



Cinema of Flames

Balkan Film, Culture and the Media

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16. Here I am not discussing the representations of the violence and the victims of earlier infamous Balkan camps such as Jasenovac (run by Croatian Ustasha) or Goli Otok (run by Yugoslav communists), nor similar camps in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. These camps have been the subject of numerous documentaries and feature films from the region.
17. Quoted in Judith Miller, 'Taking Two Bosnian Women's Case to the World', *The New York Times*, 23 February 1997, sec. 2 p. 36.
18. For a good discussion of this work of visual anthropology as a human interest documentary, see Peter Loizos, 'A Duty of Care? Three Granada Television Films Concerned with War', in Allen and Seaton (1999).
19. Noted by John Wrathall in his review of *Savior* in *Sight and Sound*, July 1998, p. 52.

Chapter 10

Representing Women's Concerns

In the 1990s, women across the Balkans were facing a range of grave social problems: unemployment, cuts in social benefits, deteriorating or unaffordable health care, inadequate contraception and denial of abortion rights, a rise in domestic violence and a decline in child-care options. In parts of Yugoslavia, however, women faced an additional set of problems. By the mid-1990s many of them had lived through the harsh experiences of war and rape, had become homeless refugees, had sunk below the poverty line and had seen their previously modest living conditions reach deplorably low levels. Many realised that their children's chances for a decent life were extremely limited, and many others chose not to have children at all. The representation of some of these coarse experiences merits a discussion.

I will begin by looking at the mass rapes of the Bosnian war and the main issues which came to determine the public discourse: victims and perpetrators, rape warfare and the subtle problems of interpretation which arised at the intersection of feminism and nationalism. I will then move on to explore a range of cinematic representations of wartime rape, discussing in detail Mandy Jacobson's *Calling the Ghosts*, a documentary which, taking the case of two Bosnian women, raises issues of universal concern – violence, survival and witnessing. My aim will be to show the confining nature of the specific 'feminisation' of the critical discourse on resistance to nationalism which established itself as an alternative to the popularly mediated perception of 'macho' Balkans.

The Bosnian rapes

In *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, written in 1991, feminist Slavenka Drakulić talked about the deprivation of women under communism, and in *Balkan Express* (1993a), written in the period of Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia, she scrutinised the repercussions of rising nationalism in her country. But she could not foresee what the problems of Bosnian women were to look like only a little later. Her writing did not in any way anticipate the mass rapes and the violence that were soon to come. It was the same for all feminists

from Zagreb, Sarajevo and Belgrade – all of them emancipated urbanites who now had to face one more, unanticipated, side of the war: the automatic guns and mortar shelling of Vukovar and Sarajevo and the knife-killing butchery that swept through the Bosnian villages. The reports of horror emanating from the patriarchal hamlets had become a fact of life.

In the late summer of 1992, along with the unravelling of the Bosnian war, reports of mass rapes of women started appearing in the international media. The first one to extensively investigate and report the rapes was the *Newsday* journalist Roy Gutman, who eventually received the Pulitzer Prize for journalism in 1993 for his *A Witness to Genocide* (1993). Gradually the mass rapes became a *cause célèbre* for feminists in Croatia, Serbia, Germany and the USA. Mainstream magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Der Spiegel* published reports on the rapes, feminist publications such as *Ms.*, *WIN News* and *Connexions* regularly reported on the evidence, and even popular women's magazines such as the Canadian *Homemakers' Magazine* joined in and ran a shattering report on a rape victim, a 59-year-old peasant woman.¹ Names of camps – Keraterm, Omarska, Manjaca, Trnopolje – emerged repeatedly, along with the names of 'ethnically cleansed' towns such as Zvornik, Prijedor and Dobo, and those of notorious wartime brothels such as 'Sonja's' near Sarajevo or the 'Vilina Vlas' hotel in Visegrad. Two feminist books dealt exclusively with the subject – a volume edited by Alexandra Stiglmaier (1994), and Beverly Allen's monograph *Rape Warfare* (1996) – reporting horror stories about the ordeal of women mostly with Muslim names. Documentary reports were compiled by the team led by the Chicago law professor Cherif Bassiouni, who worked on the preliminary report for the UN investigation into the atrocities of the Bosnian war, and eventually by the team led by the former Polish prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

The estimates of how many women were raped contradicted each other. Moreover, it was almost certain that not all rapes were reported, as many women felt ashamed to come forward, fearing repercussions from the traditional mentality that puts the blame on the rape victim. Different numbers were reported by different sources, and these vary between 800 firmly registered cases to an estimate of 50,000.² In the report prepared by the European Community the number of rape victims was estimated at around 20,000.³ It is certain that in at least 119 cases pregnancies had been forcibly induced.⁴ Rape victims ranged between seven and sixty years of age. Human rights activists who collected information on the rapes spoke of a variety of patterns and settings – of cases like the rape of an elderly women, witnessed by a large group of villagers, the repeated rape of a twelve-year-old girl, and of many women who were forced into brothels to entertain soldiers and who were more likely to be killed than released.

The information on the perpetrators was scarce. The confessions of three mass rapists, all Serbs from Bosnia, were featured in Stiglmaier's book – Borislav Herak, Cvjetin Maksimović and Slobodan Panić. They all claimed they had acted under orders and that they had to commit the rapes to prove that they were 'real Serbs' to Serbian Chetnik paramilitaries who had crossed into Bosnia from Serbia and who, for the duration of the rape, would play turbo-folk tunes loudly. Most of the perpetrators, however, remained unidentified.

The reports seemed to suggest that while Croatian and Bosnian Muslim men were involved in rape, the majority of mass rapes in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina were committed by Serbs, mostly against women of Muslim ethnicity. Gradually, concepts such as 'genocidal rape' came into use, seen as part of the 'ethnic cleansing' policy systematically performed as warfare by the fighters for greater Serbia. It was now believed that women had been systematically raped with the purpose of driving them out of their home towns. While it was never possible to prove the existence of such an overall systematic rape policy, most reports indicated that many of the rapes could not have been carried out without some level of organisation and group activity.

Even though women of all national groups in former Yugoslavia were raped – Croatian, Bosnian Muslim, as well as Serbian – most of the media attention was focused on the Bosnian Muslim women. In her detailed account of the rapes, Alexandra Stiglmaier admits that the cases of Serbian women were rarely reported internationally and that there was little sympathy for Serbian victims, because these women were the

wives, sisters, and daughters of the aggressors. There is hardly a journalist who feels motivated to seek them out, to check up on what has happened to them and thus offer propaganda material to the Serbian side – this is, the 'bad' side, the side 'responsible for the war.'
(Stiglmaier, 1994, p. 138)

The intense coverage of the Bosnian rapes led to a situation in which the Serbs more or less came to be perceived as the only rapists. The generalisation on this issue of the perpetrators of rape led to further stigmatisation of the Serbs.

Popular media offered a range of instances of preferential coverage of the rapes in former Yugoslavia, wherein the significance of some rapes was downplayed in order to stress cases and patterns that fitted into the respective nationalist agendas.⁵ This was further enhanced by the writings of high-profile American feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon (in Stiglmaier, 1993) and Beverly Allen (1996), who, in their efforts to construct a convincing interpretation of rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing chose to focus on the prevailing ethnic pattern constituting the rapes (Serb perpetrators and Bosnian victims)

and to neglect cases involving a different ethnic make-up (Bosnian or Croat perpetrators and Serbian victims).

The involvement of MacKinnon and associates, however, came under scrutiny by scholars with a first-hand knowledge of the region, who undertook to show the problems connected with the 'genocidal rape' interpretations. Elissa Helms criticised the rushed and generalised denunciation of Serbs as rapists and the almost complete neglect of the fact that rapes were also committed against women of Serbian origin by Croats and Muslims.⁶ She pointed out that the preferential treatment of some cases and neglect of others could only distort the genuinely feminist cause, which cannot possibly exclude any rape. Helms pointed out that the Western feminist public advocacy for select victims of ethnically motivated 'genocidal rape' was immediately abused by those ethnic nationalists (like Bosnian Muslim or Croatian) who were spared criticism and who 'used rape testimonies to add fuel to their [nationalist] cause'.⁷ Helms insisted that the Bosnian rapes should be understood as part of the larger context of ethno-nationalist ideologies dominant in all of the successor states of Yugoslavia. Robert Hayden also criticised the hasty reaction of American feminists in speaking about 'genocidal rape', noting that

by viewing rape as 'genocidal' they have, in fact, accepted the message that coexistence is not possible, for how could anyone expect victims of genocide to live communally once again with perpetrators of that act? Thus labelling rape as 'genocidal' would seem to acknowledge its effectiveness as a tool for partitioning purposes. (Hayden, 2000, p. 13)

Hayden claimed that the disproportionate attention given to any case that fitted the criterion for 'genocidal rape' had effectively diverted attention from the equally important issues of loss and suffering experienced by women—lost relatives, lost children, displacement, homelessness, loss of the means of survival.

The Bosnian rape victims had hardly benefited from the feminist intervention. Even worse, they were objectified in the process, and thus victimised again, a situation occasionally described as their 'second rape'. Helms commented:

The difficulties for feminists in taking the 'right' position vis-à-vis rape in Bosnia should not be surprising. The nature of critiques levelled at all types of feminist representations of the Bosnian rapes recall the objections of 'Third World' women, lesbians, and women of color to 'First World,' white, heterosexual, middle-class feminists who presumed to represent the interests of all women based on their own specific experiences with gender oppression. Nevertheless, . . . feminists still attempt a 'global' approach, positing universals in women's experiences before the details and local contexts are known, rather

than after. The case of Bosnia shows how even the most well-intentioned advocates have served to undermine the very causes they seek to further.⁸

It was important that rapes were approached in a context where gender relations were analysed in their complexity and above ethnicity, because it was the 'gendering of nationalism' among all ethnic groups that had provided the ideological impetus for the use of rape as a strategy of war against ethnic others. It was precisely this nationalist gendering that was unintentionally endorsed by the vocal involvement of Western feminists.

Although I have no doubts about the sincere motives of MacKinnon and Allen's vocal involvement with the Bosnian rapes, I believe that their efforts were largely discredited, as they not only became entangled in nationalist bias but also occasionally rushed into unsupported and incompetent speculation. I will discuss only one example which illustrates the overall approach.

Even though they readily admitted that there was no supporting evidence, the number of extreme statements they made about the media use of the alleged videotaping of rapes was alarming. In her study of the Bosnian rapes, Catherine Niarchos claimed, for example, that 'some of the rapes have been videotaped and shown on Serbian television, with the Bosnian or Croatian victims presented as Serbian women and the Serbian attackers as Muslim or Croatian men' (Niarchos, 1995, p. 655). Similarly, Catherine MacKinnon repeatedly insisted that rapes were filmed and that the tapes were subsequently sold for the pornographic market. She concluded that 'in the conscious and open use of pornography, in making pornography of atrocities, in the sophisticated use of pornography as war propaganda, this is perhaps the first truly modern war'.⁹

In her book, Beverly Allen repeatedly stressed allegations of the videotaping of rapes and of the subsequent distribution of the videotapes throughout clandestine porn markets in Eastern Europe. In the footnotes of the same book, she admitted that she has never been able to find evidence of the distribution or even of the existence of such tapes. Nonetheless, Allen assumed the tapes exist (Allen, 1996, pp. 34–7), which permits her to frame the (alleged) practice of videotaping by referencing it to the Nazi use of media, and then conclude that in their 'escalated explicitness', 'the Serbs make the Nazis' efforts look comparatively primitive' (ibid., p. 80).

By relegating the admission of her lack of evidence to the footnotes, while reasserting the unsupported claims in the body of the main text, and by treating the question of proof as negligible, writers like Niarchos, MacKinnon and Allen (some of whom were trained as lawyers) consciously engage in an attractive conceptualisation which may fit well in the feminist discourse on pornography but which remains deeply problematic as far as the discourse on gender and nation-

alism is concerned. Such seemingly minor but disappointingly revealing instances of manipulation seriously taint the overall picture of feminist involvement with the grim legacy of Bosnian rapes.

Rape and representation in Balkan film

I will approach the issue of rape from another angle: in the context of the Balkan cinematic tradition. I will look at rape representations in feature films dealing with Yugoslavia's breakup, and then contextualise by widening the discussion to include representations of rape in Balkan and international cinema at large. It is my intention to show that in international film, gender violence has mainly been used as a metaphor for general deprivation and social disturbance.

When one looks at the cinematic representations of rapes from the time of the Yugoslav breakup, it becomes immediately clear that rape is treated by filmmakers not so much within the discourse on gender but rather within the discourse on violence, despair and social turmoil. The spotlight is not on rape as a sexual act but on rape as another dimension of the brutal violence that reigns all around. This is probably the reason why, in the narrative films made in response to the Yugoslav crisis, rape has rarely been focused on exclusively. Rather, it has been explored as just one of the many violent aspects of the war. Rapes and their consequences are shown but rarely made a main focus in the representation of the conflict. In the cases when gender-specific violence is depicted, rape is conceptualised as just one of the means used for achieving the goal of driving people out – it is not so much about sexual overpowering but about homes, territory and control.

The plot line of *Savior*, a curious hybrid American–Serbian product of transnational cinema, is driven by a rape which the viewers are not shown, even though they are exposed to all sorts of other horrific scenes of violence.¹⁰ The young Serbian woman in the film, Vera, has been raped and impregnated by Muslims.¹¹ When she is sent back home to Serbian territory in a state of advanced pregnancy, the reaction of Goran, the soldier who takes her back, is to blame it all on her. He calls her a whore, takes her to an abandoned tunnel and forces her into labour, pointing his gun between her legs so that he can shoot the baby as soon as it emerges. It is a scene of unsurpassed violence. Vera's miraculous escape is due to the intervention of the American protagonist, the mercenary Joshua. Later on in the film Joshua continues to help Vera, who is also rejected by her own family, and develops a tender relationship with her and the baby. Most of the time Vera remains numb, displaying complete resignation about the circumstances that produced the child, the stigma of her disgrace. She herself has accepted that it is all her fault, refusing to forgive herself for being violated; she never manages to come to terms with her own

experiences and ends up a tragic victim, sacrificing herself in an intense situation during the next violent encounter with villains on the loose.

Boro Drašković's *Vukovar*, set during the 1991 war over Croatia's split, featured a brutal rape scene in which the Serbian protagonist, who is eight months pregnant, is raped in her own home by two looters disguised as nationalist fighters, who are speaking in the Croat dialect (this scene triggered the wave of protests among Croat-Americans). The sexual violence, again, is not at the centre of the film's narrative. It is just an added dimension in the overwhelming range of violence that reigns over the lives of the protagonists. The approach is similar in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, where sexual violence is not explored as such but is shown as just one more aspect of the overall violence. The same spirit is apparent in the Serbian film *Powder Keg* – violating the self-esteem of women is shown on several occasions in the film as a routine form of sadism. In this, and in many other recent Serbian films, rape as such does not even happen; it does not really matter, however, as the air is saturated with the spirit of violence. It is an environment populated by people gone crazy, who experience bizarre pleasure in tormenting whoever they come across. Only Želimir Žilnik puts the subject of sexual violence at the centre in his *Marble Ass*, a re-enacted documentary film in which the protagonist, a male prostitute, claims that he is engaged in a noble project to divert and absorb the violent energy of his macho clients which, if not vented in this way, would find a more dangerous outlet. If made in the context of a consumerist Western society, such a claim would be treated as a metaphor; in the context of Belgrade in the 1990s, however, it may just be best to take it literally.

In the wider context of Balkan cinema, rape is often portrayed as a traumatic event that takes place within an ordinary setting. In Lucian Pintilie's *La balanta/The Oak* (1991) the protagonist is gang raped; but the rape does not even become the focus of cinematic investigation, which treats it as just one episode in the protagonist's continuous grim existence in Ceaușescu's Romania. In another Romanian film, Stere Gulea's *Stere de fapt/State of Things* (1996), set around the time of the 1989 'revolution', the raped protagonist tries to seek justice, only to become trapped in the limbo of a corrupt legal system. The shocking mess of disoriented people's lives is also explored in the utterly gloomy *Patul conjugal/The Conjugal Bed* (1991). Here rape is just an aspect (and not the worst one) of the dark picture of drabness and violence prevailing in the chaotic post-communist reality of Romania. The ruthless reality of Pintilie's *Terminus paradisi/Last Stop Paradise* (1998) – a film exposing a merciless and mindless military machine and depicting a society where relationships are reduced to hasty copulations – is even more violent and bleak. Women are exposed to violent assaults and systematic sexual harassment on a daily basis;



A range of films featured assaults on fair-faced Orthodox women by hairy-chested Ottomans: a scene from the Bulgarian *Koziyat rog/Goat's Horn* (1972)

they no longer even realise that they could oppose the seemingly endless circle of brutality. The directors of these films seem to share the view that women adapt better than men in tough times: their protagonists get bruised and battered but nevertheless handle the bleak post-communist realities; they will manage to outlive whatever is to come. They are not victims, but survivors.

Rape as a metaphor has been extensively used in Balkan cinema, most often for the purposes of historical discourse, where one's own nation is usually identified with the rape victim. This is the case with films where the focus is on the totalitarian past – here the communists are constructed as rapists and the raped women, seemingly identical with the respective 'raped' nations, suffer political oppression and deprivation. In such films, women are often subjected to violent sexual assaults, even in relationships they have sought themselves. They are silently and gradually tormented through their sexuality. The socio-historical clash between good and evil surfaces as a clash between the sexes, with innocent female victims and evil male perpetrators. Female sexuality is traditionally interpreted as passive and submissive, while male sexuality is exploitative, violent and excessively carnivorous.¹²

Rape has been publicly acknowledged as a weapon of war only recently, but in Balkan films which evolve around past clashes along ethnic divides, such

depictions of rape have been used for a long time. In a range of films, focusing on national struggles, rape is represented as one of the means foreign invaders use against local women, thus associating the image of the enemy with an overwhelming sexual violence. The Ottomans, the traditional enemies, have been shown as rapists in a wide range of Balkan films. One should note, however, that this representation is not always black and white, but is often accompanied by a deeper and more complex treatment of the issues of power and violence.¹²

When we try to contextualise the Balkan film representations of rape internationally, it becomes apparent that the parallels with Hollywood depictions of rape are limited. Whereas all sorts of shoot-outs and other violent acts make up the Hollywood routine, images of rape are relatively rare. I am inclined to explain this by the impossibility of aestheticising rape in the way that Hollywood has treated various other kinds of violence. Contrary to Molly Haskell's (1974) influential argument that Hollywood's portrayal of women is becoming increasingly disrespectful and violent, I believe that representations of rape are not as frequently exploitative as representations of other types of violent clashes. Shattering rape scenes found in recent American films, such as *The Accused* (1988) and *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1989), are memorable exceptions which, as a rule, do not stand in for a wider context of social turmoil or oppression.

Graphic depictions of rape immediately linked to a troubled social backdrop, however, can be found in many films belonging to non-Hollywood traditions, where violence in general is conceptualised as something painful and ugly, and is depicted as such. These representations are found in the cinemas of countries that have lived through the experiences of war and violent confrontations. Painful images of wartime rape are seen in the Italian neo-realist classic, *La ciociara/Two Women* (1961), in German war films such as *Die Betchtrommel/The Tin Drum* (1979), *Deutschland Bleiche Mutter/Germany Pale Mother* (1980) and *Stalingrad*, as well as in the Russian war classic, *Idi i smotri/Come and See* (1985). In the recent Indian saga, *Phoolan Devi/Bandit Queen* (1994), a dramatisation of the real-life story of a popular fighter for the rights of lower caste women, Phoolan Devi, rape was shown as a routine method of denigration and subjugation used against the rebellious protagonist.

In most of these films, Balkan and international, the rapists are clearly identified, but are usually strangers. In many of the rape cases from Bosnia, on the contrary, the perpetrators were recognised and identified by the victims as their personal acquaintances. I am not aware, however, of a single narrative film which explores this type of situation. While in reality it was often neighbours or school friends who committed rapes and tortured women, sometimes wearing balaclavas and sometimes not even disguised, the mainstream cinematic representation of rape remains an act committed by strangers, resulting in a

treatment in which the image of the perpetrator is obscured. With a few exceptions, it seems that film-makers are not up to the challenge of looking and exploring rape situations where women not only endure rape but also, unless they leave, often have to face further encounters with the rapists within the same community, village or town. The painful aftermath, the stifling feelings of injustice and trauma, are topics that are treated almost exclusively in documentaries.

Calling the Ghosts

Why would I rape a woman of forty-five when I am twenty-six, especially since the woman in question is bad and unattractive. The way she was, I would not have leaned my bicycle against her, let alone rape her.

Željko Meakić, commander of Omarska camp, in response to rape allegations raised by Jadranka Cigelj in *Calling the Ghosts* (USA/Croatia, Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincić, 1996)

How did this statement come about? Jadranka Cigelj was the first female survivor of Omarska to talk to journalist Roy Gutman, the American reporter who first wrote about the death camps of Bosnia in 1992. As a principled independent investigator who knows he has to confront the perpetrator and ask him to react to the allegations, Gutman sent Meakić an outline of Jadranka's testimony, and asked him to comment on her allegations that while she was detained at camp, she was repeatedly gang raped, and that on several occasions he personally raped her. Meakić's faxed response, sent through the Bosnian Serb press centre in Banja Luka, denied that women were ever held at Omarska, and that they were brought in for interrogation only occasionally if the course of the investigation dictated it. Nothing like rape ever occurred. And besides, why would he, a young stud, rape this old woman? He would not even lean his bicycle against her.

The disturbing arrogance of Meakić's reaction is not his denial of the rape. The reply is upsetting, because it takes rape from the realm of violence and transplants it into the realm of sexuality. He treats an act of ultimate abuse as if it is a casual sexual encounter. He is appealing to a common sense that equates sex and rape. Rape, however, is not about sexual impulses. It is about aggression and deprivation, and about the intentional humiliation of the victim. Meakić's response is a radical refusal to recognise a victim's distress. It is a rejection of the violent essence of the rape.

In this particular case, it was this reply that helped the rape survivor to take the difficult decision not only to admit the rape but also to discuss it in public.

Due to the nature of the subject matter, documentary films about rape like this

one do not rely on a direct and graphic representation of the violence, but rather focus on the subtle realms of trauma and bearing witness. The best-known of this type of cinematic work is probably Helke Sander's celebrated documentary, *Befreier und Befreite/Liberators Take Liberties* (1992), which features numerous interviews with now elderly German women, raped by Russian soldiers in 1945, who recall and talk of these experiences forty years later.

Similarly, Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincić, the authors of *Calling the Ghosts*, focus on trauma following the rape and raise questions about the chances of recovery and redemption. 'We wanted to make a film not so much about what it means to have been raped,' Jacobson said, 'but about how these women made sense of what had happened, and how they were going to reconstruct their lives'.¹⁴

Calling the Ghosts tells the story of two former school friends from the Bosnian town of Prijedor, Jadranka Cigelj, an ethnic Croatian and a lawyer, and Nusreta Sivać, an ethnic Muslim and a civil judge. Both women are survivors of the Serbian camp at Omarska. The film documents their stories two years later, at a time when they both live as refugees in Croatia and are recovering from traumatic camp experiences. The women are shown in everyday situations which emanate calmness: sitting near water, looking into a river and even riding on a merry-go-round. The tone in which their testimony is delivered is calm and controlled; they speak of humiliation and rage in an even voice, and the shattered side of their psyche rarely comes to the surface.

Unlike many others who shared similar fate but stayed silent, these two women have decided to speak in public. The decision has not been an easy one, and the protagonists are clear about the choice they are making: 'If I stay silent, is this moral? If I speak – how good is it for me? I would actually have to expose myself.'

Their narrative of the camp is straightforward and horrific: when Serbian paramilitaries take power in Prijedor on 29 April 1992, no one expects that the women would be targeted. About a month later, however, amid a full-blown ethnic cleansing campaign, which leaves people dead and houses on fire, a number of men and women are taken to the camp that has been set up nearby at Omarska, a place which is to become notorious for chilling killings and tortures. Many of the guards at the camp are local men, who now pretend not to know the prisoners. The commander, Željko Meakić, a man in his late twenties wearing paramilitary uniform, is also from Prijedor. At Omarska, the men are routinely tortured and the women routinely raped. Jadranka describes, in spare but shattering words, her own experience of repeated gang rape led by Meakić. Nusreta prefers to talk about how she hoped to survive.

Obviously concerned to conceal the fact that women were kept in the camp, the commanders release the female prisoners as soon as they learn of an

unexpected visit by two Western journalists, the *Guardian's* Ed Vulliamy and *Newsday's* Roy Gutman. It is a miraculous development – if it were not for the arrival of the reporters, the women doubt they would be alive today. Jadranka drags herself for 20 kilometres until she finally reaches home, emaciated and barefoot, and drops exhausted on the threshold. 'We were stinking of death,' she says. 'Even my dog ran away from me.' Seven women remain in Omarska, locked up in the bath. They never return.

A few months later, both Jadranka and Nusreta manage to emigrate to Croatia, where they have lived ever since and where the film-makers meet and talk to them. They do not plan to return to Prijedor: the place is now inextricably linked to a series of horrifying flashbacks. Nusreta is reunited with her husband, and Jadranka with her teenage son. But while Nusreta has grown numb and talks little of her experiences with anyone, Jadranka has gradually managed to tell her son about her ordeal, mostly to prepare him for the day when, as she has decided, she will come to testify in public.

Jadranka admits that revenge was all that she thought about initially, and she believed that her own public testimony would grant her that revenge. Later, however, she comes to realise that the revenge would have a much stronger impact if supported by the testimonies of others. This is why she begins to work for the Croat Information Centre and other NGO's that are interviewing rape victims.

In order to explore the crime, you violate the witness, says Jadranka. Witnessing is an ordeal for all the women to whom she speaks, but they feel they have to do it, if just for the sake of the ones who will never be able to speak. As she turns into a confessor, Jadranka's own stance changes, her hatred gradually subsides. By listening to the witnesses, by collecting testimonies, she realises that she can accomplish more than simple revenge – she can give relief to the suffering. Jadranka now believes she has overcome every nationalist bias and is able to see violence against women as a crime regardless of whether it was committed against a Muslim, Croat or Serb. She lives for the day when the perpetrators of this violence are brought to trial.

Jadranka and Nusreta are bound to be disillusioned, however. They have put all their hopes in the International Tribunal. They even travel to the Hague to see the court's headquarters. But will the trial bring the justice they long for?

The epilogue is a grim one. By the time the tribunal starts working, many of the indicted ones, including Meakić, have not been apprehended. The scenes from the opening of the tribunal show a hall full of men. They begin work. One of the few women in the room, judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, reads the indictment of Duško Tadić, one of the guards at Omarska, whose plea is 'not guilty'.¹⁵ In May 1996 the first scheduled witness from the camp withdraws her testimony because she is afraid for her own and her family's safety.

At the time of its release, *Calling the Ghosts* faced criticism from some proponents of the cause for intervention in Bosnia. Critics saw the film as just another human interest story lacking a broader political or historical context. The testimony given by the women may have played a cathartic role for the witnesses, but such testimony could have no real effect in preventing any further rapes or violence.¹⁶ What was needed was intervention, not humanitarian concern, critics insisted.

But *Calling the Ghosts* was not a film that intended to call for intervention. It had an impact in a different and important way: one of the few films to be shown internationally, picked up for distribution by Women Make Movies, it was screened at special events around the USA, and is available for distribution on video. The testimony of the two women thus won an enduring presence in the wider context of issues such as trauma and witnessing.

Women's films, women's voices

Most of the documentaries which focus on women's experiences of hardship and conflict are made by women. Female activists from the Texas-based Foundation for a Compassionate Society visited refugee women in Croatia and made a film about them, *Spansko Refugee Camp* (1993). Two women – Norwegian anthropologist Tone Bringa and UK director Debbie Christie – brought the everyday concerns of several Muslim and Croatian peasant women to wider audiences with their ethnographic portrayal of a Bosnian village, *We Are All Neighbours*. American documentarian Jo Anders made *Black Kites* (1996), a film about art and creativity as a survival strategy, a dream-like spectral interpretation of the journals of Bosnian visual artist Alma Hajrić, who survived the Sarajevo siege in a basement shelter. Canadian documentarian Brenda Longfellow travelled to Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo in the last months of the war to meet women activists she had encountered on the Internet, and showed these encounters in her *Balkan Journey* (1995). The women in this film were involved in different forms of resistance – underground radio operators, lesbian graffiti artists, feminist philosophers and members of Women in Black, who stood each Wednesday in Belgrade's Republic Square to protest against the war. The activists of *Frauen in Schwarz/Women in Black* (1997) were the subject of yet another documentary, the German full-length production by Zoran Solomun and Helga Reidemeister. Two other documentaries were made in francophone Canada. The first, *They Were All Called Sarajevo*, included testimonies from seven Sarajevo women from the time of the siege. They talked of their fear, of the cold, of the hunger, of the darkness, of the lack of running water, of deprivation and of a bleak future. Yet, despite these hardships, they tried to practise their professions and raise their children. The second, *Les Rendez-Vous a Sarajevo/Sarajevo*

Encounters (1997), brought two teenage refugees to Montreal back to their native Sarajevo.

For the film-makers who realised these projects, however, the journey was soon over, and they returned to Toronto, Montreal, Berlin or New York, to work on new projects looking at women elsewhere. Those who remained interested in the Yugoslav topic were mostly artists from the region.

The Zagreb-based feminist agency for healing through art, Nona, helped many traumatised refugee women to regain self-confidence. As the hostilities subsided, however, it gradually lost its funding and had to transfer its activities on-line, into the less expensive virtual space.¹⁷ Marina Abramović, a Serbian performance artist based in Amsterdam since the 1970s, received a Golden Lion in Venice for her show *Balkan Baroque*, which was turned into a film in 1998: a deeply personal narrative, in which Abramović talks in Serbian and English about a cosmopolitan background, ranging from Balkan partisan stories and memories of a Yugoslav childhood, to soul-searching travels to Tibet. Vesna Ljubić, the director of *Ecce Homo* (1992–4), made her film in Sarajevo during the siege. The video experiments of Jasmila Zbanić, a young Sarajevo video artist, were seen and acclaimed at a range of international film festivals. Women film-makers from across the Balkans were given a forum at the feminist film festival at Créteil in 1997, where they were able to showcase their work.

Thinking not only of these film-makers but also of the writers, the journalists and the scholars, I am more and more often inclined to think that it is women who represent the viable and vocal critical alternative in former Yugoslavia today. This is due, in my opinion, to the questionable credibility of the men who occupy the public sphere in the Yugoslav successor states, and is certainly associated with the widespread perception that machismo and nationalism go hand in hand in former Yugoslavia. Women are spared such suspicion, so it is no wonder that during the Kosovo war in 1999 it was two Serbian women whose reports from Belgrade were the only ones to be seen internationally, and whose texts were translated and reprinted across Europe: feminist writer Jasmina Tešanović and the young playwright, Biljana Srbijanović.¹⁸ Even earlier on, women were more vocal than men, and female voices from Serbia were internationally heard, such as those of academics Svetlana Slapšak (1997), Dubravka Knežević (1996), Nevena Daković (1997) and the radical activist Lepa Mladenović (1995). Similarly, Slovenian Renata Salecl (1994), Serbian-American Jasminka Udovicki (1995) and Milica Bakić-Hayden (1992, 1995), as well as the Serbian-British Vesna Goldsworthy (1998), authored internationally respected works in sociology and cultural studies. The polemical writings of Dubravka Ugrešić (1994, 1998) and Slavenka Drakulić (1996) have become internationally regarded as definitive accounts of the Balkans. Maria Todorova (1995, 1997), a historian by trade, is compelled to

occasionally switch to high-quality polemical journalism in order to deliver knowledgeable and competent opinions on current Balkan-related issues to a wider audience (Todorova, 2000). The overall picture suggests that the leading figures of the Balkan critical intelligentsia are women – let's add here Romania's best-known dissident, Doina Cornea, and Bulgaria's Blaga Dimitrova, an internationally respected intellectual. These women have come to play an equally important role (albeit less recognised) to the one which the critical intelligentsia, comprising of men like Vaclav Havel, György Konrad and Adam Michnik, played in the self-definition of Eastern Central Europe throughout the 1980s. The influential writings of those men shaped the self-perception of, and redefined the discourse within, the countries of Eastern Central Europe. The influential writings of these women have the potential to do the same for the Balkans in the year 2000. My main concern is that these female voices are still better heard internationally than at home.

Notes

1. Sally Armstrong, 'Eva, Witness for Women', *Homemakers' Magazine*, Summer, 1993, pp. 19–33.
2. Allen (1996, p. 76), quoting Cherif Bassiouni, who worked on the preliminary report for the UN investigation into the atrocities of the Bosnian war.
3. The report for the European Community was prepared by former Polish prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki in 1995.
4. This number is repeated by both Stiglmaier (1992) and Allen (1996) quoting Mazowiecki.
5. In a PhD dissertation entitled 'From Media War to Ethnic War: The Female Body and Nationalist Processes in the Former Yugoslavia, 1986–1994' (University of Nijmegen, Netherlands: Centre for Women's Studies, 1999) Dubravka Žarkov shows how government-controlled mass media in Serbia and Croatia have used specific textual strategies to exclude certain sexually violated bodies from territories where they do not belong, thus creating a specific 'sexual geography of ethnicity'.
6. Elissa Helms, 'Writing the History of Wartime Rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–95)', presentation at the 'Doing History in the Shadow of the Balkan Wars Conference', University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 18 January 1997. A similar criticism is found in Vesna Kesić, 'A Response to Catherine MacKinnon's Article "Turning Rape into Pornography: Postmodern Genocide"', *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, No. 5, 1994, pp. 267–80.
7. Elissa Helms, 'Representations of Wartime Rape in the Former Yugoslavia: Nationalism, Feminism, and International Law', MA thesis in Cultural Anthropology, p. 38, University of Pittsburgh, 1998.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 46.