

TopographieForschung Bd. 3
(LiteraturForschung Bd. 11)
Herausgegeben vom Zentrum für Literatur- und
Kulturforschung

Miranda Jakiša, Andreas Pflitsch (Hg.)

Jugoslawien – Libanon

Verhandlung von Zugehörigkeit
in den Künsten fragmentierter Kulturen

Mit Beiträgen von

Monique Bellan, Jan Dutoit, Lotte Fasshauer, Miranda Jakiša,
Anne Cornelia Kenneweg, Katja Kobolt, Matthias Meindl,
Riccardo Nicolosi, Tatjana Petzer, Andreas Pflitsch, Boris Previšić,
Manfred Sing, Peter Stankovič, Zoran Terzić, Ines Weinrich,
Miriam Younes und Tanja Zimmermann

Kulturverlag Kadmos Berlin

Das dem Band zugrundeliegende Forschungsprojekt wurde vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung unter dem Förderkennzeichen 07GW04 gefördert

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <<http://dnb.d-nb.de>> abrufbar

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig. Das gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Copyright © 2012,

Kulturverlag Kadmos Berlin. Wolfram Burckhardt

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Internet: www.kv-kadmos.com

Umschlaggestaltung: kaleidogramm, Berlin.

Umschlagabbildung: Ziad Antar *Tuna*, Nebojša Šerić *Spomenik*

Gestaltung und Satz: kaleidogramm, Berlin

Druck: Standartu Spaustuve

Printed in EU

ISBN (10-stellig) 3-86599-149-1

ISBN (13-stellig) 978-3-86599-149-2

Revolution for Whom? Constructions of Gender Identities in Slovenian Partisan Films

PETER STANKOVIČ

Introduction

Slovenian partisan film is a term which denotes films glorifying Slovenian communist-led guerrilla fighters (so-called ›partisans‹), who resisted the German and Italian occupying forces during WW II. These films were made during the decades of communist rule in post-war Yugoslavia and were an important part of the official ideological propaganda. Since the fall of communism in 1989 and Slovenia's secession from former Yugoslavia two years later, however, partisan films have fallen into complete neglect. This is regrettable since they not only represent an important (and not necessarily unattractive) part of Slovenian film history but also allow unique insights into the complexities of the official ideology during the decades of communist rule in the country (1945–89). Namely, the existing ideology was not as simple as might have seemed from the outside: while the Slovenian Communist party had no problems with class issues (class inequalities were regarded according to the Marxist agenda as bad and everything was actually done to eliminate them), there were many important areas of social life that were neglected or dealt with in ideologically relatively ambivalent terms. With gender, for example, it was obviously an aim of the communist regime to promote equality between the sexes but since Marx had presupposed that the end of class inequalities would somehow automatically also lead to the end of all other forms of exploitation the regime consequently simply did not pay much attention to this issue. The result was that in many respects the traditional male hegemony was neither addressed nor challenged. Women were encouraged to have jobs, but that was basically it. What this usually meant in practice was merely that they had to work both at home and at their workplaces.¹

¹ Mirjana Ule: »Kontekst ženskih študij v Sloveniji«, in: Eva D. Bahovec (ed.): *Od ženskih študij k feministični teoriji*, Ljubljana (Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in antropologijo, posebna izdaja) 1993, pp. 119–124, p. 123.

In this respect it should be also noted that former Yugoslavia was a complex political entity comprised of several ethnic groups and with different religious and cultural affiliations. These groups were historically often antagonized, so the communist government tried hard to block any attempts at ethnic or religious separatism, actively promoting the ideology of ›brotherhood and unity‹ (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) among the country's different ethnic groups. The ideology of ›brotherhood and unity‹ was in Yugoslavia in many respects even more pronounced than the conventional Marxist ideology of classless society, but the gender issues fell out of this agenda, too. Not only is in the slogan ›brotherhood and unity‹ the female dimension (how about ›sisterhood‹?) conspicuously absent, the almost exclusive focus of the Party's propaganda on inter-ethnic cooperation and understanding itself removes the question of gender equality from the agenda and delegates it among the less important issues.

Much research has been carried out as regards the question of the actual emancipation of women in the former Eastern Bloc, but there is a conspicuous lack of a thorough analysis of the official ideology itself relating to gender issues. Obviously, in the most general terms it was all for equality but the question arises of how this was translated into and presented in actual popular forms: in films, for example, which were regarded at the time by Communist Party officials themselves as one of the most important vehicles for the promotion of communist ideals.² Were women represented here as corresponding to these ideals, as actually being equal to men? And in all respects? Were films in this sense normative and encouraging female emancipation? Conversely, were these films also full of other ideologies and cultural references, with many of these being patriarchal in many aspects, just as was the case in actual life in socialist Slovenia where in spite of their feverish attempts for various reasons and to various extents the communist rulers were unable to eliminate other existing ideologies (catholicism, liberalism, nationalism, to name just a few). In the article, I therefore try to explore how in Slovenian partisan film, one of the principal sites of official communist ideology during 1945–89, tensions were negotiated between the official progressive ideology about universal equality on one hand and on the other real life in Slovenia at a time when patriarchal conventions had survived in many forms. To do that, I will employ the concept of representation as it allows us to understand how exactly

² Marcel Štefančič jr.: *Na svoji zemlji. Zgodovina slovenskega filma*, Ljubljana (UMco d. d.) 2005, p. 241–242.

gender identities in these semi-propaganda films were represented and therefore constructed and naturalized.

The analysis of representations and signifying of practices is an already well-established approach in cultural studies. It rests on constructivist assumption that signifying systems do not simply reflect the pre-given material reality, but rather represent it according to their specific logic,³ which is, according to Foucault, inextricably enmeshed in relations of power.⁴ Social identities, such as gender or ethnicity, are in this context understood as constructed by the various signifying practices and representations, but as these constructs often only serve to reproduce, legitimize and naturalize hegemonic social oppression, researchers try to highlight their artificial, constructed nature: in an ideal sense this should encourage their transformations into more equal ones. Researchers' attention here is predominantly directed at popular media and texts,⁵ which are because of their influence and popularity today the principal sites of where social identities are constructed. The point here is obviously that in order to challenge the relations of power hidden in dominant identity constructs one has to understand how they work in the first place. In the following pages I will try to do something similar, although my focus will be slightly different: instead of popular texts competing for attention in the saturated media space of a free-market economy I will examine official ideological (although not necessarily unpopular) texts from Slovenia's recent communist past – partisan films. However, before proceeding with an analysis of Slovenian partisan films with respect to their construction of gender identities I will first examine the genre a little more thoroughly.

³ Stuart Hall: »The work of representation«, in: Stuart Hall (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London (Sage Publications) 2000, pp. 13–74.

⁴ Michel Foucault: »Kako preučevati oblast? Predavanje dne 14.1.1976«, in: Michel Foucault: *Vednost – oblast – subjekt*, ed. by Mladen Dolar, trans. by Boris Čibej et al. Ljubljana (Knjižna zbirna Krt) 1991, pp. 29–40, p. 29.

⁵ E. g. Nicola Dibben: »Representations of Femininity in Popular Music«, in: *Popular Music* 3.18 (1999), pp. 331–355; Jeff Hearn et al.: »Critical Studies on Men in Ten European Countries: Newspaper and Media Representations«, in: *Men and Masculinities* 2.6 (2003), pp. 172–201; Matthew W. Hughley: »Black Aesthetics and Panther Rhetoric: A Critical Decoding of Black Masculinity in The Black Panther, 1967–80«, in: *Critical Sociology* 1.35 (2009), pp. 29–56; Sean Nixon: »Exhibiting Masculinity«, in: Hall (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (note 3), pp. 291–330; Kelly Farrell: »Naked Nation: The Full Monty, Working-Class Masculinity, and the British Image«, in: *Men and Masculinities* 2.6 (2003), pp. 119–135.

Slovenian Partisan Films

Slovenian partisan films were part of the larger film production of former socialist Yugoslavia: in other former federal republics, perhaps even more than in Slovenia, many partisan films were also made. For the above reasons of ideological propaganda, the state invested hugely in the genre⁶ which resulted not only in big quantities of these films but also in their more than just occasional formal quality and their reasonable popularity with audiences. After all, there were many stories to be told: during WW II in Yugoslavia the strongest guerrilla movement in Nazi-occupied Europe emerged. The partisans involved fought many spectacular battles and caused many serious problems for the occupying forces and managed to liberate the country with only the marginal help of the Soviet Red Army. This allowed a certain autonomy from the Soviet Union in the post-war period of the new, socialist Yugoslavia (compared with other Eastern Bloc countries), which quickly led to the famous row in 1948 between Stalin and Tito, the charismatic Yugoslav communist leader, and subsequent introduction of an independent, definitively less autocratic and oppressive form of Yugoslav socialism.

Accordingly, is it possible to analyze the genre of Slovenian partisan film as a separate unit irrespective of the wider context of the genre of Yugoslav partisan film, or perhaps given the fact that partisan films were also being made in the Soviet Union, North Korea and Vietnam, of the partisan film genre in the most general sense? While it is obvious that any analysis should take into account the fact that Slovenian partisan films form part of this wider tradition, it should be noted that the films made in Slovenia during the socialist period could be regarded as a separate unit since they were made in Slovenia (at the time the Socialist Republic of Slovenia) by Slovenian studios with their own set of recognizable stylistic peculiarities which at least partly set them apart from other film traditions in the genre. Let us take a quick look at these peculiarities, apart from the obvious one that they address the relatively peculiar Slovenian historical situation during WW II compared with other former Yugoslav socialist republics.

The first one is an *almost exclusive focus on the individual* in the Slovenian partisan film, encompassing their struggle against their fears, existential dilemmas about the war and the act of killing itself, on the

⁶ Which sometimes even enabled the casting, at least for larger productions, of Hollywood stars: Richard Burton starred in *Sutjeska/The Battle of Sutjeska* (Stipe Delić, 1973), for example, and Yul Brynner and Orson Welles appeared in *Bitka na Neretvi/The Battle of the River Neretva* (Veljko Bulajić, 1969).

way they are tormented when the situation requires them to take sides in the conflict etc. While the pattern is certainly complex, one can argue that in the partisan films stemming from other former Yugoslav republics the hero is definitely not a mere individual (it is instead ›the bare-handed people‹ – a collective), and if there ever is an individual hero they are usually simply a metaphor for the whole collective and, in any case, they have no problems supporting and joining the partisans. Some notable exceptions are the quite personalized Serbian *Novi film* (New Film)⁷ and the Slovenian *Na svoji zemlji/On Our Own Land* (Franc Štiglic, YU, 1948), which is clearly a Soviet-style story about an impoverished collective from a remote valley (a metaphor for Slovenia?) stubbornly resisting the occupiers. *Na svoji zemlji* is actually the first ever Slovenian feature film and was shot before the row occurred between Stalin and Tito so it clearly displays a relatively clumsy story and lots of Soviet influence. However, after this one in Slovenian partisan films the individual almost immediately becomes the hero.⁸ And not necessarily the bravest one either as was usually the case with the heroes in other partisan film traditions: the Slovenian hero is rarely a ready-made hero, he must develop as a person first, understand the importance of the resistance, and only then do they join the partisans and/or overcome their fears in the action. And even that does not necessarily happen.

Not unrelated to this is the second feature of Slovenian partisan films: their *topics*. While in the other former Yugoslav republics partisan films covered many different topics and issues, they also consistently covered all the major battles (Kozara, Neretva, Sutjeska, Drvar etc.) fought by the partisans during WW II. Yet Slovenian films with only one exception (again *Na svoji zemlji*, which depicts the partisan offensive on German communications in Baška grapa in 1944) leave this option out in favor of the abovementioned subjective-existential focus. There were many spectacular occasions during the war in Slovenia which could no doubt make great material for stunning epics; however, for some reasons this avenue was not taken up. This might have something to do with the Slovenian tradition of individualism, but it is difficult to be sure. What in any case is clear is that screenwriters, directors, producers etc. definitely and quite unusually for the genre preferred the dilemmas and

⁷ For more about *Novi film* see: Daniel J. Goulding: *Liberated Cinema. The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 2002, pp. 111–142.

⁸ Cf. Ranko Munitić: *Živjet će ovaj narod, jugoslavenski film o revoluciji*, Zagreb (RK SOH and Publicitas) 1974, p. 69, and Silvan Furlan: »Kratka predstavitev slovenskega celovečernega filma«, in: Silvan Furlan/Bojan Kavčič/Liljana Nedič/Zdenko Vrdlovec (ed.): *Filmografija slovenskih celovečernih filmov 1931–1993*, Ljubljana (Slovenski gledališki in filmski muzej) 1994, pp. 9–19, p. 14.

anguishes of simple, small people in small, historically insignificant, yet subjectively definitely the most dramatic situations.

Another distinctive feature of the Slovenian partisan film is its recognizable *literary* or *theatrical note*. This is actually not only typical of the Slovenian partisan film, it is more like a quite consistent feature of Slovenian film in general (though things have recently been changing), but it still contributes to the recognizable quality of Slovenian partisan films compared to other national traditions of the genre. The quality itself probably derives from the fact that Slovenian culture emerged in the 19th century precisely from the tradition of the written and spoken word, which led to the elevated status of literature and theatre in Slovenian public life and their subsequent influence on the other arts, perhaps on film even the most. This theatrical or literary dimension of Slovenian films is recognizable in the quite theatrical style of how the performers act, the levels of attention given to the use of the ›proper‹ Slovenian language in dialogues (making them quite unnatural), the relatively static film language and frequent adaptations of Slovenian literary classics.⁹ In the context of this serious, literary and theatrical pedigree of Slovenian films, Slovenian partisan films quite consistently display a dimension of artistic inclination which is otherwise rare in this genre in former Yugoslavia. One can therefore argue that Slovenian partisan films were caught up within the parameters of different demands, functions and expectations: the directors wanted them to be serious works of art, the party officials at the ministry of culture which produced them expected them to be in line with the official ideology, while the people wanted them to be entertaining and – as they grew increasingly disillusioned with socialism in the 1970s and 1980s – critical of the official interpretation of WW II.¹⁰ How the films negotiated these often conflicting demands is difficult to say since some films were really successful, sometimes even with all three dimensions at the same time, while others were not. What really matters, however, is that deriving from the established literary and theatrical traditions in Slovenia there was a recognizable artistic dimension in partisan films, something quite uncommon in the partisan films from other republics of former Yugoslavia.¹¹ The artistry of Slovenian directors was, of course, sometimes artificial and unconvincing, but there

⁹ Furlan: »Kratka predstavitev slovenskega celovečernega filma« (note 8), p. 10.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹ Although obviously not necessarily entirely absent. One might mention here the successful use of cinematic procedures as introduced by French New Wave directors in the late 1950s and 1960s, or in popular TV serials *Otpisani/Written Off* (Aleksandar Djordjević, YU, 1974) and *Povratak otpisanih/The Written Off Return* (Aleksandar Djordjević, YU, 1976) produced in Serbia.

was obviously an expectation these films should involve more than just official propaganda and/or popular entertainment.

According to these peculiarities, the object of analysis will be the Slovenian partisan film or, more specifically, all feature films produced in Slovenia which in at least one substantial sense depict WW II in Slovenia. This latter qualification is important since some films do not really focus on the partisan struggle for national liberation and social revolution yet still do touch or reflect on it in more than just a marginal way (*Tistega lepega dne/One Fine Day* (France Štiglic, YU, 1962), *Christophoros/Christophoros* (Andrej Mlakar, YU, 1985), and *Dediščina/Inheritance* (Matjaž Klopčič, YU, 1984) for example). They are hence not truly partisan films in the strict sense. However, given there are not so many Slovenian strictly partisan films (Slovenia is a small country with less than two million inhabitants – its film production is thus small) and that I am interested in as many nuances in the regime of representations, I will also include these films in the sample. Therefore the films (with their English translations, directors and respective years of production – in the following pages I omit these in order to avoid too much repetition) included in the analysis are:

Na svoji zemlji/On Our Own Land (France Štiglic, YU, 1948);
Trst/Trieste (France Štiglic, YU, 1951);
Trenutki odločitve/Moment of Decision (František Čap, YU, 1955);
Dolina miru/Valley of Peace (France Štiglic, YU, 1956);
Kala/Kala (Andrej Hieng and Krešo Golnik, YU, 1958);
Dobri stari pianino/Good Old Upright Piano (France Kosmač, YU, 1959);
Akcija/Action (Jane Kavčič, YU, 1960);
X 25 javlja/X 25 Reports (František Čap, YU, 1960);
Balada o trobenti in oblaku/Ballad about a Trumpet and a Cloud (France Štiglic, YU, 1961);
Tistega lepega dne/One Fine Day (France Štiglic, YU, 1962);
Ne joči, Peter/Don't Cry, Peter (France Štiglic, YU, 1964);
Nevidni bataljon/Invisible Battalion (Jane Kavčič, YU, 1967);
Peta zaseda/The Fifth Ambush (France Kosmač, YU, 1968);
Sedmina/Funeral Fest (Matjaž Klopčič, YU, 1969);
Onkraj/Beyond (Jože Gale, YU, 1970);
Begunec/The Fugitive (Jane Kavčič, YU, 1973);
Čudoviti prah/Beautiful Dust (Milan Ljubić, YU, 1975);
Med strahom in dolžnostjo/Between Duty and Fear (Vojko Duletič, YU, 1975);
Draga moja Iza/My Dear Iza (Vojko Duletič, YU, 1979);
Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni/See You in the Next War (Živojin Pavlović, YU, 1980);
Dediščina/Inheritance (Matjaž Klopčič, YU, 1984);
Ljubezen/Love (Rajko Ranfl, YU, 1984);
Christophoros/Christophoros (Andrej Mlakar, YU, 1985);
Doktor/Doctor (Vojko Duletič, YU, 1985);
Čas brez pravljic/Times of No Fairytales (Boštjan Hladnik, YU, 1986);
Živela svoboda/Long Live Liberty (Rajko Ranfl, YU, 1987).

In these films I will try to identify possible regime of representations of femininity and masculinity. Before doing that, however, I would like to sketch an informative outline of the development of Slovenian partisan films. *Na svoji zemlji* was the first Slovenian film made after the WW II. It is, just as the majority of Yugoslav films of this period, an epic tale about the struggle against the foreign occupation told from the perspective of a small community and made in socialist realist style.¹² In contrast to the other similar Yugoslav films from the period, however, *Na svoji zemlji* stands as a reasonably deep and mature effort,¹³ which met with a considerable success and recognition. In the first round of screening, for example, more than 50 000 people have seen the film and in many instances the screenings were accompanied by outbursts of loud screams, applause and crying.¹⁴ Later on, in the 1950s, several good partisan films were made, but in their search for new artistic visions filmmakers turned to symbolism and introverted individualism, which was not received as well by the audience as the combination of revolutionary zeal and proud nationalism of *Na svoji zemlji* was. The most important films of this period are *Trenutki odločitve*, which portrays existentialist dilemmas of a doctor, who was forced to kill a Home guard officer if he was to save a wounded partisan, and *Dolina miru*, a poetic meditation about the nature of war.

1960s were in socialist Yugoslavia a period of steady economic growth and political liberalization. Changed social circumstances encouraged many Yugoslav directors to pursue new stylistic directions and address new issues. The most important of these were Serbian directors like Aleksandar Petrović, Živojin Pavlović and Dušan Makavejev, who soon became notorious for their unsentimental portrayals of the lowlife in socialist Yugoslavia (*novi film*), but there have been several important original directors in Slovenia, too (e. r. Boštjan Hladnik and Matjaž Klopčič), while the fresh air of the political thaw also contributed to changing directions of the Slovenian partisan films. *Balada o trobenti in oblaku* is, for example, a visually stunning expressionist portrayal of an old man's hesitation before he sacrifices his life to save a group of wounded partisans. *Sedmina* is a very poetic film about a young man's decision to join the resistance. *Ne joči Peter* is a light comedy, which met with enormous success in movie theatres. *Nevidni bataljon* is the first partisan film with no partisans at all (the story is about children

¹² For more on that see Rosalind Galt: *The New European Cinema*, New York (Columbia University Press) 2006, pp. 163–169.

¹³ Goulding: *Liberated Cinema* (note 7), p. 21.

¹⁴ Stanko Šimenc: *Panorama slovenskega filma*, Ljubljana (DZS) 1996, p. 75.

in a small town, who, confronted with complacency of their parents, take up the initiative in struggle against the Germans), while *Akcija* and *Peta zaseda* even openly depict partisan cowardliness and communist sectarianism in the partisan units.¹⁵ The era of political and economic liberalism ended abruptly in former Yugoslavia after the communist crackdown of Croatian national movement in the early 1970s. Together with the worsening of the economic situation this meant that filmmakers had to abandon their progressive stylistic experimentations and social critique, but, on the other hand, the communist elite did not want to interfere in film production too much, so what came out, at least in the genre of the Slovenian partisan film, was an uneven amalgam of socialist dogma and artistic individualism. The films of this period (*Begunec*, *Draga moja Iza*, *Med strahom in dolžnostjo*, *Čudoviti prah*) are, consequently, somehow mellow, neither politically apologetic neither critical, but not necessarily uninteresting.

In the 1980s Yugoslavia sank into a grave economic crisis, which meant ever decreasing funds for filmmaking. The Slovenian film was at this period inevitably weak, but among the few partisan films made in the decade (*Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, *Doktor*, *Ljubezen*, *Čas brez pravljic*, *Živela svoboda*) two stand out as convincing, artistically accomplished efforts. The first one is *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, a film made by Serbian director Živojin Pavlović for the Slovene film studio Viba film, which ruthlessly deconstructs virtually all myths about the partisan struggle (film was promptly ›dispatched to the bunker‹¹⁶), and the second *Ljubezen*, a warm film about a boy who cannot accept that his pre-war friends have suddenly become bitter enemies, members of conflicting military formations (partisans vs. Home Guards and MVAC)¹⁷ eager to

¹⁵ Slovenian partisan units were unique during the WW II in Yugoslavia in their heterogeneous composition. While in other former Yugoslav republics partisans were organized and led by the communists, in Slovenia the guerilla units were, initially at least, made of members of different leftist political groups (communists, Christian socialists, and *Sokolji*). Communists officially took over in 1943, but during the whole period of the war they manoeuvred ruthlessly against what they perceived as their political rivals. Official histories and representations of the partisan uprising covered up this not so glorious detail of the partisan struggle for the most part, which is important to bear in mind if one is to appreciate the extremely polemical tone of *Peta zaseda*, which tells a story about a devoted partisan officer, who is eventually liquidated by the communists just because he was not a communist. *Peta zaseda* was in spite of its open criticism released to theatres normally, but after the crackdown of political liberalism in Yugoslavia in the early 1970s, the film was ›sent to the bunker‹.

¹⁶ ›Bunker‹ was a popular expression for the films, which were not officially banned but were still nowhere to be seen. Apparently, ›someone‹ (important) made a phone call and that was it: the film stayed in depots (›bunkers‹) for decades.

¹⁷ Home Guards and MVAC were, slightly simplified, local anti-communist militias organized by the Germans and Italians. The militias enjoyed certain degrees of political

wipe each other from the earthly existence. The film's title (*ljubezen* means love) might seem inappropriate for a film which deals with the horrors of war, but in fact it nicely expresses the film's essence, the young hero's gentle determination to love all his friends, regardless of their political and military allegiances and the brutal reality around him.

And just one final note: in the analysis I will completely sidestep questions about the meaning of the partisan resistance during WW II. This issue is plaguing Slovenian public life today probably just as much as it did during the war itself,¹⁸ but it has nothing to do with the focus of the present analysis: the point of interest is films about a certain era in Slovenian history, not the era as such.

Femininity and Masculinity in Slovenian Partisan Film

From the constructivist perspective, our gender identities are basically social constructs. The point is that while we do inhabit (essentially) two biologically different kinds of bodies, male and female, this on its own does not mean anything. It is how we inhabit these bodies, how we perceive the biological differences or interpret them, and how these differences are made meaningful for us that matters since human beings simply do not have natural, culturally unmediated access to their bodies. How we feel our bodies, live in and develop them is entirely dependant on the layers of meanings imposed on them by social conventions, customs and interpretations, and the differences between the two sexes are accordingly basically nothing but social interpretations which construct us as certain types of gendered individuals. Researchers in this context often point out that gender identities are, ›more often than not, constructed not through any specific combination of inferent ›essences‹, but rather negatively, in relation to what is considered as ›Other‹.¹⁹ This is confirmed by anthropological evidence: the immense variety of ways of being a woman or a man seen across different cultures proves there

if not military independence and were in many respects originally pro-Allied, but the reality of civil war effectively pushed them under the German and Italian wings.

¹⁸ Nobody actually denies the importance of the active resistance to the Italian and German occupations during WW II, however, the communist-led partisans also brought about a social revolution, obviously not to everybody's liking and even more their struggle was more than seldom extremely and unreasonably violent, above all when dealing with those Slovenians who did not support them.

¹⁹ John Haynes: *New Soviet Man. Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema*, Manchester (Manchester University Press) 2003, p. 13.

is not much that is ›natural‹ in our gender identities.²⁰ What becomes important from this constructivist perspective is the question of what kinds of gender identities are constructed in societies and what their political implications are and, since popular culture is today due to its omnipresence and popularity probably the most influential site where these constructs are articulated, reproduced and naturalized, many researchers focus their work on this area. In what follows I will try to do something similar, however, as I have already pointed out, the focus of the analysis will be a peculiar form of popular culture, Slovenian partisan films – one might even say ›communist pop‹.

A closer look at the selected films reveals that the pattern of gender construction in the Slovenian partisan film is, in fact, quite complex. Not that it is really new or unusual – it appears that it basically only reproduces traditional Slovenian constructs of femininity and masculinity – it is more like it is in a slightly indeterminable way somewhere in-between. It is neither really patriarchal nor really progressive or emancipated. On one level, the heroes and leading roles etc. are usually male, the initiative is theirs, the audience is made to identify with them and they are the protagonists of the action. In this sense, Slovenian partisan films clearly reproduce the patriarchal gender constructs of men being central, active, dominant, rational etc. figures. Yet the representation of women in Slovenian partisan films does not complement this picture: women are also usually determined, brave and strong, definitely not necessarily passive creatures waiting for their men to save the country for them. It is in fact often the case that their otherwise relatively sparse actions actually lead to decisive turns in films and, even more importantly, in most films they stand as moral authorities who structure not only the symbolic universe within which the male heroes operate but also the interpretative framework within which the audience is invited to understand morally and politically often complex stories.

But let us take a closer look. Regarding the centrality of characters, it should be re-emphasized that the heroes are almost exclusively male. There are basically only two notable exceptions, the first is *Dobri stari piano* where the hero is – as the title suggests – an old upright piano, but at the crucial moment it is in fact the partisan girl Anka who uses the piano in a way which enables the partisan side to win a battle, while the second is *Čas brez pravljič* where the hero is a mother who wanders around the devastated countryside with her two children searching for her husband

²⁰ Cf. Lynn Segal: »Sexualities«, in: Kathryn Woodward (ed.): *Identity and Difference*, London (Sage Publications) 1997, pp. 183–238.

(who is with the partisans). Two other lesser exceptions in this respect are *Dolina miru*, with a boy and a girl sharing the leading parts with a (black) American pilot lost in the Slovenian woods, and *Med strahom in dožnostjo* where both a husband and wife act as some kind of reluctant heroes. In all the other 21 films the central characters are male.

So how is it possible to argue that Slovenian partisan films actually do not reproduce a patriarchal ideology, at least not in a linear or straightforward way? The thing is that while the female characters are usually not very central to the narratives their relative importance is much greater than the very frequency of their appearances might suggest. In *Na svoji zemlji*, for example, the heroes are mostly male – villagers joining the partisan guerrilla fighters – however, the most dramatic moment in the film, actually one which gives meaning to the whole story, is when the mother (of the male hero Stane) takes off her shoes when being led away by the Germans to be shot »to feel her country's soil for the last time«. Thus, while most of the fighting in the film is done by men, it is a woman who symbolizes the poor (›barehanded‹) populace's struggle against the foreign occupation, its suffering and simultaneously its pride and determination. There is also another woman in the film, the mother of another hero, Drejc, who prevents him joining the partisans (she is religious and the partisans were communists). In this sense, she does not contribute much to the events themselves but nevertheless effectively hinders one of the male characters' development into a conventional hero of a partisan film. Significantly, it is only the influence of another woman (Drejc's love, Tidlica) – and not his own volition – which distances him from his mother and enables him to join the partisans and become a true hero. A similar pattern can be identified in *Trst*, the second Slovenian partisan film: most of the action is male-oriented but the character who legitimizes the partisan struggle and elevates it to a symbol of personal sacrifice in the name of a bright future is again a woman, the activist Vida, who is captured and viciously tortured by the Germans while still refusing to give out any information. Chronologically speaking, the next Slovenian partisan film, *Trenutki odločitve*, is about an existentially charged conflict between two men and once again there is a symbolically very important female figure: an old woman, at whose place the hero, a doctor, finds temporary refuge when escaping the city, not only saves his life but also with her tranquil and yet caring and determined persona represents nothing less than ›Slovenianness‹ as such. As she helps this man, she obviously not only justifies his decision (he had killed a Home Guard officer in order to save a wounded partisan's life) but also legitimizes the partisan resistance as such.

The character of a ›mother‹ as a not really emphasized and yet potent symbol of ›Slovenianness‹ is in fact very common in Slovenian partisan films. Mothers symbolizing Slovenia can be found in *Dobri stari pianino*, *X-25 javlja*, *Balada o trobenti in oblaku*, *Ne joči*, *Peter* and *Čudoviti prah* and to a slightly less obvious extent in *Tistega lepega dne*, *Med strahom in dolžnostjo* and *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*. It is an interesting question why a mother image is so consistently used as a symbol of ›Slovenianness‹, whereby with her warm and dedicated support for the partisans she discreetly suggests that only the partisan (and not the Home Guard) side was truly Slovenian. Is it a form of secularized Catholicism (the cult of the Virgin Mary was traditionally particularly strong in Slovenia), the so-called ›Cankar's syndrome‹ (named after the most important Slovenian novelist who was famously haunted by feelings of guilt towards his mother) or simply a pattern that is not uniquely Slovenian of portraying the motherland in terms of a, well, ›mother‹? It is difficult to say, but it should be clear in this context that since the legitimization of the partisan struggle in Slovenian partisan films is almost exclusively nationalistic and the key symbol of Slovenia is a ›mother‹, the role of women in these films is not necessarily really marginal, at least on the symbolic level. This is even more the case if taken together with what was already said about the women in the films *Na svoji zemlji* and *Trst*, which however, do not stand alone in this respect.

Namely, there are many more important female figures in Slovenian partisan films. In *Tistega lepega dne*, for example, women not only stand out as the most determined core of Slovenia's not so quiet opposition to the Italian occupation but also as really strong characters who in fact rule over the whole village. The character of Pečanka is a good example in this respect: she commands her children, other women's children, her husband, the Italian soldiers, just about everybody in fact. In *Ne joči, Peter*, one of the leading characters is the partisan girl Magda who turns out to be a more resourceful and capable soldier than her male counterparts – the two miners, Danilo and Lovro, assigned to the same mission – and at the end of the film we, together with Danilo and Lovro, even find out she is a partisan intelligence officer which makes her even formally superior to the male characters. In *Nevidni bataljon* the heroes are children; however, while the boys do most of the commanding the girls by no means subordinate themselves to this self-assigned male dictatorship: they are stubborn and act according to their own reasoning. In *Peta zaseda*, the plot is at first glance quite conventionally patriarchal: the story is about internal conflicts (between men!) in a partisan unit, however, during the dramatic finale when the commander and

the political commissioner of the unit shoot the politically unorthodox partisan Bregar (he was not a communist) for alleged treason, it is the accusing look of the nurse Mija who directs the audience's interpretation of events when it turns out he was innocent, thereby establishing her as a moral authority who judges the (male) actions in the film. Further, in *Sedmina* it is Niko's girlfriend Marija who convinces him to join the partisans, which is something Ana in *Begunec* also tries to do but in this case she fails (nevertheless, Ana is the only sympathetic character in the film – while not the film's hero she is the only one who invites the audience's identification).

All these examples, however, should not lead us to believe that the Slovenian partisan film was a genuinely democratic genre. As pointed out before, things are in fact quite ambivalent and, together with the representations of women as strong figures with moral authority, there are others where women are portrayed in more traditional, plainly patriarchal ways. In *Akcija*, for example, there is not one single female character while in *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, somewhere along the lines of the infamous sexism of the writer of the novel on which the film is based, women are essentially reduced to passive objects of the male hero's sexual exploitation, in the first place the partisan girl Kristina who in this way seems to be paying for her ›sin‹ of being too emancipated in the patriarchal world. The argument is therefore that in many ways Slovenian partisan films portray women as emancipated, the new women of communist universal equality, but in a most inconsistent manner with more than just occasional instances of them being reduced to patriarchal stereotypes. It seems the emancipation of women in the Slovenian partisan film has remained an unaccomplished task and, if this is the case in films, how far did their emancipation go in reality? Not very, apparently.

In any case, to fully understand the relations of the social power hidden in the filmic images of Slovenian partisan films a slightly more general question of the very constructions of gender identities in the genre should also be addressed. How is masculinity in the Slovenian partisan film constructed? In which terms? With which associations and connotations? And what do these mean? And femininity? What has been addressed so far is basically the question of the very presence of men/women in partisan films, of their symbolic positions, but what about the constructs of gender roles themselves? What kinds of men are the partisans in Slovenian partisan films and what kinds of women are the partisan girls? In short, what kinds of gender roles do the partisan films naturalize?

Regarding masculinity, there is a very clear demarcation line between those films made before the late 1960s and those after that period. In the first period, masculinity is constructed (via the construction of leading male roles – obviously the most important and influencing figures in films) in terms of something one might call *strong men*. There is a slight problem with translation here since in the Slovenian language the term *ornk descj*, a colloquial expression, not only designates the type more precisely but also, as well established concept, actually constructs it whereas in English there is, at least to my knowledge, no precise equivalent of this. The expression refers to slightly older (usually aged somewhere between 40 and 60), physically strong, tall, good-looking, healthy, determined, resourceful and wise men who in the context of partisan films bravely put up with all the difficulties and challenges of partisan life and struggles. There are some fine examples already in the first partisan film, *Na svoji zemlji*, in the characters of Sova and Stane as well as Drejc (after he manages to free himself from the inhibiting influence of his overly religious mother – in fact, Stane Sever, the actor who played Drejc, soon became an ideal-typical figure of the Slovenian strong man fighting for the partisans), and these were followed by Burut in *Trst*, a determined leader of the underground resistance in Trieste (again played by Stane Sever), Doctor Koren in *Trenutki odločitve* (again featuring Sever), Andrej in *Kala*, Ludvik in *Akcija*, Temnikar in *Balada o trobenti in oblaku*, and Dane and Lovro in *Ne joči, Peter*.

However, after the late 1960s the typical male hero changes: he becomes younger and above all more soft, even confused and uncertain than his predecessor from the era of the early partisan films. While Bregar in *Peta zaseda*, a controversial film from 1967, still represents a typical ›strong man‹ from the early partisan films his opposition to communist sectarianism in a partisan fighting unit already challenges the hitherto absolutely unquestionable equation between a strong, healthy and determined man on one side and the Slovenian nation and communism on the other (the latter falls out of the equation). Niko in *Sedmina*, made in 1969, is even ›softer‹, he is young, inexperienced, indecisive, sentimental and uncertain, while more or less the same stands for Damjan in *Onkraj*, and Ernest from *Begunec*, and to some degree also for almost any other hero from the period after 1968, typically for Goli in *Čudovit prah*, Andrej in *Moja draga Iza*, Marjan in *Ljubezen* and the medical practitioner in *Doktor*. Slightly different characters in this respect are only Berk in *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, who seems to abound with self-confidence and determination, although he is still very young and at least slightly confused, and Kozlevčar from *Med strahom in dolžnostjo*, who actually

looks like a traditional Slovenian ›strong man‹ but nevertheless lacks his usual determination and stubbornness. In a way, one could argue that the representation of masculinity in Slovenian partisan films since the late 1960s is best exemplified by the character of the father in *Čas brez pravljič*: he is a typical Slovenian ›strong man‹ but he disappeared – throughout the film his wife and children are looking for him (he went to join the partisans some time ago and when they are forced to flee their home they cannot find him). The Slovenian ›strong man‹ is reduced here almost to a mirage, to a phantasm about the nation's strength in some distant past assured by determined men.

But what does this clear shift in the construction of male heroes in Slovenian partisan films from the late 1960s onwards mean? Why is there this bold softening of the male characters? There are no easy answers here, only some general lines along which one might proceed with interpretations. One is that the diminishing of the traditional strong and determined male characters in Slovenian partisan films was part of a more general process of restructuring masculinity which started under the influence of feminism, flower-power and other counter-cultural movements roughly at the same time in Western societies. This can be exemplified by the emergence of the so-called ›mellow man‹ ideal of masculinity with popular figures such as the musician Neil Young, for instance, and this certainly also had some resonance in Slovenia. *Sedmina*, for example, the film which features Niko, the first entirely ›soft‹ male hero in Slovenian partisan film, was obviously made at least partially under the influence of the hippie subculture. This is evident not only in the character of Niko but also in many other details, including the slightly psychedelic texture of the film and the unrealistic costumes which in many instances are closer to the contemporary flower-power look than the look of high school students in 1940s' Ljubljana (the original setting of the film). Another possible interpretation is that the arrival of a new, soft, confused and indecisive hero is a projection of many doubts about the partisan struggle during WWII, doubts that before the late 1960s, the era of certain economic and political liberalization in socialist Yugoslavia, were simply impossible to express. Fact is that the partisan struggle was not just a simple fight for national liberation but also part of a bloody and ruthless civil war where both sides, that is conservative (Home Guard) and progressive (the partisans), each committed their share of appalling atrocities. This part was, of course, downplayed in the official communist interpretation of events but as the political climate became more relaxed in the late 1960s doubts cautiously started to emerge about the official interpretation of events. It might be that

this new type of partisan hero is therefore part of this story: while the narratives of the partisan films remained relatively stereotypical (about the good partisans and bad German and Italian occupiers, as well as their quisling supporters (Home Guard)), the hesitant indecisiveness of the heroes seems to suggest that they themselves did not really believe in what they should traditionally stand for.

Further, the indecisiveness of male heroes from the late 1960s onwards could be seen as a return to some interesting peculiarity of the Slovenian literary tradition, namely for the European novel untypical passivity of the hero, his extreme un-heroism. Already in the first Slovenian novel, *Deseti brat* (The Tenth Brother, 1866) by Josip Jurčič, the hero Lovro Kvas actually does not do anything except for waiting for events around him to unfold, and many other Slovenian literary heroes thereafter have followed this pattern. Much has been written on this issue and the possible reasons for it, most notably by the distinctive Slovenian scholar Dušan Pirjevec,²¹ but for the present purpose it suffices to say that the process of ›softening‹ the Slovenian partisan hero after the 1960s might be understood at least in one sense as a return to an established literary pattern. Lastly, the relative weakness of partisan heroes could also be understood as a symbolic re-establishing of the traditional weakness of the Slovenian male identity, which probably derives from the fact that the Slovenian bourgeoisie has traditionally been very small and weak, and its peasant populace on which the traditional construct of Slovenianness has been established throughout history in such severe economic difficulties that it simply did not manage to produce a consistent construct of sovereign, let alone dominant masculinity. This probably helps to explain not only the weaknesses of literary and, later, film heroes, but also the differences between post-1960s Slovenian film heroes and the heroes of Soviet revolutionary cinema: Haynes, for example, argues that it is precisely the traditional Russian patriarchal value-system which undermined the communist project of gender emancipation.²² If the patriarchy was traditionally not as strong in Slovenian culture, than it should be obvious that also the symbolic re-establishment of the male dominance in socialist Slovenia could not happen in such a thorough manner as it did in the case of Soviet Union. However, of the mentioned possible interpretations of the decline in the strength of Slovenian partisan men from the late 1960s onward, the last one is definitely the most slippery one: no research has been conducted in this direction which would

²¹ Cf. Tomo Virk: »Dušan Pirjevec in slovenski roman«, in: *Literatura* 67–68 (1997), pp. 76–101.

²² Haynes: *New Soviet Man* (note 19), p. 30–31.

prove that the Slovenian traditional construct of masculinity is actually weak. There is, however, huge historical evidence which demonstrates that during the economic crisis in the second half of the 19th century the farms of Slovenian peasants went bankrupt on a large scale, with men as a rule either becoming alcoholics or emigrating to the United States, and women taking care of the children and whatever was left. In this context there were obviously no preconditions for the development of a consistent patriarchal ideology.

It is difficult to say which of these possible explanations applies, in a way it might even seem that all of them apply at the same time. Anyway, what matters here is that the construction of the male hero in Slovenian partisan film as a ›strong man‹ clearly deteriorates after the late 1960s and that this has some important consequences for the construction of gender roles in Slovenian partisan films in general. Obviously, men are also not that dominant on this level. However, before drawing any conclusions, let us take a closer look at the other side of the story, the construction of femininity in Slovenian partisan films.

It should be initially noted here that women in Slovenian partisan films are constructed in a much more uniform way than men. From the first to the very last Slovenian partisan film they are consistently portrayed in terms which depict them as basically dedicated, reliable, warm (although not too emotional), caring, hard-working and silent *mothers*, in fact even regardless of their actual motherhood – even the young women who have no children yet seem to have in their eyes little images of the children they are going to have with the male heroes, and their actions clearly reflect this. Examples abound: Stane's mother, Tidlica and most of the women in the village in *Na svoji zemlji*, Vida in *Trst*, nurse Marija in *Trenutki odločitve*, Anuška in *Dobri stari pianino*, Ana in *Kala*, Secretary Kramerjeva in *X-25 javlja*, Teminkarica in *Balada o trobenti in oblaku*, nurse Mija in *Peta zaseda*, Marija in *Sedmina*, Anja in *Onkraj*, Ana in *Begunec*, Kozlevčarjeva in *Med strahom in dolžnostjo*, Lenka in *Christophoros*, and the mother in *Čas brez pravljič*.

What this obviously suggests is a construction of femininity in clearly traditional terms (of motherhood), which by no means challenges the existing patriarchal order. However, as already suggested things are not that simple: while the leading characters of Slovenian partisan films are usually male and women are as a rule reduced to the role of a mother, this does not necessarily mean they are weak, dominated or dependent in their relationships with men. For one thing, male heroes have since the late 1960s become increasingly soft and unreliable which means that even if the construct of femininity (in terms of motherhood) in Slovenian

partisan films actually supports the patriarchal symbolic agenda, the men themselves do not: most often they are simply not strong enough to take care of themselves, let alone their women. Further, the construction of femininity in terms of motherhood as such does not necessarily mean submissiveness: in Slovenian culture the mother figure has traditionally been understood as both important and strong which is, as noted, in several respects reflected in many Slovenian partisan films with strong female figures who hold moral authority. So despite the fact that the only emancipated woman in Slovenian partisan films in a politically progressive sense of the word is the partisan girl Magda (actually intelligence officer Brina, as it turns out) from *Ne joči, Peter*, plus to a lesser extent some other girls, it would be difficult to argue that the genre simply reproduces patriarchal stereotypes. It obviously does not, but not – this is the interesting twist – because it is so progressive or politically correct towards the women, that is not because of its manifest revolutionary agenda, but to a significant extent because it reproduces traditional constructions of gender identities in Slovenia where for various reasons masculinity was not necessarily, or at least not uniformly, constructed in terms of dominance and femininity of submissiveness.

It should be also noted that in the genre of partisan films women heroines representing motherland (›rodna-mat‹) are frequently rallied in times of crisis to elicit a strong emotional response.²³ The construct of women heroines as motherlands is in itself problematic, as it invokes the figure of the Freudian ›good mother‹, an object of love, but not of sensuality, yet in the context of the present discussion it also signals a degree of symbolic importance of the female characters, which should not be overlooked.

This should not, however, take us too far as there are instances of women being represented in clearly patriarchal terms, for example in a ›hysterical‹ interpretative framework (Kristina in *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni* and Mira in *Dediščina*). It is therefore possible to conclude that in Slovenian partisan film the representation, and along with that the construction and ideological legitimization, of gender identities is in fact a thoroughly mixed affair. On the one hand there are many traditional elements, some of which are clearly patriarchal, but not all of them since, as we have seen, the traditionally strong figure of a Slovenian mother also remains strong in this new context of revolutionary films, while the weak male hero from the late 1960s onwards seems at least to some extent to stem from the traditional Slovenian construction of

²³ Ibid, p. 166.

masculinity. On the other hand, there are some progressive elements obviously along the official lines of the communist ideology (modern, emancipated, resourceful, competent and self-sufficient partisan girls of which Magda from *Ne joči*, Peter is the prime example), but these are not so common and it even seems that the element which actually makes these films at least partly democratic in terms of gender relations is not these sparse emancipated female heroines but rather the deterioration of stable, strong and determined masculinity seen in the late 1960s. Women are not necessarily emancipated in these later partisan films but there are definitely not many men around who would want to dominate them as it seems that they have all undertaken some mission of finding themselves and their reasons for joining the partisans.

Conclusion

The analysis of representations of masculinity and femininity in Slovenian partisan films at two basic levels, of action and of the construction of gender identities, has pointed out a mixed pattern. What is most striking is that, all in all, very few of these films display any traces of emancipatory gender politics: in spite of their intended revolutionary political agenda most of them leave traditional gender relations unchallenged, without any real alternatives. However, since traditional gender identities in Slovenia are in at least some respects not constructed in uniformly patriarchal ways and since Slovenian partisan films have developed from a distinctively ideological medium of the legitimization of the partisan struggle against foreign occupation, as they were up to the late 1960s, into a more ideologically ambivalent form where ideological legitimization often coincides with its questioning, which has happened primarily through the deconstruction of the old image of partisans as ›strong men‹, this does not necessarily mean that these films have simply reproduced a patriarchal symbolic universe and along with that the existing inequalities between men and women. It seems more like they were a medium onto which the complexities of existing gender relations in socialist Slovenia were simply imprinted. Some films might in this respect be slightly more conservative, others more progressive, but if taken all together as a genre they did not produce any substantial ideological surplus; they simply reproduced what was already there.

In this sense, Slovenian partisan films do not appear to be very interesting as documents of the official ideology at the time. In spite of party officials' efforts, they apparently remained outside of their im-

mediate influence in everything but the most basic outlines (that the partisans were the good guys while the occupiers and their collaborator were the bad guys), although it should be noted that the ruling communist party itself also did not have a very conclusive political agenda on women's emancipation in socialism. Accordingly, one can argue that Slovenian partisan films primarily bear witness to this inconclusiveness and indecisiveness of the communist elite's policies on gender relations, albeit it is probable that the almost complete absence of emancipatory gender politics in these films also had something to do with the fact that the communist elite simply did not manage to control the production of partisan films effectively enough: the Slovenian partisan film was a genre established as an effective *agit-prop* vehicle aimed at the ideological legitimization of the social revolution but which soon turned into a convincing medium of often disenchanting reflections of existing real life in the socialist reality. Instead of optimistic images of what should be, it started to portray simply what it is, hinting at the rulers' incompetence in delivering what they had promised – equality for all. If women's emancipation is difficult to identify in these films, this does not necessarily mean it was not sought after; a probably more correct reading would be that this absence critically suggests it had not yet been achieved and that, if the related official policies were not to change, there would be little promise of a change for women in the then foreseeable future.