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**Yugoslav(i)a on the margin: Sexual taboos, representation, nation and emancipation in
Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works* (1969)**

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Abstract

In socialism, Yugoslav women became empowered by employment and income, but gender equality stayed rather nominal in the family domain. Such gender inequity is addressed in the works of the Yugoslav *novi film/New Film* (1961-72) auteurs. They occasionally turned to allegories in order to communicate political criticism. One of them was Želimir Žilnik. His most internationally lauded film, winner of the Golden Bear in 1969, is *Rani radovi/Early Works* (1969). It features a heroine Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović), whose name is eponymous of Yugoslav nation. Bearing in mind that in the majority of Yugoslav *New Films* a leading character is a man, *Early Works* is exceptional for having a woman as the main heroine. I will approach Jugoslava's character: as an allegory of Yugoslavia and its revolutionary spirit, as well as a prototype of an emancipated woman, punished by rape and killing. My research studies the link in the film between Žilnik's political critique via strong heroine as a proxy, and her objectification. By reading the film from a feminist perspective and building my arguments on close analysis, I contend that Jugoslava is concurrently empowered and disempowered, an active subject and sexually objectified object, a raped nation and a raped feminist.

Key Words: Yugoslav New Film; Želimir Žilnik; female rape and murder; nation; representation

‘My mother would be more liberated by a washing machine than by a right to vote!’

Jugoslava

Rani radovi/Early Works (Želimir Žilnik, 1969) features a female character Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović), whose name is not accidental, but the director’s deliberate choice to create a link between the heroine and the Yugoslav nation. Jugoslava can be seen both as an allegory of Yugoslavia and as a prototype of an emancipated woman (both sexually and by education), punished by rape and murder. I undertake feminist film criticism, grounded in authors such as, Mulvey (1989), Kuhn (1992) and Dillman (2014) – of Žilnik’s political questioning of Yugoslav socialism and revolutionary spirit, which is partly based on objectification of a woman and the female body. I investigate how Žilnik’s approach can be considered problematic despite Žilnik’s intention to side with a discriminated woman in *Early Works*, and the women’s question in general.

Starting from 1946, three subsequent Yugoslav Constitutions, and much legislation, ratified what women won by participating in the Second World War: legal gender equality in all aspects of Yugoslav society, including the right to vote (Ramet 1999, 94). This was a reward for their indispensable contributions to the liberation struggle as Partisan fighters, nurses, doctors, spies, and food suppliers. In socialism, Yugoslav women became empowered by rights to work, to have equal salaries with men, to have access to free education, to health and social insurance, political representation, to abortion, to one-year paid maternity leave, and to inheritance, marriage and divorce rights (Morokvašić 1986, 125). Nevertheless, gender equality remained nominal in the family sphere, and remnants of patriarchy lingered in interpersonal relations between men and women (Morokvašić 1986, 127). Such gender asymmetry is tackled in the works of the Yugoslav *New Film* directors.

Yugoslav *novi film/New Film* (1961–72) was a Yugoslav contribution to world-spread new wave movements, as the French *Nouvelle Vague*, Czechoslovak *nová vlna*, or Brazilian *Cinema Novo*. Yugoslav *New Film* directors were often (but not exclusively) debutants when it comes to feature length films, and their styles were disparate in terms of thematic and formal aspects (Novaković 1966, 6). However, what they often had in common included a new audio-visual sensibility of their films, fragmented narratives, open-endedness, proneness to metaphors, and openness to free interpretation by the viewers (Novaković 1966, 6). Usually, Yugoslav *New Films* address some form of conflict in socialist society, such as generational, or between the individual and the environment where he¹ lives (Novaković 1966, 6). This heterogenous movement, without a manifesto, brought a freer stance towards sexuality and eroticism (Petrović 1988, 331). In addition, Yugoslav *New Film* directors, ‘by breaking the old rules of directing, also break numerous bureaucratic barriers (both in the manner of thinking and in the manner of film production), due to which certain topics and delicate social problems were pronounced for “taboos”² (Novaković 1966, 6, emphasis original). Yugoslav *New Film* directors sometimes resorted to allegories in order to convey a certain political message or critique. One of them was Želimir Žilnik.

Žilnik’s most internationally acclaimed film is his fiction debut *Early Works*. After being already screened for four months (from March 1969), both in Yugoslavia and abroad, the film was taken to District Court in Belgrade, due to a lawsuit, a decision on the temporary prohibition of screening, signed on 19th June 1969 by Spasoje Milošev, District Public Prosecutor, for ‘heavy injury of societal and political morals’ (in Miltojević 1992, 73). It was defended, at a trial open for public, by Žilnik himself, who was a lawyer by vocation, by arguing that the film was aligned with the main principles of Yugoslav politics, as well as with its generally accepted democratic rights and freedoms, such as: of thought, expression, critique, and art (in Miltojević 1992, 78–86). Ljubomir Radović, the judge who presided over

the jury, acquitted the film. The court was of the opinion that the administrative bodies cannot categorically act as objective artistic critique (Radović in Miltojević 1992, 88). As reported by the newspaper *Borba*, although the District Public Prosecutor's office appealed on the acquitting decision to the Supreme Court, the appeal was withdrawn by a higher instance on the republican level, Public Prosecutor's office of (Yugoslav) Socialist Republic Serbia (*Borba* in Miltojević 1992, 89). Finally, the film was released on 1st of July, just barely on time to participate at Berlin International Film Festival and to win the Golden Bear on 6th July 1969 (*Borba* in Miltojević 1992, 90).

Žilnik's *Early Works* is titled after the eponymous collection of early Marxist classics, *Early Works* (Marx and Engels [1953] 1961) – published in 1953 in Yugoslavia for the first time – including the letters that young Karl Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge (mostly dating from 1843). Their excerpts, as well as fragments from other Marxist classics, such as *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), are spoken verbatim by the main heroine Jugoslava. Žilnik listed Marx and Engels in the opening credits, as the authors of additional dialogue. Film *Early Works* is made in the wake of, and under the influence of the student demonstrations that took place in Yugoslavia's capital Belgrade in June 1968. At that time, there was a wave of student protests in other countries, starting with France in May 1968. In Yugoslavia, *Early Works* was often screened in the movie theatres as a double bill with Žilnik's short documentary *Lipanjaska gibanja/June Turmoil* (1969) about Yugoslav student protests (Tirnanić 1986, 57). To Gržinić, 'Žilnik hijacked the basic framework of the 1968 student riots and filled it with scopophilia, rape and murder' (2006, 68). Also, *Early Works* refers to and is critical of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

The plot of Žilnik's seminal film revolves around Jugoslava, who leaves her home, critical of the 'feudalism' that reigns in her household and the intimate partner violence her mother is exposed to from her husband, Jugoslava's father. She and her three male comrades:

Dragiša (Bogdan Tirnanić), Kruno (Marko Nikolić) and Marko (Čedomir Radović) embark on a quest to emancipate peasants in the countryside and workers in factories. They do this by propagating communist principles. The clique of four youths encounters several predicaments during their quest, including their beating by peasants and Jugoslava's gang rape, problems with the police, as well as the indifference of the factory workers. Eventually, realising that the group has failed, Jugoslava leaves without notice and returns to her household with patriarchal relations. Consequently, her three angry comrades kill Jugoslava for injuring their male prides, and for witnessing their political and sexual failures. They cover her body with the flag of League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the proletarian flag, and burn her corpse with a Molotov cocktail, which marks the end of the film.

My research examines the correlation in the film between Žilnik's engagement in political critique via the strong female character as proxy, and her objectification. Such objectification under the cover of political activism is self-evident, although under-researched, in many other critically acclaimed Yugoslav *New Films*, including the ones by Dušan Makavejev, Živojin Pavlović, Krsto Papić, and Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić. Considering that in most Yugoslav *New Films* the protagonist is a man, the shift in *Early Works* from a woman as the Other to a lead heroine, from periphery to the centre, is worthy of attention. Grounded in film feminist theories and through close reading, I argue that Jugoslava is simultaneously empowered and disempowered, an active subject and a sexually objectified object, a raped nation and a raped feminist. Nevertheless, Jugoslava's feminism comes more from Marxism than from the Western feminists, since she refers to Clara Zetkin, German advocate for women's rights, theorist and activist. Jugoslava breaks gender and sexuality taboos, because she freely chooses her partners, has an active stance towards sexuality, and gives a lecture on contraception.

Jugoslava belongs to a group – women – that was concurrently empowered and somewhat marginalized in the Yugoslav real-life private sphere, due to their frequent double burden and the remnants of patriarchal mores in interpersonal relations, as was also the case in other socialist countries. The film demonstrates how the celluloid gaze switches to a woman as a main heroine, as opposed to the usual woman's place on the margin of Yugoslav *New Film*. In Žilnik's case, that results in problematic aesthetic solutions, namely her visual exposure to the male gaze. The heroine's empowerment and subsequent ultimate disempowerment by death, reveal her simultaneous emancipation and marginalization, and open the question of Žilnik's ambivalent stance towards Jugoslava.

I argue that there are two possible readings of Jugoslava's brutalisation: (1) rape and murder of a woman as an allegory of violated nation and (2) rape as a punishment of an emancipated woman. The first interpretation in which 'woman and nation are equated' (Naaman 2006, 277) recurs in many cinemas worldwide: Middle Eastern cinema (Atakav 2017), Chinese cinema (Cui 2003), Indian cinema (Banerjee 2016), Polish cinema (Mazierska 2006), French cinema (MacDonald 2010) and Yugoslav cinema (Vuković 2018). As Iordanova (1996, 25) notes about male-dominated Balkan cinema, when the focus is on female characters' destinies, it is not necessarily for the purpose of any feminist cause, but rather for creating allegories about other matters that the directors find significant, such as for promulgating political points, embedded into the fates of disempowered women. Moreover, Yugoslav New film, as Daković finds, handles 'topics such as poverty, ethnicity, marginal social groups and oppression of society towards the individual, frequently placing "woman" as the oppressed figure' (1996, 42).

Woman as nation

Jugoslava, eponymous of her country's name, embodies the Yugoslav nation, its revolution and the betrayal of its promises. In two different scenes the heroine is juxtaposed to a crudely-drawn star, which further emphasises her role as the symbol of Yugoslavia: in one with a subtext of the sexual revolution of Yugoslav women (**Figure 1**), and in another scene in which Jugoslava shouts slogans about the cultural revolution with a clenched fist (**Figure 2**). The red star stands



Figure 1. Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) and the crudely-drawn star in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

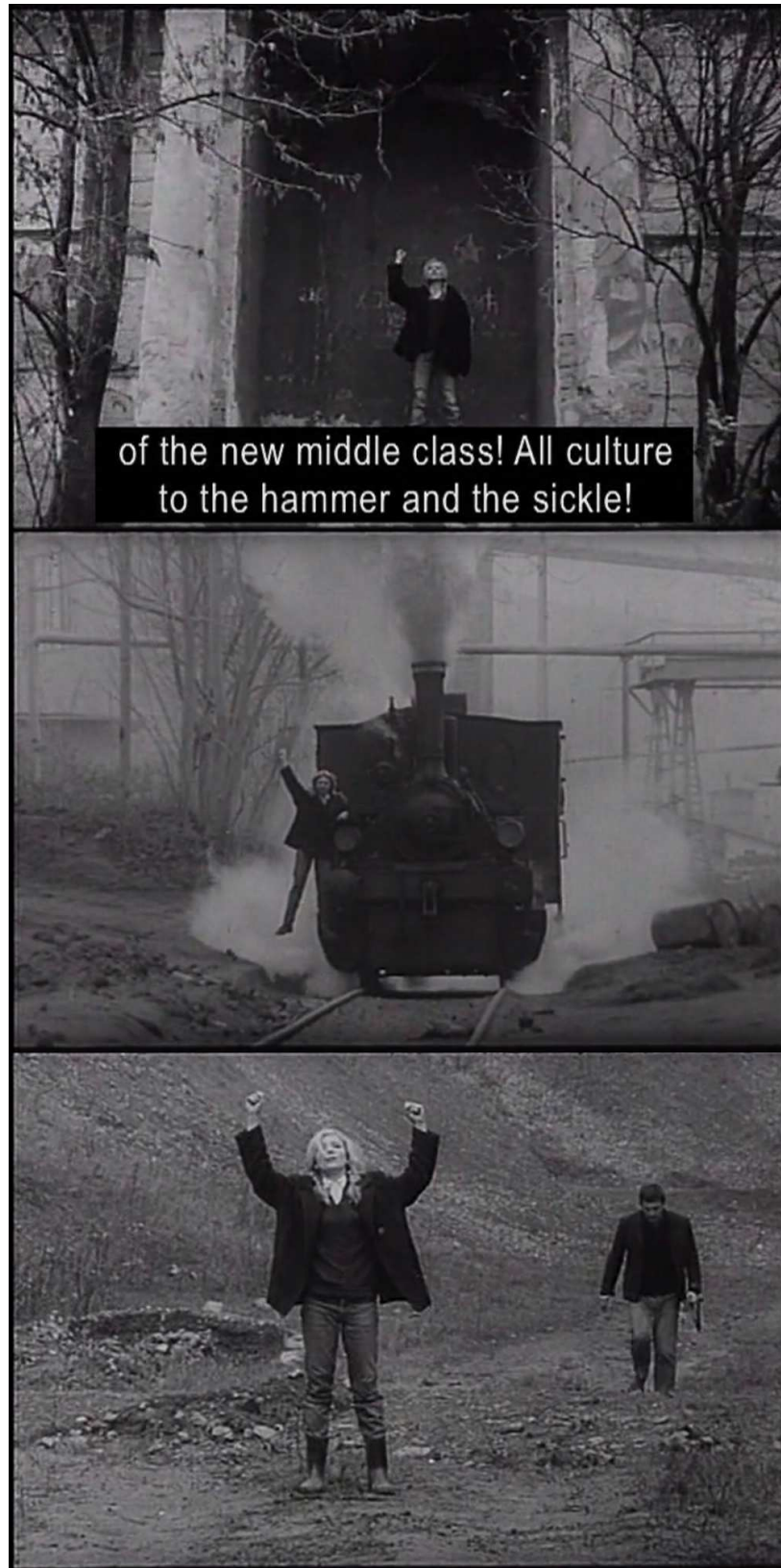


Figure 2. 1-3. Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) and the clenched fist in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

for communism and the Yugoslav Partisans, who fought and won against the occupiers in the Second World War. The red star has a prominent place on the Yugoslav flag. Also, it is featured on the flag of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the proletarian flag, on which is written: 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!'

The proletarian flag, that is, the flag of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia appears twice in the film. The first time it is shown in a sequence consisting of several shots, each composed like a tableau vivant, filmed from the same camera position and in the same space, and edited together with jump cuts. For instance, the shots are of the main actors in a Citroën 2CV car that changes its position in space, then of the director himself and his co-scriptwriter Branko Vučićević, both in the car, who make a cameo appearance in the film, followed again with the shots of the actors in the car, while Jugoslava, the only one of them who is standing, holds and waves the flag of League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the proletarian flag (**Figure 3**). The sequence is underscored with a non-diegetic male voice: 'Tirke and Milja. That's them. A banner with a star!' So, the main audio-visual focus is on the flag and star. In this sequence Žilnik deliberately breaks the film's illusion by including himself and Vučićević, as well as by the usage of the names Tirke and Milja in the voiceover, which are Dragiša's nickname and Jugoslava's name in real-life, respectively. At the end of the film, Jugoslava will be associated with the flag of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (and of the proletariat) once more. She is shot to death, covered with the flag (**Figure 3**) and burned with a Molotov cocktail; all by her comrades, whose political and sexual impotence she has witnessed.



Figure 3. 1-2. Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) and the proletarian flag in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

A sequence which stages Jugoslava on a railway locomotive also uses the style of the *tableau*

vivant.³ At first, she is shown sitting on it, with a subtitle – in fact, a quote by Marx – that reads ‘Revolutions are the locomotives of history’, indicating that Jugoslava is the personification of Yugoslavia and its revolutionary spirit. Then, another shot follows, where she stands on the steaming locomotive, with her arm defiantly raised and fist clenched (**Figure 2**). Such gesture was recurrent motif in art and media, found in the representations of a woman as the symbol of Yugoslavia. As Sklevicky observes, the New Year number of newspaper *Vjesnik* in 1946 had an illustration on front page, which included a woman with ‘a five-pointed star in her raised hand, who personifies the [Yugoslav] Republic’⁴ (Sklevicky 1996, 178). Similarly, Jovanović, following the art historian Bojana Pejić, finds that in sculpture and painting in Yugoslavia at the end of 1940s, ‘female allegorical figures [were frequent] which stood for the revolution, the anti-fascist struggle, and freedom’, but later they were gradually outnumbered by corresponding male figures (Jovanović 2014, 10). Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that there is something monumental in the representation of Jugoslava, which evokes Yugoslav Partisan-themed art, namely sculptures dedicated to Partisan women. For instance, the *Victory* sculpture atop *The Battle of Batina Monument*, created by Antun Augustinčić in 1947, and *Monument to the Revolution* in Kranj, sculpted by Lojze Dolinar in 1961 (Niebyl 2020). Such monuments feature female Partisan or civilian women, as embodiments of Yugoslav nation, its struggle for liberation and its victory. However, ‘modern viewers, rather than the works themselves by virtue of their original purpose, assign meaning and significance to a monument’ (Riegl 1996, 71).

Jugoslava’s monumental gestures throughout the film lead back to the opening thought of this article, ‘My mother would be more liberated by a washing machine than by a right to vote’. Jugoslava utters these words during a *tableau vivant*-like, one-shot scene, when she and Marko are playacting her execution by him with a firearm, foreshadowing her actual murder at the end of the film by her three comrades. Jugoslava delivers the line while looking straight at

the camera, therefore directly addressing the viewer in a Brechtian distancing effect fashion, which, to borrow from Forbes, ‘elicits reflection on what has just been seen’ (2016, 196). Her line, as well as the gestures of her hands clenched in fists (**Figure 2**), are references to Yugoslav Partisan women, who earned the right to vote for all Yugoslav women, given in the wake of the Second World War as a reward for their indispensable participation in that war. Žilnik’s mother Milica Šuvaković was one of the courageous Yugoslav Partisan women who gave their lives for the liberation of the country, as did his father, Konrad Žilnik, a National Hero of Yugoslavia (see Žilnik in Jovanić 1988). Estimated two million Yugoslav women contributed to the People’s Liberation Struggle (Jancar-Webster 1999, 70). Out of that number, 282,000 female participants perished in the concentration camps (Jancar-Webster 1999, 70), including Žilnik’s mother, who was a member of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, as well as of clandestine resistance of Yugoslav People’s Liberation Army against the occupier (Žilnik in Jovanić 1988). Approximately 100,000 women were soldiers of combat units, who fought on the battlefields (Sklevicky 1984, 97). One fourth of those brave female Partisans died, and 40,000 were wounded, out of which number around 3000 had to live with severe permanent disability (Sklevicky 1984, 97). The utmost bravery of Yugoslav women was recognized, so 2000 became officers of People’s Liberation Army during the war, while 87 became National Heroes after the war (Sklevicky 1984, 97). In one of his interviews, Žilnik states that the ‘film is intended for youths and old [Partisan] fighters because it speaks about experiences of both’ (in Prelog 1969). Considering that Jugoslava is executed by Marko in the previously mentioned enactment scene, it could be argued that this is Žilnik’s condemnation of the Yugoslav state’s partial betrayal of the legacy of female Partisans. It failed to fully fulfil the promise of gender equality, namely in the private sphere, in Yugoslav households where women frequently had a double burden.

When it comes to the representation of women in modern Yugoslav *New Film*, Yugoslav

film critic Boglić (1980, 122) observes that they are depicted somewhere on the continuum between myth and degradation, more leaning towards the latter. Jugoslava's body is both mythicized and degraded throughout the studied film, in the service of being a symbol of Yugoslavia and its revolutionary spirit. A woman as a metaphor for a nation is a frequent motif in art worldwide. For instance, in the painting *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) by Eugène Delacroix, a woman with denuded bust, carrying the French flag, stands for France. Similarly, a giant sculpture *The Motherland Calls*, by Yevgeny Vuchetich and Nikolai Nikitin, erected in 1967 in Volgograd, depicts a woman, holding a sword, that symbolizes contemporary Russia. Analogous to it, in her metaphorical meaning of a nation, is *Statue of Liberty* (Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and Gustave Eiffel, 1886, New York City, USA). As Pejić (2021, 54) notes in the same vein, other allegorical female statues, eponymous of their nation-states, include *Germania*, *Hungaria*, *Polonia*, *Hispania*, *Hellas*, and *Serbia*.

Besides the interpretation of the portrayed violence towards Jugoslava as the allegory of the nation's violation as well as of its revolutionary spirit, another possible reading of her brutalization is as the patriarchal punishment of an emancipated woman, for her active sexuality and independence. Depictions of sexual abuse are one of the main sites for shaping and discerning prevalent notions about femininity and feminism (Horeck 2004, 8). Moreover, a 'liberated' heroine's rape and death are 'punishment for refusing to submit to the codes that define her place and limit her possibilities to what patriarchy demands' (Kaplan 1990, 7).

Rape

According to Slapšak (2000, 134–135), rape is one of the most common sexual motifs in Yugoslav film at the end of 1960s. The heroine Jugoslava will be raped, after citing political slogans in an attempt to emancipate the peasants in the countryside. In this sequence, Žilnik condenses time by utilizing ellipsis, a narrative and editing device that omits a section of the

story (Yale 2002), for the purpose of shocking the spectators. When the shot of Jugoslava, who is addressing the peasants via megaphone while standing in the moving car, ends with: ‘We support you, you should support us’⁵, it is suddenly cut and juxtaposed to a shot of Jugoslava and her three male comrades being beaten by male peasants. Ironically and to some extent comically, Žilnik underlines the futility of the group’s failed attempt to revolutionize the countryside by shouting political slogans. He mocks his characters by showing the discrepancy between Marxist theory and practice. The men of the countryside are obviously not appreciative of the group’s attempts to enlighten them. On the contrary, they are shown being infuriated and offended by Jugoslava’s Marxist announcement via megaphone, stating, amongst other slogans, that ‘the peasants are stuck in the idiotism of rural life like in the mud’. Consequently, Jugoslava and her three male companions are literally stuck in the mud because they are being dragged through it by the angry peasant mob. They flop in the muddy puddles like drowning fish while the (male) peasants pull them, push them, and kick them. The sound of flopping is accentuated. Throughout this scene, the camera is handheld, shaky and unsteady, contributing to the dramatic tension. The usage of the zoom lens, combined with whip pans and black and white photography creates the suggestion of a real event, simultaneously disclosing Žilnik’s background in documentary filmmaking. Dragiša, in a cowardly fashion, manages to escape. Two peasants pull Jugoslava through the mud (**Figure 4**), away to some hay, each holding by force one of her hands. She tries to fight back and kicks with her leg, but to no avail. They rip off her shirt. The scene ends with an abrupt cut, while Jugoslava is pinned down by them, so gang rape is clearly implied, but not depicted further. Žilnik deliberately decided to finish the scene when the implicit, off screen penetration begins, presumably in order not to show sexual violence explicitly or engage into voyeuristic eroticised objectification of the abused female body.



Figure 4. Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) degraded in mud in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

If the character of Jugoslava is examined with regard to one of the feminist debates noted by Rich, ‘of woman-as-agent versus woman-as-victim’ (1986, 556), she temporarily breaks the victim mould, usual in Yugoslav *New Film*, and refuses to be a victim. Her only remark in the aftermath of being raped by the peasants, while sitting later that night around a bonfire with her three comrades, is ‘I am happy that peasants will no longer exist in communism’. Jugoslava’s phlegmatic reaction to her sexual abuse does not seem to stem from her repressed memories of the rape trauma, but rather from deliberately not allowing the trauma to get the best of herself. However, Žilnik keeps the audiences’ empathy at bay by only briefly depicting Jugoslava in this post-rape scene, from a third person, objective perspective, instead of by showing her subjective perspective (for example, in her point-of-view shots), which is

also not given during the sexual assault. The fact that neither the heroine or her comrades address the impact of rape trauma on her, but move on as if nothing happened, in combination with the complete absence of the indictment or punishment of the rape perpetrators in the film, is rather problematic.

Seven times

It is important to keep in mind that the actress who played Jugoslava, Milja Vujanović, was in real-life crowned Miss (Yugoslav) Socialist Republic of Serbia, the most beautiful woman of 1967, at a beauty contest (Tirnanić 1986, 57). At the time when the shooting of the film began, in the autumn of 1968, she was still the actual Miss SR Serbia (Tirnanić 1986, 57). Since in the newspaper interviews with Vujanović, journalists only focused on the fact that she was to appear nude in the film, as Tirnanić – film critic-turned-actor, who interpreted Dragiša – finds, Žilnik decided to take advantage of such interest, and advertise *Early Works* from the very beginning of its shooting as a film that shows ‘the beauties of the homeland and the beauties of a female body’⁶ (Tirnanić 1986, 57). However, Žilnik himself argued in one interview that ‘the film advocates the beginning of a sexual revolution because the position of a woman is infinitely unequal’⁷, while sex is envisioned as socio-political action (in Prelog 1969).

I will analyse a sequence of a sexual encounter between Jugoslava and Dragiša, one of her comrades, which begins with Jugoslava’s amusement in the foreplay phase, eventually to be concluded in a negative manner in the postcoital phase. The dominant role she assumes, in both sex and life, can be deduced when she steps on Dragiša’s chest during the foreplay. However, the camera undermines this empowerment by fragmenting her body. For instance, a tilt flows upwards from Jugoslava’s feet, all over her nude figure, until it stops on Jugoslava’s smiling face in a close-up. Consequently, the unity of her body is broken down into fragmented details: legs, buttocks and breasts. In Mulvey’s (1989, 20) opinion the fragmenting of the female

body by close-ups, such as of legs (which thus become a substitute fetish object), permeates the film narrative with eroticism by transforming a woman into icon or cut-out. Consequently, the depth of field is significantly reduced, so the image gives impression of flatness instead of realism, which introduces fetishism into representation of a female character (Mulvey 1989, 20). Although the described part of the scene is portrayed as playful and liberating, it is also important to note Kuhn's observation that the pornographic penchant 'to isolate bits of bodies may be read as a gesture of dehumanisation' (1992, 37). Furthermore, the dialogue that accompanies the tilt is of a sexual nature. Dragiša lasciviously asks Jugoslava whether she has ever made love until her teeth tingled, and she responds laughingly that he is too green for that. Despite the fact that Jugoslava seems to be enjoying the stepping game and the foreplay in general, the sexual objectification of her body is an indicator of an ambivalent stance of Žilnik towards representation of his heroine. He simultaneously disempowers Jugoslava by transforming her nude body into the object of the male gaze and empowers her by making her a subject of her actions, be it sexual or otherwise. The stepping game could be taken as an example of Dillman's (2014, 5) argument that there can be contradiction between the narrative and images because, for instance, the images can sexually objectify women and have sexist connotations, whereas simultaneously the narrative can have feminist undertones. This theory can be fully applied to *Early Works* since there is a tension between the narrative and the visuals.

Then, there is a shot abundant with many uninterrupted camera movements. Firstly, it starts from Dragiša's close-up, in which Jugoslava's hand pushes his head away playfully. Secondly, it is followed with a pan to Jugoslava's close-up in profile, as she reclines on the floor on her back. Thirdly, from there the camera glides all over her recumbent body, panning leftwards over her breast, stomach and thigh with a hint of a pubic hair. Therefore, her body parts are again isolated, sexualised and offered on display through camerawork in the sexual foreplay sequence. Moreover, during the segment of the camera movement when camera pans

over her naked body, Dragiša inquires Jugoslava in voiceover how many times per night is her record to have had sex. Fourthly, the uninterrupted camera movement continues with an upwards tilt over Dragiša's naked chest, until it finally stops on a close-up of gazing Dragiša. The tilt is underscored with Jugoslava's voiceover: 'You are so dumb. Tell me something nice.'

Dragiša's close-up is followed with an unexpected cutaway scene, consisting of one extreme long-shot of Dragiša in an exterior. He is walking on a grass-covered, bushy landscape, reminiscent of pubic hair (**Figure 5**), whilst the diegetic wind howls and his voiceover, belonging to the previously shown scene with Jugoslava, is heard: 'With you, I could do it seven times per night.' There is a cut back to his face in an interior, in a big close-up, looking upwards (**Figure 5**), followed with a fast, unmotivated pan towards the right, that stops on the detail of Jugoslava's upright thigh shown from profile (**Figure 5**). The pan, therefore, strongly suggests that Dragiša was gazing at Jugoslava's pubis. Thus, Dragiša's previously mentioned strolling on the grass could be interpreted as the metaphor of desired sexual intercourse. From Jugoslava's thigh in profile, camera tilts upwards (**Figure 5**), and again, for the third time during the sexual foreplay sequence, flows over her fragmented nude body parts, such as her breasts, until it stops on her smiling face in a big close-up in profile. Regardless of how aesthetically pleasing it might be for a spectator, Jugoslava's deconstructed nude body is visually erotically overemphasised, so it contradicts the egalitarian narrative that the film propagates, especially keeping in mind that none of the male characters is represented in such a sexually objectifying manner.



Figure 5. 1–5. Sexually Objectified Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

Thereafter, a palm reading that Jugoslava gives Dragiša is embedded within the sexual foreplay sequence. Incidentally, the actress Milja Vujanović, who interpreted Jugoslava, was famous for practicing chiromancy and astrology in real-life. Žilnik utilises palmistry to foreshadow the unbound sexuality of his heroine Jugoslava, as well as Dragiša's failure to satisfy it. While touching with her index finger a line on Dragiša's palm, as shown in a close-

up detail (that also encompasses Jugoslava's nipple), Jugoslava's chiromantic observations in voiceover include the one that his Mount of Venus is crumbling away. In palmistry the term Mount of Venus 'shows a person's passions – or lack of them' (Vernon 2018, 25). However, the phrase is also referred to in Latin as 'mons pubis' and 'Mons Veneris', under which name it appears in the medical dictionary, meaning 'a pad of fatty tissue and thick skin that overlies the symphysis pubis in the woman. After puberty it is covered with pubic hair' (O'Toole 2017, 1160). Clearly this is another allusion of the director to intercourse, keeping in mind that previously, in the foreplay sequence, there was an exterior shot of Dragiša walking on the grass, which stood for Jugoslava's pubis. Jugoslava continues reading from Dragiša's palm and states that he is a quick man, which again has sexual connotation. While she is saying that, the camera tilts from the close-up of his palm with her index finger on it, over Jugoslava's nipple, onto her big close-up, in which her gaze is directed downwards and thus sexually suggestive. The impending sexual act will not be shown, but only implied due to an ellipsis.

The next scene begins with a shot of Jugoslava's hands cutting bread with a knife in a close-up detail. This implies looming symbolical castration of Dragiša. Thereafter, Jugoslava puts some spread on a bread slice and gives it to Dragiša. While they are eating, she comments how the first-time sex that they had, just moments ago, was fine, but then taunts Dragiša to fulfil his vow to have sex with her seven times in a row. Žilnik visually suggests Dragiša's sexual inferiority to Jugoslava, by positioning him lower than her in space, because he is seated on the floor, whereas she sits on a chair, higher, placed in the position of power. Intimidated with her words, Dragiša fails to even try to have more sex with her and instead resorts to playacting with a gun, as a crutch for injured, challenged masculinity. He aims at his target Jugoslava, whom is heard saying in a frightened voiceover: 'Why are you fooling around', whilst seven gunshots in total resound, without wounding her, as if Dragiša were firing blanks. Instead of off-screen Jugoslava are shown, for instance, extreme close-ups of Dragiša's face, as

well as close-ups of the gun. Every gunshot is symbolic, and each substitutes a sexual act, out of seven promised in a row. The gun is a phallic symbol which must subjugate a sexually active woman by murdering her (Kaplan 1990, 6). Žilnik does what Vincendeau described as a point made 'to punish a woman with power, portraying her as castrating' (2017, 33). Since Jugoslava exhibits open sexuality and dominant personality, this sequence foreshadows that sexually inadequate, patriarchal, hegemonic masculinities, for instance embodied in Dragiša, feel intimidated by her, which results in symbolical and physical violence. It is a premonition of how in the closure of the film Jugoslava will be killed with a gun by another member of the group, Marko, with Kruno's and Dragiša's help.

Sexual Emancipation

In Mazierska's view, the violence in *Early Works* 'can be seen as stemming from the frustration of the men that the goals of their journey were not being achieved, and that for their female partner this is a proof that they have failed as males' (2013, 139). Similarly, Daković (1996, 47) notes that in some Yugoslav films there are conservative fears about female sexuality, namely of younger women, who are the incarnations of carnal desire and slaves to it. Cinematically, such sexually active female characters are put under control: either by marriage, or by punishment for their purportedly unchaste conduct, often by killing (Daković 1996, 47), as happens in *Early Works*. Along the same line, Beard finds that Žilnik himself cannot be absolved of culpability for gendering the narrative, because the film, in which Jugoslava is silenced by death, 'both reinforce[s], as well as critique[s], the wider social fear of strong women, whilst also indulging in stereotypes of women as sexually dangerous' (2019, 110).

Furthermore, Dillman argues that 'what happens in the visual realm and what happens in the narrative chain are sometimes at odds' (2014, 103–104). In contrast to the images that objectify Jugoslava's body throughout the film, the narrative stresses her emancipated feminist

stances, such as her free outlook on sexuality, and the critique of the 'feudal' state of her family where her mother and herself are subjugated to her abusive drunkard father. Also, Jugoslava briefly does difficult physical labour at the factory, embodying the gender equality principle, even though at certain point she collapses due to the over strenuous work.

Another occasion when Jugoslava expresses feminist concerns, is when she gives a lecture to peasant women on birth control. She demonstrates a contraceptive coil and contraceptive spermicide foam. The women who attend Jugoslava's lecture are shot in documentary style, as in a *talking head* interview, sometimes even looking straight at the camera. They are authentic peasants, most likely instructed by Žilnik on what to ask Jugoslava during the emancipatory presentation, which the director does not hide, but on the contrary underlines by leaving audible male voiceover, possibly his, signalling peasant women when to start their questions regarding birth control. The rural women are concerned: whether the pill or coil is a better contraceptive; how many times a woman can have abortion and stay healthy; how old should a woman be when she gives birth; and whether health is affected if the couple controls reproduction with coitus interruptus. During the address to the peasant women, Jugoslava mentions Clara Zetkin, a German Marxist and leftist propagator of equal opportunities for women. Jugoslava further stresses that:

We won't achieve anything significant there as long as in the family a man behaves as a boss, as a proprietor, and as long as a woman is exploited like the proletariat. A woman could be liberated from subservience only by exchanging the structures of employment and by deconstructing the monogamous family, which could not had been fulfilled even by the overthrowing of bourgeois state. But third, the Technological revolution towards which we are going will bring it for sure. After all, biologically, women are the stronger sex, and they will rule in a decade or two.

Following that, an unidentified male voice yells in voiceover ‘Long live the 8th March, the International Women’s day’, supported by other unidentified male voices. It is ambiguous whether this is a mockery or a genuine expression of support, perhaps both. In general, Žilnik mocks not only Jugoslava but all the main characters by showing the discrepancy between practice and theory consisted of slogans. The 8th March is another reference to Clara Zetkin, who, together with Käthe Duncker and other female comrades, that is, the participants of the Second International Women’s Conference at Copenhagen, held in 1910, proposed that ‘the Socialist women of all countries will hold each year a Women’s Day, whose foremost purpose it must be to aid the attainment of women’s suffrage’ (Clara Zetkin, Kathe Duncker and Comrades in Zetkin 1984, 108).

The first time an international feminist conference, named ‘Comrade Woman’, took place in Yugoslavia was in Belgrade in 1978, which inspired eight Yugoslav feminists to form the first feminist group in Yugoslavia the same year (Drakulić 1993, 128). Nevertheless, years before in socialism also existed egalitarian initiative which is nowadays occasionally referred to as state feminism (Imre 2017, 89). Continuing the pre-Second World War efforts of Yugoslav women’s movements (of both feminist civic and communist workers’), the Antifascist Front of Women (AFW) – a communist women’s organisation where they could join on voluntary basis – shaped the lives of Yugoslav women during the war, as well in the wake of the war. It was incepted during the war by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (from 1952 renamed to League of Communists of Yugoslavia), formalizing its existence in 1942 at the First Conference of AFW of Yugoslavia, held in Bosanski Petrovac (Sklevicky 1984, 91). One of the goals of this women’s organisation was to mobilize Yugoslav women into supporting war efforts, as equals to men – for instance, in the front line as Partisan fighters and nurses, and in the rear as suppliers, caregivers, and clandestine resistance in occupied territories. Besides being a major backbone to the antifascist struggle, the key contributions of AFW were also the antipatriarchal efforts on

the political (e.g. active and passive voting rights) and cultural emancipation of women (e.g. literacy courses and female press) (Sklevicky 1996, 25–30). Also, their struggles were the preparations to integrate women, on equal basis to men, in the future society that they were creating, as well as to change traditional mindsets of men, which were euphemistically dubbed as ‘low political consciousness’⁸ (Sklevicky 1996, 30). Gradually, the autonomy of this mass women’s organisation was reduced by its maker, League of Communists of Yugoslavia (via organisations that acted as its transmission), culminating at the Fourth Congress of Antifascist Front of Women, held in 1953, when the decision was made about its (self)disbandment, and the founding of the Alliance of Women’s Associations of Yugoslavia instead (Božinović 1996, 170). A big number of female delegates experienced this ‘as the degradation of women’s organisations and women themselves. And many activists of the AFW organisations reacted in such a manner that they stopped working’⁹ (Božinović 1996, 170).

Even though no parallel can be accurately drawn between socialism and western systems in regard with the position of women, in the former there was an overall egalitarian initiative from which women generously profited, but it was not in the least specifically feminist in its motives (Ivekovic 1995, 12). This is because the concept of feminism was regarded negatively, due to being linked with the capitalist West and the bourgeoisie (Imre 2017, 89). However, the socialist state programmatically encouraged female emancipation (Slapšak 2007, 38), which can be induced from Jugoslava’s stances that sound quite feminist and sexually empowered.

Since Jugoslava exhibits active sexuality and personality, patriarchal, hegemonic masculinities feel threatened by her, which results in violence. This can be seen in a scene in which Jugoslava and Lepa, a girl whom the group of four comrades befriends, draw lots. On each paper there is a male name written: Kruno, Dragiša and Marko. Jugoslava draws Kruno’s name, implying she will have sex with him. Lepa gets the paper with Dragiša’s name. The lot with

Marko's name was not drawn by any of the two girls. So, he is dismissed by Jugoslava and told to return in the morning. Nevertheless, Kruno is not eager to have an intercourse with Jugoslava, as has already been shown in a previous scene, in which – although he is already naked because his clothing is wet – he does not respond to her advances under the pretext of not wanting to spoil their comradeship. Perhaps he is intimidated with her open sexuality, because she does not behave like a prey, but like a huntress. Similarly, when the lot with his name is drawn, Jugoslava takes the initiative, and he does not seem to be comfortable with it. Kruno tries to convince Dragiša, who already started foreplay with Lepa, to go to Jugoslava instead of him, but to no avail. Dragiša tells him to call Marko, who was previously dismissed by Jugoslava because the paper with his name was not drawn. The dominant woman becomes angry. As a retribution she tells Lepa to come, so they both sit on the pile of sacks. She insults the two men: 'Why are you sitting, you faggots!' Consequently, the men seek revenge because their patriarchal heteronormative identities are insulted with this nowadays completely politically incorrect and pejorative term for gay men. They drag Jugoslava out of the room, in a manner which is reminiscent of the rape scene, when she was dragged by the peasants prior to the rape. Nevertheless, the intention of Dragiša and Kruno is to punish her, by banishing her outside and excluding her from the sexual orgy. The last thing she manages to utter before being thrown out is: 'Lepa, don't do it with both of them, please!'

Unlike many Yugoslav *New Film* heroines, Jugoslava is not a passive victim, but even manifests sadism. The fact that she is not only shown as dominant, but also as sadistic, can be inferred from the sequences when Dragiša is willingly tortured by his comrades, for his cowardly escape from the enraged peasants, on the occasion when his comrades got beaten and Jugoslava gang-raped. In one of the torture sequences, Jugoslava sets Dragiša's feet on fire. Nonetheless, in contrast to Jugoslava's fleeting empowerment due to being an active agent in the narrative, the visuals objectify her by sexualising her nude body that is frequently

exposed and foregrounded, such as in a shower scene, in which sexual act between her and Marko is interrupted by Kruno and Dragiša.

Shower

In the shower scene, Jugoslava is seen washing in a large communal shower, having been covered with cement dust during a factory shift (**Figure 6**). She invites Marko, who has remained in the locker room, to come in, but under condition that he is not going to look. It is a small courtship game, because moments before, when she was undressing in his presence, she most likely has been aware that he took advantage of her nudity by gazing at her in secret, whilst pretending to have his back turned to her.

Consequently, he accepts her invitation and joins her in the large shower room. They are both seen showering, but separately. He drops the soap and loses it amongst the wooden floorboards. She approaches him and soaps his back with her soap. He takes her soap and soaps her breasts. One thing leads to another, and they start making out. Given that the film is saturated with politics, it is not surprising that even the lovemaking scene features revolutionary slogans. Jugoslava says to Marko: 'If Engels didn't say that sincere sexual love exists only between the proletarians, you would get nothing today'. This controversial shower scene, although shortened due to the censorship (*Reklamna obmana* 1969), perhaps seeks to display the beauty of the female form, but its cinematic style inevitably leads to the objectification of that which it seeks to celebrate. Kruno and Dragiša, who are clothed, interrupt the sexual act between the nude Jugoslava and Marko by entering the shower room. Dragiša, Jugoslava's former sexual partner, even spits. This action implies a sadistic pleasure in punishment by humiliation, which emerges from being in the position of power of the voyeuristic gaze (Mulvey 1989, 23). The two men are the active bearers of the look, whilst the couple are being looked at. Consequently, the lovers part, objectified and suddenly aware of their nudity, like Adam and Eve. Once Dragiša and Kruno have stopped the lovers by making them feel ashamed, they leave



Figure 6. 1–3. Sexually Objectified Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

with an air of contempt, as if their mission has been accomplished.

In an aforementioned scene, for a brief instant, Dragiša and Kruno are as voyeuristic as the old men depicted in the *Susanna and the Elders* recurrent motif in painting, whom are, according to Berger (1977, 50), the proxies of the spectators, because they all spy on a represented naked woman while she is bathing alone. Several different painters depicted this theme, as Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti), Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri), and Jan Brueghel the Younger. What most of such paintings have in common is, as Berger would have it, that female '[n]udity is placed on display' (1977, 54), just like in the analysed film Jugoslava's nudity is exhibited. The paintings in question are inspired by the biblical narrative from the *Book of Daniel*, in which Susanna is a chaste married woman, who is, after refusing the advances of two voyeuristic, lecherous, elderly men, falsely accused by them of having sex with a young man. In contrast, in *Early Works* shower scene, Jugoslava is an unmarried, sexually active young woman, who actually engages in a sexual activity with a young man. Moreover, in the story depicted by paintings the sight of the naked Susanna's body causes sexual urge of two voyeurs, while in *Early Works* hypocrisy arises amongst the scopophilic men instead of sexual arousal. Considering that '[to] be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself' (Berger 1977, 54), whatever pleasure and empowerment might have been present in the beginning of this scene, its effects of sexual liberation are annulled when Jugoslava starts being an object of scopophilic gaze, stops experiencing pleasure and starts experiencing shame. Ways of seeing and representing female body did not fundamentally change from Baroque painting times to Yugoslav *New Film*.

Death

Besides being caressed, throughout the film, Jugoslava's body is also dragged through the mud, raped, shot at, murdered and burned post-mortem (Gocić 2003, 21). The escalation of violence culminates towards the end of film. Jugoslava quits the group after the failed emancipation of the peasants in the countryside and of the workers. She returns to her 'feudal' family. After some time, her former comrades barge into the courtyard in front of her house. Their arrival is shown in overlapping in several shots, meaning that the part of the action at the end of each shot is repeated at the beginning of the next one. So, the walking distance the three men have already passed in the previous shot is partially repeated in the following one, which Žilnik perhaps did in order to amplify the dramatic and ominous nature of their unexpected appearance. They find Jugoslava chopping wood, with an axe (**Figure 7**). She is shown for the first time wearing a skirt, as opposed to the pants that she had always worn earlier in the film. Krijnen and Van Bauwel assert that when a woman wears the attire often associated with her gender, such as a dress or skirt, 'she also simultaneously articulates a certain type of femininity' (2015, 41). Žilnik contrasts Jugoslava's feminine aspects, such as her beauty and quite womanly clothing, with her tomboyish aspects, such as chopping wood, which was a common task for women in rural, patriarchal setting. Such juxtaposition is perhaps a hint: at the real-life fact that in the Yugoslav post-war society female Partisan veterans, and women in general, were relegated to the domesticity – even if they were employed, which often was the case – as well as at their feminization, because the emphasized femininity once again became the ideal of a woman's prettiness (Jovanović 2014, 11). However, in Jugoslava's case the process of apparent feminizing in her 'feudal' family, reflected in her outfit, has not affected her assertive, tomboy personality.



Figure 7. Tomboyish Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) in *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969).

The three men order Jugoslava to come with them. After she refuses, they taunt her that before she was not afraid. She defiantly responds that she is not afraid now either, throws away the axe and goes with them. They bring her to a secluded meadow. When she asks them what they wanted, Dragiša mockingly replies: ‘To see if you could do it with the three of us.’ She tells them she already said everything is finished and that she is not interested in them. Although she walks away, they grab her. After manhandling her for a while, the three men push her away, whereas she utters indomitably: ‘Let’s see who will do it first’. That has an emasculating effect on the men, so they freeze temporarily. When none of them makes a move, Jugoslava voices that they have always horsed around. Then, full of contempt, she spits in their direction insolently and utters the words: ‘You are never able to finish anything!’, further injuring the already inflamed egos of male characters by stressing their ineptitude. When male peers of a dominant woman feel emasculated, their frustrated sexual energy can become vented in a

dangerously retributive manner (Dillman 2014, 102). Consequently, the three men jointly punish Jugoslava. Marko shoots her with a gun on behalf all of the men, while Kruno and Dragiša fiddle around with a bottle bomb. When Kruno approaches to cover Jugoslava's murdered body with a cloth – which is the flag of The League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the proletarian flag, shown earlier in the film – a funeral march starts, and then Dragiša burns Jugoslava's body by throwing the bottle bomb at it.

Originally, the funeral march is a Russian song *Вы жертвою пали/You Fell Victim*, often linked with death and revolution (Titus 2016, 138). Its versions are featured in few films from the Soviet Union, such as *Юность Максима/The Youth of Maxim* (Grigori Koznitsev, Leonid Trauberg, 1935), and *Великий гражданин/The Great Citizen* (Fridrikh Ermler, 1938–1939) (Titus 2016, 138). However, in the Yugoslav film *Early Works*, the Serbo-Croatian language version of the song titled *Posmrtni marš proletera/Funeral March for the Proletarians* – often heard at commemorations and funerals of Second World War Partisan heroes, while its lyrics were inscribed on their tombstones and monuments to the national liberation struggle (Beard 2019, 105) – has a completely different connotation. It functions rather as a sharp criticism than as a collective epiphany and lament full of pathos over unjustly fallen revolutionaries, martyred for the greater good of the people. This can be inferred because, on the one hand, in the denouement of the film, there is an intertitle with a quote by Louis de Saint-Just, which reads: 'Those who make revolution halfway only dig their own graves', implying that the four young revolutionaries did not live up to their proclaimed goals. On the other hand, the intertitle is underscored with the following verses of the funeral march, 'Lie calmly in your tomb, under the banner of liberty we will carry on the battle!'. Such juxtaposition of image and sound implies the director's ironical stance towards Jugoslava's death, allegorically connoting the death of revolutionary spirit, while he simultaneously pays her respect by including the commemorative, ceremonial music in the sequence, as well as the

gesture of covering her body with the flag of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the proletarian flag. The film ends with a very long-shot of the three men, as they are walking away from the camera in the background, while the flames of Jugoslava's funeral pyre are visible in the foreground, and as the non-diegetic, mournful, female voices of the funeral march resound. Žilnik used Jugoslava's brutal demise in order to convey political allegory that the revolution was betrayed halfway through, by the students, peasants, and workers.

Conclusion

In Yugoslav socialist society, women were simultaneously encouraged by the state to emancipate, and hindered from progress by the remnants of patriarchy in interpersonal relations between men and women. It is not surprising that those contradictions are interwoven into the studied film. They manifest as the director's ambiguous stances towards his female character, whom he empowers, but ultimately deprives of both power and life. On the one hand, Žilnik clearly condemns the murder of Jugoslava by placing the compassion of the spectators on the side of the slain victim. On the other hand, even though the director does not condone misogyny, he still uses Jugoslava for his own means in order to convey a political critique, regardless of as whether she is interpreted as a punished emancipated woman, or as a metaphor of a violated Yugoslav nation and its revolutionary spirit. Dillman (2014, 20) contends that films which feature violent demises of female characters annul any feminist messages, produced by, for example, the existence of strong heroines within the plot. If Dillman's theory is applied to Jugoslava's case, this means that although Jugoslava is rhetorically empowered and gesturally monumentalised by Žilnik, in praxis she is ultimately disempowered by death and the effects of her feminist stances are nullified.

In addition, Žilnik visually sexually objectified Jugoslava by the usage of pans and tilts that flow all over her nude body, fetishistically fragmented by them for the visual pleasure of

the viewers addressed as male. The director argued, when interviewed, that by showing nudity, he actually confronted the false bourgeois morality (Žilnik in J.A. 1969), which was in line with the zeitgeist of sexual revolution in the 1960s. However, it is rather questionable that the real-life status of actress Vujanović – as the woman with the most beautiful body, due to being the Miss of Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Serbia – was used in promotional materials to advertise the film, such as in a booklet handed out before its premiere at Berlin International Film Festival (Dikić 1969). Moreover, both Vujanović's and Žilnik's interviews in the press before the release of *Early Works*, as if by rule included the promotional stills from the film shooting that showed Jugoslava's naked breasts, sometimes accompanied with excerpts from the screenplay imbued with sex (Munitić 1969). To borrow from Žilnik himself, although I take his statement out of context, 'despite all erotic freedoms, some taboos should not be broken, simply because the human body has some limits'¹⁰ (Žilnik in J.A. 1969). In Žilnik's defence for breaking all taboos after all, Vujanović was complicit with her sexual objectification, because in those interviews about the film, she herself emphasised her own nudity. Namely, she drew a parallel between it and the nudity in Francisco Goya's painting *La Maja Desnuda/The Nude Maja* (1797–1800) (Vujanović in Husić 1969). This relates back to Berger's (1977, 63) aforementioned observation on how women have internalised to perceive themselves as a sight. Žilnik's insistence on female beauty in the studied film, since pretty women as Jugoslava and Lepa¹¹ are brought to the fore, evokes Marx's observation in a letter to his chauvinist friend Dr Kugelmann, that '[s]ocial progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex (the ugly ones included)' (Marx [1936] 1941, 83). The director's concern for the social position of a Yugoslav woman is commendable, but perhaps it should have also included the more rounded portrayals of those less endowed with outer beauty or youth, such as the depicted peasant women.

Also, Jugoslava's represented gang rape is not addressed as a grave sexual violence, because the male peasants who raped her are not penalised at all for it, just as her three comrades do not face any consequences for her murder. Regardless of the director's actual allegorical, or critical intent to side with the brutalised woman, the fact that the film features unpunished represented female murder and rape is rather problematic or, to say the least, ambivalent, in light of severe physical and sexual violence towards women in real life worldwide, of which the latter is recently confronted in the #MeToo movement. Contrary to his debatable stance towards Jugoslava's rape and death, the director simultaneously portrayed his heroine as a strong-minded, independent, modern woman. The film testifies about an ambivalent state of gender power relations, which affects how the spectators view the condition of women in SFR Yugoslavia, the extent of the sexual liberation movement of the 60s, and the representation of the female body on screen. Even though it is uplifting to watch such an indomitable lead female character such as Žilnik's heroine (which is rare in Yugoslav *New Film*), it is difficult to observe her downfall and demise that strip her of agency. In conclusion, although Žilnik's Jugoslava is one of the most powerful heroines created in Yugoslav *New Film*, by meeting a grim end, she is ultimately disempowered by the director, who was, thus, discursively simultaneously complicit and critical of depicted patriarchal, violent oppression of women.

Notes

1. Men are mostly main characters.
2. Own translation.
3. Perhaps this is a creative contribution by Karpo Aćimović Godina, the director of photography(DOP) and editor of the film, because such staging is also prominent in Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić's Yugoslav *New Films: Uloga moje porodice u svjetskoj revoluciji/The Role of My Family in the World Revolution* (1971) and *Slike iz života udarnika/Scenes from the Life of a ShockWorker* (1972), in which he also worked as the DOP.
4. Own translation.
5. All quotations from the film are translated by the author.
6. Own translation.
7. Own translation.
8. Own translation.
9. Own translation.
10. Own translation.
11. Beautiful.

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