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# **Violated sex: rape, nation and representation of female characters in Yugoslav new film and black wave cinema**

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The focus of this article is the fictional representation of female rape as an allegory of a political ‘rape’ within former Yugoslav nations. In this context ‘rape’ stands for physical and ideological abuse of power on domestic soil. My approach builds on Mostov’s theory of links between sexuality, gender and nation in former Yugoslavia, where a female body figuratively embodies feminine national territory – farms, homes and battlefields (1999, 91).

A woman as a symbol of the nation is a reappearing motif in feminist film theory (Taylor-Jones 2013, 31). This motif has been observed in diverse cinemas: Middle Eastern cinema (Atakav 2017, 234), Chinese cinema (Cui 2003, 20), Indian cinema (Banerjee 2016, 71), Polish cinema (Mazierska 2006, 161) and French cinema (MacDonald 2010, 58), where a female rape scene serves as a powerful political and social critique.

## **Methodology**

This article draws on literature regarding rape in American cinema, rather than Eastern European or Russian cinema because I have no data on them. In addition, there is the scarcity of relevant literature discussing sexual violence towards women in Yugoslavian cinema, with rare exceptions such as in a segment of De Cuir’s (2011) book on Black Wave Cinema, in Slapšak (2007) and Bogojević (2011) research, and in

parts of Jovanović's (2014) PhD thesis. My intention is to contribute towards closing the literature gap on the portrayal of sexual assault in Yugoslav cinema.

An American screenwriter Andy Horton, after viewing several Yugoslav films, 'found love scenes to be rather rare, [but] rape scenes were commonplace' (Slapšak 2007). Between 1961 and 1972, 284 movies were directed by Yugoslav directors (Petronić, Milenković-Tatić, and Obradović 1996; Jovanović 2014; Kovačević 2014; Volk 1986). When viewing most of these films, I noticed that 41 of them (28 belonging to Yugoslav New Film), or approximately 15.30%<sup>1</sup>, feature the motif of explicit, implicit or attempted rape. In American cinema more than fifty films produced from 1903 to 1979 portrayed rape, as Projansky (2001, 28) estimated based on her own viewing. This is indicative of 0.21%<sup>2</sup>, out of the estimated 26,657 feature films that were made in the U.S. during that period (Sterling and Haight 1978, 30; Finler 2003, 367; IMDb), suggesting that rape is a common motif in roughly one decade of Yugoslavian cinema (1961–72).

In the next step, from this group of 41 films (all directed by males), the mainstream films were excluded. The films presented as case studies, therefore, were selected on the merit of belonging to the Yugoslav *novi film* (New Film) movement, more precisely to its subdivision - Yugoslav Black Wave. In addition, they all address a specific historical moment of instability due to the rift between the President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, and the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, triggered when the Cominform expelled Yugoslavia in 1948 and demanded the replacement of the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, to which Yugoslavia disobeyed (Kullaa 2011, 25).

All of the above-mentioned selection criteria have narrowed down the number of films and based on this, three were selected for this analysis: *Lisice/Handcuffs* (Krsto Papić, 1969), *Uloga moje porodice u svjetskoj revoluciji/The Role of my Family in the World Revolution* (Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić, 1971) and *Doručak sa đavolom/Breakfast with the Devil* (Miroslav 'Mika' Antić, 1971). *Mali vojnici/Playing Soldiers* (Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić, 1967) and *Rdeće klasje/Red Grain* (Živojin 'Žika' Pavlović, 1970) also fulfil the criteria, but due to space constraints, I have not included them in the analysis.

### **Yugoslav New Film and the Black Wave Movement**

The Yugoslav New Film (1961-1972) gathered Yugoslavian avant-garde film theorists, critics and directors (Goulding 2002, 66). It emerged as part of worldwide New Wave movements, such as the French Nouvelle Vague, the Brazilian Cinema Novo, and the Czechoslovak Nová Vlna. The most recognizable features were: the auteurist approach by the directors, the innovation in film form, the focus on marginalized characters and location shooting and sound recording. 1961, the year when annual feature film production doubled compared to previous decade, marks the beginning of films directed by the new generation of cineastes, with Aleksandar Petrović's *Dvoje/The Couple* (1961) and Boštjan Hladnik's *Ples v dežju/Dance in the Rain* (1961) being the harbingers of the new wave (Goulding 2002, 63-7). 1972 is considered to be the last year of Yugoslav New Film, which was dismantled due to the economic crisis in the film industry, combined with an unfavourable ideological atmosphere. Such sentiments started around 1969 with a counterattack on what was then labelled as Black Wave – dark, pessimistic films with politically provocative content (Goulding 2002, 78-83).

The state apparatus exploited the director Lazar Stojanović as a scapegoat due to an affair with his student movie *Plastični Isus/Plastic Jesus* (1971). The campaign resulted in his incarceration in 1972 and served as an excuse to suppress the politically dangerous film movement, culminating in a persecution towards Black Wave directors, some of whom subsequently fled the country (Sudar 2013, 230-5).

Black Wave Cinema, therefore, is a subdivision of the Yugoslav New Cinema (De Cuir 2012; Goulding 2002; Levi 2007; Sudar 2013). There was no manifesto, nor unifying style, instead it varied from director to director. Even though most of the Black Wave films were produced in Serbia, Black Wave was a pan-Yugoslav phenomenon because they were also made in other republics, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia (De Cuir 2011, 253; Šijan 2011, 9-10). Notable Yugoslav New Cinema and Black Wave directors include Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, Želimir Žilnik, Živojin Pavlović, Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić, Miroslav 'Mika' Antić and Krsto Papić.

### **Rape in cinema**

During same period (the 1960s through to the beginning of the 1970s) in American cinema, there is an unprecedented amount of movies featuring rape, a means with which patriarchy, threatened by the woman's liberation movement, suppressed active female sexuality through (Hollywood) cinematic representations (Kaplan 1990, 7). Two diametrically opposed rape narratives were carved out: the ones portraying independent women facing rape because of their emancipation or sexuality, and the ones representing vulnerable women, raped because of their innocence or powerlessness (Projansky 2001, 31), the latter being of interest to this article.

In Yugoslavia, the stereotypical role of women as housewives started changing during the revolutionary struggle in the Second World War (Jancar-Webster 1999, 68). Female efforts took place on the frontline and in the rear, as Partisan soldiers, recruiters, suppliers or nurses, significantly contributing to the victory over the German enemy. Gender equality was on the political agenda for communists that organised the Partisan liberation struggle, hence the widespread participation of women in the war (Jancar-Webster 1999, 69). As a consequence of that ideology, and justified with the sacrifices that female Partisans made, women were granted equal status by the law in liberated Yugoslavia, which was ratified in 1946 by the first post-Second World War constitution (Ramet 1999, 94). Women gained vast freedom in the realm of reproductive rights, economic, social and political empowerment; and their position was in many aspects better than in the Western countries (in terms of the policies defining social and legal equality) (Kralj and Rener 2015, 42-3).

De Cuir argues that women gradually progressed in terms of education and presence in the workforce, which resulted in the increased sense of empowerment and sexual freedom, and consequentially perturbed their past fixed roles of Partisan fighters or patriarchal housewives. Hence, the representation of rape, the most frequent method of attack towards women in the Black Wave Cinema, signifies, in De Cuir's view, the inhibition of female sexuality, caused by the intimidation and even fear towards the power of women (2011, 109). Kralj and Rener (2015, 42) observed that socialism had a delineation between public and private, which resulted in the concerns of domestic violence not being properly addressed.

The approach of this article is that many films are not mere reflections of social realities of women, but also act as allegories. A significant number of films featuring

rape scenes belonged to the mainstream cinema and addressed the issues of occupation of the national territory by the foreign invaders throughout history, such as the Ottomans in *Makedonska krvava svadba/Bloodshed at the Wedding* (Trajče Popov, 1967) and *Republikata vo plamen/Republic in Flames* (Ljubiša Georgijevski, 1969); the Bulgarians in *Istrel/A Shot* (Branko Gapo, 1972); and the Germans and their allies in *Kozara/Kozara* (Veljko Bulajić, 1962), *Dve noći u jednom danu/Two Nights in One Day* (Radenko Ostojić, 1963), *Bomba u 10 i 10/Bomb at 10:10* (Časlav Damjanović, 1967) and *Cenata na gradot/The Price of a Town* (Ljubiša Georgijevski, 1970).

In all of these films female characters are sexually assaulted by foreign invaders and face death in narrative, as if it serves as a cautionary tale that loss of virtue is a fate worse than demise. Even though women are susceptible to becoming ravaged, dishonoured and inseminated by the ethnic/national ‘other’, in former Yugoslavia they are expected to remain chaste as symbols of the nation, designators of its space and fertile reproducers (Mostov 1999, 90-91). Therefore, in the above-mentioned films, sexual violation of a woman is metaphorically linked to the violation of the country’s physical space. Besides what is seen in the mainstream cinema, this metaphor can also be found in Yugoslav New Film, such as in *Roj/The Beehive* (Miodrag ‘Mića’ Popović, 1966), where a raped woman – a mother – stands for a national territory ‘raped’ by Ottoman conquerors. Similarly, throughout the literary history of the nations that became constituent Yugoslavian republics, a recurring theme was a woman as ‘an idealized symbol of an oppressed and rebellious homeland’ (Crnković 1999, 245). I therefore presume it is possible to trace the roots of the representation of a woman as a metaphor of a nation, originating in the literature and later incorporated into Yugoslav New Film.

Contrary to mainstream cinema, where the rapist was an external enemy, the directors of Yugoslav New Film mostly addressed the internal issues of a Yugoslav nation, but likewise conveyed political messages with rape metaphors. The purpose was to amplify the abuse of power by the element of a society that rapes, both physically and ideologically. The sexual imagery of violation was paralleled with the ‘gendering of boundaries and spaces (landscapes, farmlands and battlefields) in the former Yugoslavia’ (Mostov 1999, 90). In the films selected as case studies, the sexual abuse of women’s bodies correlates to the seizure of the farmland, livestock and property done by force, but also by persuasion; or general misuse of power by the pro-Stalinists in Yugoslavia. In *Handcuffs*, Višnja’s murdered body becomes one with the barren mountain karst, which it personifies. A mother’s rape corresponds to lawful confiscation of parts of the house in *The Role of My Family in the World Revolution*; while a peasant woman, who is coerced into sex in *Breakfast with the Devil*, mirrors the blackmail of peasants to give up their land and join soviet-modelled collective farms.

Grounded in Mostov’s theory regarding ‘metaphoric figurations of the nation as mother (homeland/Motherland) and as female body’ (1999, 91), I argue that the prevalent fictional representations of rape in Yugoslav New Film could imply a link between raping of women and nations in some films.

### **Humiliation and shame**

As an intertitle in the first part of *Handcuffs* states, the movie is about: ‘A wedding in the Dinara mountain region in tumultuous 1948 when Stalin accused Yugoslavia for not getting along with his politics.’<sup>3</sup> In Yugoslavia, especially the rural parts, there is a traditional wedding custom that requires a bride to throw an apple over



the roof of her new home for good luck. The director Papić utilized the recurring motif of the apple, organized into a triad. When the *Handcuffs* marriage procession stops in front of the groom's house, Višnja thrusts an apple over the household and succeeds. Ante, the groom, follows her example and thrives as well. People congratulate them because it symbolizes a good omen for the prosperity and happiness of their marriage.

Figure 1. Višnja (Jagoda Kaloper) throwing an apple over the house in *Handcuffs* (Krstó Papić, 1969).

Later in the movie, a group of three girls belonging to the wedding party, together with the bride, enter the bedroom of the newlyweds' house. There are two apples placed on the head frame of a large wooden bed. Višnja sits on the bed while two girls lie on the bed and giggle. One of them takes an apple off of the bed frame and tells the bride: 'Before the two of you kiss, you bite in first, then he [bites]' Afterwards the two girls enact the fondling events they anticipate will take place during the first wedding night and bare one of the girls' nipple in the course of the staged lovemaking, whilst the remaining girl and Višnja watch, laugh and blush. This carefree caressing performance underlines the innocence of the virginal bride, portrays her imminent defloration as something pleasurable and is concluded with the statement of one of the play-acting girls: 'You are lucky, Višnja'. The happy overtones of the yearned coupling reverberate in the spectator's memory when a brutal scene of rape occurs, because it takes place in the same setting and features the third appearance of the apple leitmotif. The rape of Višnja perpetuates the stereotype 'of rape victims as young, sexually attractive women' (Projansky 2001, 54).

When Andrija, a prominent village member, decorated Second World War partisan hero and the groom's godfather, obtains a head injury in a bloodthirsty frenzy

to shoot a small crow with a rifle, he is taken to the bedroom in the groom's house. One of the elderly men suggests that Višnja tends to Andrija's wound, a customary belief that whomever is nursed by a bride must recuperate. The two of them are left alone in the bedroom. When Andrija regains consciousness, he takes advantage of the situation, locks the door, overpowers Višnja and rapes her twice, once on the floor and a second time on the bed.

Papić depicts this scene in a realistic manner, accentuated by the black and white photography of the movie. The shots are mostly framed from a third person omniscient perspective. Nevertheless, there are also shots from Andrija's point of view that fetishize Višnja due to, as Kuhn notes, fragmenting of body's unity into sexualized body parts in close-ups, which expropriates the personhood (1992, 37), underscoring Andrija's carnal lust. For example, camera pans from a close-up of Višnja's face onto a detail of Višnja's breasts covered with traditional white shirt, which is low-cut so it slightly exposes cleavage; followed by a big close up of Andrija, suggesting that the previous shot was depicted as subjectively seen by him; which is then cut back to the same shot of the shirt with cleavage, in which Andrija's hand grabs Višnja's clothed breast. Later, Višnja too is given a subjective point of view in a shot of Andrija as a big close up. He becomes more and more threatening as he approaches her, while his intimidating face blurs, a moment before he shuts her mouth with his hand to silence her scream.

When Andrija subdues her on the floor, there is an objective shot of Višnja's barren breast and nipple that mirrors the shot from the abovementioned, cheerful scene of the girls' coupling enactment. Similar framing underscores the juxtaposition of those two scenes, opening the gap between the virginal expectations of young girls and the

aftermath, in which joyful laughs during the sex performance are replaced with Višnja's cries of defilement.

At the very end of the first rape, Andrija's body completely pins down Višnja's on the floor, until there is only his to be seen, as if her flesh disintegrates and disappears as it is entirely consumed beneath him. The rape scene is intercut in parallel editing with an exterior scene of men dancing the traditional folk dance *kolo*, named after the circle that the dancers form by holding each other's hands whilst performing rhythmical steps. The sound of the dancers' footsteps continues as a sound bridge into the medium long shot of Višnja, prostrated on the floor, on her back, with arms outstretched as if crucified in the aftermath of the rape. Andrija lies on the bed and eats one of the apples that were placed on the bed frame. He devours the apple in a grotesque manner, as if it is a symbol of Višnja's youth and innocence which he has forcefully taken away from her.

From Višnja's perspective of a rural girl from the patriarchal Dalmatian karst, she is the one responsible, the one who bears the blame for the loss of her virginity. This can be deduced from the line she utters aloud: 'God, you see everything. May the punishment strike me for the shame I brought on my husband and my home'. Višnja's reaction is a consequence of chauvinist discourses widespread in patriarchal societies that 'hold women responsible for their sexual attack through their behaviour, manner of dress, and/or suggested promiscuity' (Carter 2003, 63) and to me it seems like the film tries to denounce such patriarchal behaviour.

Andrija, completely unaffected by both Višnja's predicament and her speech, rapes her the second time. This time the rape is implied and not explicitly shown. Projansky (2001, 1) made the connection between the humiliation of a woman by rape,

and humiliation of a nation, which in the case of *Handcuffs* was done within the borders of Yugoslavia by pro-Stalinists who took whatever they wanted, by persuasion or force. This parallels how Andrija wanted to kill a small crow by any means, and craved to sexually possess Višnja, regardless of her humiliation and shame. Hence, the movie has strong political overtones, because Andrija is a Stalin sympathizer. The plot is placed in 1948, the year of the irreversible rift between Tito and Stalin, which resulted in purges of pro-Stalinists. From then on, Stalinism was officially regarded as a rigid, negative version of communism and instead the more liberal socialism was nurtured in Yugoslavia. The film is a complex depiction of the inner political conflict because it criticises both Informbiro followers who experienced the fall from grace and the Tito followers who persecuted them, embodied in the figure of Ćazim, an executioner that collects pens of his pro-Stalinist victims as trophies.

Patriarchal punishment by death for the loss of the virtue befalls Višnja and is regarded as unfair by the viewer. The film could therefore be read as narratively taking a stance against patriarchy, whilst at the same time, visually reinforcing patriarchy by objectifying Višnja during the rape. When the rape becomes known to the peasants at the end of the movie, Višnja is taken by force from Ante by a pack of self-righteous males belonging to the wedding party, with intent to return her to her family as damaged goods. In the midst of the bare mountain karst, they come up with the idea to strip the 'whore', as they called her, naked, so she would be publicly shamed, but Višnja manages to break free. Nevertheless, the patriarchal punishment takes its toll because one of the peasants shoots her in pursuit with Andrija's rifle. According to Kaplan (1990, 6), in *film noir* the gun symbolises the phallus, which dominates woman by murdering her, as it can be applied also in Višnja's case. In the end of the movie Andrija as well is punished by death, although not for the rape of Višnja, but as a part of the

purge of the Stalinist clique held accountable for the ideological violation of the country, whereas the rape of Višnja stands for a political abuse of power within a Yugoslav nation.

### **Explicit and implicit rape**

Similarly to *Handcuffs*, in *Breakfast with the Devil*, directed by Antić, the rape of a peasant woman symbolises the mistreatment of peasants, according to the rule that ‘the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms (feminized soil, landscapes and boundaries, and masculine movement over these spaces)’ (Mostov 1999, 89). Antić exposes the flaws of Soviet-influenced agrarian reforms that were implemented immediately after the Second World War. The peasants must either join the farming collective union (by giving up the ownership of their *feminized soil*) or give away a compulsory amount of crops, animals and their own bodies for the sake of the state.

In 1947 pro-Stalinist Yugoslavia, a state official named Karan, who came from the city, takes advantage of his position and forces himself on the peasant woman. She is a minor, episodic character, of no importance except as a director’s cautionary tale about how any power could become abusive - in this case the pro-Stalinist apparatchiks, who bullied the Yugoslav peasants. When Karan orders the peasant woman to go upstairs to the attic and get undressed, she replies she doesn’t owe that to the state. As she is pressured to climb the ladder, she says that it is an act of free will as everything else they (the party and people’s rule) achieve by force. He justifies his action by asserting that peasants are whores.

Figure 2. Rape scene in *Breakfast With the Devil* (Miroslav ‘Mika’ Antić, 1971).

The rape scene itself is explicitly shown. As in *Handcuffs*, there is a stereotypical shot of a woman's naked breast being groped by a man's hand. Her representation conforms to Mulvey's (2000, 46-7) claim, that in mainstream films, a female character is a sexually objectified, rather passive spectacle, that connotes 'to-be-looked-at-ness', while subjected to an active male gaze on three levels: of a camera, of a male character and of a spectator identifying with a male character. Hence, when in one of the following shots Karan's face immerses into the breast in a close-up, the woman's image is reduced to a cut-out - butchered and objectified. The shots of the sexual assault are intercut with the shots of pigeons fluttering about with their wings in the attic, at the scene of the rape. The pigeons symbolize the trepidation of the woman and underline the gravity of the act to which she has been cornered.

On a broader scale, the scene is intercut in parallel editing with the outdoor scene where a representative of people's rule vomits, while a colleague is holding his forehead. The drunken man is rambling about how the revolutionary thought will crush all the maggots. This juxtaposed to the rape scene leaves a bitter feeling regarding the revolution, the sacredness it meant for the people who fought for it in the Second World War, and the sacrilege it became in the aftermath because of people who abused their position of power, such as Karan the rapist.

The rape could therefore be read as an allegory of exploitation of the peasants by pro-Stalinists within the Yugoslav nation. The director draws a parallel between the woman as a member of peasant stratum, who eventually succumbs to being raped by the representative of the state, and the peasants in general, who at first vehemently resist to the forceful collection of goods, yet have no other choice than to submit themselves to the coercion, '[b]ut submission is not equivalent to consent' (Peterson 2009).

If Andrić's opus is taken into consideration, in *Sveti pesak/Holy Sand* (1968) the director also uses sexual metaphor, but this time in regards to the male character. The purpose is to criticize the mistreatment of pro-Stalinists during the so-called Informbiro period (from Tito-Stalin chasm in 1948 onwards), when they were punished for their political views by being purged, sent to work camps or prison. Some of them were wrongly incarcerated, such as the main character of the movie, whose sexual impotence signifies the inability to restore his dignity and life once he is given back freedom. In spite of his bravery, shown in combat as a Partisan fighter, he will never be re-inscribed to history from where his war comrades have deleted him, which he becomes aware of when his name is not mentioned during the commemoration day two decades later, as if he had never existed.

Similarly, Papić also criticized the rigidness of the Informbiro period in his opus by linking sexual and political repression, such as in *Život sa stricem/My Uncle's Legacy* (1988), where the young hero is literally castrated with a ricochet bullet after being intellectually castigated. The incident occurs as Martin is being expelled from school and publicly shamed, after denouncement by his uncle to whom he sent a letter, in which he had criticized the unfairness of the new reforms towards the peasant stratum, and therefore questioned the infallibility of the Communist party.

However, allegorical representations such as in *Breakfast with the Devil*, are deeply problematic since they neglect the rape victims' perspective. It appears that the peasant woman even starts enjoying the act because of a shot in which her fingers are interspersed with the rapist's. If examined for a degree of verisimilitude, this is quite an unconvincing depiction of the rape, especially having in mind that such sexual aggression is a traumatic experience. It absolves sexual violence towards females, implying that subliminally 'they want it' (Vincendeau 2017, 33). Also, the feminists

scholars are alarmed that viewing on-screen rape potentially influences a normalization of male sexual violence (Barker 2010, 146). The film raises the question if there is a necessity to show explicit rape scenes, especially those that do not offer a female point of view, due to the concerns as to whether they are exploitative and the possibility that some male viewers might take sexual pleasure from them (Kuhn 1982, 227).

Surely director Antić failed to criticise rape as sexual instead of political violence and could have taken a different stance: chose a narrative that does not represent the peasant woman as if she takes pleasure from being raped, framing that does not sexually objectify her and depict sexual assault from her angle if it had to be shown. Does all above-mentioned imply that Antić's representation of the raped peasant woman was misogynistic? Yes, because women do not enjoy being raped. Is Antić a misogynist director? No, since in the same film he also represented a former Partisan woman Olga as a more fleshed out character in a non-misogynist manner. Was he an exploitative director? Yes, because the peasant woman is raped and Olga is later accidentally killed. Films are usually not binary objects, but multifaceted – they can be misogynistic somewhere, but feminist elsewhere.

*Handcuffs* is another example where sexual assault is represented in minute detail by the usage of fleshly close-ups, which according to Mulvey, fragment a female body's unity, embroider eroticism into film narrative by transforming a woman into a cut-out, flatten the image by depriving it of depth of field, and hence leave a fetishistic rather than veritistic impression (2000, 40). Contrary to these overt representations with fetishized close-up shots of breasts and thighs, in *The Role of my Family in the World Revolution* the rape is clearly implied, however not explicitly demonstrated. Only the struggle is shown, in wider, long shots. When the implicit penetration begins, the scene ends, which underlines that the director has deliberately chosen not to show rape bluntly.



The necessity of portrayal of rape is questionable even in cases where a film aims to criticise the misogyny because rape narratives ‘perpetuate rape discursively’ (Projansky 2001, 19). Therefore, even though there are nuances, in all the analysed films women were debased; the escalation of degrading portrayals is with Antić’s representation of rape which I find most misogynistic because he condones the sexual violence towards the peasant woman, since it is depicted as if she likes it. Less problematic is Papić, who condemns patriarchy in the narrative and even gives few point-of-view shots from Višnja’s perspective during the first rape. This was done whilst simultaneously objectifying Višnja by providing an abundance of fetishized, close-up shots of breasts and thighs, from objective instead of subjective perspective, as if the director himself is a perverted sadistic voyeur instead of the charismatic pro-Stalinist rapist. Contrary to him, Čengić does not objectify female body by fragmenting it, but completely fails to address the experiences of two women after sexual assaults. He neglects their stories once they served his allegorical purpose and therefore narratively misuses their portrayal to his own means. Thus, regardless of differences in visual style and the varying degrees of objectification of women, all the directors exploited images of women by subjecting them to the violence in the narrative in order to metaphorically convey a wider political critique, and hence increased the presence of rape in the discourse.

### **Sexual Abuse in the Family**

Čengić’s *The Role of my Family in the World’s Revolution*, shot in colour and highly stylized in terms of departure from veritism, is another movie with strong political implication and prevalence of the motif of rape. A former Partisan woman aggressively

coerces an adolescent boy, who belonged to the pre-war bourgeoisie strata, into sex. This could be seen, metaphorically, as his final step of initiation into a new classless society, after previously obtaining a tattoo of Stalin and becoming a member of the Communist party.

One part of the boy's bourgeois family house was appropriated by the state due to the disproportionate size of the space compared to the low number of tenants, so few people were appointed by the state as new lodgers, among whom was comrade Strogj<sup>4</sup>. He uses every opportunity to take advantage of this cohabitation by forcing himself onto household women: the boy's sister Leposava, but he fails because she faints, and the boy's mother, whom he rapes in the bathtub. In this scene of sexual assault, director Čengić relies more on camera and actor movements than on editing, resulting in a lower number of shots with longer duration. The rape is implied and juxtaposed to creatively used sound.

The sound in this scene is a non-diegetic 'happy birthday' instrumental tune, as if it came from the invisible music box. It reverberates the mood of the previous scene that featured a variation of the same 'happy birthday' tune, where the old and the new household members are eating together from a birthday cake shaped like Stalin's head. They are eating Stalin's brain made of whip-cream, which could have multiple interpretations, such as a metaphor for being fed with Stalin's ideas in Strogj's case, or anthropophagic desecration of Stalin's authority in Miodrag Vaculić's case.

Figure 3. Leposava (Milena Dravić) carrying the Stalin-cake in *The Role of my Family in the World Revolution* (Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić, 1971).

The two men represent the oppositional strands of communism: the dogmatic one embodied in Stalin and the liberal one. The rape scene that follows could possibly

have strong political implications. If a raped woman's body is perceived as a metaphor of a violated nation/home, then the sexual assault on a member of the remains of pre-Second World War Kingdom of Yugoslavia's *vieux riche* - the mother, by a state official of the post-Second World War Yugoslavia - the new compulsory house tenant Strogic, could be interpreted as an allegory of how the new ruling pro-Stalinist communist stratum was both literally and figuratively 'raping' the old remnants of capitalist bourgeoisie stratum, designated to disappear in the new communist society, where everybody was supposed to be equal.

Later in the movie, in the scene where Strogic sentences Vaculic to be demobilised and expelled from the Communist party, Vaculic, positioned on the left of the frame below Lenin's portrait, stands for the moderate, literally leftist strain, while Strogic, placed on the right and exactly below Stalin's portrait, signifies a rigid strain of political thought.

This chasm is also visible in one of the preceding scenes when the Russian soldiers in military tank, completely covered with flowers, mistakenly stop in Belgrade, thinking it is Prague in Czechoslovakia. One soldier exclaims while he exits the tank: 'Forward for Stalin!'. He initially tries to grope Leposava, but her mother and Vaculic protect her. Then another Russian goes to the enormous huge white banner, which reads in red letters 'Long live Comrade Tito' on the left and 'Long Live Comrade Stalin' on the right-hand side. When the Russian crosses out 'Long Live Comrade Tito' with a brush, Vaculic angrily pours a bucket with red paint over 'Long Live Comrade Stalin'. Strogic appears, suddenly, from behind the banner and says 'They have been building communism for forty years, so they surely know better than you what it is'.

The increasing discontent with the pro-Stalinist strain of communism is depicted through another allegory of sexual abuse. Two Russian soldiers on the tank adorned in flowers are about to leave, the bourgeois family bids them goodbye, but a woman lingers with them. At first, she appears to consent to the advances of one of the soldiers, however the manner in which the second soldier shoves her down into the tank and closes the lid, implies it is turning into rape. This is cut onto a close-up shot of a phallic tank gun that moves upwards, followed with a shot of rocking tank, both suggesting people inside of the tank are having intercourse. Eventually the thick layer of flowers falls off the rocking tank, possibly implying that whatever is embellished eventually will be unveiled. The tank gun, in close-up, moves downwards. The completely naked woman runs out of the tank, suggesting that what started as consent spiralled out of control and turned into abuse. This is all underscored with a song: 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star, we'll be ruled by USSR. Hail Stalin, magic might, all you do is double right! Hail Stalin, fragrant flower, proletarians you embower'. Then Strogic appears again, unexpectedly, by popping out of the tank, gives a political speech about greatness of Russia and Stalin, and concludes by saying: 'There is just one way to socialism and all those who go astray will be relentlessly swept by iron broom'.

This sexual abuse illustrates the relation of Soviets with Yugoslavs, at first embedded in likeness, then denigrating - sexual violation of the woman being an allegory for political violation of Yugoslavia by USSR. In addition, due to being followed by Strogic's political speech given from that very tank, it simultaneously becomes an allegory of ideological violation by the domestic dogmatic subdivision, consisting of Stalin's sympathisers. Director Čengić criticizes pro-Stalinists, who took advantage of their position (until they experienced a loss of power in 1948).

The attention was paid when reading the representations of sexual assaults as to whether the films seek to empower the female protagonists, for example by showing how they successfully overcame the rape, or rather disempower them by augmenting the feeling of vulnerability without offering the alternative reading from feminist point of view (Projansky 2001, 61). In *Breakfast with the Devil* and *The Role of My Family in the World Revolution*, the issue of how a female character feels after the rape is not addressed at all. It is a disconcerting because the directors turned female characters into objects in order to convey a political message. In *Handcuffs*, in the imminent aftermath of the rape, the broken posture of the victimized female body speaks disempowerment.

Also, in *Breakfast with the Devil* there is a lack of closure of raped female character because she literally disappears after the rape. The closure occurs in *Handcuffs* where Višnja is lynched by a mob of self-righteous men as if it is her fault she was raped and *The Role of My Family in the World Revolution* where the mother seldom appears, but goes on with her life as if nothing happened. None of the case study films offer empowerment for women because they either have narratives that end with the death of a female character or lack the punishment of the rapist for the act of rape. If the rapists are punished, such as Andrija and Strogij by death (Karan is only sent back to a city), it is never by the victim nor for the rape itself, but for their general political misbehaviours. Therefore, female characters function as cyphers in service of the Yugoslav New Film male directors.

## **Conclusion**

This article explored why rape is a recurrent motif in the Yugoslav New Film Movement. I argued that represented rapes could be interpreted as allegories of

oppression and humiliation of the country during a period of Yugoslav history when pro-Stalinists were in power.

I showed that both mainstream and Yugoslav New Film displayed penchant for sexual abuse of women and exploited their representations in order to convey a political message to the viewer. The result therefore confirms that the division between two groups of films should not be approached in oversimplified binary terms. However, Yugoslav New Films address internal political problems within the nation, embodied through sexual abuse of female characters, as opposed to mainstream films, which mainly focused on troubles with external enemies (whom penetrated the borders/female bodies of the Yugoslav nation) and featured closure with the death of a raped woman (either by murder or suicide).

The analysed representations of rape varied from director to director, some of them depicting rape in a more salacious manner than others. While Andrić's representation is the most problematic because he debased the female character both visually and in the narrative, from where he disposed her off once she was raped; Papić has tried to narratively criticise patriarchy by showing the injustice of the heroine's punishment. He has even given her some point-of-view shots during the rape scene yet he simultaneously sexually objectified and fetishized her from the third person perspective, by breaking the unity of her body and giving preference to cut-outs of thighs and breasts. Čengić chose to imply sexual assaults instead of showing them and did not fragment female body but depicted it naked in its entirety, which resulted that it was less objectified than in Andrić's or Papić's case. All of those representations fail to address rape as grave sexual violence.

Would it be wrong to perceive at first glimpse that analysed Yugoslav New Films express misogyny and perpetuate discursive presence of representations of rape? Probably not. Even though the directors clearly locate the rapists on the side of evil, and although rape is condemned as one of the wrongdoings and abuses of position of power, it is still problematic because in order to paint the pro-Stalinists black, the directors objectified and violated female characters. They did not undermine patriarchy, nor reproached sexual violence specifically. Nevertheless, if read against the grain, those movies have in common that they utilize a representation of a raped woman to illuminate an allegory of an ideologically violated nation and therefore criticize certain political phenomena. The characters of *Višnja*, the peasant woman and the mother, transcend their individual existences through the filmic expression and embody the political violation within their homeland through the violation of their bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> This rough estimation excludes 16 Yugoslavian films produced between 1961-1972 that I was unfortunately not able to find.

<sup>2</sup> I put Projansky's 'more than fifty' as 55 films when I roughly calculated the percentage.

<sup>3</sup> All translations from Serbo-Croatian are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Stern.



Figure 1. Višnja (Jagoda Kaloper) throwing an apple over the house in *Handcuffs* (Krstó Papić, 1969).



Figure 2. Rape scene in *Breakfast With the Devil* (Miroslav 'Mika' Antić, 1971).



Figure 3. Leposava (Milena Dravić) carrying the Stalin-cake in *The Role of my Family in the World Revolution* (Bahrudin 'Bato' Čengić, 1971).