renan's (1992) legitimisation of forgetting or the dialectics of memory and oblivion regarding shared history as a strategy of strengthening the nation.

8 This refers to the genocide Croatian Ustashas committed against Serbs and the violence perpetrated by Serbian Chetniks against Muslims in eastern Bosnia, as explored in Max Bergholz's book (2016).

Holocaust justified the wars of the 1990s as the war for the Serbian righteous cause.

Ethnicised regression of memory into rigid national borders was sustained by the evoked "universal moral reference" (Alexander 2004) as well as by the anguish and destruction of one nation (Serbian or Croatian) during the break-up of Yugoslavia. Memories of the Shoah are skilfully instrumentalised to explain new conflicts to the ignorant world audience and to identify the roles allotted to the warring parties. They worked toward the change of the internationally accepted image of Serbs as the exclusive aggressors and perpetrators or, at least as the ones most responsible. The pronounced parallel of the victim-perpetrator with the Holocaust effectively supports the new Serbian national identity and the new national (victimhood) narrative. At the same time, it attempts to make the world see Serbian other identity as the one of traumatized subjects of wars and victims of genocide and hear the pertaining victimhood narratives and sacrificial myths. Thus, Jasenovac as an event so "horrendous (...) that (it) leaves indelible signs" upon a nation, shaping its memories and changing its "future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2002) is, finally, identified as a cultural trauma as well. Art and media texts about Jasenovac, metonymically stand for the overall destruction and suffering of Serbs in Croatia over the decades, thus confirming overall victimhood.

The conflict of the 1990s turned out to be a sort of new encounter that reopened the past ones. "Encounters involve, not only the surprise of being faced by the other which cannot be located in the present, they also involve conflicts" (Ahmed 2000: 8). Ahmed's suggestion that any present encounter has the history of the conflict aptly explains how the encounter of Serbs and Croats in the 1990s revived the conflicts of the XXth century and especially WW2, and enabled the recognition of the other. Lea David (2020) elaborates the process using the Freudian notion of screen-memory, i.e. revived Holocaust discourse is used to repress and hide other events proclaimed to be equally traumatic or, even more traumatic than the Holocaust within national boundaries.

Victimhood narrative and the sacrificial ritual

The important aspect of the sacrificial and victimary mechanism in the (hi) story of Serbian ethnicity in Croatia is that the Serbian (and Croatian, for that matter) language uses the same term 'žrtva' for both 'victim' and 'sacri-

fice'. The suggestion that in the Serbian language, and therefore perspective, it stands as one notion further means that the possibility of ritualizing the act of (self)sacrifice is always present. According to Girard (1982, 2003, 2011), the sacrificial mechanism has a distinct social function, that of creation of the sacred in paganism. In Christian context, the same mechanism is used to create the notion of the holy, though it is necessary to emphasise that the sacred as pagan and the holy as Christian are profoundly different notions. Nevertheless, both are achieved by activation of the sacrificial mechanism, with the difference that the creation of the sacred is cyclical, and indeed, rhythmical (to be made anew whenever necessary) whereas the creation of the holy only truly happened once, with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The distinction is, also, important as we address the multi-layered Serbian mythomoteur situated in Kosovo Vidovdan battle and, afterwards, in the genocide committed against Serbs by the Ustasha state. The Kosovo *myth(o-moteur)*, saturated with the ideals of martyrdom, sacrifice, victimization, injustice and suffering, surfaces from the collective Serbian medieval past since it fell from the heavenly realm of glory onto the slavery imposed by the Ottoman Empire. This myth is unique, Christian-Orthodox and, thus, considered the holy one. However, through repetition of the basic sacrificial mechanism, as the massive slaughter of Serbs happens again (and again), it is displaced into the realm of the sacred, the cyclical and closer to paganism. The double work of the sacrificial mechanism invites the notion of the terrible fate, indeed the fathom, of Serbs to be 'žrtva' – both the victim of genocide and the sacrifice in the sacrificial offering. The ordeals of individuals or collectives (ethno or national) underline the intrinsic link of myth, sacred and ritual articulated by Petrovic as:

> [...] *we see how not only the mythical narrative carries a distinctly religious dimension, but is also from the very beginning (bearing its connection to the ritual) transmedial* [...] *It is also, and that is of no lesser importance (again, by its proximity to the ritual, by definition a sacred practice), heavily infused with the quality of the sacred.* (Petrovic 2017: 44)

Serbian language spontaneously suggests that every victim IS a sacrifice; every victim of a genocide, is therefore made sacred. The blending of the two notions into one term, 'žrtva', is a way of activating the sacrificial mechanism; it is a way of rendering every victim divine. The Serbian language has other terms that invoke the notion of ethnic cleansing. For example, 'ognjište' / hearth /fireplace – a focal family gathering place in the rustic home – evokes

the image of Serbian people forced to leave their hearths because of wars, resettlements, migrations, deportations or simply by being killed. In this regard, one will seldom use the term 'žrtva' without connecting it, one way or another, to the ethnic cleansing committed against Serbs.

The invoked sacrificial mechanism that brings about the aura of the sacred, situates the Serbian (national) and Hebrew (ethno) myths in the same anthropological category (Girard, 2003). The situation with most myths, Girard argues (2003), is that they speak of a foreign body, person, or an entire group that has to be thrown out of a myth making community, so that the latter is purged and made whole. The specificity of the Hebrew myth, explained in the *Old Testament*, specifically in *Genesis*, is that the Hebrew community situates itself as the 'foreign body' that is to be expelled from Egypt in order to be made whole. The entire desert ordeal, forty years spent in the most brutal of all environments, is the ritual cleansing the Jewish community needs to go through, before they reach the promised land.

The Hebrew ritual in nation building myth involves two (scape)goats – one is to be slayed and the other cast into the desert. The sacrificial goat cast into the desert makes the entire community, therefore, it is to assume its role and be cast into the desert, camp or else. As all sacrificial rituals are instrumentalised – as argued by Girard – and very much after the Hebrew nation building myth so the Serbian community sees itself almost in the same way. Thus, all Serbs are invited to partake in the Kosovo battle. Regarding the entirety of the Serbian community in NDH, it is to be annulled according to the infamous formula,[9] one third killed, one third cast out, one third catholicized. The ritual of Jasenovac as Serbian nation building and sacrificial myth, has one small difference – it involves three goats: one to be slayed, one to be cast out and one to be converted and deprived of identity and belonging.

In this regard, the ending of *Dara* speaks for the shift of mythomoteurs. The new mythomoteur, complementing the Kosovo one, emerges related to the Great War but changed and refined to suit new historical and political contexts of turbulent transition and EU integration of the post-October Serbia. Unlike the myth from the "ethnic fund", the new one is turned towards life while the nation moves towards the Earthly kingdom and different ethnoscapes (Greek island Corfu, river Drina, summit of Kajmakčalan). The perennial sacrifice palimpsestically radiates through the story but is critically

9 It is the infamous principle made in Czarist Russia for dealing with Jews – one third is to be killed in pogroms, one is to be exiled to Siberia and one third is to be Christianised.

re-examined. The traditional meanings are put "under erasure", while the modern ones refer to the sacrifice through hardships and for life.

> *In the* [...] *XXth century death and sacrifice are rethought pragmatically, as the heavenly kingdom is replaced by the earthly one, accompanied by the, in the eyes of Europe, eternally ambiguous concepts of national sacrifice and victimhood, suffering and heroism* (Dakovic 2014: 151–152)

Cinematic heritage

The context of silence and absence surrounding Jasenovac, as the acknowledged site of genocide of European Jewry and Serbian ethnicity in Croatia, imposes its double contextualisation within Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav cinematic legacy. The "honesty of remembrance" has gradually made Holocaust (hi)stories into films (and other media narratives) that courageously deal with the "victims, concentration camps, massacres, and genocide" (Sindbaek 221). Three discernible periods (1945–1978; 1978–2008; 2008–) are reflected in the diversity of local Holocaust titles. In the first period, few films deal with the Holocaust straightforwardly (*Ninth Circle* / *Deveti krug*, France Štiglic, 1960; *Himmelkommando* / *Nebeski odred*, Boško Bošković, Ilija Nikolić, 1961; *The Fed One* / *Hranjenik*, Vatroslav Mimica, 1970)[10], while three titles approach the subject innovatively through the trauma of post-generations, survivors and perpetrators (*Mörder auf Urlaub* / *Ubica na odsustvu*, Bosko Boskovic, 1965; *Bitter Herbs* / *Bittere Kräuter* / G*orke trave,* Žika Mitrović, 1966; *The Smoke*) happening "somewhere in Europe". In the second phase, the Holocaust is simply mentioned as a side plot (*Kraljevski voz,* Aleksandar Djordjevic, 1981; *Balkan Ekspres*, Branko Baletic, 1983). During the last phase, in ex-Yugoslav republics as well as in the Balkans, there appeared a wave of Holocaust films (*Lea and Darija* / *Lea i Darija*, Branko Ivanda, 2011; *When the Day Breaks* / *Kad svane dan*, Goran Paskaljević, 2012; *The Third Half* / *Treće poluvreme*, Darko Mitrevski, 2012) all largely following the Holocaust melodrama formula which paved the way for new eth(n)ic narratives.

When the analysis is narrowed down to narratives about Jasenovac, the first encountered are documentary films – *Jasenovac* (*Jasenovac*, Gustav Gavrin, Kosta Hlavaty, 1945), *Jasenovac 1945* (Bogdan Žižić, 1966), *Gospel of Evil*

10 To be added to the list is the film *Hell River* (*Partizani*, Stole Jankovic, 1974) with oblique references to Kladovski transport. It became famous as it was cited in Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019).

(*Evanđelje zla*, Đorđe Kastratović, 1973), *Blood and Ashes of Jasenovac*, *Tower of Death* (*Kula smrti*, Vladimir Tadej, 1988) – all mainly going along the official historical narrative in which the concentration camp is a chapter in the history of NDH, kept at a safe distance from the history of the SFRY.

Among fiction titles, the very first is Look *for Vanda Kos* (*Potraži Vandu Kos,* Žika Mitrović, 1957) where *Olga* (Olga Spiridonović) learns that her brother, denounced as communist, was sent to Jasenovac. *The Ninth Circle* ends with the unsuccessful rescue attempt of the girl (Ruth / Dusica Zegarac) taken to the concentration camp which, although unnamed, clearly refers to Jasenovac. Eduard Galic's 1967 film *Black Birds* (*Crne ptice*), tells the story of another failed escape involving inmates who are only identified as political prisoners and Ustashas are hardly shown as Croats.

In the post Yugoslav times, the story is gradually rewritten in diverse stylistic registers and regenrified; in different wording and from opposed memory, ideological and political perspectives. Offering narratives of dissent, resistance or denial reinforced by escalating nationalism, the films contributed to historical revisionism. While the first of these films appeared as early as 2003 – *Remake* (Dino Mustafic) – the trend gained full strength only fifteen years later with the film – *The Diary of Diana B*. (*Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević,* 2019*,* Dana Budisavljević). The docu fiction narrates Jasenovac through the biopic of the "forgotten heroine", Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica) who organized help-and-rescue operation of Serbian children from the notorious Jasenovac camp. The director goes for the post traumatic film (Hirsch 2004) of fragmentary, non-linear narration and hybridisation of diverse film footage accompanied by a voice off reading parts of Diana' s diary (discovered and published only in 2008). In the first dissonant cinematic memory the roles of villains and victims are not divided along national lines, but thoughtfully point to the new perspectives, laying the ground for Serbian films to tell the story from a complementary point of view of victims saved by Diana, who now plays the deus ex machina role.

Dara of Jasenovac and *The Children of Kozara*

Dara of Jasenovac is the first Serbian classical narrative film about the death-camp, planned to premiere on the 55th anniversary of the break out from the camp survived by only a handful of prisoners. State supported and favoured project – national candidate for the Oscar, marked by a series of scandals – carried the weight of multifold tasks set in accordance with

Serbian memory politics, rewritten national history and national identity building strategy.

The story of "new martyrs" of Jasenovac, primarily Serbian women and children, is told through the eyes of a ten-year-old girl Dara. She is taken to the camp during the (ethnic) cleansing of the area along with her mother (Anja Stanić), brother Jovo and the barely two-year-old brother Buda (played by triplets Luka, Jakov and Simon Šaranović), and other villagers. Although Dara loses her closest and dearest, one by one, she grows to be strong and manages to protect the youngest brother at all costs, thus fulfilling the solemn vow given to her mother. In the end, she and Buda manage to leave the camp with a group of Diana's children.

The director, Predrag Antonijevic, together with the executive producer, Michael Berenbaum – one of the top names in the Holocaust Studies – decided to reach for the Hollywoodised Holocaust melodrama (Wiesel 1978; Rosenfeld 1995; Doneson 2002; Insdorf 2003; Baron 2005)[11] – their decision supported strongly by the fact that Jews were the second largest ethnic victims of the notorious camp. However, there were three consequences. Firstly, the decision brought the danger of making the story of Jasenovac yet another overtly trivialised "success story" (something that the Holocaust never was in reality). Secondly, the formula of the Holocaust (maternal) melodrama[12] – employed for the telling of Serbian victimhood narrative which asserts moral and political privilege for the whole nation at all times – allowed local history, now widely known outside the region, to be internationally recognised and read through the cinematic template of proven efficacy. Thirdly, it strengthened nationally adored thesis about the same martyr and sacrificial destiny shared by Jews and Serbs, that played out well in both the national and regional (memory) and (real) politics.

The unconditional empathy is centred on the typical melodrama heroine as helpless, virtuous, saintly, innocent and absolute victim, who is, consequentially, the overall – optical, emotional and ideological – focaliser. It is through the look (optical) of her soulful eyes that we see the world of horror and atrocities. Her emotional experience becomes the one of the audiences. The

11 Dara is bound to go through deja vue and much exploited horrors while the "localised elements" fixed in place and chronologically bound barely make it different from the story of any other concentration camp in the occupied Europe.

12 For the analysis of Antonijevic previous film, *The Saviour* (1998) as a maternal melodrama with Biblical allusive spectre and representation of the 1990s wars, and tailored to the gaze of ignorant international audiences, see Dakovic, 2020.

metaphor of dying – going to the back of the train freight car (like the one they all arrived in to Jasenovac) in blinding whiteness of the fog – comes as the cut away from Dara' s close up in shot/countershot structure. The symbolic representation of death and, presumably, Heaven is highly consistent with emotional optique of the pathetic victim seeking spiritual comfort; highly referential for children's imagining of death; and clearly embodies the classical trope of the "nacht und nebel". Eventually, the given genre's persuasive identification confirms Dara as the ideological focaliser and the mediator of the Serbian victimhood narrative.

Dara's coming to maturity is presented through her change from the passive witness into the active heroine; from the passive object into the active subject of the look and centre of the scopic regime of the film. Her stoic gaze,[13] with the same mixture of fear and hope as the one found in the emblematic Holocaust photo of Settela Steinbach, asserts the essential structural parallelism of emotional and drama development. The musical chairs scene – brutal execution – which, in terms of dramatic structure, comes too early in the narrative climax, is justified from Dara's emotional perspective. Gazing from the darkness, she intuitively comes (in alternative editing) to the traumatic awareness about the Hell she is brought to. Another important moment is the one when she finally acts. At first hidden behind the doors, Dara observes a brutal incident in the fight for food. But when the guards shoot at inmates, she runs out from her hiding place and gets the food for herself and other children.

The rescue in the end conforms to the rules of melodrama and "success story" of the Holocaust. Dara impulsively runs after the bus that is carrying away Buda and other children on Diana's list; Blankica (Jelena Grujic) is killed while preventing the guards to shoot the runaway girl; Dara manages to jump onto the bus. Diana kindly asks her "Where are you from, Dara?" Her decisive and simple answer "I am from Jasenovac" buckles the circle. The other, announced at the beginning of the film as Ilic from Mirkovci, in the end can only be from Jasenovac making the latter the key of Dara/Serbian identity. The site is "ideologically and psychologically shaped so that it represents the strongest identity and existential threat to the community" making its narrative important "cultural trauma". Further, it works as an alibi for the belligerent nationalist politics (Alexander 2004: 1–10) since the melodrama pertinent to moral polarisation in the boiling post-Yugoslav atmosphere of historical revisionism turns the victims and perpetrators into the ones with impera-

13 Dara's dark eyes and their captivating look are, already, referred to in the opening song *My Beautiful Black Eyes* (*Moje lepe crne oči*).

tively acquired ethnic qualifications. Moreover, Dara's adoption of Jasenovac as the core of her identity, sends the same message as Kosovo myth – he/she who forgets Jasenovac, forgets his/her origin and renounces their identity. All Serbian prisoners are the scapegoats of the sacrificial myth reaching to the Hebrew legacy. All those killed in Jasenovac are the scapegoat that is literally slayed; Jovo and other boys who are catholicized, made to renounce their religion and identity are the scapegoat metaphorically slayed; and Dara and Buda are the one cast out.

The victimhood of Serbs as Orthodox – convergent with the Jewish votive one – is sealed by the end citation from the New Testament, that simultaneously substantiates the melodrama's tacit belief in the happy end in the form of eternal life achieved in memories. „He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." (Gospel of Luke, 20:38) – Serbian victims of Jasenovac and the whole nation continue to live, just as prophesied in Kosovo mythomoteur, like Heavenly nation.

The concept of victimhood ending with the ultimate salvation of the chosen – is literally achieved through the chain of individual sacrifices: Jaša (Jew, Bogdan Žirović) sacrifices for Mileta; mothers do everything to save the children; Blankica (nurse, Jewess) dies for Dara. Dara and Buda have to survive to preserve the existence of the nation and fulfil the sober promise given to all who died for them. The line of graded and concentrated events becomes sacrificial synecdoche – framing the myth and making community the scapegoat – where the entire nation and its huge losses in the wars of the XXth century are represented by a few chosen survivors. Dara is, therefore, raised to the rank of the French Marianne or the American Columbia. She is the allegorical incarnation of the 20th century Serbian fathom, immense suffering, yet unbroken will to live and survive, and – perhaps most importantly – the firm decision to never forget (which is also the Holocaust dictum).

The story of *The Children*…. develops beyond Jasenovac through recurring episodes – the trademark of Diklic's oeuvre – proving his commitment to the topics of victimhood, suffering, traumatic and tragic destiny of children in WWII. In the novel[14] and film *Do not Look Back my Son (Ne okreci se, sine*, 1956, Branko Bauer) a Serbian boy is raised in an Ustasha orphanage, while in *Salas u Malome Ritu* (Branko Bauer, 1976, made both as film and mini-series) and *Wintering in Jakobsfeld (Zimovanje u Jakobsfeldu*, Branko

14 The novel was written written after the film and published in 1966.

Bauer, 1975)[15]– kids from Serbian families in Vojvodina who escaped with partisans go in hiding and one has to serve in a German (folksdeutscher) catholic family. There are many such recognisable episodes in *Children of Kozara,* developing after Rada's escape from Jasenovac. Rada seeks shelter with a Catholic Croatian family, Blaz and Bara, who would like her to stay for ever as they do not have children of their own, just like the German couple in *Salas u Malome ritu*. During her stay in Ustasah's orphanage she witnesses many brutal scenes of psychic torture of children (including staged appearance of Krampus), physical drills as well as severe punishment, the worst one being when she is discovered to be a girl – all strongly echo the novel and the film *Do not Look Back My Son*. Moreover, the protagonists of Diklic's oeuvre are children from Serbia and Western Bosnia – with the implication but not the over statement that these are Serbian/Orthodox children – thus making the ethnic victimhood less emphasised. Also, being essentially children lost in the turbulent and evil times of war they are led by the desire for life and survival that prevails over any political or ideological principle.

Baja, who is Rada's self-appointed protector has lost his whole family and does not know life beyond the concentration camp, befriends Lovro, an Ustasha soldier from the camp. Eventually, the two of them run away together trying to reach Italy and escape the Partisans. "They throw their luggage on their backs and go away. One, big and broad, in full strength, an awful butcher and the other an immature boy, victim" Diklic underlines that the perpetrator and the victim, an Ustasha and a Serbian orphan, go hand in hand towards the border. They imagine the scene in which an English soldier lets them pass through thinking that if these two awful looking creatures are running from someone … it is difficult to imagine how horrible those they are running away from are... Strkljasti, the other boy from the camp, goes with the Partisans and becomes half wild and mad with the desire for revenge; he is last seen in the traumatic epileptic like fit. In liberated Zagreb, upon learning from Dijana – her god like benefactor- that her mother has died in Ravens Bruck, Germany, Dara makes a remark about Germans as eternal evil doers and merciless perpetrators. Few moments later, an elderly woman warns her not to talk like that as Dijana (Obexer) is from Austria, she is German and does not escape from the fact. Different traumatic events on the road home and children's reactions to them (crying Gojko, catatonic Mico and stubborn Rada implicitly defeated by the scene) hint at the dark and conflicting future

15 Both are made after the three volumes novel published in 1953.

that lays ahead[16] and make the *Children of Kozara* closer to tragedy – born, among other things, from the sacrificial ritual. In the tragic world like that of Euripides', where humans are merely toys in the hand of destiny (not gods) their hamartia and hubris lie in the fact that they are small, other, and different. Being children, our protagonists are literally small, confused, emotionally torn and tragic, but not morally impeccable, heroes. The story of *The Children of Kozara* is focused on children and told with only discreet mentioning of *the* Holocaust as the point of comparison. One of the references is the talk between Kamilo Bresler, Ustasha Max and his helper. They refer to Kamilo as "Jew/Civutin" and after slaughtering him (and destroying the archive of the Red Cross) the young Ustasha licks the knife and confirms Kamilo to be Jew – because Jewish blood tastes differently. Further, it is told without melodrama's clear ethnic/ethic equations which is visibly stated in the text at the end of the screenplay:

This horror film and the abject things you saw are not a work of fiction.

In the cleansing of Western Bosnia done by Fascists and Ustashas, in the summer of 1942, thousands of civilians were killed while more than 20.000 children were brought to camps and orphanages. Red Cross and patriots from Gradiska, Sisak, Zagreb and places nearby managed to save only a small number of those unfortunate children. Others perished or were killed.

In other words, the perpetrators are Ustashas and Fascists, and the victims are children from Western Bosnia – instead, as it is implied in Dara, Croats/Ustasha/perpetrators and Serbs/victims. The partisans liberating the orphanage are shown in realistic, ethnically elusive way compliant with the premise that in the time of war and evil neither side is victorious – we are all tragic losers, playing many roles – victims, perpetrators, bystanders, witnesses, saviours, helpers – at the same time.[17] Croats living around the camp and orphanage willingly risk their own lives to help and shelter the children. Their human

16 In the last episode of the TV series *Dara of Jasenovac*, „Kristallnacht of Zadar" ("Zadarska Kristalna noc"), Dara (Mirjana Karanovic) comes to Zadar on the eve of the riots that would grow into the wars of the break-up of ex-Yugoslavia. She visits Budo (Marko Gvero) who has forgotten about his family from Mirkovci. In the ongoing crises he has to face the truth about his identity and accept the guilt of his son and other members of post-generations who unknowingly go against own parents. In a way, the episode works as an epilogue of Zafranovic's film.

17 Similarly in the film *The Saviour*, the role of perpetrators is evenly given to all ethnicities in the WW2 and, respectively, in the wars of 1990s.

and parental instincts overcome the presumed interethnic hostility and conflicts.

According to Diklic, Ustashas are largely deethnicised incarnation of evil allowing the narrative to escape falling into the trap of ethnicisiation of history. It firmly stays as the universal story about perpetrators[18] and victims – helpless and innocent children – above ethnic divisions, as neither were all Croats Ustashas nor were all Serbs absolute victims. The bottom top[19] model rises from the well-developed individual story to the universal tragedy of the children first and foremost, whose victimhood is, accordingly, more pronounced than sacrifice. As already pointed out, the implied repetitiveness of evil against children brings the quality of sacred as understood in paganism, sustained by Zafranovic's claim that his film is "from the very beginning (...) sacred" (Sudar 2023).

The symbolic power of being a victim

The notion of screen memory, in its Freudian meaning, explains the complementary work of two films in constructing narratives of victimhood as well as in their role in contemporary memory and identity politics. The two films, as well as other media texts, have reinstated Jasenovac as an identity myth, shaping narratives of victimhood and cultural trauma into the political discourse that asserts victimhood of Serbian ethnicity in Croatia as Serbian. Moreover, besides the play on words screen (memory) / screening, Jasenovac-as-screen-memory is used to "displace, repress or screen other"

18 Diklic's explicit claim is sustained by Zafranovic's reflection about the destiny of his film *Blood and Ashes of Jasenovac* that was withdrawn as Yugoslav candidate for Oscar. „No one was satisfied with the film. Serbs were not satisfied as I have not used the number of victims they demanded, and Croats thought that I should not have revealed the things that civilised nations hide – own evil. My premise was that in order to be able to talk about the evil done to us by others, I have to talk about the evil of my own people. That evil has brought us historical shame and a big black stain that I wanted to remove – with the film – from me and from all great and courageous Croatian sons who have fought, together with my father, Ivo, for four years against that biggest evil in the history of Croatia and possibly of the world." (Zafranovic 2022). "Niko nije bio njime zadovoljan. Srbi nisu bili zadovoljni jer nisam stavio broj žrtava koje su oni zahtijevali, a Hrvati, da nije trebalo otkrivati ono što civilizirani narodi skrivaju – vlastito zlo. Pošao sam od toga da bih mogao govoriti o zlu, koji su nama napravili drugi. Mora da se govori o zlu u vlastitom narodu, koji nam je donio povijesne sramote i veliku crnu mrlju, koju sam, tim filmom, htio skinuti sa sebe i sa tih hrabrih i velikih hrvatskih sinova, koji su se, zajedno sa mojim ocem, Ivom, četiri godine borili protiv tog najvećeg zla u historiji Hrvatske, pa i svijeta."

19 *Dara*, by contrast, is primarily Serb and only afterwards a child making the top-bottom development problematic in a way that the top stated national victimhood is capillary and problematic way brought down to the example of one child.

(David 2020), memories of the wars of the 1990s (both for its rewriting and for its denial in the form of Serbs-as-perpetrators story). The history of Jasenovac as a narrative of victimhood and sacrifice reveals the full vulnerability of cinematic narratives which more often than not become "a component of nationalist ideology" (Bauer 2020) through various narrativizations of the "historical truth".

Dara of Jasenovac is the overreaching narrative of Serbian victimhood, being subsumed to the Holocaust – as "a unit of moral measurement"- story pattern and establishing equivalence between Serbs and Jews[20] as universal and irreproachable victims. The similarities of their identities, histories and myths reach back to the Hebrew sacrifice myth whose rituals are, in a perverse way, "symbolically" performed in the camp. The destiny of Serbs in Croatia as perennial victims works for the nationally homogenising and hegemonic (hi) story and the means of social cohesion based upon melodrama polarised world where ethic neatly become ethnic qualifications of Serbs/victims and Croats/perpetrators. Dara, a young Serbian girl in the concentration camp in Croatia, is the absolute and innocent victim obliged to act through sacrifice to literally save her loved ones, and metaphorically to save the world, restore order and poetic, religious and worldly justice. She, thus, embodies the dualism of the absolute victim of national melodrama and the perfect victim/scapegoat of the national myth in the polarised world of melodrama.

By staying clear of the Holocaust formula, *The Children of Kozara* build the victimhood narrative as universal and not an endemic case of the victimhood (of children). Even in the end when it hints the tragedy of the nations in the times to come, the ethnic component does not automatically entail the ethic one. As already pointed out, the victims – children from Western Bosnia – are Serb Orthodox who nevertheless pass to the "other" side, that of Ustasha; people from places around the camp are Croat Catholics who together with (Austrian Catholic) Dijana try to help the children. The partisans have no ethnic identity but the one of communists and, although unknown at the time, that of future Yugoslavs.

Unlike heavily ethnicised Holocaust and maternal melodrama *Dara of Jasenovac* – after the preferred state concept – Diklic's *The Children of Kozara* are

20 At one point, Blankica explicitly tells Dara, that their two peoples are the same as they suffer just because of being different, "small"; that they have to be the silent, the inferior and the tortured ones.

deethnicised in the sense of portraying people and rising into the realm of universal human tragedy.

Told from complying and almost complementary perspectives, the national-victimhood narrative forged around Jasenovac and its symbolic power plays out well and versatilely in the present-day political reality. On the one side, it epitomises rigidly national(ist) populist politics of memory in victimhood melodrama narrative attempting to match the Holocaust trauma and Jewish sacrificial myth. On the other side, it matches the universal victimhood narrative, thus belonging to all and none nation, working out individual, collective and civilizational trauma, as genocide and not rigorously the Holocaust.

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ŽRTVENIŠTVO I ŽRTVOVANJE NA FILMSKOM PLATNU: DARA I DRUGA DECA JASENOVCA

Apstrakt

Cilj ovog rada je analiza jugoslovenskih i postjugoslovenskih filmova o Jasenovcu kao višestruko određenih (i)storija o Holokaustu/genocidu, o kulturalnoj traumi i nacionalnom žrtvenom narativu. Poređenje različitih filmskih priča Jasenovca – dubinska analiza filma Dara iz Jasenovca *(Predrag Antonijević, 2020) i analiza scenarija filma* Zlatni rez 42: Djeca Kozare *(Lordan Zafranović, 2024; u trenutku pisanja ovog rada film je bio u postprodukciji i nije bilo moguće organizovati projekciju) – kao mesta dvostrukog genocida (Holokausta i Srba u Hrvatskoj) omogućavaju da u radu ocrtamo različite modalitete pripovedanja i reprezentacije nacionalnog žrtveništva i njihovih uloga u okvirima zadatim savremenom političkom agendom.*

Ključne reči

žrtveni narativ, žrtvovanje, Holokaust, Dara iz Jasenovca*,* Zlatni rez 42: Djeca Kozare

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