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CHAPTER 16

Images of Bosniac Women in Contemporary Antiwar Films: An Intersectional Analysis of Victim Feminism in *Grbavica* and *In the Land of Blood and Honey*

Ivana Drmić

Abstract

Visual representations of sexual violence in the Bosnian War in Jasmila Žbanić's *Grbavica* (2006) and Angelina Jolie's *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011) reveal different dimensions of victim feminism. Both directors sought to raise awareness of the issue of wartime rape and to direct viewers' attention to the pain of the distant Other. An intersectional analysis of the two productions (one domestic and one US-based) helps convey the impact of national and gender stereotyping both on self-representations and on representations of Otherness. Moreover, the analysis of a cinematic response to the Western gaze encourages rethinking prevalent images of the so-called Balkans.

Keywords

feminism – othering – Bosnia – Balkans – film

> Hollywood has been mining Balkan stories for ages, without knowing where the Balkans are exactly, who lives there and how.
>
> DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV (IORDANOVA 2006, xvi)

The wars in the former Yugoslavia have inspired filmmakers and "resulted in an incredibly large body of film productions" (Mazaj 2008, 9), and the Bosnian War (1992–1995) in particular has become the subject of numerous domestic

and international films. After the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the multiethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina underwent a brutal conflict. Its capital, Sarajevo, became a symbol for resistance, and received substantial international media attention as journalists reported from the besieged city on a daily basis.[1] However, "while the role of journalism in constructing for the West a perception [of] the Balkans [...] is certainly significant, it was film that created in the West a sustained perception about this Balkan crisis [...]" (Mazaj 2008, 1).

This article focuses on the representation of sexual violence against women in the Bosnian War, both in Hollywood and in domestic film productions of Bosnia. With regard to self-representation and Otherness, the comparison highlights the different perceptions regarding the Balkans[2] as a region through the example of Bosniac women (Bosnian Muslims[3]). The films discussed in this article, *Grbavica, The Land of my Dreams* (2006), the first feature film by Bosnian filmmaker Jasmila Žbanić, and *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011), Angelina Jolie's debut as a film director, both tell the story of sexual violence

1 The capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, was under siege for 1,425 days (April 5, 1992 to February 29, 1996). International news media regularly reported onsite. The multiethnic and multiconfessional character of Sarajevo stands as a symbol for diversity and resistance. The importance of symbolic Sarajevo in movies is stressed by Dina Iordanova: "[...] I keep returning to the bitter irony that Sarajevo and its inhabitants came under the spotlight of international film-making because of martyrdom and the predicament through which they had to live. Had the Sarajevo siege and massacres not occurred, the city would still be perceived as semi-oriental and almost none of its inhabitants would be known beyond the borders of their land-locked republic" (2001, 237).

2 The term "Balkan Peninsula" was used by the German geographer August Zeuner, whereas Theobald Fischer, also a German geographer, proposed the term *Südosteuropa* for the peninsula (Živančević-Sekeruš 2007, 104). As the region partly belonged to the Ottoman Empire, the majority of Western travellers regarded the region as the antitype of the enlightened West at that time (Hammond 2004, xii). The label "Balkan" rose to international attention with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the following wars in the 1990s, as it was described as the "Balkan" crisis. Bosnia is strongly associated with the "Balkans" label.

3 There is a distinction between the terms "Bosniac" and "Bosnian." Bosnian (*Bosanac* or fem. *Bosanka*) refers to the geographic area of Bosnia (without Herzegovina) and describes a person from Bosnia regardless of his or her religious or ethnic background (see Helms 2013, 35). In 1993 Bosniac intellectuals and politicians decided on the term "Bosniac" (*Bošnjak* or fem. *Bošnjakinja*) to recognize Bosnian Muslims as a nation (see Richter and Gavrić 2010). The term Bosniac has replaced the term Muslim, which has been used since the 1963 Yugoslav Constitution, and which referred in its preamble to "Serbs, Croats, and Muslims," implying that Slavic-speaking Muslims in Bosnia are a nation (see Malcolm 1994, 198) rather than a religious group. In Yugoslavia since 1968 a distinction has been made between the capitalized "Musliman," which referred to a member of a nation, and the lowercased "musliman," which referred to a religious believer (ibid., 199).

against Bosniac women as it happened in the Bosnian War in the 1990s. The films were successful at international film festivals,[4] and the Hollywood production especially evoked a controversial public debate on war crimes and female victimhood in Bosnia. Both had an impact on Bosnian society and participated in what can be described as a national narrative of victimhood. The analysis of each film's aesthetic and approach to the topic in light of Naomi Wolf's theory of victim feminism and Maria Todorova's concept of Balkanism reveals how the female protagonists are victimized and othered. In order to understand the entanglement of Balkanism and victim feminism necessitates an intersectional imagological approach. Identity categories such as gender, sexuality, class, and religion should be examined in combination.

The intention of both directors was to raise awareness of the prevalence of rape and sexual violence against women during the Bosnian War. I aim to provide a discussion in this article of how "visual representation of suffering poses increasing challenges to the ethics of witnessing" (Jelača 2016). As both films focus on Bosniac women as victims, the question arises if the directors' intentions to point out the issue of sexual violence against women and break the taboo of silence strengthens victimhood instead of agency? To elucidate further, I turn to Naomi Wolf, who in the early nineties posited the distinction between power feminism and victim feminism. According to Wolf, victim feminism

> [...] casts women as sexually pure and mystically nurturing, and stresses the evil done to these "good" women as a way to petition for their rights. The other which I call "power feminism," sees women as human beings—sexual, individual, no better or worse than their male counterparts—and lays claim to equality simply because women are entitled to it.
>
> WOLF 1993, XVII

Under this aspect, I will take a close look at the way the filmmakers portray their female protagonists as they claim to show women in possession of agency, but instead they stress "the evil done to these 'good' women as a way to petition for their rights" (ibid.). Based on Wolf's thesis, the "sexually pure" (ibid.) female signifies the traumatic event. As a result, Jolie and Žbanić unintentionally support a narrative that portrays Bosniac women as passive actors lacking in agency. Furthermore, the films reveal how gender intersects with ethnicity and nationality in postwar Bosnia since, in both of the aforementioned films, it

4 Such as the Sarajevo Film Festival, the Berlinale, and the Golden Globe Awards.

is the Bosniac female who is victimized and the Serbian male who is the perpetrator. Although *In the Land of Blood and Honey* and *Grbavica* utilize a similar frame, they produce divergent representations of Bosniac women, Bosnia, and ultimately the Balkans.

The distinction between the domestic and Hollywood portrayals reveals stereotypes about the Balkans. On the one hand, there is a Hollywood actress and director giving the victim a voice (cf. Jolie and Žbanić 2012) and with regard to Jolie's activism supposably with the intention of contributing to the peace process in the region, and on the other hand there is Sarajevo-born director Jasmila Žbanić, who suffered under the siege and reflected on postwar Bosnia in a film she produced with a small production company, while remaining cognizant of Western perceptions and also responding to them. Žbanić's film is set twelve years after the Bosnian War and focuses on a mother–daughter relationship, their everyday life in a war-torn society, and the daughter's realization that she is the outcome of a violent rape. Jolie on the other hand depicts a romantic story between a Serbian man and a Bosniac woman who meet again in a detainee camp where he is the commander and she is the detainee. Both films focus on an educated urban, secular, liberal Muslim woman (Bosniac) who lives in Sarajevo. Still they tend to represent Bosnia as a semi-oriental "Other" by depicting it as backward in its response to war crimes. The label "Balkans" has been revived since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars, and the region has been characterized as a "powderkeg, the spirit of never-ending disagreement, the dark side of Europe" (Živančević-Sekeruš 2007, 105), and Bosnia, as a former member of Yugoslavia and a geographic part of the Balkan Peninsula, is often directly indicated by such a label. According to Maria Todorova, who developed the thesis of Balkanism on the basis of Said's concept of Orientalism, the Balkans are the Other within Europe and are associated with negative primitive images (cf. Todorova 2009, 20). Therefore, the female Bosniac victims in *Grbavica* and *In the Land of Blood and Honey* both arguably represent the distant "Other."

1 *In the Land of Blood and Honey*

Hollywood actor and activist Angelina Jolie stated that her motivation to make *In the Land of Blood and Honey* was to give the victim a voice; in an interview with the Bosnian film director Jasmila Žbanić at the Berlinale Film Festival, Jolie emphasized that she felt encouraged to make the film after a woman told her about a traumatic experience in a detainee camp during the war in Bosnia and that she thought that her story should not be forgotten (cf. Jolie

and Žbanić 2012, min. 00:03:52–00:04:40). Significantly she made the film in both an English and a Bosnian version. For an authentic and realistic representation, she chose actors from Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia, most of whom experienced the war as children and contributed to finalizing the film script. Jolie has stated in several interviews that her interest in making a movie on sexual violence against women originated from her involvement in numerous humanitarian projects as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bosnia.[5] Apparently to film particularly the Bosnian War came from her frustration with the lack of intervention (cf. ibid., min. 00:01:58–00:02:02), either through diplomacy or military action (as a last resort) to stop the war. By increasing awareness of wartime events in Bosnia, Jolie hopes that people who see the movie will relate to other conflict zones and say: "Please international community, please somebody stop this, please come in, please do something" (ibid., min. 00:15:20–00:15:25). Therefore, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* can be regarded as an attempt to provide victims some form of justice. This gesture once again shows the power imbalance between the empowered Hollywood actress seeking justice from the privileged position of giving the victim a voice and the victimized Bosniac woman, who stands for a war-torn country, destruction, and mass rape, represented as unable to speak up for herself. Jolie continuously simplified the conflict and underlined that her main characters Ajla (Zana Marjanović) and Danijel (Goran Kostić) are "a couple […] being symbolic of the war […]. In the beginning, there is unity and then there is the past and the history comes and haunts and leads you and tells you this is how you should be and it guides you and pushes you" (ibid., min. 00:12:12–00:12:29). This is not only a simplification of the causes of the conflict but implies the negative notion of the Balkans as politically instable and ethnically divided, where people act based on ancient hatred, which is one of the most common hetero-images of the region.

Regarding the representation of Bosniac women and victimhood, Jolie's film evoked controversial reactions after a rumour had spread that the film was about a love affair between a Bosniac (Muslim) woman and her Serbian (Christian Orthodox) rapist.[6] The public debate shows how sensitive and

5 Angelina Jolie is the cofounder of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. She continues her struggle against sexual war crimes; recently, for example, she issued a plea in the *Washington Post*, along with the former foreign minister of Germany Heiko Maas, demanding more action against sexual war crimes. The plea was issued shortly in advance of the UN Security Council meeting. For further information, see Jolie and Maas (2019).

6 The rumour was about a love between a Serbian rapist and his Muslim victim although the "eight sentence synopsis by Ms. Jolie, obtained by The Independent, does not mention rape but says the young characters Lejla and Danijel are separated by the war, and meet

taboo the issue of sexual violence against women in postwar Bosnian society still is. The intersection of the ethnicity and gender of the main protagonists dominated the discussion since critical attention was mainly focused on a Bosniac woman being raped by a Serb, and the woman subsequently falling in love with her rapist. The loudest critique came from Bakira Hasečić, the head of the Association of Women Victims of War (orig. Udruženje "Žena Žrtva Rata," ŽŽR), who criticized Jolie for offending female rape victims (Beaumont 2010). As a result, Jolie temporarily lost the filming permit given by the Bosnian Federal Cultural Ministry, and had to relocate the shooting to Hungary. The "depiction of sexuality and sexual relationship [sic] under detention in war" (Močnik 2016, 26) particularly contributed to this controversy. Then again, not all victims and NGOs supported Hasečić, as she monopolized "the discussion of Bosnia's raped" (Beaumont 2010). Yet the film controversy broke a "long-existing taboo against criticizing war victims' organisations and their influence in Bosnian society" (ibid.). Above all, the dispute reveals the dimension of victim feminism and illustrates how the self-advocacy of the main protagonist Ajla challenged the "moral purity" and "innocence" (Helms 2013, 11) of the female Bosniac victim. It shows how victim feminism is "judgmental of other women's sexuality and appearance [...]" (Wolf 1993, 137) and "obsessed with purity [...]" (ibid.). Moreover, the discussion "casts women *themselves* as good and attacks men *themselves* as wrong" (ibid.) by portraying Bosniac women as good and Serbian men as evil.

The discussion about the film in Bosnia reveals the starkly gendered ethnonational perspective that is prevalent in representations of the war. The story of *In the Land of Blood and Honey* is set almost completely around a detention camp during the Bosnian War. Almost all males in the film are Serbs while all the females are detainees and Bosniacs. The victim–villain structure depicted in the movie oversimplifies issues of both gender and ethnicity. As a result, the film strengthens the image of the Bosniac female victim and the male Serbian aggressor. Yet Jolie gives the audience two main protagonists who although they represent the victim–villain narrative as Ajla is the Bosniac female victim and Danijel is the perpetrator, at the same time challenge these images. On the one hand there is Ajla, who already caused a public debate on having agency and sexuality as a Bosniac female victim; on the other hand there is Danijel, who instead of representing the Balkan hetero-image of a strong, patriotic, and aggressive male, stands for a man full of doubts, emotions, and empathy.

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again later, under changed circumstances. Danijel is a prison camp commander and Lejla an inmate. 'Danijel tries to find the best solution that would be acceptable for all. The question is if such a solution exists at all'" (Zimonjić Perić 2010).

Nevertheless, the film did not contribute much to the peace process in the region, as Serbs felt unfairly depicted due to their representation as villains, whereas Bosniacs were represented as victims (CBS News 2011). Moreover the narrative can be criticized on the ground that wartime rape also happened to Bosniac males, a fact that has hardly been taken into account in public discourse or any artistic depiction to date.[7] The problem, however, is that when one gender of an ethnic group is continuously victimized, the "collective guilt and innocence rigidly constructed in ethno-national terms" (Helms 2013, 24) leads to "collective disempowerment" (ibid., 10) and "denial of responsibility" (ibid., 11).

Furthermore, the reactions to *In the Land of Blood and Honey* point to the question of "who had the moral right to speak on behalf of women victims" (ibid., 23). The victims along with other members of Bosnian society quickly reacted either by taking offense or by seeing the movie favourably. The audience in favour of the screenplay perceived the film as a *true* story about the war instead of regarding it as a piece of fiction, whereas critics did not want to see such a narrative circulated, since it was Hollywood, an influential outsider from the West, trying to portray the Bosnian War. Although Jolie stressed that her film represented a fictional approach to the topic and should be regarded as an artistic expression, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* contains a political message. The fact that a famous Hollywood actress shot the film raised concerns about what kind of image she would transmit on Bosnia and the war. The public debate, in comparison to the one on *Grbavica*, which was evaluated positively among the Bosniac population and only criticized within the Serbian population in Republika Srpska,[8] reveals how sensitive Bosnian society is, when it comes to the Western perception of the Bosnian War.

Hollywood's portrayal of Bosnia in *In the Land of Blood and Honey* is simplified from the very beginning. The introductory lines of the film picture prewar Bosnia as a utopian vision of multicultural harmony: "Before the war, the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was part of one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Europe. Muslim, Serbs, and Croats lived together in harmony" (Jolie 2012, min. 00:00:00–00:00:30). The violent and complex dismantling of Yugoslavia is simplified here. The introductory sentence implies a diverse and unified prewar society in Bosnia. Although multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism was and still is characteristic of Bosnia, which has been religiously

7 For more information on the wartime rape of men, see Garaca Djurdjevic (2017).

8 Republika Srpska was a self-proclaimed state by Bosnian Serbs on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. It became under the Dayton Peace Agreement (December 14, 1995) one of two entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. For more information see OSCE (1995).

diverse throughout its existence, it is a convenient way of interpreting the breakup of Yugoslavia. *In the Land of Blood and Honey* is indicative of typical Hollywood storytelling in which war always comes abruptly, and in which the main protagonists usually belong to different ethnic groups and find themselves on different sides of the war, similar to the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* or *West Side Story*. Moreover, Jolie simplifies the film by dividing it into prewar and wartime periods, the former being dealt with in the very first minutes (Jolie 2012, min. 00:04:42–00:04:42). Both periods stand in contrast to each other in terms of colour, architecture, and the use of music. The beginning of the film is very colourful, the weather is pleasant, the apartment of the main character is cosy, as evoked by warm colours, whereas the rest of the film is gloomy and gray. The same effect is achieved with the architectural setting, where prewar Sarajevo is shown with a lack of religious and socialist buildings, as well as the missing oriental bazaar Baščaršija in the heart of the city. In the beginning the viewer is confronted with lots of cafes, whereas the rest of the film shows rather gray socialist buildings.

Jolie also marks ethnicity by her choice of music. While the Serbs listen to Turbofolk music,[9] the Bosniac people listen to Yugoslav rock music from the 1980s. Accordingly, Serbian soldiers are accompanied by Serbian Turbofolk music as they get drunk and harass women. Jolie depicts Turbofolk culture in a very explicit way when she characterizes the Serbs. In a scene in the detainee camp in which a soldier and some imprisoned women listen to a radio report on the Srebrenica massacre, in which 8,000 Bosniac men were killed by Serbian paramilitary forces, the Serbian soldier switches to a different radio station that plays Turbofolk music.

Even though Bosniac women play a significant role in Jolie's movie, the narrative focuses on the individual fate of the main protagonist Ajla. The other Bosniac women remain in the background. The heroine Ajla stands out because, unlike most other women in the camp, she is portrayed as very attractive. The other women represent the traditional Bosniac victim, elderly rural women wearing headscarves, which used to be a common image in news

9 Turbofolk music is associated with Serbian paramilitary structures and nationalism, machoism, mafia, corruption, primitivism, chauvinism, war, seduction, and sexism. It originated at the beginning of the nineties in the Milošević era in Serbia and was used as a propaganda instrument to motivate Serbian soldiers in fight. Today it is part of the mainstream music in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It can be described as folk music with elements of popular music and beats. The genre is associated with primitivism and nationalism as the gender roles represented therein are conservative: potent heterosexual men and sexily dressed female singers. In stark contrast to turbofolk is the new wave music scene (electro, punk, and new wave) of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For further information see Vogel (2017, 11–13, 50, 57–58).

media. Non-Bosnian women, presumably from the other warring side, are for instance shown enjoying the sight of an old Bosniac woman being humiliated and forced to do a striptease for them, and are otherwise depicted sparingly and in the background. The protagonist Ajla evokes empathy through her beautiful appearance. Even in the camp she wears a clean yellow sweater. As a comparison, Žbanić represents her heroine Esma as a woman who does not stand out with attractiveness and whose clothes are far from fashionable.

The victim–villain structure is embodied through Ajla and Danijel. Ajla's relationship to the commander, who turns out to be her former date Danijel, presents her as a self-confident woman who has choices and whose actions are based on her own will. He saves her from rape and she lives under his protection in the camp separated from the other women. The dynamics of their relationship are characterized through an overlap of love, lust, and consensual sex. Toward the end of the film, during Danijel's internal struggle with the expectations of his surroundings and his dominant father Nebojša (Rade Šerbedžija), as well as the ongoing war, his desire for Ajla turns into possessiveness, aggression, and even violence. However, in the end, Danijel opposes his patriarchal father and lets Ajla flee from the camp. She joins a self-armed Bosniac group and returns to Danijel to the camp to presumably get information on Serbian military positions. Danijel is not able to fully protect her, as his father uses his absence to confront Ajla and leaves her with a soldier who rapes her. After a massive explosion in a church, where Serbian military commanders had been holding a meeting, among them Danijel's father, Danijel accuses Ajla of betraying him when returning to the camp. Overall, it can be said that Ajla and Danijel stand out from the represented ethnotypes of Serbs and Bosniacs, which are depicted in a rather traditional and straightforward fashion. Unlike other Balkan men in the film, Danijel consistently shows a sensitive side to his masculinity. The director evokes sympathy for the perpetrator Danijel and the victim Ajla and wants the viewer to believe that this relationship could have been possible without war. Nevertheless the depiction of a "Romeo and Juliet" love relationship between him as a Serbian man and her as a Bosniac woman simplifies the conflict and does not do justice to the complexity of the war: "To those who are sure that right is on one side, oppression and injustice on the other [...] what matters is precisely who is killed and by whom" (Sontag 2003, 10). In the end, it is Danijel who beats and eventually shoots Ajla to death. The missing happy ending may seem surprising for a Hollywood film although it leaves the viewer with a feeling of sorrow and empathy for the victim, who was desired and beautiful, and killed only for belonging to the wrong ethnicity. Danijel confesses his murder and hands himself over to the hands of the UN peacekeepers admitting that

he is a war criminal. His surrender can be read as Serbia taking responsibility for the war crimes, as it should, which again can be read as Hollywood doing justice to Bosnia.

2 Grbavica

Grbavica, The Land of my Dreams (2006) is a Bosnian-Croatian-German-Austrian feature film coproduced by the companies coop99, noirfilm, Jadran film, and Deblokada, the latter of which belongs to the Bosnian director Jasmila Žbanić herself. The film was therefore a domestic production and the director's film debut. The film deals with the human consequences of sexual violence in the aftermath of the Bosnian War. Žbanić pointed out in an interview that she found out about mass rape in 1992 (cf. Žbanić 2007). She intended to make a movie since the topic is still taboo in Bosnian society,[10] and deliberately chose to make a fictional film because she believed that a "documentary would not have this deepness like a fiction film has" (ibid., min. 00:00:00–00:00:18). The reason Žbanić pictures the Bosniac single mother Esma (Mirjana Karanović) and her twelve-year-old daughter Sara (Luna Mijović) in the aftermath of the trauma was her interest in the lives of raped women in Bosnia today. Unlike the ambivalent reactions within Bosnian society to *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, the film was perceived as "one of the most productive ethical and political treatments of traumatic events and experiences in the context of (post-) war Bosnia" (Husanović 2009, 104). Like Jolie, the filmmaker follows the narrative of collective female victimhood, as Helms points out:

> Muslim women rape victims, along with the women survivors of Srebrenica, had become a major symbol of the suffering of the Bosniac people and the cause of a multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. […] Both mass rape and the sex-selective killings of ethnic cleansing were made to stand for the brutality of the enemy, the drama of Bosnia's plight, and the suffering of the Bosniac nation. The film [*Grbavica*] thus immediately took its place in the familiar narrative of national innocence and victimhood.
>
> HELMS 2013, 3

10 Wartime rape has become a topic in Bosnian society only recently. The interactive play "Yellow Boots" by the Bosnian director Anes Osmić, which premiered on December 8, 2018 at the Sarajevo War Theater, and an exhibition called *Breaking Free* (April 8–14, 2019), which showed images of children born as a result of rape, both aimed to address the stigma of wartime rape. For further information see Lakić (2019a, 2019b).

Grbavica shows the suffering of female Bosniacs very effectively as the viewer gains a deep insight into the everyday life of the protagonist. The missing artistic depictions of male victims and non-Bosniac victims in the film clearly emphasizes Bosniac female victimhood.

The feature film had international success and was awarded the Golden Bear at the 2006 Berlinale. This made Jasmila Žbanić the third woman in the history of the Berlinale and the first female filmmaker in twenty-nine years to receive the winning award (Egetenmeier 2018). The fact that only three years later the Peruvian female film director Claudia Llosa won a Golden Bear for a movie that thematized sexual assault of women in the Peruvian Civil War in the 1980s shows the great significance the jury attaches to the issue of wartime rape. Žbanić used her acceptance speech to make a political statement on war crimes in Bosnia:

> Thank you [...] for being so liberal to invite such a small film from a small country with a small budget. [...] I just want to use this opportunity to remind us all that war in Bosnia was over some thirteen years ago and that war criminals Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić still live in Europe freely. They are not captured for organizing rape of 20,000 women in Bosnia, killing 100,000 people, and expelling from their houses one million. This is still Europe and nobody is interested to capture them. In my opinion it just grows bigger and bigger. I hope this will change at least your viewing on Bosnia and I hope this bear will not be disappointed when he sees Bosnia.[11]
>
> ŽBANIĆ 2006, 1:02:49–1:08:35

With this statement, the filmmaker continues to victimize Bosnia and its women as well as to blame the "West" for being complicit in the failure to prosecute the crimes that occurred during the war. Žbanić acknowledges the superiority of the West, which is symbolized by the awarded bear, and by doing so, with this narrative she reduces the agency of the Bosniac people, as it seems they have to seek for protection and justice from the West.

Bosnia's Otherness and the choice of the main female character show that both Jolie and Žbanić had an educated urban audience in mind for their films. Ajla in *In the Land of Blood and Honey* and Esma in *Grbavica* both come from an urban space, namely the city of Sarajevo, and are well educated. Žbanić explained her choice in an interview with the argument that, although she

11 My transcription of the audio acceptance speech at the Berlinale.

is aware of the fact that most rape victims came from rural areas in Bosnia, she deliberately chose a main protagonist from the city, with whom "we"—meaning the audience—can identify with and feel empathy for. She needed a well-educated character who did not lack agency and who had the freedom of choice in her own life (cf. Žbanić 2007, 00:03:19–00:04:35). Jolie achieved the same effect by picking an urban artistic woman from Sarajevo as her main female character.

Right from the beginning of *Grbavica* Žbanić represents the opposed images of femininity and masculinity in today's Bosnian society. Collective female victimhood, underlined by passivity and sorrowful singing, is demonstrated in the opening scene. Throughout the film, the visual depiction of the past and present, of ethnic and gender contrasts, is marked with music. The story begins with a melancholic traditional Islamic song *ilahija*, "Birth," when the audience is introduced to Esma, who is sitting with female Bosniacs in a women's centre at the floor listening with closed eyes to a female voice singing the sentimental song. The camera wanders for several minutes between the female bodies, showing details of their faces with closed eyes, their hands, and their feet. The sudden interruption by an impulsive Turbofolk[12] song in a nightclub, where Esma asks for work, contrasts with the poetic and sorrowful singing in group therapy. Underlined by the music, the audience is confronted with the male Balkan stereotype. The prevalence of domineering, intoxicated males, such as Esma's new boss, also contributes to the creation of an "overall context where female subjects are depoliticized by being reduced to simplified archetypes devoid of complexity so as to reproduce dominant patriarchal regimes and norms" (Husanović 2009, 106).

The filmmaker skilfully depicts the Bosnian postwar and postsocialist society in which Esma is stigmatized. The plot develops around the mother's desperate search for money and Sara's discovery of her mother's lies. In order to attend a school trip, she needs two hundred Bosnian mark or a certificate that her father died as a so-called *shaheed*, a Bosniac war hero. Esma, who hides from her daughter that she was conceived by rape, tries to get the money with part-time jobs and asks colleagues and family members if they can help her out.

Against Žbanić's argument that her heroine Esma has agency due to her education and urban surroundings, I claim that she is in fact lacking in agency. The first impression of Esma is that of a psychologically traumatized woman in a safe space (a women's centre). In the second scene, in which Esma is

12 Original Serbian song title: "Nije ovo moja noć" (This is not my night) by Singer Saša Matić.

surrounded by chauvinistic drunk males, she seems out of place. The job search in the nightclub emphasizes her marginalization. Esma's body language and her short dialogue with the nightclub's owner, in which she only passively answers questions and even denies having a child, give the impression of female passivity. This impression is further strengthened, when Esma, having been isolated by family members, meets an apparently rich aunt dressed in a fur coat who refuses to help her. Esma is unable to stand up for herself and reacts passively by lowering her head and feeling ashamed to ask for help. Moreover, she is pictured living an isolated life, and attending group therapy with the sole aim of receiving money for her participation. The fact that she is a biologist only strengthens the image of victimhood. Her encounter with another man, Pelda (Leon Lučev), who is also an academic and works for the bar's owner, emphasizes the dismal economic possibilities in a postwar and postsocialist country such as Bosnia. Together they symbolize the human consequences of war. The film illustrates how Bosniacs who experienced the war have become a lost generation and how this war is affecting the next one, which is embodied in Esma's daughter Sara.

The daughter–mother relationship is haunted by the mother's trauma of being raped. Esma tries to be a caring mother, but her inability to speak to her daughter is repeatedly apparent. While fooling around with Sara, the trauma of rape recurs and Esma aggressively pushes Sara away, denying her love. While Žbanić's intention is to emphasize Esma's agency, the film in fact ends up portraying her lack of agency; in fact, she effectively demonstrates Esma's inability to express herself or to stand up for herself. From an intersectional perspective, *Grbavica* illustrates how Esma is discriminated against as a woman, as a rape victim, and as a single working mother without the financial or educational perspective of building a realistic future in the Bosnian society. In fact, the stigmatization is also shown through Sara, Esma's twelve-year-old daughter. Sara is stigmatized at school, and in her desperation to find out what truth her mother is hiding, she perpetuates the cycle of violence when she breaks the silence by confronting her mother with a gun in order to find out the truth. The violent act of pointing a gun at her mother grants her the power to confront her. Whereas Esma stands for victim feminism, her daughter, taking on the position of power feminism, refuses to remain a victim out of desperation; Sara has some kind of self-advocacy and takes the gun as a last resort to find out the truth—that she was conceived through rape—at the climax of the film.

Once Sara pushes Esma to tell her the truth, Esma herself is empowered in a new way: she finally finds her voice. Here the narrative turns toward a hopeful future, as Esma opens up in group therapy in the women's centre and speaks

about her trauma and about giving birth to Sara in detail. The film ends with Esma bringing Sara to the school bus, which means she can ultimately attend the school trip. The love between mother and daughter is expressed through Esma's body language, crying in relief, and waving at Sara. At the same time Sara, who is already on the bus, waves back. The camera focuses on Sara, who is shown singing with her classmates and for the first time joining her peer group, as they all sing the song "Sarajevo ljubavi moja"[13] by Kemal Monteno, a nostalgic song from prewar Sarajevo. The song is dedicated to the city of Sarajevo, from a time when unity in society was presumed. As the film started with sorrowful traditional *ilahija* singing and aggressive Turbofolk music, the song at the end of the film underscores the idea of a hopeful future for mother and daughter.

Žbanić addresses and questions the typical Western images of the Bosnian Other. She does this by evoking stereotypical Balkan representations of femininity, masculinity, and the economically weak society. The filmmaker filmed in devastated areas on purpose since Bosnia was, in the 1990s, often in the media and was represented mainly with images of destruction and war. Furthermore, she pointed out that she deliberately filmed in winter to underline the war narrative. It strengthens the effect of othering Bosnia, still being closely associated with a war that destroyed it. The second powerful image was the patriarchal society and the stereotypical Balkan male, who acts in an aggressive and dominant manner, while the women are shown as emotional and vulnerable.

3 Conclusion

The comparison of *Grbavica* and *In the Land of Blood and Honey* shows that sexual assault against women in the Bosnian War and the resulting trauma can be negotiated in very different ways. Although both films deal with the same subject, they use a different visual language, time span, narrative, and style of storytelling. Apart from the time span and visual effects that reveal a different film aesthetic, the narrative structure allows a different view into the characters' life. Whereas in Jolie's film the pain of the distant Other is illustrated through the brutal act of mass rape in war, Žbanić's film abstains from directly showing combat and violence. She brings the audience closer to the healing process of the traumatic experience of sexual assault by showing the everyday

13 Original Bosnian title. My translation: "Sarajevo, my love."

life of her main protagonist Esma in postwar Sarajevo. The power of *Grbavica* lies in its skillful representation of a traumatized postwar society.

To conclude, both films address the issue of sexual violence against women in the Bosnian War revealing that the representation of victims is challenging as one has to regard gender, ethnicity, religion, and class. Dijana Jelača asks "how can we visually frame suffering in ethical ways that avoid the pitfalls of oversaturation, simplistic objectification, or fetishization of pain or pity" (Jelača 2016). *Grbavica* succeeded in representing pain and trauma without fetishizing it, because the viewers see the aftermath of the war with deeper insight as they follow closely the development of the mother–daughter relationship haunted by trauma. On the other hand, Jolie's film achieves a sensationalist effect by showing explicit violent scenes that do not contribute to the peace process in Bosnia and serve the hetero-image of the Balkans as a region. Nevertheless, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, although representing female victimhood, challenged the traditional auto-image of raped women for Bosnians by giving Ajla agency and sexuality.

However, Jolie's film ultimately presents a disempowering image of the Bosniac female, despite its well-intended choices. Although Jolie's intention to make such a movie may sound noble, especially in light of her choice to work with a mixed cast from all former warring groups, the film was mostly rejected within Serbia. Her second aim, which was to reach an international audience who will call for intervention in future conflicts, seems rather naive. Susan Sontag suggests in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) that, unfortunately, the act of looking at someone's pain will not lead to intervention and aid as a consequence.

Moreover, taking everything into account, the narrative structures in both films contain the victim–villain pattern that intersects gender, ethnicity, and class. It is still the Bosniac woman who was raped and suffers, unable to find a voice. *In the Land of Blood and Honey* gives the victim a voice, whereas in *Grbavica* Esma cannot stand up for herself and is violently forced by her daughter to speak up. Therefore, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* and *Grbavica* both unintentionally continue to victimize Bosniac women as they both fail to deviate from the stereotypical ethnic and gender images of Balkan social positions.

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