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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

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After the devastating war in Bosnia & Herzegovina of 1992-1995, the warring sides were amnestied, and an official winner was never proclaimed. A war, civil war, an aggression or a genocide, are all titles assigned to this conflict in which around 200,000 people died. The ambivalent reality and the different histories allow for media and scientific approach to this problem, yet in the film narrative, things stand different. The basis on which war movie dramaturgy rests is the conflict; e.g. the clash between the good and the evil. It can be manifested within the community, between individuals or in the character itself in a form of an inner conflict. Therefore, film has this tendency to establish clear boundaries between good and bad, e.g. protagonists and antagonists in the conflict it shows. However, in the movies made in Bosnia and about Bosnia, as well as in Bosnian production films from the end of the war to date, almost all subjects have been related to the war or its consequences, yet an explicit finger pointing at the enemy hasn't been shown.

Almost every approach directors use for the theme of war tacitly inclines towards the ideological concept of their production origin. Thus, the Serbian films of which the plot develops in Bosnia will have an ideological concept like – it is everybody's fault. Bosnian and Croatian movies have the need to establish the fact of who started the war, e.g. to identify the guilty one, but they fail in that attempt in the sense of presenting the antagonist to be a social group as a whole, so they seek for an individual within a certain national-religious inclination which is then labeled as the evil one. Subtle characterization in the replicas and actions of the main characters point at the enemy, but in no movie is a certain side characterized as either the winning or the beaten one, i.e., there is no clear propaganda marking of the good and the evil.

Twenty years after the war in Bosnian cinematography, as well as in the films from Serbia and Croatia, not a single movie has been made in a James Bond style. We don't have action heroes in our languages (neither in Bosnian, Croatian nor in Serbian language). We don't have Stalones nor do we have Schwarzenegers. We don't have *Bitka na Neretvi* (The Battle On The Neretva River). After the conflict like the one that happened following the death of Yugoslavia, not a single movie has been made in a Partisan manner. There has been no single war movie in which clear boundaries between the bad and the good guys have been defined. There has been no single war action fairytale? Why?

Unlike foreign movies, which have been shot in Bosnia, and of which the main setting is the war, with predetermined and clearly defined enemies, domestic movies made in the region do not take such an approach to the war and post war themes. The introduction sequence of *The Hunting*

Party, directed by Richard Shepard in 2007, the movie on the search for a war criminal, as a metaphor of Radovan Karadžić's hiding, shows the Sarajevo airport while a collage montage describes Sarajevo. In one of the shots an old man is sitting on the Bašaršija wearing fez, a clothing piece of which the origin is not Bosnian but Turkish and which currently is displayed only in museums. The music behind the scene is explicitly oriental, which again has nothing to do with the Balkan and Bosnian ethnographic melody. Let us imagine a comparative approach to this scene through a description of an airplane landing at JFK in New York: in the background a mouth organ is playing the Wild West melody, and at the airport sitting on a horse is a guy with a cowboy hat on. At the very beginning, it is clear that foreign movies dealing with the war in Bosnia have to clearly establish stereotypical – ideological visual identifiers, even if they are completely inaccurate.

But, domestic movies do not face these problems, because they do not deal with the differences but the similarities in the tragedy that happened as a consequence of the war which took place after Yugoslavia fell apart. Even though tragicomic elements are present almost as cinematographic – cultural mark, movies from the region mostly deal with the serious subjects through the classical drama genre or the grotesque dark humor satire drama. So, who are the good and the bad guys in our movies? The majestic film essay of the Vuletić's *Hop, Skip, Jump*, as well as the shot sequence of the Imamović's brilliant *Ten Minutes*, clearly show that the bad guys behind "that line" kill civilians, women and children, yet, the idea of these movies is not to promote hatred but to illuminate the horrors of the limits of humanity. "Who started the war?" as the famous replica in the Oscar awarded *No Man's Land*, is not the question to which the answer is given but with its absurdity the boundary between the good and the evil is blurred placing the conflicts in the grey of the Dante's Purgatory. The *Notre Musique*, from 2004 by Godard, points to it and drags the heroes, secularism, religious empathy and the humanity consciousness of the war in Bosnia together into the space of the tragedy referred as the Purgatory. *The Perfect Circle* of 1997, being the first Bosnian feature film, is dealing with the human evil in a similar way with the connotation of individual survival but the collective survival too which refuses to surrender itself to the violence.

The characters of different national or ethnic background in the movies of *Turneja* (The Tour) or *Nafaka* (The Nafaka-the Arabic word meaning *that which is destined to you*) clearly show that the other one and the different one are not antagonistic at the same time. The movies such as *Djeca* (The Children), *Ostavljeni* (The Abandoned) and *Grbavica* (The Grbavica), which deal with the postwar subjects and the younger generations on which the war left certain traumas, illustrate the issues of the memories of the victims and the enemies. They openly portray "bad individuals" behind that one over there boundary; still, the entire conflict is perceived as unnecessary and tragic. There is no conflict at all, and the movie plot is placed in the Tito's time in the B&H movie of *Hiljadarka* (The Thousand Dinar Bill); the comedy which is reflective of our society in the fight of individuality against conformism. All national (dialectic) differences are there, but there is no trace of nationalism and stereotype. Conflict is not perceived, nor in the interpretation of the past, can its seed be seen.

The absurdity of conflict perhaps is summarized best in the dialogue scene between Stanko and Hamdo in the movie of *Gori vatra* (Fuse) from 2003, in which two former neighbors discuss the war defining it as the problem created by those who had come to save "you and me both." Somebody from the outside is the Evil, while within the conflict there are the bad and the good guys on both sides. Similar ideological approach is seen in the Serbian movie of *Parada* (The Parade) from 2011 in which ex warriors, e.g. war criminals, from the sides in conflict (Serbia, Croatia, Muslim part of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania) insultingly, stereotypically, and

grotesquely characterized work together to protect a gay parade in Belgrade from a Neo-Nazi chauvinist gang – the new Evil, the youth. The Evil is identified as unnecessary aggression, not wearing the mask of religion or nationality, but it is blood thirsty itself. This concept of the Evil being outside the good and the bad geopolitical space of ex-Yugoslavia is shown in a snuff film *Srpski film* (Serbian movie). If this movie is taken into consideration through its metaphorical subtext, then it is contextually a connotation of puppeteer breakup of Yugoslavia in which the Evil comes from the outside, and not the inside. In that sense, the *Srpski film* talks about the Evil worse than everything bad done by all sides in the conflict during the war. In the movie of *Halimin put* (Halima's path), the Evil also comes from the outside of anything all the characters are willing to do or anything that guides their motivations heated by national – religious separatism and historically given circumstances of the false coexistence. The International Community is not being accused of it, as is the case in the movies of *Gori vatra* and the *Srpski film*, i.e. the common denominator is not given to it, but Evil is identified as something that cannot be influenced by the good and the bad. The Evil is bigger than that and it represents the destiny itself. In relation to that Evil, the bad from our neighborhood is seen as a tragic guilt or some higher power under the influence from the outside, in an incapability of control over destiny controlled by the Evil. The tragedy is like that because it is ours and the Evil itself is as it is. Therefore, we do not have war movies showing the fight between the good and the bad. The true denotative propaganda about the bad and the good sides is not given in any of the movies of the region. The good and the bad can reconcile after they identify the Evil.

Translated by Dženan Borovac

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