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*D. NIKOLIĆ, Three Votive Plaques from Upper Moesia • I. KOMATINA, A Hypothesis about the Origin of Závaš's Cross • J. HENDERSON & V. ŽIVKOVIĆ, Experiencing Disease and Medical Treatment in Renaissance Italy • F. GUIDA, The Second Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) • A. D'ALESSANDRI, The Opening of the Italian Legation in Belgrade in 1879 • J. I. TOMAŠEVIĆ, Movies about the First World War • M. RISTOVIĆ, The March on Rome and its Consequences • B. MILOSAVLJEVIĆ, Italy in the Writings of Slobodan Jovanović • J. RAFILOVIĆ, Yugoslav-Italian Foreign Trade Relations 1919–1939 • M. T. MRAOVIĆ, Creation of an Alternate Reality • A. EREŠ, The Venice Biennale and Art in Belgrade in the 1950s • E. COSTANTINI, Relations between the PCI and the League of Communists from the Second Post-War Period to the Mid-1960 • M. DOGO, Belgrade 1969–1972 • B. ŽIVKOVIĆ, The Two Last Encounters between Broz and Berlinguer • P. DRAGIŠIĆ, The Yugoslav Perspective on Italian Eurocommunism in the Second Half of the 1970s* 

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## Movies about the First World War: Shaping the Collective Memory. Cases of Serbian/Yugoslav and Greek Cinematography

**Abstract:** The First World War brought radical changes to the political map of Europe and took more than 15 million lives on both warring sides. This conflict of unprecedented proportions has left deep traces on the lives of people who found themselves in a whirlwind of war. Therefore, it is no wonder that the theme of war was present in various types of human creativity – through literature (especially autobiographical genres), art, but also popular culture, where movies rightly took centre stage. Even during the period 1914–1918, the film became the main weapon of propaganda. Through this instrument, the message was able to reach quickly a large number of people, regardless of their social status and level of education. After 1918, the film served as a popular medium through which the memory of war events was preserved. The first movies exuded the anti-war spirit at the moment when post-war Europe was facing long-term economic consequences that had surfaced. Pacifist messages could be seen in different film productions, which to a large extent looked up to Hollywood, the most significant film industry in the world. The same was in the case of smaller allied countries such as Greece and Serbia, which both paved a different path of development due to the complexity of historical processes conducted in these Balkan countries. This paper aims to point out these different developments and shed light on lesser-known facts about Yugoslav and Greek WWI cinematography.

**Keywords:** First World War, collective memory, war movies, Serbian cinematography, Yugoslav cinematography, Greek cinematography

### I

The gunshot by a young Serb from Bosnia, Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, was a spark that lit the war flame in Europe leading it to the largest and the bloodiest war in history until then. The four-year war brought radical changes on the political map of Europe and took more than 15 million lives on both warring sides.<sup>1</sup> This conflict of unprecedented proportions has left deep traces on the lives of people who found themselves in a whirlwind named the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Everett, *The Two World Wars. World War I*, Vol. 1 (Connecticut: Bison books, 1980), 248.

Great War. Therefore, it is no wonder that the theme of war was present in various types of human creativity – through literature (especially autobiographical genres), art, but also popular culture, where movies rightly took centre stage. Even during the war, the film became the main weapon of propaganda. Through this instrument, the message was able to reach quickly a large number of people, regardless of their social status and level of education.<sup>2</sup> Lenin soon realized its advantages during the Russian Revolution, while the American Committee on Public Information was also using movies to “enlighten” its compatriots.<sup>3</sup>

After the war, the film gained a different role, actively participating in shaping memories and interpreting events from the period 1914–1918.<sup>4</sup> As a medium in which creation veterans<sup>5</sup> themselves were often taking part, bringing in some of their memories and emotions, the film became, in addition to its artistic significance, also a valuable historical source for the study of the past. This period exuded an anti-war spirit, at a time when countries on both warring sides had to face the harsh consequences of a four-year conflict. Difficult economic situation accompanied by existential insecurity, rising unemployment and job

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<sup>2</sup> At first, the film – as well as popular culture in general – encountered resistance among the elite, which was inclined toward the so-called high culture such as opera or theater. Nevertheless, it managed even before WWI to become the favorite form of entertainment for all social classes: K. Maze, *Bezgranična zabava: uspon masovne kulture: 1850–1970* [Unlimited Amusement: the Rise of Mass Culture: 1850–1970] (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008), 11–14.

<sup>3</sup> The CPI which was founded to influence public opinion to support the entrance of the USA in WWI, encouraged different propaganda activities, while for this purpose the film served as an already favorite form of entertainment. Along with the propaganda movies themselves, the Committee encouraged short patriot talks that volunteer speakers gave in movie theaters during changing film reels. In this way, during the last two years of the war, more than tens of millions of viewers heard the speeches of 75,000 people in the designed campaign called “Four Minute Man” (it took about four minutes to change a film reel when showing feature-length films): A. Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: the Making of American Propaganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 47–48, 94–95.

<sup>4</sup> “Many times we have been told that the film is capable of imprinting in the minds of people as much truth about history in one afternoon as the whole months of learning”: statement by film director D. W. Griffith, see T. Žiro, *Film i tehnologija* [Film and Technology] (Belgrade: Clio, 2003), 109.

<sup>5</sup> To preserve the image of the Great War from oblivion, the war participants were publishing their experience during the 1920s and 1930s, some of which were used for film adaptations. It was not a solitary case that besides the author, the director himself shared the experience of WWI. The American silent war movie *Wings* (1927), which won the Oscar for the best film at the first American Film Institute Awards, provided an authentic view of the world conflict. This film was written, directed, and starred firsthand by veterans of the last war: L. Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism: the Movies and World War I* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 160–161, 190.

losses due to war devastation, veterans' attempts to find their place in post-war society, and over-indebtedness of the country due to war loans are just some of the reasons for the gloomy picture of everyday life and general depression that existed across the world. Having found themselves in such a situation after years of warfare and uncertainty about "bare life", unsettled in society, strangers even to their own families due to long-term separation and war experience that changed them permanently, it is understandable that veterans were mostly negative about everything related to the war, which – after all – did them no good.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the first war films sent a strong anti-war message. In such an atmosphere, it is even less surprising that they were well-received by the audience and gained worldwide fame. Even the one considered the most popular war film – and one of the best of all time – sent the same pacifist message. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) directed by Lewis Milestone is based on the novel of the same name by Erich Maria Remarque, who was a German soldier on the Western Front. The story follows three schoolmates who went to war at the very beginning of adulthood. In addition to the initial enthusiasm, the young soldiers soon felt all the hardships of the trench life and the ruthless war that was taking more and more of their comrades. At the end all the actors died, even the main character Paul while trying to catch a "ray of hope" – a butterfly flying over his trenches. The movie, which carries a strong anti-war message, points out the futility of war. Such a message was not always in agreement with the official policy adopted by totalitarian regimes in the post-war world. In the Third Reich, the movie was banned, while Remarque's novel was destroyed in the Nazi book burnings of 1933.<sup>6</sup> In some countries, the film was screened in a censored form, while the end itself was changed.<sup>7</sup> Even when it was finally shown to the audience in 1950, the revised version was 40 minutes shorter than the original. However, such "interventions" did not prevent the movie from gaining worldwide fame and being included in the list of the best films ever made. This masterpiece is one of the best-screened testimonies

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<sup>6</sup> More about the movie ban, see M. Eksteins, "War, Memory and Politics: The Fate of the Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*", *Central European History* 13/1 (1980), 60–82. More about the Nazi book burnings, see P. Gej, *Vajmarska kultura: autsajder kao insajder* [Weimar Culture: the Outsider as Insider] (Belgrade: Geopoetika, 1998), 186–187, A. Mitrović, *Angažovano i lepo: umetnost u radoblju svetskih ratova (1914–1945)* [Engaged and Beautiful: Arts in the Period of World Wars (1914–1945)] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1983), 161–168, Ibid., *Vreme netrpeljivih: politička istorija velikih država Evrope, 1919–1939* [Age of Intolerant: Political History of the Great European Powers, 1919–1939] (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1974), 482–489.

<sup>7</sup> More about different changes that the movie has undergone and often censorships, see A. Kelly, "All Quiet on the Western Front: brutal cutting, stupid censors and bigoted politicians (1930–1984)", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 9 (1989), 135–150.

not only about WWI but the war in general. Milestone himself was glad to announce that the film became very popular, although it was shown to viewers in a shorter and reworked version: "The picture proved to have a longer life than many a politician and is still going strong in spite of brutal cutting, stupid censors and bigoted politicians".<sup>8</sup>

Besides leaving its mark on world cinema, *All Quiet on the Western Front* paved the way for anti-war films during the interwar period.<sup>9</sup> The first Hollywood movie adaptations of WWI, which revived the war testimonies of veterans, were well received by the audience. In addition to depicting the war events, in the movies very often was obvious the transformation of the protagonists themselves. Most often, the films began with scenes of idyllic life before the war and ended with the return of soldiers to their homes, which would complete the story. Created in the same anti-war spirit, these movies are imbued with similar motives. Undoubtedly, patriotism is the most common one. For obvious reasons, this feeling dominates even more in films made during the war, which, along with depictions of war efforts served to boost public morale, while after the war, touching stories of ordinary people who were participants in the events of 1914–1918 came to the fore.<sup>10</sup> Their perception of the war and authentic true stories made a mark on the films. Veterans even represented a significant part of the cinema audience who actively gave feedback, thus influencing the reception of films with such themes in public.

As the culmination of patriotism and heroic act, death was presented – the motif of the most sublime sacrifice that the protagonists can offer. This motif was very popular in various art forms in the years after the war, so it did not

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<sup>8</sup> A. Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the aforementioned production *Wings*, which, besides showing a heart-warming story, represents a true spectacle due to pictures of air battles and the U.S. air force, *The Big Parade*, as well as *What Price Glory?* (1927) are also worth mentioning. These silent films highlight an ordinary man who describes the tragedy of war from his perspective. They represent authentic testimonies of veterans from the Western Front: M. T. Isenberg, "The Great War Viewed from the Twenties: *The Big Parade* (1925)". In *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood image*, ed. J. E. O'Connor and M. A. Jackson, (New York: Ungar Publishing Company, 1979), 22; K. Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 296.

<sup>10</sup> This transition can be seen in the portrayal of the enemy in the movies. Before America entered into WWI, the image of Germans portrayed in a negative light served as a support for national goals. They are presented as Huns villains, who "are throwing babies out the window", "raping young women", "killing innocent civilians", etc. (characteristic films are *The Kaiser*, *The Beast of Berlin*, and *The Prussian Cur*). Hollywood films made in the 1920s are showing a more moderate image of Germans as enemies, while there is also a place for sympathy because of the war destruction that affected both sides: Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism*, 36, 196.

bypass the film, although it was essentially an anti-war character. Even if it did not contribute to the glorification itself, the cult of the fallen soldier who died for his country tried to disguise the horror of war and justify its purpose.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the opposite of death is love which defies everything. Almost all war films are imbued with this pure emotion, creating a contrast between scenes full of tenderness and brutality of war. It is most often about the soldier's love for woman,<sup>12</sup> but also the homeland, nature, peace, and everything that is not related to the war. Probably the most shocking scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is when the protagonist Paul dies trying to catch a butterfly that landed next to his trenches. His reach for the butterfly was enough for the French soldier to locate him. Realizing the futility of war and sadness because of the loss of his brothers-in-arms, he tried to reach for the butterfly, that "glimmer of hope" that would connect him with his pre-war life.<sup>13</sup>

Movies like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Big Parade*, and *What Price Glory?* represent epochal works not only about WWI but about the war in general. Numerous awards testify to their success, as well as the general interest of the audience, which does not abate for these classics even today. The American industry recorded several other smaller achievements,<sup>14</sup> but the mentioned titles paved the way for war films in European cinemas, which to a large extent looked up to Hollywood, the most significant film production in the world. The

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<sup>11</sup> More about the cult of the fallen, which is nurtured in the allied countries and Germany through commemorative activities, monumental architecture, military cemeteries, but also through various art forms, see G. L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7, 70–106.

<sup>12</sup> Love stories in war-themed movies have, among other things, contributed to a larger number of female cinemagoers: Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism*, 193.

<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the film, Paul as a little boy and his sister are collecting butterflies. Thus the butterfly symbolizes the home as Paul remembers it and represents an attempt to connect with what is left of his previous life far behind the trenches of death.

<sup>14</sup> In the following decades, several movies about WWI were made: *The Last Flight* (1931), *Gold Diggers* (1933), *Three Comrades* (1938), and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) dealt with social problems and topics such as the plight of returned soldiers who struggle to find a job. Due to such circumstances, some are turning to crime as in the movie *The Roaring Twenties*. The anti-war achievement *The Man I Killed* (1932) was also noted, which indicates the meaninglessness of war and the power of forgiveness; after the war, a French soldier is looking for the family of a German soldier he killed in battle to seek forgiveness. Among the last great Hollywood achievements about WWI was *Paths of Glory* (1957), which referred to the cruelty and injustice of military decisions. A French colonel (Kirk Douglas) refused to sacrifice his soldiers in a suicide attack on the enemy: Kelly, *Cinema*, 100–137, M. Hammond, *Great War in Hollywood Memory, 1918–1939* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 127–238, M. Paris, *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 138–161.

German film industry produced several achievements such as *Westfront 1918* (1930),<sup>15</sup> *Comradeship* (*Kameradschaft*, 1931),<sup>16</sup> and *No Man's Land* (*Niemandland*, 1931).<sup>17</sup> Important movies of British production – *Journey's End* (1930)<sup>18</sup> and *Tell England* (1931)<sup>19</sup> – both exude an anti-war spirit.<sup>20</sup> It is worth looking briefly at the title *Blighly* (1927), which deals with the social aspects and post-war problems of veterans. The director himself pointed out the need to make a film in a different tone because most of them are based on “heroism and sacrifice”, which the audience less and less prefers.<sup>21</sup> At the center of the story is a British soldier who after the war returns to his old job as a driver. Finally, the picture would not be complete without the mention of war cinematography in another of the European great powers – France. *The Grand Illusion* (*La Grande Illusion*, 1937) has been included in the list of the best films ever made. Apart from gaining world fame, it is also considered the only WWI film that does not contain

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<sup>15</sup> The movie is based on the novel “Vier von der Infanterie” by Ernst Johannsen, who was himself on the Western Front. This film was also targeted by the Nazis, who perceived pacifist films as a threat to their aggressive policy. The story follows four German soldiers who experienced the horror of trench warfare on the mentioned front. Using the latest audio technology, the director managed to faithfully portray the thunder of cannons and the noise of battles at the front: M. Helmers, “The Transition from the Silent into the Sound Era in German Cinema: The Innovative Use of Sound in Pabst’s *Westfront 1918*”, *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 12/2 (2018), 121–139.

<sup>16</sup> In this movie was also pointed out the possibility of reconciliation between the two sides, when a group of German miners took the initiative to rescue their French colleagues who remained trapped due to an explosion in the mine. The movie was inspired by a true event, a coal mine disaster in the north of France in 1906.

<sup>17</sup> The story begins in a destroyed and abandoned house behind the trenches, where people of different nationalities find refuge – a French soldier, a British officer, a Jewish tailor, a dark-skinned dancer, and a German carpenter. Due to the troubles that befell them, they managed to regain their humanity and turn against the only common enemy – war: Kelly, *Cinema*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> One of the most famous movies of that period, which represents an adaptation of the play of the same name by Robert Cedric Sherriff, who fought on the Western Front. The film’s director, James Whale, also a veteran from the same front, contributed in his way to bringing the authentic war experience to the cinema screen; he tried to compensate for the shortcomings of the then still undeveloped sound technology by creating a claustrophobic atmosphere in the trenches.

<sup>19</sup> *Tell England* showed the battles of British troops in the Gallipoli campaign.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–64, B. McFarlane & A. Slide (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of British Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 33, 49, 700, 816.

<sup>21</sup> A. Brunel, *Nice Work: The Story of Thirty Years in British Film Production* (London: Forbes Robertson Ltd, 1949), 126.

war scenes.<sup>22</sup> Although none of them achieved the fame of *The Grand Illusion*,<sup>23</sup> several other successes were recorded in French war cinematography.<sup>24</sup>

All of these films exuded the anti-war spirit at the moment when post-war Europe was facing long-term economic consequences that had surfaced. An ordinary man and his superhuman suffering were more frequently in the foreground. The national element was overcome and the films were enthusiastically accepted in countries of both warring sides, in which the average cinemagoer, a veteran of the last war, could find himself and identify with the suffering of the protagonist. On the other hand, due to their pacifist message, they posed a threat to totalitarian regimes whose shadow was increasingly hovering over Europe.

## II

Pacifist messages could also be seen in the production of smaller allied countries such as Greece and Serbia, but both of them paved a different path of development due to the complexity of historical processes conducted in these Balkan countries. For Serbia, which lost almost 1/3 of its pre-war population, the only compensation was the realization of the great idea of Yugoslavism, while for Greece in 1918 the war was not even over. In the first case, the new state facing many problems in the integration of three nationalities into a common system quickly forgot about its soldiers from the Macedonian Front, who had then become war invalids and/or were in miserable financial situation. The history of

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<sup>22</sup> There are very few images of killings through the film, and the main part of the action takes place in a German prison camp. The director tried to point out the futility of war with a story about human solidarity; the closeness of the various prisoners who help each other to survive transcends all national and class differences: D. Parkinson, *Istorija filma* [History of Film] (Belgrade: Dereta, 2014), 123.

<sup>23</sup> The film suffered a similar fate as other anti-war movies of the time; it was banned in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Interestingly, although he banned it in 1937, Mussolini preserved one copy of the film for his archive and organized private screenings attended by prominent Italian citizens and film directors: Kelly, *Cinema*, 90.

<sup>24</sup> *I Accuse* (*J'accuse*, 1919), a pacifist film with a strong anti-war message (it culminates in an anthological scene in which the dead soldiers rise from their graves and go to their relatives to warn them so that their sacrifice should not be in vain), as well as *Verdun* (1928) which shows a reconstruction of the most famous, but also the bloodiest French victory in WWI. To portray the fight scenes as faithfully as possible, the director hired amateur actors who were acquainted with the trench warfare in the last war and used to a large extent authentic videos from 1916: Brownlow, *The Parade's*, 531–534, C. Crisp, *French Cinema – A Critical Filmography: Volume 1, 1929–1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 183–186. More about the anthological scene in the movie *I Accuse*, see M. Hurcombe, “Raising the Dead: visual representations of the combatant’s body in interwar France”, *Journal of War and Cultural Studies* 1/2 (2008), 159–174.



WWI was neglected in every way. Oblivion and inadequate care of war memories in Yugoslav society were products of different causes.<sup>25</sup> Since in different parts of the country WWI was perceived in multiple ways with important and essential differences, where it was a case of completely different war experiences that are not compatible with each other<sup>26</sup> – especially when you bear in mind the Austro-Hungarian military conscription of a part of the population – it is not surprising that Yugoslav cinematography was not very fond of WWI movies.

However, even in such a “hostile” environment and lagging behind certain allied film industries, several titles about the Great War were produced. The first one was *Through Storm and Fire* (*Kroz buru i oganj*, 1929), however, not much could be said about it since it has not been saved. It is known that the struggle of civilians in occupied Serbia against enemy troops is at the center of the action. The domestic audience showed great interest after the first screening; the film was shown for 33 days in a row in cinemas, which was a great success even for foreign films of the time that usually attracted more viewers.<sup>27</sup> It was followed by *In God We Trust* (*S verom u Boga*, 1932) directed by Mihajlo Al. Popović, who first took a role as an actor in the previously mentioned film, whilst came up with the idea of his own by watching war invalids begging on the city streets. Like other war films of the time, it began with depictions of idyllic life before the war; the harmony of church bells and the songs of reapers were interrupted by the declaration of war and following mobilization. The film, which shows

<sup>25</sup> Oblivion was a reflection of the lack of organization of war veterans from the Macedonian Front, their leadership and affiliations, and also because of social and political instability in general. The limitation of financial resources also had its role in this “collective amnesia”. However, probably the main cause of this negligence lied in the positions of politicians from the former territories of the Habsburg Monarchy who expressed dissatisfaction whenever the war role of Serbia was emphasized in the creation of the Kingdom. Although the ultimate goal of national unification was - at least in theory - achieved, there was an internal division between the “victorious” and the “defeated” side in the First World War. Therefore, the study of WWI was interrupted to avoid conflicts among “brother” nations: O. Manojlović Pintar, *Tradicije Prvog svetskog rata u beogradskoj javnosti, 1918–1941: magistarski rad* [Traditions of the First World War in the Belgrade Public Opinion, 1918–1941: Master Thesis] (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 1996), 23–38, D. Šarenac, *Top, vojniki i sećanje: Prvi svetski rat i Srbija 1914–2009*. [Cannon, Soldier and Memory: Serbia and the First World War 1914–2009] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2014), 154, 213–219, 242–260.

<sup>26</sup> More about the cult of “victory” and “defeat” among the Yugoslav veterans, see Dž. P. Njuman, *Jugoslavija u senci rata: ratni veterani i stvaranje nove države, 1903–1945* [Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903–1945] (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2018), 15–59.

<sup>27</sup> D. Kosanović, *Kinematografija i film u Kraljevini SHS/Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, 1918–1941* [Cinematography and Movie in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918–1941] (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2011), 95.

the suffering of the Serbian people and the war devastation, follows the tragedy of a rural family in WWI. Images of destruction are overwhelmed with a sense of terrible martyrdom, while Popović uses the scene of the crucifixion as an epiphany of death – a sublime sacrifice to save others.<sup>28</sup> As in war films of European and American production, the story ends with the return of soldiers from the war, while the final shot is also characteristic: three boys dressed in national costumes are seen while the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian anthems successively follow.<sup>29</sup>

The final shot was a reflection of the new representations of the past in the newly created state. In a country where it was not possible to emphasize a certain national group and where the equal role of all peoples in the creation of the Kingdom was insisted on, an official state version of the events that took place during the war had to be established soon. According to that version, all parts of society participated and suffered equally in the war, regardless of whether they were those who died of starvation and cold in Albania, those who remained in the occupied country, or those from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia who were recruited for the needs of the Austro-Hungarian army.<sup>30</sup> From time to time state policy imposed “correct” representations of the past,<sup>31</sup> while occasionally the intervention was even more open. In the case of *The Calvary of Serbia* (*Golgota Srbije*, 1939) by Stanislav Krakov, the most significant anti-war achievement until WWII and the best documentary in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it was repeatedly filmed, censored, banned, suppressed for almost ten years, went through three title changes, three premieres and two censorship.

Initially, the film was shown in silent version under the title *Honor of the Fatherland* (*Za čast otadžbine*) in May 1930, when it was banned by cen-

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<sup>28</sup> N. Daković, “Mythomoteur i Veliki rat” [Mythomoteur and Great War], *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti* 25/26 (2014), 141.

<sup>29</sup> A. Janković, “Veliki rat i jugoslovenski film” [Great War and Yugoslav Film], *Medijski dijalozi: časopis za istraživanje medija i društva* 21 (2015), 440.

<sup>30</sup> Over the years, this simplified version of history and a distorted picture of the war has proved completely wrong: Manojlović Pintar, *Tradicije*, 34–38.

<sup>31</sup> It should be borne in mind that the film was extremely suitable for that because for a long time it was the only form of accessible mass entertainment in Yugoslavia. Thus, the cinema served as an educational tool for the semi-literate peasant population, but often also as a tool for propaganda: Kosanović, *Kinematografija i film*, 48–50. More about the use of film for propaganda purposes, see D. Tadić, *Propagandni film* [Propaganda Film] (Belgrade: Spektrum, 2009), 155–168, A. Vranješ, *Partizanski filmovi i propaganda* [Partisan Films and Propaganda] (Banja Luka: Glas srpski, 2008), 73–82, B. Simić, “Film in the service of state propaganda during the 1930s, cases of Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria”, *Tokovi istorije* 2 (2012), 64–76.

sors who were bothered by how Austro-Hungarian soldiers were presented.<sup>32</sup> In the film that follows the war agony of the Serbian people during 1914–1918, Krakov who was also a participant in the war,<sup>33</sup> reconstructed scenes of the Albanian retreat and liberation of Serbian cities in 1918 using archival material and recording sequences “with surviving participants in an authentic environment”. The newly recorded version which was sounded was released in March 1940 but waited for several months because it did not receive censorship due to “preventive diplomacy”, i.e. a possible impact on the deterioration of Serbia’s relations with neighboring countries.<sup>34</sup> The re-edited film was renamed *Fire in the Balkans* (*Požar na Balkanu*) and at the dawn of WWII, it finally received permission to be shown. The film tape was buried in the ground and so survived the war devastation. One of the owners of “Artistic Film” handed it over to the new authorities, which, due to the political pattern and negligence of the state bureaucracy, enabled a new projection only in the early 1970s. Then, this “forbidden version” in a new montage and under the name of *The Calvary of Serbia* finally saw the “light of day” in front of an audience that did not hide its enthusiasm.<sup>35</sup>

In *The Calvary of Serbia*, which represents a valuable testimony to the Serbian war efforts that influenced the construction of national identity in Yugoslav society, the motif of sublime sacrifice for the sake of others and liberation of the homeland was emphasized. The motif of sacrifice and martyr’s narrative is also present in *In God We Trust*. Both of these films can be considered anti-war modeled on foreign cinematography.<sup>36</sup> It is also worth mentioning that these

<sup>32</sup> P. Volk, *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma* [History of Yugoslav Film] (Belgrade: Institut za film, 1986), 86.

<sup>33</sup> Krakov occupies an important place in the field of remembrance of the First World War with its literary and film opus, which often interact with each other. He was a prolific writer who left valuable testimonies about the war. His descriptions of less conventional topics are also interesting, in which he dealt with the image of foreign allies on the Macedonian Front, but also the entertainment of soldiers and everyday life. His works on WWI are: *Through the Storm* (*Kroz buru*, 1921), *Wings* (*Krila*, 1922), *Our Last Victories* (*Naše poslednje pobeđe*, 1928), *Crown Prince Peter* (*Prestolonaslednik Petar*, 1932) where the war is presented in segments, and his autobiography *Life of a Man in the Balkans* (*Život čoveka na Balkanu*, 1997) which is published posthumously.

<sup>34</sup> Among other things, the film was censored due to sequences that negatively portrayed Bulgarian soldiers, at a time when Yugoslavia had been trying since the Balkan Pact (1934) to bring the two countries closer together: Kosanović, *Kinematografija i film*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Volk, *Istorija*, 85–86.

<sup>36</sup> The closing scene of *In God We Trust* set in a cemetery full of crosses, where the soldier explains to his son “when you grow up, you will understand”, expresses the sense of tragedy and the nonsense of war: R. Vučetić, “Film/Cinema (South East Europe), 1914-1918 Online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/filmcinema\\_south\\_east\\_europe](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/filmcinema_south_east_europe) (last accessed May 2022).

lonely attempts of movies about WWI have immense historical value at a time when Serbian and Yugoslav<sup>37</sup> cinematography were not institutionalized and systematically organized, but were independent projects led mostly by amateur directors who could only get required knowledge abroad. So, this is not about organized national cinematography, which could only exist with the support of the state. And to the state itself, which used the film to promote its principles, such topics were not a priority.<sup>38</sup>

With the war devastation during the period 1941–1945, the civil war, and the process of erasing memories of the Karađorđević dynasty, historical discontinuity and room for blankness in the collective memory were created. By implementing the policy of “brotherhood and unity”, a large part of commemorative ceremonies were abandoned and one of the most important elements of preserving memories disappeared with them. Also, since the 1950s there was not a single historical handbook that referred to WWI.<sup>39</sup> The situation was similar in film production. In general, during the second half of the 20th century, the political, ideological, sociological, and historical context of Yugoslav cinematography was not favorable to the significance of WWI, from which Yugoslavia emerged as a product.

Only on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary, a significant achievement was made, which is also the best domestic film about the Great War. *March on the Drina* (*Marš na Drinu*, 1964) attracted a lot of attention from the public; it was the first movie of Tito’s Yugoslavia on the theme of WWI, perceived as an introduction to the creation of the Kingdom. As the plot of the film is based on the Battle of Cer, there was curiosity (and fear) regarding the approach to that battle as a great victory of the Serbian army. However, the director Živorad Žika

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<sup>37</sup> Worth mentioning is the Croatian film *Life Goes On* (*A život teče dalje*, 1935), which points out the price of the personal sacrifice of the participants in the war. The fake news about the death of the husband in the prison camp caused problems when his wife remarried due to a difficult financial situation. The main actor who escaped from the camp comes back home, where he finds out that his wife is about to deliver another man’s baby. Realizing the harsh reality that “life goes on”, he leaves for good while his wife never knew of his comeback.

<sup>38</sup> The most characteristic example is the Partisan films that were very popular in Yugoslav cinematography: Vranješ, *Partizanski filmovi*, 96–145, R. Vučetić, *Koka-kola socijalizam: amerikanizacija jugoslovenske popularne kulture šezdesetih godina XX veka* [Coca-Cola Socialism: the Americanization of Yugoslav Popular Culture in the 1960s] (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2020), 125–144, M. Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film* [Yugoslav War Film], 2 Vols. (Belgrade: Institut za film, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Only in the 1950s military historians took the first steps in publishing a small number of studies on the Balkan Wars and WWI. However, for obvious reasons, the main interest of historians lied in WWII which had left deep scars after the “fratricide”: P. Opačić, “Jugoslovenska vojna istoriografija o Prvom svetskom ratu” [Yugoslav Military Historiography of WWI], *Zbornik radova* 3 (1985), 105–106.

Mitrović pointed out that he wanted to bring family tragedies above the national ones.<sup>40</sup> And those tragedies, as in other war films that were made in Yugoslavia and around the world, exist to remind us of the futility of war and the waste of human lives. As in *The Calvary of Serbia*, the motif of death is symbolically represented by the movement of the camera over the dead bodies scattered after the battle and stopping at the roadside monuments known as “krajputaši”.<sup>41</sup> In the final frame, the mortally wounded protagonist uttered through his teeth the first curse ever in the Yugoslav film – “Drino, goddamn it!”. There is a clear message before the eyes of the spectators: the battle was won and the state was created but at the costly price of the disappearance of entire generations.<sup>42</sup>

Mitrović also successfully put nationalism in the background in the very depiction of the enemy, which was shown in the crowd, without specifics and close-ups. Therefore the movie lacks one personalized image of the enemy, which was intended to cover up or at least mitigate the participation of compatriots in Austro-Hungarian uniforms in the Battle of Cer. After the most significant Serbian movie about WWI, none of them united thematically and provided such emotion as *March on the Drina*, nor did it occupy so much public attention.<sup>43</sup> Some titles such as *Sarajevo Assassination* (*Sarajevski atentat*, 1968), *The Assassination at Sarajevo* (*Sarajevski atentat*, 1975), and among the last films made in the former Yugoslavia *Last Waltz in Sarajevo* (*Poslednji valcer u Sarajevu*, 1990) are interesting due to different interpretations of one of the most important figures of WWI, Gavrilo Princip, who has been presented with a lot of contradictions in the decades of the common state. In his case, the path from hero to villain was

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<sup>40</sup> Asked to define the style of the *March on the Drina* at the time of filming, Mitrović answered succinctly: “The cinematic unity of this story should be preserved, protected from the national-victorious *pathos* and enthusiasm, because no matter how magnificent that victory looked in historical assessments and military analysis, it is completely different if viewed through the suffering, efforts, blood, and death of a Serbian soldier, ordinary and modest, and we make a film about such people... And that’s why, instead of loud and big patriotic words – swearing, teeth clenching, cramp, and death”: M. N, “Tvrd, muški realizam” [Hard, Masculine Realism], *Politika* (6 June 1964), 28.

<sup>41</sup> “Krajputaši” played a significant commemorative role in Serbia. In memory of the fallen soldiers, the production of roadside monuments increased in large numbers after the Balkan Wars and the First World War: Manojlović Pintar, *Tradicije*, 40–41, see also B. V. Radičević, *Seoski nadgrobni spomenici i krajputaši u Srbiji* [Rural Tombstones and Roadside in Serbia] (Belgrade: Jugoslavija, 1965).

<sup>42</sup> D. Batančev, “Šta je muškarac bez puške i penisa: dekonstrukcija heroja u srpskim filmovima o Prvom svetskom ratu” [What is a Man without Rifle and Penis: Deconstruction of a Hero in Serbian Movies about the First World War], *Časopis za povijest zapadne Hrvatske* 8 (2013), 117.

<sup>43</sup> The film even won the Audience Award at the Pula Film Festival, where it was shown: Šarenac, *Top*, 246.

not long, while such presentations served to shape national memories.<sup>44</sup> After the shooting for the film *Assassination at Sarajevo*, the director Veljko Bulajić, who was already famous for his partisan movies, commented on the role of Princip and other participants in the unfortunate event that served as an occasion for the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war. In the movie, they are not presented as conspirators, but as “poets, revolutionaries, patriots”, who “shot at Ferdinand with their hearts”.<sup>45</sup> During the later period and in completely different historical circumstances, on the eve of the celebration of the centenary in 2014, another film that contained a picture of Princip saw the light of day. *I Defended Young Bosnia* (*Branio sam Mladu Bosnu*) is a story about the Sarajevo assassination told from the perspective of Princip and his comrades.

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<sup>44</sup> Probably the best example of these radically different interpretations of Princip is the commemorative plaque placed in his honor in Sarajevo. On the day of its revelation on 2 February 1930, newspapers from Belgrade published an article full of enthusiastic words about its “owner” and characterized the monument as a sign of self-sacrifice. During WWII, the plaque was taken off by German soldiers, who thought that this could be an ideal present for Führer’s 52nd birthday. On that day, the oldest Croatian daily newspaper from Rijeka wrote that this “shameful plaque in honor of murderer Princip” was finally taken away, while the *Sarajski novi list* that “Sarajvo” – as the Ustaše named the city – “has cleaned itself of the Vidovdan stain”. As was expected, after the war another plaque was revealed accompanied by several manifestations and a formal ceremony. In the latest war, in 1992, the plaque had been removed again until 2004, when it was revealed by the authorities of then independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, the commemorative plaque was revealed on the same spot even four times during the turbulent years of the common state. Memorial words were different every time. Princip was characterized occasionally as a national hero and sometimes as a terrorist, and the texts were written from time to time in the Latin alphabet and sometimes in Cyrillic in just a few decades. It is also worth mentioning that the first plaque was not a state initiative at all (due to external and internal reasons) and was placed by friends and relatives of Princip and his comrades without the presence of state officials: R. Ljušić, *Princip Gavrilo: (1895–1918): ogleđ o nacionalnom heroju* [Princip Gavrilo: (1895–1918): an Essay on the National Hero] (Belgrade: Novosti, 2014), M. Mašović-Nikolić, “Lik Gavrila Principa u savremenoj srpskoj književnosti” [Gavrilo Princip as a Character in Contemporary Serbian Literature], *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti* 25/26 (2014), 307–315, I. Velisavljević, “Tri lica Gavrila Principa: Gavrilo Princip u jugoslovenskom filmu” [Three Faces of Gavrilo Princip: Gavrilo Princip in the Yugoslav Film], *Beogradski književni časopis* 36/37 (2014), 310–326, D. Trbojević, “Politika sećanja i identiteta: simbolička upotreba lika i dela Gavrila Principa u političkim narativima na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije” [Politics of Remembrance and Identity: Symbolic Use of Image and Work of Gavrilo Princip in the Political Narratives in the Territories of Former Yugoslavia], *Hereticus* 14 (2016), 247–260, T. Rosić, “Bunt u ulici Gavrila Principa u Beogradu” [Rebellion in Gavrilo Principa Street in Belgrade], *Kultura* 163 (2019), 46–63, etc.

<sup>45</sup> M. Durić, “Sprega mladosti i filmskog iskustva” [Combination of Youth and Film Experience], *Politika* (5 August 1975), 10.

In addition to films in which WWI appears fragmentary,<sup>46</sup> the image of Serbian cinematography about this event would not be complete without referring to *St. George Shoots the Dragon* (*Sveti Georgije ubiva aždahu*, 2009) directed by Srđan Dragojević, which was announced as a project of national importance. The plot of the film covers the period of the Balkan Wars and the First World War until the Battle of Cer. In addition to depicting battles, as opposed to the “male world of war”, there is a love triangle between the main actors in the film. At the end, two widowed women pull a cart with the corpses of men killed in battle. A strong message is conveyed about the futility of war; it is ironically presented that only in Serbia one can experience five seasons – autumn, winter, spring, summer, and war. The season of war has been going on for a long time, and the reason for it is not the liberation of the Serbian people but the inevitability of the “Balkan-Serbian *fatum*”,<sup>47</sup> which people from this region cannot avoid. The myth of Kosovo and the sacrifice for own country was changed and turned into the martyrdom of the soldiers from Cer.<sup>48</sup>

### III

Martyr’s death, the ultimate sacrifice for the country, and the futility of war conflict marked films about the First World War in various national cinematographies. These segments are also present in another Balkan film production, which, in addition to war depictions, did not miss the opportunity to provide overly negative and stereotypical notions about its neighbor and centuries-old enemy.<sup>49</sup> Similar to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later of Yugoslavia, Greece until the Second World War had directors who acquired the craft abroad, while they mostly worked independently and without the help of the

<sup>46</sup> WWI is also the theme of the films: *Where the Yellow Lemon Blooms* (*Gde cveta limun žut*, 2006) by Zdravko Šotra which is a feature-length documentary, the drama *Convalescents* (*Rekonvalescenti*, 2006) based on a short story by Dragiša Vasić, the most expensive title of Serbian film industry *Charleston & Vendetta* (*Čarlston za Ognjenku*, 2008), and *Solemn Promise* (*Besa*, 2009) by Srđan Karanović which was Oscar-nominated.

<sup>47</sup> Daković, “Mythomoteur”, 154.

<sup>48</sup> The myth of Kosovo found its way in the resurrection of a Serbian soldier from Cer, the Albanian coast, and the Macedonian Front. This important element of Serbian national consciousness was noticed by some allies, war journalists who covered the exploits of the Serbian army on the Macedonian Front, such as John Reed and Harry Collinson Owen – Dž. Rid, *Rat u Srbiji 1915*. [The War in Eastern Europe] (Cetinje: Obod, 1975), 54; H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After: the Side Show that Ended the War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 136.

<sup>49</sup> In Greek popular discourse, a *Turk* is almost synonymous with the word *enemy*: P. Mini, “The Image of the Turk in Greek Fiction Cinema: an Overview”, *Études Balkaniques* 53 (2017), 55.

state. However, in matters of national interest, such as the operations of the Greek army in Asia Minor, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided in 1919 to make a film that would serve propaganda purposes. The three Gaziadi brothers, whose family was originally from Constantinople, went to the front line the following year and made the first feature-length silent film *Greek Miracle* (Το ελληνικόν θαύμα, 1922), which consisted of authentic footage of the war.<sup>50</sup> Another Greek director tried his hand at directing a film with the same theme, using authentic shots made by war photographers in Asia Minor. Achilleas Madras as well as the Gaziadi brothers was originally from Istanbul, which was certainly an additional impetus in the creative enthusiasm for the tragedy of the Greek people in today's Turkey. His film *War Refugees* (Πρόσφυγες του πολέμου, 1921) showed the operations of the Greek army from the winter of 1920 until the final collapse of Asia Minor, which ended with scenes of persecution.

Until the Second World War, the two mentioned directors remained dominant in shaping the memory of WWI, while their productions took the form of feature films. They pointed out the profound changes that the war had left on society, while in the film *The Downpour* (Η μπόρα, 1929) the tragedy of the Greek people was shown through a love triangle.<sup>51</sup> Also during the later period, the Greek movie about WWI did not leave the scenes of persecution of the Greek population of Asia Minor, while some dealt with the issues of integration of refugees into Greek society, which did not always receive a warm welcome from their compatriots. Movie *1922* (1978) of Nikos Koundouros is based on the novel "Number 31328" written by Elias Venezis, who spent 14 months in a Turkish labor camp. Additionally, the film is enriched with true stories of people who survived an event better known in Greek historiography as the Asia Minor Catastrophe. This is the last phase of the Greco-Turkish war (1919–1922), which ended with the massacre and deportation of the Greek population. The film won great awards at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival,<sup>52</sup> despite

<sup>50</sup> M. Arkolakis, "Οι αδελφοί Γαζιάδη: η εμφάνιση των βιομηχανικών ταινιών στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου" [Gaziadi Brothers: The Appearance of Feature Films in Interwar Greece], *The Athens Review of Books* 63 (2015), 41.

<sup>51</sup> As in the Croatian film *Life Goes On*, the story follows two Greek soldiers who are fighting side by side in Asia Minor. After severe injuries, one suggested to his comrade-in-arms to leave him behind. With a promise that he will take care of his spouse, he leaves unaware that his fellow soldier has survived. After he falls in love with the wife of his best friend, with whom he starts living together. The surviving soldier finally came to his hometown, but when he realized the new situation, he leaves for good while nobody was aware of his comeback: V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 20.

<sup>52</sup> The film won hearts and an audience award. However, it should be borne in mind that several decades of conflict were not enough to heal wounds, especially if they are reopened by events such as the Istanbul pogrom in 1955 when the Turks expelled the remaining Greek population of Istanbul and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Besides, Thessaloniki,



being sharply criticized for its “lack of political sobriety”<sup>53</sup> and censorship that banned it for several years.

Koundouros’ film showed a great deal of passion for traumatic events, as did other similar titles in the first decades of the post-war period.<sup>54</sup> However, there have been attempts by some film directors to strive for a more objective approach, emphasizing the humanity of ordinary people. A typical example is *The Odyssey of an Uprooted Man* (Η Οδύσσεια ενός ξεριζωμένου, 1969), where the protagonist, a refugee from Asia Minor who grew up in Greece, wants to return to Turkey to find his father who was captured by the Turks in 1922. On the way, he is helped by various Turkish characters which therefore win the sympathy of the audience, while the conflict of 1919–1922 is presented as “an unfortunate circumstance that has made both sides unhappy.”<sup>55</sup> In addition, the film emphasizes the cultural ties between the two countries, which are especially reflected in the music; in one scene the protagonist listens to well-known among refugees oriental songs called *amanes*, while in another he sings one mixing Greek and Turkish words.<sup>56</sup> Also worth mentioning are *The Weeping Meadow* (Το λιβάδι που δακρύζει, 2004), as well as *Smyrna, the Destruction of a Cosmopolitan City, 1900–1922* (Σμύρνη, η καταστροφή μιας κοσμοπολίτικης πόλης, 1900–1922, 2012). The Greek tragedy is reflected in *The Weeping Meadow* through the story of a family from WWI to the civil war in Greece (1946–1949). The film shows the fate of refugees, the exchange of population between the two sides, and the social problems they faced. The historical documentary of Maria Iliou about

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as well as the north of Greece itself, has been always traditionally populated by refugees who just made up a large part of that same audience.

<sup>53</sup> The film shows an extremely negative image of the Turks, “cutthroats and rapists”: M. Chalkou, “1922 (Νίκος Κούνδουρος, 1978)” [1922 (Nikos Koundouros, 1978)]. In *Λεξικό λογοκρισίας στην Ελλάδα: καχεκτική δημοκρατία, δικτατορία, μεταπολίτευση*, ed. P. Petsini & D. Christopoulos (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018), 531.

<sup>54</sup> More moderate, but again quite a one-sided representation of the Turkish side in the conflict, could be spotted in the films: *Persecution* (Διωγμός, 1964) with images of Smyrna in flames and the forced deportation of Greeks from the coast of Asia Minor, *Heavy is the Curse of Discord* (Βαριά κατάρα ο διχασμός, 1968) about the attempts of a Greek veteran to find peace, *Uprooted Generation* (Ξεριζωμένη γενιά, 1968) about the efforts of family members who were separated during the deportation to find each other, while a similar theme is also in the films *The Refugee* (Ο πρόσφυγας, 1969), *Refugee Girl on the Run* (Κυνηγημένη προσφυγοπούλα, 1969) and *The Woman of Smyrna* (Η Σμυρνια, 1969): Y. G. S. Papadopoulos, “Uprootedness as an Ethnic Marker and the Introduction of Asia Minor as an Imaginary Topos in Greek Films”. In *Ottoman Legacies in the Contemporary Mediterranean: the Balkans and the Middle East Compared*, ed. E. Ginio – K. Kaser (Jerusalem: The European Forum at the Hebrew University, 2013), 340–341.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 341–343.

<sup>56</sup> Mini, “The Image”, 60.

Smyrna represents a refreshment in a series of films about Asia Minor. With a much more moderate image of the *Other*, while avoiding traditional images and stereotypes that are free of nationalist charge, the film is about the downfall of Smyrna, a city where Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Jews, and many others have lived together for centuries.<sup>57</sup>

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Greek cinematography about the First World War fully looks back at the end of the Greek-Turkish conflict that culminated in the summer of 1922 with the killing and persecution of the Greek population. Moreover, it not only refers to the very end but also completely to the Greco-Turkish war. In other words, there was no place in cinematography for war events before 1918. This phenomenon can be explained by the initial Greek unwillingness to enter the conflict, and then by the rapid Turkish capitulation in October 1918, which thwarted the expansionist aspirations of Athens. For the Greeks, the Greco-Turkish war was a natural continuation of the European conflict and an opportunity for the liberation of the “Greek holy lands”.<sup>58</sup> The films mostly failed to bypass nationalist aspirations and egocentrism, as well as the usual stereotypical images, which were also the features of some Serbian war films. However, there were some more realistic representations of the *enemy*, as well as the placement of ordinary people as heroes in the center of the story. The tragedy of the Greek people is personified in the characters of the protagonists who lost their property, their freedom, and finally, their lives. A common motif is an attempt of the main characters to connect with their previous lives, while some are looking for missing members of their families. Following the example of other world productions, love appears as a component that defies death and national hatred.

Greece sought its interpretations of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, while Serbia encountered the same stumbling block in radical notions of Princip. Interpretations of this kind are no different from the rest of the world; it would be enough to think of fascist ridicule in Charlie Chaplin’s comedies. Each of these national productions used the seventh art to promote its ideology. Another common feature is that the initial achievements of the two Balkan cinematographies were mostly independent works of newly trained domestic film directors. However, unlike in Greece where from time to time existed the support of the state, Serbian traditional film did not enjoy or at least did not have to a large extent the

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<sup>57</sup> A. Koutsourakis & M. Steven, *The Cinema of Theo Angelopoulos* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 144.

<sup>58</sup> About the tradition of WWI in Greek collective memory, see J. Tomašević, *Veliki rat i “mali” čovek: svedočenja srpskih vojnika* [Great War and “Little” Man: Testimonies of Serbian Soldiers], (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2018), 278–279.

support of the king, and then the communist regime, which was more in favor of making partisan movies. During the years of the common state, only some titles about the Serbian army from 1914–1918 made their way through a mass of red five-pointed stars. Even the fall of communism did not automatically mean the beginning of serious production. In the years that followed, the memory of the First World War was largely reworked, reshaped, and re-instilled and it was used for inflammatory propaganda at the moment when the conflict flared and when the people of former Yugoslav republics were searching again for their national identities.

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