



The Battle of Neretva (1969): Production, Exhibition, Reception, Aesthetics, and Historiography

Mina Radović

To cite this article: Mina Radović (2023) *The Battle of Neretva* (1969): Production, Exhibition, Reception, Aesthetics, and Historiography, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 43:3, 789-809, DOI: [10.1080/01439685.2023.2173382](https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2023.2173382)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2023.2173382>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 31 Jan 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1414



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

THE BATTLE OF NERETVA (1969): PRODUCTION, EXHIBITION, RECEPTION, AESTHETICS, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Mina Radović

The Battle of Neretva, directed by Veljko Bulajić is one of the biggest war spectacles produced in Yugoslavia following the famous partisan battle with Axis forces during World War II. The film serves as a useful site from which we can understand the conventions of the Yugoslav war film while its exceptional production and exhibition strategies and reception history signal a critical turning point in the cultural understanding of the war film as a mediator of history. By studying the film's production, exhibition, and reception, aesthetics, and historiographical significance, and drawing upon original archival documents preserved in the Jugoslovenska Kinoteka/Yugoslav Cinematheque in Belgrade, this paper aims to identify, assess, and expose the layered significance of the film The Battle of Neretva, and to further map out its position within (Yugoslav) film history.

The war film was one of the most important genres in Yugoslav cinema over the century and to a great extent the platform from which the history of Yugoslavia was captured, mediated, and re-negotiated. The subject of this article is the film *The Battle of Neretva* (Veljko Bulajić, Yugoslavia-Italy-West Germany, 1969), one of the biggest war spectacles produced in the country. The film follows the epic plight of partisans who fought the Axis forces in World War II. While a systematic examination of the war film in Yugoslavia deserves a more comprehensive set of studies, *The Battle of Neretva* serves as a useful site from which we can understand the conventions of Yugoslav war film as the film, in its aesthetics, integrates several different types of representations of war. At the same time, the exceptional

Correspondence to: Mina Radović, Department of English and Creative Writing, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW, United Kingdom. Email: Mrado001@gold.ac.uk

production and exhibition strategies and the reception history of the film, particularly in the case of large-scale spectacle, served as a critical turning point for understanding the role of war films for mediating the country's past, and dictating the cultural and aesthetic standards for producing war films in the future, so much so that we can say there were war films 'before and after' *Neretva*.

The article is structured in three parts which reflect the three primary ways through which we can assess the significance of the film: production, exhibition, and reception; film aesthetics, and *The Battle of Neretva* in the history of Yugoslav cinema. My methodology in the first case comprises primary source research (press and newspapers, film journals, exhibition programmes), in the second film analysis (*mise-en-scène*, editing, sound), and in the third historiographical analysis (mapping out in the first instance the relation between a film and the historical context in which it emerges, and in the second, the relation between different films and film-makers across time, including direct and indirect influences). The corpus I have used in my research includes 232 archival documents preserved in the Jugoslovenska Kinoteka/Yugoslav Cinematheque in Belgrade drawn from a variety of press and media outlets that reported on the making of the film. The overall aim of my text is to identify, assess, and expose the layered significance of the film *The Battle of Neretva*, on and off-the-screen, and to further map out its position within (Yugoslav) film history.

Before, during and after: the production, exhibition and reception of the film

For the purposes of understanding *The Battle of Neretva*'s production, exhibition, and reception it is useful to briefly articulate the organization and structure of the film industry. After 1945 a nationalized studio system was formed in Yugoslavia. With the young King Petar exiled to Britain the country was now a socialist state under the tutelage of Josip Broz Tito. The state supported the creation of a sophisticated studio system, with a major studio set up in the capital of each of the six new republics, including the central studio Avala Film in Belgrade, Jadran Film in Zagreb, Triglav Film in Ljubljana, Bosna Film in Sarajevo, Lovćen Film in Cetinje, and Vardar Film in Skopje. Championing its own brand of self-management socialism Yugoslavia became a forerunner between East and West and a geo-cultural crossroads between Europe, Africa, and Asia. It was thanks to the studio infrastructure, to the range of facilities, professionals, immense outdoor backlots, and the range of architectural and natural landscapes available for shooting, to lower production costs and the good working relationships that developed with film colleagues across East, West, and the Non-Aligned World as a result of the country's politics that made the Yugoslav film industry so vital domestically and so attractive for co-productions internationally.¹

In international films Yugoslavia served as much a backdrop for the Ancient World, for the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, or as double of the Russian Empire in Anglo-American films when co-productions with the Soviet Union were not possible. Strong partnerships were forged with Italy, France, and West Germany, in China Yugoslav epics were experienced like Hollywood

blockbusters in the West, and the Yugoslav film industry made a significant cinematic contribution to Third Cinema. The *Filmske Novosti* documentaries serve as useful historical texts for understanding Yugoslavia's consolidation of the Non-Aligned Movement, formed in Belgrade in 1961, as Tito travelled the globe visiting its constitutive members.² Similarly, the first Mozambiquan fiction feature and important text of Third Cinema *The Time of the Leopard* (1985) was made as a co-production with Yugoslavia and directed by Zdravko Velimirović, who, in addition to his Yugoslav productions, had already been making films in Mozambique since the 1970s.³

Cinematic representations of partisans emerged in Yugoslav cinema immediately after the Second World War. The term 'partisan film' typically designates popular war epics which feature partisans as heroic liberation fighters. Partisans were, however, also represented in more critical light, both in the classical cinema and the New Yugoslav Film but also in the very popular epics which portrayed them as heroes, and they also figured across genres, from romantic and black comedies, film noirs, horrors, to children's films, animations, experimental and avant-garde cinema. Veljko Bulajić is one of the most popular and commercially successful directors of war epics in Yugoslavia. His film *Kozara* (1962) confirmed him as a powerful voice in the cinematic dramatization of World War II and the Yugoslav Partisan Offensives and he was a director who was well-known to the state, receiving support for his next film, the documentary on the earthquake, *Skopje '63* (1964). After this he made *Looking into the Eyes of the Sun* (1966), a harrowing portrait of four partisans in the snow-capped mountains slowly destroyed by typhus. However, *The Battle of Neretva* represented a much bigger and more ambitious undertaking. It built on the melodrama for which the director was well known (he also co-wrote *Neretva*) and combined it with some of the darker tones articulated best in his last film. Furthermore, it set up a new precedent for transnational modes of production, featured an all-star (inter)national cast, and benefited from the support of the state.

The film gathered around it one of the biggest media spotlights in the country. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent this spotlight was the result of a formally organized campaign to promote the film, or rather to what extent it was the result of the film's special production context. The production took nearly five years to complete and had an unprecedented, and as a result of prolonged filming, increasingly growing budget, a total of approximately \$12 million dollars (an amount equivalent to high-cost Hollywood films at the same time). The film was funded by over 50 self-managing Yugoslav companies and banks (including Bosna Film, Filmska Radna Zajednica, Jadran Film, and Kinema), foreign production companies from Rome (Igor Film) and Munich (Eichberg Film), with the co-operation of London and New York (Commonwealth United Entertainment), as well as by investment from the state both in terms of monetary capital but also non-monetary support, such as giving permission to the director to use military personnel and replicas of the Yugoslav People's Army. It boasted a high profile of national and international stars, in the spirit of 1960s international war epics such as *War and Peace* (Sergei Bondarchuk, USSR, 1966) and *Is Paris Burning?* (René Clément, France-USA, 1966), including but not limited to Velimir Bata Živojinović, Milena

Dravić, Pavle Vuisić, Boris Dvornik, Ljubiša Samardžić and Špela Rozin on the one hand and Orson Welles, Yul Brunner, Franco Nero, Sergei Bondarchuk, Sylva Coscina, Hardy Krüger, Curd Jürgens, and Anthony Dawson on the other. Furthermore, the subject matter was of historical importance in the cultural memory of the people of Yugoslavia given that Neretva was one of the important offensives for the partisans during World War II which, as many contemporary historians noted, would have a decisive role in shaping 'the outcome of the revolution and the preservation of historical memory in post-war Yugoslavia'.⁴ The film employed over 10,000 actual soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army during filming and in that way the film aimed to bring the national liberation effort closer to the contemporary viewers by including those people who were living representatives of the fruits of the struggle shown in the film. The spectacle around the film grew as the release date drew closer and there was significant attention given to the film abroad.

Newspapers across Yugoslavia, including major papers in Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Ljubljana, and Skopje, continuously provided information about the film, from its initial shooting to its theatrical release and the diverse public and critical responses garnered by the film. Two examples demonstrate how the exhibition of the film was developed with the aim of being a local as well as global spectacle. Sarajevo's *Vječernje Novine/Evening News* announced that for the premiere of the film a hundred female university students of Philosophy and Philology would be gathered to guide the guests for the premiere of the film.⁵ Connecting education and industry allows inter-institutional and cultural endowment to the filmic event. Publicizing this in national newspapers reflected one step towards the film's proposed cultivation of culture by giving an opportunity to young talent to participate in the country's most prolific event and the international guests attending that event. Likewise, the same newspaper's communication of information about hotels being booked out raises the anticipation for the event and its cultural status within Yugoslavia. The event is portrayed as exclusive and inaccessible (the article writes about high-profile international guests, attendance by invitation only and *all* of Sarajevo's hotels booked out).⁶ Thus the premiere is represented as a phenomenon accessible to the highest delegates of the industry and the country and in doing so creates an aura of participation in an event par excellence.⁷

The premiere of the film in Sarajevo was technically and formally envisioned as a spectacle in the way of exhibition. First the city was chosen as the capital of the republic in which the battle took place: the director of Bosna Film Neđo Parežanin stated in an interview that in the decision resulting from a meeting between Bosna Film, Kinema and Jadran Film was 'for the world premiere to be in Sarajevo because ... Sarajevo was the centre of all the events.'⁸ Parežanin further elaborates that their decision included 'practical concerns', namely that of the space and Sarajevo won out, being home to the 'the biggest ... and most modern cinema place in Europe with 3100 seats'.⁹ This leads to the second point and that is the fact that the technical expectations of the film's production team were pushed to the limit, as a cinema screen was built specially for the premiere in the city's palace that measured 25 × 11 metres (82 × 36 feet).¹⁰ For reasons of comprehension it is worth saying that this construction was the biggest screen in the

country and is still larger than today's standard IMAX screen.¹¹ The exhibition strategy pre-figures and in many ways supersedes – in terms of size and vision – modern film exhibition's attempt to create spectacle beyond the screen.

Once the time came, the daily bestseller *Večernje Novosti/Evening News* in Belgrade, reporting on the premiere, declared it 'the festival of one film' describing how it lasted five days and included a series of palace screenings, glamorous gatherings, press conferences, luncheons and receptions.¹² The premiere took place symbolically on the 29th November – the day on which socialist Yugoslavia was founded in 1945, commonly known as the Day of the Republic – with the premiere of the film simultaneously inaugurating the opening of the huge cultural and sports centre Skenderija.¹³ With over 1000 international guests in attendance and the premiere broadcast on television, Sarajevo saw an array of screen stars which in addition to the talent from the country included Orson Welles, Yul Brunner, Hardy Krüger, Sylvia Coscina, Anthony Dawson, Sergei Bondarchuk, and Sophia Loren.¹⁴ The premiere also attracted over 300 journalists from the country and abroad, with the Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje/Liberation* announcing among others the arrival of Italy's 'most respected film critics' along with the head of Cinecittà Enrico Rossetti and the director of Cannes Favre Le Bret.¹⁵ To this we could add directors Roman Polanski and Louis Malle, poet Desanka Maksimović, artist Oton Gliha, distinguished academics Velibor Gligorić and Živan Milisavac, and sportsmen including chess master Mikhail Botvinnik and footballer Predrag Đajić.¹⁶ Sarajevo's *Večernje Novine/Evening News* reported, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who was scheduled to attend had to decline due to illness.¹⁷

Most interestingly of all, in addition to the Yugoslav delegation headed by the president Josip Broz Tito representatives of the British and Soviet delegations attended the premiere.¹⁸ Furthermore, on hearing that war veterans from around the world would re-unite in Sarajevo Sir Fitzroy Maclean reported that the premiere would represent 'the most joyous moment for all of us who served in Yugoslavia during the Fourth Offensive.'¹⁹ Furthermore, Pablo Picasso designed the poster for the film which was publicized, especially in Belgrade, in the week leading up to the film's premiere.²⁰ At the same time the premiere came under fire from journalists for spending money on putting on a 'carnival' in the capital of Bosnia while in neighbouring Banja Luka people were 'freezing in tents' following the earthquake that hit the city some weeks earlier.²¹ The director and the producers of the film responded, as, for instance, on Bulajić's way back from making final cuts to the film in Rome, the Italian producer stated that he 'wishes the proceeds to go to the victims of the earthquake in Banja Luka'.²² Later the German producers from Munich-based 'Columbia Film' announced that their share of the proceeds would also go to helping the people of Bosnian Krajina.²³ In this way the reaction of the crew in part went to acknowledging if not exactly mending the critical socio-ecological situation near the capital.

The film played in Yugoslavia for three years. By February 1970, just over two months since the premiere, the prestige daily *Politika* reported that Neretva had been seen by 380,000 people in Belgrade and with a 72 day run represented 'the longest premiere run for a film in the history of cinemas in our capital city'.²⁴ By March 1971 five million people had seen the film in Yugoslavia.²⁵ In

one city the local University went as far as to organise coaches to bring people from the villages to see the film.²⁶ In Priština, alongside the original version in Serbo-Croatian, the film was re-released after the producers finished synchronization into Albanian.²⁷

During the exhibition run, particularly in the capitals of each republic, cinema spaces and palace screening venues were decorated with large and decorated posters and live military replicas, such as army tanks and canons from World War II, used in the film. This strategy pre-figures and in many ways outmatches contemporary attempts by auteur spectacles to merge on-screen and off-screen realities through their production and exhibition run, for instance through the work of Christopher Nolan.²⁸ By putting real-life military replicas against star actors, the filmmakers connected lived experience with cinematic experience. Memory and history were renegotiated in an intricate way, where after going from the actual to the filmic spaces they came back round to the socio-political space in which they originated.²⁹

Following the film's release, a heated discussion concerning the question of the film's financial and critical success arose and attained national proportions in the headlines. The controversy was provoked by journalist Sreten Petrović's article in the *Vječernje Novosti/Evening News* where he described the film as a 'financial ruin'.³⁰ The director, members of the crew, and most significantly the film's various producers and investors all came forward to give their statements.³¹ Meanwhile journalists across the country responded to Petrović's claims and analysed the latest developments on the controversy as they came in.³² While the film included significant state capital and contribution from over fifty self-managing companies and banks the producers of the film claimed the investment was not only recuperated and paid back but also that profit was made.³³ Petrović and like-minded journalists disavowed these claims and took to examining how (un)successful the financial distribution of the film actually was.³⁴ While success was guaranteed in one way or another for *Neretva's* domestic release that success was not yet enough to cover losses. One subsequent development also revealed that the critics may have had a point. In February 1970 a Slovenian newspaper stated that the film had been sold for distribution in 82 countries and a year later *Politika* reported that the film had only been shown in seven (Yugoslavia, France, West Germany, Italy, Norway, Japan and Bolivia) and was scheduled to start showing in the United States.³⁵ A similar contradiction could be found in the film's distribution in the United States: on the one hand, the film did have theatrical distribution and, as Zagreb's *Vječernji List/Evening News* confirmed, was showing in 7000 cinemas, while, on the other, Belgrade's *Vječernje Novosti/Evening News* reported that the American distributor of the film had 'gone bankrupt'.³⁶ Uncertainties about the film's commercial success dissipated when the film received the Nomination for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards in 1970.

The whole argument shifted from the film's monetary success to that of the film's cultural success, that is, 'the greater non-monetary value of the *Neretva* project' for advancing the artistic development of Yugoslav cinema and for promoting Yugoslavia abroad, particularly given its Oscar Nomination.³⁷ When it comes to the reception among critics the film was honoured with great praise. Italian

intellectual Alberto Moravia gave a statement saying that this was ‘the only battle to have been won twice. The second time ... at the premiere.’³⁸ In Norway, Oslo’s prestige paper *Morgenbladet* called it ‘an exceptionally realistic film’ while in Hungary, Budapest’s leftist *Népszabadság* said ‘Bulajić showed his mastery in the ability to connect the film’s numerous episodes into a meaningful whole.’³⁹ As the Oscars emerged on the horizon V. Gerasimov wrote in Moscow’s *Pravda* that the film ‘possesses high artistic qualities and is deeply patriotic’ and added that ‘the Soviet people remember and highly regard the contribution of the people of Yugoslavia to the struggle against the common enemy: fascism.’⁴⁰ A year later, in Tunisia *Neretva* featured as one of the films selected in a celebration of Yugoslav culture.⁴¹ From this we can see that the film attracted as much praise on the grounds of its aesthetics as it did on the grounds of its politics. This praise was far from being divided along East-West ideological lines which dominated the politics of the cold war, but showed far more dynamic flows and contradictions, where Moravia agreed as much with Gerasimov as the Norwegian critics conceded with their Hungarian colleagues.

However, the most interesting aspects about the film’s theatrical reception remain with the claim to historicity on the one hand and the simultaneous perception of the film as a war and an anti-war film on the other. Writing for a Banja Luka daily, Limun Papić called *Neretva* ‘the greatest history lesson’, adding that the film will serve as ‘the best way to present the four years of war to our youth’ in order to remind them of ‘the significance of their past’.⁴² In Czechoslovakia, the critics went even further, with the headline in the periodical *Kino* stating that what we have here is – not just a lesson but – ‘History written with film’.⁴³ *Lidová demokracie* similarly praises the film and calls it ‘one of the greatest war films in the history of cinema’. While from Papić’s article we see the film praised for authenticity in depicting history, from the examples in Czechoslovak press we see that the film was seen as authentic to the point where it does not merely depict history but *is* history. While in the former the film is commended for its educational value in the domestic sphere, in the latter it is praised for its cinematic value in the international sphere. It is from the reception that we can appreciate the varying degrees to which critics recognized the film’s historical worth and the ways they saw this worth as significant for other spheres of life, including the instruction of young people and the preservation of historical memory.⁴⁴

While the statement in *Lidová demokracie* resonates with many contemporary readings of the film as a war film, both at home and abroad, Bulajić’s statements for Yugoslav press demonstrated that it was also viewed as the opposite: an anti-war film. Bulajić indicated that the film ‘carries within it something else other than the spars of war: the idea of a revolution, of a kind of humanism that is not about two camps going head to head, as in every other war film, but about a battle fought for the wounded ... for the saving of human lives.’⁴⁵ This offers a contrast to the most common reading of the film as a war spectacle and points to the ways in which the film could be read as more ambiguous in its representation of war. It is this ambiguity that will be examined in the next part of this paper related to aesthetics and it is also this ambiguity that puts the film in touch with

the more critical anti-war films made in Yugoslavia, as we will see in the final part of this paper.

Studying the reception is also important for understanding how the film served as a platform for a cultural debate about the nature of propaganda. The word propaganda was used in the press positively and negatively. Limun Papić exemplifies the former tendency, seeing ‘the significance of the film also in its propaganda effect, particularly in the West’ going on to add that it would show those who know ‘little to nothing’ about how the war unfolded in Yugoslavia ‘what we had to do to save our country.’⁴⁶ By comparison Sreten Petrović typifies the latter, stating ‘great is the propaganda power of the publicly written and spoken word which has created not only a cinematic-historical myth from *The Battle of Neretva* but also a myth about an exceptional financial project’.⁴⁷ Propaganda was thus perceived as positive for teaching the international audience about the specificity of the national struggle but negative for reasons of self-mythologization and claim to be a definitive representation of that struggle. What we learn from studying the reception is that contemporary critics recognized the power of the cinematic image but also the power of the word which shaped how the cinematic image was perceived in the public sphere.

By comparison, in the United States the film received press coverage following its production as early as 1967 and continued well into 1971 with its exhibition and reception. In September 1967 *Variety* published a poster of *Neretva*.⁴⁸ In October 1968, over a year before the film’s release, several proclamations were made by *Variety*: Commonwealth is to be the distributor for the US; a ‘three-English language version’ is to come alongside ‘the four-hour Yugoslav one’; the film has already sold in many countries; and it is called by the same periodical ‘the most expensive film ever made in Eastern Europe (outside of the USSR)’.⁴⁹ Similar coverage follows during 1969 when the periodical speaks about Tito hosting a banquet for the stars of the film on his island home on Brioni and the co-production market in Yugoslavia among which *Neretva* is called its ‘Biggest Venture’.⁵⁰ *Variety* covered the film’s premiere in Sarajevo – labelling it “‘Neretva’s” mammoth premiere’⁵¹ – and reviews of the film appeared in the same periodical alongside coverage in *The Hollywood Reporter* and later in *The Los Angeles Times*.⁵² The publicity provided to the film in leading industry periodicals in the United States also accented the film’s appeal in terms of scale and (inter-)national significance, well attested by the fact that the hyperbolic style in press coverage, with exceptions of irony, appeared also in the States during the film’s production and followed through to and after the premiere – attested by *Variety* to be the global spectacle for which it was presented nationally. However, two interesting developments occur in the American reception of the film. The Veteran Affairs Committee of the city of Tucson with chairman Joan Wagman call the film ‘an unadulterated distortion of World War II, a mammoth piece of false propaganda for the self-glorification of Marshall Tito and totally un-American.’⁵³ Their criticism presented in a May 1970 article of *Variety* further describes that the move to boycott the film arose with a US air force general attesting to his life and that of other airmen being saved by General Draža Mihailović, Chetnik leader of the royalist Yugoslav Army during World War II who is represented ‘as a villain in

the film' and as the article's title further suggests: the film 'distorts Chetnik heroics'.⁵⁴ In March 1971 the film is called a 'lone ... opener' in Denver and its box office reported 'slow'.⁵⁵ Despite a certain monopoly of representation, the first case presents us with a challenge to the historical truth the film claims to depict and by extension to represent as a cinematic artifact. The second raises the issue of commercial success as a precondition for an epic foreign-language film released in the United States wishing to obtain a greater audience or press coverage. However, *Neretva* is reconfirmed as an anomaly, as by this stage it has already gained the status of cultural landmark and all other information, including the returns which would appear essential for a big budget film, became irrelevant.

Examining the film's production context and exhibition strategies demonstrated the ways in which the film complicated the traditional production model in Yugoslavia, particularly in the case of the war film. Our survey of exhibition also showed the ways in which the film's producers sought to stage the film's premiere as a local and global event – a representation which resonated in the film's coverage in American press as well – and to target a broad spectrum of different audiences – public, political, and artistic alike – who, in the case of the premiere, were otherwise never likely to meet in the same space. Studying the reception of the film revealed the range and diversity of readings the film attracted from all corners of the public realm at home and abroad. It showed how one film served as a site for mediating the historical memory of the war on and off the screen as well as discussing the cultural significance of spectacle, the historical and future development of Yugoslav cinema, the geo-cultural position of Yugoslavia on the world scene, the definitions of genre, and the nature of propaganda. In showing the diametrically different and frequently opposing ways in which contemporary viewers read the film this analysis aims to enrich our understanding of the film and its cultural significance in Yugoslavia. The contemporary reception also stands in direct contrast to more recent analyses of the film which have frequently reduced it to its ideological dimension and altogether lacked exhibition and reception analysis.⁵⁶

What makes an epic: the aesthetics of *the Battle of Neretva*

It is useful to turn at this point to study the audio-visual and narratorial composition of *The Battle of Neretva*, namely its aesthetics, as this is the primary site from which we can identify the dominant ways the film makes and unmakes national-cultural myths about war. I study the film's employment of partisan iconography, multi-perspective narratives, and its ambiguous representation of religion.

The film integrates partisan iconography through character ethos, interpersonal relationships, costumes and décor, and music. The ideals of brotherhood and unity that were at the heart of post-war Yugoslav socialism are depicted through the national liberation effort of World War II that gave meaning to the ideals. The ethos shown is one of togetherness exhibited by a diverse set of characters in the film. The importance of individual commitment and methodical determination on the one hand is embodied in the officer played by Velimir Bata Živojinović (perhaps the most recognizable talent of the war film), whose intense sense of

integrity, personal will and collaborative spirit enable him to build and lead the partisan group through the field of war. Brotherhood is reconciled with sisterhood on the other hand through the platonic relationship of the two ensigns, played by Ljubiša Samardžić and Silvyja Coscina. At the same time cultural and national ties are transcended as explicated in the gradual journey of the Italian officer Captain Riva, played by Franco Nero, from antagonism and indifference to closer affiliation with the partisans as he turns to their side. Keeping his own personal ethos that differs from his countrymen Captain Riva envisions a different kind of Italy.⁵⁷ Sergei Bondarchuk gives a fiery performance as the artillery commander Martin who from his cannons pushes the frontline with his battalion. As a major director of international war epics who just completed his 7-hour Tolstoian saga *War and Peace* (1966) Bondarchuk's presence endows *The Battle of Neretva* with intertextual significance in portraying the struggle of a people faced by war.

The employment of costume and the organization of spatial décor in the film contribute to the partisan iconography. The characters explicitly wear green to brown guerrilla uniforms, they brandish MP40-style submachine guns, carry caps and emblems with the red five-sided partisan star, and some even carry the flag of socialist Yugoslavia, also embroidered with the partisan star. While these modes of dress and props explicitly embody a partisan iconography of brotherhood and unity the film also employs dress and prop more implicitly to express the spirit of the national liberation struggle. The crowds of Yugoslav refugees who accompany the partisan fighters on their offensive wear civilian clothes, covered by black shrouds, they carry blankets, push their carts carrying their livelihood, bear their children, and they tend to the gravely wounded on stretchers. Using pedestrian and dilapidated costumes to literally dress the crowds of refugees creates a sense of ordinariness mixed with suffering. By coupling these costumes with those of the partisans, in shared physical spaces, heightened by the shared gestures of understanding and affection (particularly with the protection of the most wounded, civilians and soldiers alike) the film visually aligns the two groups, making civilians, though they do not wear explicit partisan symbols or costumes, a significant part of the national liberation struggle and the partisan iconography that demonstrates that struggle. Moreover, they frequently occupy one and the same space, with the concentration of spatial décor – beds made closely together, with no room in-between, characters lying across one another – indicating the dependency of characters on each other and thus a commonality expressed across physical as well as social lines.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect about the film's representation of an ethos of commonality is that this ethos is also expressed *across enemy lines*, primarily through music. The song 'Padaj Silo i Nepravdo' ('Fall ye Force and Injustice') sung by the husky partisan Šumadinac played by Stole Arandelović represents a moment which unites for one instant the partisans and their German and Axis counterparts in a moment of remembrance and awe. Andrea Gelardi stresses well that unlike many war films it is this moment that estranges, rather than fuels, the participants from the conflict by reminding them of the microcosmic nature of the battlefield and the immensity of life beyond it. Gelardi reminds us that the scene perpetuates a homesickness of existential proportions that distances the characters from the moment of conflict rather than integrating them into the heart of it,

thereby unconventionally disrupting the cinematic narrative of war.⁵⁸ Though the film may be interpreted as using partisan iconography to make a myth about war, this kind of 'choral' disruption is key for unmaking that myth by suspending if not obliterating the line between friend and foe.⁵⁹

Brotherhood and unity are expressed on the macro-level of the film's aesthetics as the *visual interconnectedness* of the filmic characters in internal connected spaces of battle and external disconnected spaces of battle. In the first the characters rely on one another and carry one another, both literally and figuratively, through moments of hardship. In the second lands to be conquered by the exodus, exhibited through suffering and movement of people across insurmountable geography, displays their joint struggle. The aerial photography, wide landscape and extreme long shots capture the scale of the movement and map out the struggle in relation to the landscape while the more intimate close-ups capture the details of the movement and position the struggle in relation to more basic needs, such as food, shelter, and medical care. The representations of suffering as *intensely personal* and *affectively collective*, exodus as a war with geography as much as necessity, and resistance as a means of defence against totality creates a language of melodrama that is entirely present in the film, perhaps one that is most centrally evident through the partisan aesthetics, but which is equally counteracted by the multi-perspective narratives which move melodrama from the representation of monologue to one of dialogue.

Multi-perspective narratives unusually integrate the stories of diverse individuals and groups, from the partisans to the Nazis, Italians, Ustaše and Chetniks. While on the one hand the multiple perspectives offer a point of unity for the partisan collective this integration breaks with the traditional partisan portrayal of the enemy. This is most clearly exhibited through the characters of Orson Welles and Franco Nero: Welles's Chetnik commander has more character than similar figures in other films and Nero's arc of surrender to the partisans and simultaneous connection with his people fighting on the opposite side makes him estranged from the field of battle.⁶⁰ The significant detail to which the film goes to examine the inner workings of each of the represented groups creates a kind of dramaturgical mosaic which bring out the differences as well as the similarities between these groups. While melodrama is certainly ingrained within the film's aesthetics, a sense of ordinariness also emerges from looking at the psychology of the characters. The representation of an all-pervasive sense of death across the different groups, including the partisans, acts as a critical point of disruption to the cinematic narrative of war. Instead of vitality attributed to a morally superior group we see destruction and decay subsume friend and foe alike. In this way the film enables us to see again the ordinariness of the people involved in the conflict – it reminds of their shared mortality – and thus brings us a step closer to an accurate comprehension of the reality of war.

Finally, and most strikingly, the film presents an ambiguous view of religion that is not entirely conducive to socialism. It is worth comparing two scenes in the film – the scene of the Chetnik leader's address to his army and the scene of the choral disruption with the song 'Padaj Silo i Nepravdo' – in order to

demonstrate how this presentation is achieved. In the first, we can see the entrance to a Church when the leader of the Chetniks speaks to his soldiers. The leader appears towering and despotic in foreground and the priests appear quiet and complacent in the background. In the second, the bells of a Church ring alongside the song when the partisans are victorious against the Axis. Soldiers, civilians and wounded alike appear in foreground, expressing sobriety and joy despite visible pain through body language or shedding tears through expression. While the backdrop of the Church behind the Chetnik Nazi collaborator appears unobtrusive and silent, in a sudden and unexpected shift, the bells emerge with the partisans to signify that God is with the people in the struggle. The representation of the Church, and religion per se, is thus more ambiguous than first meets the eye. The presence of this kind of representation – like the choral disruption that connects enemies and estranges the participants from the conflict – in the most lucrative of war epics shows us how Yugoslav cinema, even in its most popular forms, contained lateral engagement with subjects which were sensitive if not rejected in the socialist cultural imaginary.⁶¹

The Battle of Neretva in the history of Yugoslav cinema

Critical representations of the national liberation struggle and the history of the Second World War form an important part of Yugoslav cinema heritage. It is worth tracing some of these representations historically in more detail so that we can better understand and situate the significance of *The Battle of Neretva* within that heritage.

There were a series of films produced in Yugoslavia during the three decades before *Neretva* which dealt with representations of the Independent State of Croatia. Branko Bauer's seminal work *Don't Look Back, My Son* (1956) shows the journey of a partisan father who escapes from a train headed for the concentration camp Jasenovac. On arriving in Zagreb and finding his young son indoctrinated by fascist ideology the father must find a way to get his son back and to get them both out of the city before they are discovered by the regime's police. The film raises the question of personal responsibility and moral action under a totalitarian regime and is one of the first post-war films to address the genocide perpetrated against Serbs, Jews, and Roma in the Independent State of Croatia. While the former is an issue already addressed just two years after the war, in *This Nation Will Live* (Nikola Popović, 1947), Bauer's treatment is much more subtle and visually refined, placing suggestion before exposition. A film which takes the issue of ideological difference even further is *The Ninth Circle* (France Štiglic, 1960): a film about the love between a Croatian boy and a Jewish girl he marries on the eve of the Holocaust. Infusing fear and claustrophobia even into the 'open' spaces where life goes on, the film shows the importance of spiritual survival in the face of a system that, while dehumanizing the body, sets to destroy the spirit. Beyond the effect of internal division Štiglic's film shows that even impossible borders can be crossed by the person daring to step out of ideology.

In contrast *The Alphabet of Fear* (Fadil Hadžić, 1961) retains the thematic intensity of the previous works but is wrier in tone and surprisingly jazz-flavoured in

delivery. A beautiful student girl Vera works as a maid named Katica in the family of a high-ranking fascist collaborator in order to gather undercover information for the partisans. Set within the confines of the apartment home and its surrounding chiaroscuro-lit hallways the film is more psychological in terms of framing. It depicts the war through its absence. It also shows the more complex nature of personal collaboration with(in) a totalitarian regime. The daughter is shown as the firmest believer in the Ustaše's ideology, for the father collaboration appears a case of opportunism and a personal ambition to maintain professional status, for the mother it is about social status, while the younger daughter appears completely oblivious to the outside world and is good friends with Katica. However, the film does not in any way diminish their closeness with the regime as the family keeps a portrait of Ante Pavelic and holds social gatherings with the local fascist and Nazi elite. All these films reveal different sides of the war, but they remain connected in showing the living conditions and socio-political mentalities existing in the Independent State of Croatia. *The Battle of Neretva* integrates the portrayal of the Ustaše into its narrative. While that portrayal is not as critical as in the previous films it is important because it weaves what existed in public and cultural consciousness into the meta-narrative of World War II Yugoslavia.

In the history of Yugoslav cinema there are also a number of films that deal with the representations of Chetniks. Representations that explicitly deal with the role of Chetniks in World War II can be found in the films of Đorđe Kadijević, such as *The Feast* (1967) and *The Trek* (1968). Mostly minimalist in composition, rural in setting, and exploring the subtle intrusion of modern warfare on traditional peasant communities, Kadijević's work offers an insight into the role different Chetnik factions had in the lives of small communities. By contrast we see an expression of the resurgence of war trauma in contemporary Yugoslav spaces in Vojislav Kokač's work, specifically his film *Before the Truth* (1968), which in highly innovative avant-garde fashion relays the psychological impact of a chance meeting between two people, a former Chetnik and Partisan, in urban Belgrade. Both filmmakers provide the cultural context in which the role of Chetniks in Yugoslav history was examined through film retrospectively (Kadijević) and contemporarily (Kokač). Bulajić's film is a part of this cultural context, integrating the perspective of Chetniks into its meta-treatise of Yugoslav history.

The representation of partisans in Yugoslav cinema was perhaps the most common since the end of World War II. While the term partisan film is reserved for a group of highly stylized popular epics unique to Yugoslav war film, partisans were represented in Yugoslav cinema in often the most diverse and even conflicting ways, transcending countless directors, genres, and styles, and even going beyond the sphere of popular culture to break into the realm of avant-garde and experimental cinema. *Neretva* borrows as much from past productions as it sets the standards for future productions about partisans. When it comes to past productions, the film owes much to the romantic realist tradition, dramaturgical developments, and the school of political critique. Romantic realism marks the form of the first post-war film *Slavica* (Vjekoslav Afrić, 1947) and stretches to films from the early 1960s such as *Stepenice hrabrosti* (Oto Deneš, 1961), which highly romanticize the partisan struggle for national liberation and often posit partisans as figures

for adoration. The film also owes much to the dramaturgical developments in earlier partisan films, particularly the innovations displayed in Fadil Hadžić's films *Desant na Drvar* (1963) and *Konjuh planinom* (1966). The films thematize crucial operations of the war, with the former focusing, like *Neretva*, on one of the seven offensives undertaken by the partisans against the Axis. However, they are more significant for developing the mosaic dramaturgy which interweaves the stories of a variety of different characters and maps out the spatial structure and temporal progression of the offensives into one meaningful whole. This kind of composition also forms the backbone of *Neretva*'s aesthetics, as examined earlier in this paper. Political critique met aesthetic innovation in its most radical form in the work of Živojin Pavlović, mostly explicitly through his masterpiece *The Ambush* (1969) but also found in *The Awakening of the Rats* (1967) and *When I am Dead and Pale* (1968). Pavlović focused on characters on the margins of society. He fostered means of cinematic expression and is particularly striking for his portrayal of death and moral, as well as physical, decay. He also deconstructed the delusions of ideology, showing the internal strife between partisans and the type of corruption that developed after the war, where those who did not see the battlefield took advantage of governmental positions while some of the real idealists were shunned, if not killed. While *Neretva* is conservative in its ideology, the film's focus on the pervasiveness of suffering and death puts it in touch with the more critical cinematic representations of Yugoslav partisans.

While it is important to situate *Neretva* within the cinematic and cultural landscape in which it emerged, it is also important to remember that the film directly impacted the production of future war films in the country. The most direct example that followed was *Sutjeska* (Stipe Delić, 1973), an epic directed by Stipe Delić, Bulajić's assistant director on *Neretva*. *Sutjeska* many ways modelled itself on *Neretva*'s aesthetics, all-star (inter)national cast, and transnational production model. Shortly thereafter, *Užička republika/The Republic of Užice* (Živorad 'Žika' Mitrović, 1974) was to follow. Besides their formal similarities, the films also inductively built upon one another by each dealing with one of the seven strategic offensives of the partisans against the Axis. While the previous parts of the paper focused on the study of the film and the ways in which it was made, shown, and understood by its contemporaries, this part aimed to give the reader a sense of the cinematic and cultural landscape by which the film was shaped and which in turn shaped that landscape. In other words, if up to this point, we looked at the history of the film as an artifact, here we looked at the historiography of the film as an artifact in a landscape of artifacts. The aim is to stimulate more critical engagement with Yugoslav cinema and in this case apply it to the study of partisan film.

Conclusion

While scholars have frequently offered a reductive reading of *The Battle of Neretva*, this article aimed to show the textual and contextual significance of an epic war film that deserves – and initially garnered – more critical attention than first meets the eye. It also sought to demonstrate the overlaps, nuances, and contradictions in the theatrical release of the film, from its exceptionally devised premiere to its

distribution across the country to its final journey abroad. While in many ways it succeeded by figures (seeing the number of viewers in centres such as Belgrade), it also caused some of its buyers to go bankrupt. While investors chuckled and the argument over figures raged, the currency value itself changed, thus complicating the matter. Then the most interesting discourse emerged: a public debate about the nature of the cultural value of a film, one that even with such significant investment, not to mention a range of investors behind it, was found to be 'worth more than its monetary return'. This may change how we think about what constitutes the mainstream and how we determine value in an industry seemingly driven by capital interest but one where the value after all, to borrow Marxist terminology, transcends its 'material base'.

It is ironic that what many have called a clearly socialist epic attracted such a diversity of audiences, including festival connoisseurs and big distributors from the East and the West, respected actors and infamous directors by way of Welles and Bondarchuk, critical readings among the country's intellectuals, critics, journalists, and filmmakers – including those who made the film, most often represented in the press by Bulajić himself, a debate about the social, economic and ecological status of a republic hit by an earthquake and the ethics of putting on a premiere near that disaster zone. For a film where veterans came and three different representatives of the Allied powers met again to discuss their victory, we can write this off all too hastily as propaganda, but this would be completely missing the point. We also may begin to imagine the role of a film like *The Battle of Neretva* played aesthetically and culturally in gathering many of the big powers in fierce opposition during those days known as 'the Cold War' and having them sit down in a neutral zone and recall their joint successes but even this reading may be limited.

Instead, this research aims to bring the reader to appreciate the layers of meaning and indeed contradiction that went into the film and that which surrounded it as an event for five years, complicating our understanding of what should have been one of the straight fires of Yugoslav partisan filmmaking. Maybe that straight fire was reserved for *Sutjeska* but *Neretva* will remain a hybrid, a paradox. This essay has tried to unpack that paradox in the hopes of showing to the readers what really went into the production of one of socialist Yugoslavia's biggest films. This will hopefully demystify some of the subject matter and historical context and open the way for appreciating the heritage of one of the most important European cinemas of the twentieth century. A debate continues about the film today following the country's formal dissolution and the question arises: to whom does the film belong? For some, it is a Croatian picture,⁶² for others Bosnian,⁶³ and for others, most recently, Slovenian.⁶⁴ Maybe even that debate, which Bulajić himself unwittingly entered, missed the point and we can see now that *Neretva* is much more than which it always wanted to be: a Yugoslav film.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Aleksandar Erdeljanović, Svetlana Vistać, Ivan Stamenković, and all the colleagues of the library and archive of Jugoslovenska Kinoteka/Yugoslav Cinematheque in Belgrade for providing the archival documents used in this research. The author would like to thank Andrea Gelardi, James Chapman, Philippa Campbell, James Nixon, and Mark Preston for their support in the development of this research.

Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK and the Scottish International Education Trust.

Dedication

To my great-grandmother Julika who crossed the Neretva river during the battle, saving all her children.

Notes

1. For a study of co-productions, see Francesco Di Chiara, 'Looking for New Aesthetic Models through Italian-Yugoslavian Film Co-Productions: Lowbrow Neorealism in *Sand, Love and Salt*', in *Illuminace* (Prague: Czech National Film Archive), 25, no. 3 (2013), 37–49; Dragan Batančev, 'The unseen shots: anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist aspects of unmade co-productions about the 1914 Sarajevo Assassination', in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2022), Vol. 13, Issue 1, , 21–37.
2. For further reading on the role of *Filmske Novosti* in mapping out cinematic collaboration with countries of the Non-Alignment Movement and its significance in the "history of Third Cinema and militant cinè-geographies", see Mila Turajlić, 'Filmske Novosti: Filmed Diplomacy', in *Nationalities Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49:3, 2021), 483–503.
3. For further reading on Mozambican-Yugoslav cine-collaboration, see chapter on *Time of the Leopard* in Ros Gray, *Cinemas of the Mozambican Revolution: Anti-Colonialism, Independence and Internationalism in Filmmaking, 1968-1991* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 235–254.
4. Historian Vladimir Dedijer and his colleagues penned the seminal work on the history of Yugoslavia. Vladimir Dedijer, Ivan Božić, Sima M. Ćirković, Milorad Ekmečić, *History of Yugoslavia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), originally published in Serbo-Croatian in 1972. Ivan Jelić calls Neretva and Sutjeska "the decisive battles of the revolution". For further study, see Ivan Jelić, 'O pristupu povijesti jugoslavenske revolucije u „Istoriji Jugoslavije”', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 2 (1973): 63–69. While this research does not cover historical writing in the Yugoslav successor states, a chapter which gives an overview of

- these developments can be found in Vesna Drapac, 'Reimagining the Yugoslav Partisan Epic', in *War Stories: The War Memoir in History and Literature*, ed. Philip Dwyer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 168–192.
5. 'Sto vodiča za Neretvu', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 11 November 1969.
 6. 'Hoteli od 27. rezervisani', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 5 November 1969.
 7. This was also built up through articles which often used the word 'pripreme' ('preparations') coupled with exclusive images from the film, either of the cast or even the field of battle, to gauge audience reception, and a week before articles using phrases such as 'preparations almost complete' indicate that they sought to continually stimulate reader engagement alongside traditional reporting. 'Pripreme pri kraju', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 12 November 1969.
 8. My translation. '„Bosna Film”, „Kinema” i „Jadran” su na zajedničkom sastanku odlucili da svetska premijera bude u Sarajevu zato sto je, na neki nacin, Sarajevo bilo centar svih događaja.' "Svetska premijera "Neretve" u Sarajevo: Milioni za jednu noć' 13 November 1969, Newspaper cutting, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka.
 9. My translation. 'Svetska premijera "Neretve" u Sarajevo: Milioni za jednu noć' 13 November 1969, Newspaper cutting, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka.
 10. Lj. J., 'Sarajevo očekuje goste', in *Večernji list*, 21 June 1969. Newspaper cutting, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka.
 11. Lj. J., 'Sarajevo očekuje goste', in *Večernji list*, 21 June 1969. Newspaper cutting, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka.
 12. Vojin Vitezica, 'Festival jednog filma', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 1. December 1969; T. Čiča, 'Neretva okuplja filmsku elitu sveta', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 25 November 1969; Stanka Godnic, "'Bitka" kmalu v Ljubljani', in *Delo*, Ljubljana, 27 November 1969; 'Vo Sarajevo: Svetska premijera na „Bitkata na Neretva"', in *Nova Makedonija*, Skopje, 28 November 1969.
 13. M.B. 'Bulajić razgledao „Skend"', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 15. October 1969; "Bulajić zadovoljan „Skendom"' in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 7 November 1969; "Slavje v Sarajevu" in *Večer*, Maribor, 24 November 1969.
 14. Article on guests in attendance: 'Posle svetske premijere „Neretve": Zahvalnost građanima Sarajeva', in *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, 2. December 1969; Articles on television broadcast: D.Ć., 'Neretva: Dve premijere i TV prenos', in *Ekspres*, Beograd, 17 November 1969; D. Curać, 'Spektakularna premijera na TV', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 25 November 1969; article on international profile of event: Vojin Vitezica, 'Festival jednog filma', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 1. December 1969. Z. Zoković, 'Stizu inostrani gosti', in *Borba*, Beograd, 25 November 1969.
 15. M. M., 'Veliko interesovanje za premijeru Bitke na Neretvi: Gosti iz cijelog sveta', in *Oslobođenje*, Sarajevo, 23 November 1969.
 16. M. M., 'Veliko interesovanje za premijeru Bitke na Neretvi: Gosti iz cijelog sveta', in *Oslobođenje*, Sarajevo, 23 November 1969; Z. Zoković, 'Stizu inostrani gosti', in *Borba*, Beograd, 25 November 1969; D. Curać, 'Spektakularna premijera na TV', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 25 November 1969.
 17. D. Curać, 'Spektakularna premijera na TV', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 25 November 1969.

18. D.B. 'Ugledni gosti na svjetskoj premijeri: Engleska i sovjetska vojna delegacija na premijeri Bulajićeva filma u Sarajevu', in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 26 November 1969.
19. 'Pred premijeru Bulajićeva filma Bitka na Neretvi: Zvijezde stižu u Sarajevo', in *Večernji List*, 25 November 1969.
20. D. Drašković, 'Pikasoov plakat za „Neretvu”', in *Borba*, Beograd, 26 November 1969.
21. Milomir Marinović, 'Bitka za „Neretvu”', Beograd, 16. December 1969. Newspaper cutting, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka.
22. 'Prihod od premijeri postradalima', in *Večernje Novine*, Sarajevo, 5 November 1969.
23. D.B. 'Ugledni gosti na svjetskoj premijeri: Engleska i sovjetska vojna delegacija na premijeri Bulajićeva filma u Sarajevu', in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 26 November 1969.
24. 'Ličnosti u vestima', in *Politika*, Beograd, 11. February 1970.
25. Maroje Mihovilović, 'Odbrana na Neretvi', in *Nin*, Beograd, 3 March 1971.
26. 'Autobusima na Neretvu', in *Jutarnje Novosti*, Beograd, 20. February 1970.
27. *Tedenska Tribuna*, Ljubljana, 3. February 1971.
28. It is worth recalling the installation of fighter planes in London exhibition venues for the premiere of *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, USA/UK/Canada, 2014) or the press coverage of the destruction of a vintage World War II military plane for *Dunkirk* (Christopher Nolan, USA/UK/France/Netherlands, 2016).
29. For further reading on the relationship between history and memory through film, see the volume edited by Fearghal McGarry and Jennie Carlsten with special reference to the contribution by Robert A. Rosenstone. See Robert A. Rosenstone, 'Reflections on What the Filmmaker Historian Does (to History)', in *Film, History and Memory*, ed. Fearghal McGarry and Jennie Carlsten (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 183–197.
30. Sreten Petrović, 'Finansijski krah „Bitke na Neretvi', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, February 1970. Exact date missing from archival document.
31. 'Saopćenje ekipe Neretve', in *Večernji List*, Zagreb, 4 March 1970; Zulfo Bostandžić, 'Konferencija za štampu u „Bosna-Filmu”: Producenti se ponose Neretvom', in *Politika*, Beograd, 5 March 1970; 'Istina o Neretvi', in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 9 March 1970; Neđo Parežanin, 'Spor oko filma „Bitka na Neretvi”: Gde je istina? Izjava generalnog direktora „Bosna-Filma” N. Parežanina', in *Politika*, Beograd, 25. February 1971.
32. D.S., 'Bitka (ali i insinucije) još traje', in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 27. February 1970; R.V. Guzina, 'O finansijskom (ne)uspehu „Bitke na Neretvi: Kredit bez roka', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 4 March 1970; "Sarajevo: Neretva – propala; Neretva – bestseller; primer obračunavanja u domaćem filmu" in *Vjesnik u Srijedu*, Zagreb, 3 March 1971.
33. Zulfo Bostandžić, "Konferencija za štampu u „Bosna-Filmu”: Producenti se ponose Neretvom" in *Politika*, Beograd, 5 March 1970; ; "Sarajevo: Neretva – propala; Neretva – bestseller; primer obračunavanja u domaćem filmu" in *Vjesnik u Srijedu*, Zagreb, 3 March 1971.
34. R.V. Guzina, 'O finansijskom (ne)uspehu „Bitke na Neretvi”: Kredit bez roka', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 4 March 1970; 'Plat zvona med sofinancerji filma Bitka na Neretvi: Prenajljen preplah', in *Dnevnik*, Ljubljana, 23. February 1971.

35. Article on distribution rights sold: *Primorske Novice*, Koper, 14. February 1970; Article on actual distribution figures: Zulfo Bostandžić, 'Bosna Film veoma solidan poslovni partner', in *Politika*, Beograd, 27. February 1971.
36. Article on US distribution: 'SAD: Veliki uspeh Jugoslavenskog Filma: „Neretva” u 7000 Kinematografa', in *Večernji List*, Zagreb, 6 March 1971; article on US distributor bankruptcy: 'O finansijskom (ne)uspehu „Bitke na Neretvi”: Bankrotirao Americki Distributer', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 3 March 1971.
37. The press release of the film's production team, which ran in Belgrade's *Politika*, speaks about the value of the production's interpersonal and international collaboration and the film's artistic and cultural significance, as confirmed by the acclaim received, both at home and abroad. The press release finishes with the reminder that "our community has good reason to be pleased even if the film is not a commercial success, the kind of success which was never set as the aim of „Neretva” nor Yugoslav cinema." See S.O., 'Saopštenje filmske radne zajednice filma „Bitka na Neretvi”: Ima razloga da budemo zadovoljni', in *Politika*, Beograd, 4 March 1971. The film producers were joined by Josip Broz Tito and his personal entourage in attending the ceremony at the Academy Awards.
38. 'Premijera', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 1. December 1969.
39. Article on reception in Norway: 'Neretva u Oslu', in *Večernji List*, Zagreb, 23. February 1971; Article on reception in Hungary: 'Mađarski kritičari o Neretvi', in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, Split, 8. December 1970.
40. 'Moskovska „Pravda” o „Neretvi"', in *Borba*, Beograd, 4 January 1970.
41. Vljako Ubavić, 'U Tunisu – nedelja Jugoslovenske kulture', in *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, 6 March 1971.
42. Limun Papić, 'Najbolji čas istorije', in *Glas*, Banja Luka, 14 January 1970.
43. 'Strani kritičari o „Bitka na Neretvi”: Historija napisana filmom', in *Novi List*, Rijeka, 19. February 1970.
44. These voices in the press echo Orson Welles, who, shortly after the premiere, stated the film is artistically and formally interesting for world cinema, offering to the international public "an important document and historical truth." In this way the film's claim to historicity was confirmed by film auteurs as well as the media press. See Z. Zoković: "Komplimenti glumaca režiseru" in *Borba*, Beograd, 1. December 1969.
45. Bulajić in V. Vitezica, 'Neretva nije ratni film?', in *Večernje Novosti*, Beograd, 28 November 1969.
46. Limun Papić: Ibid.
47. Sreten Petrović: Ibid.
48. 'The Battle of the River Neretva', in *Variety*, New York, 13 September 1967.
49. 'Commonwealth Seen as Yank Dib of Yugo 'Neretva' Pic; Top (\$10-Mil) for East, Bar USSR', in *Variety*, New York, 16 October 1968.
50. 'Tito's State Banquet For 'Neretva' Pic Staff', in *Variety*, New York, 29 January 1969; Jack Lauder, 'Yugoslavia's Filmmaking Boom; 7 Foreign Co-Pros, on '69 Slate', in *Variety*, New York, 18 June 1969.
51. 'Neretva's Mammoth Preem', in *Variety*, London, 17 December 1969.
52. Review: 'Bitka na Neretvi (The Battle of the Neretva)', in *Variety*, New York, 10 December 1969; 'Neretva': Epic of Many Flags and Logistical Woes', in

- Variety*, New York, 24 December 1969; 'The Battle of Neretva', in *The Hollywood Reporter*, Los Angeles, 8 December 1969; "The Battle of Neretva" in *The Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, 3 May 1971.
53. 'Tucson Vets Charge 'Neretva' Distorts Chetnik Heroics', in *Variety*, New York, 6 May 1970.
 54. 'Tucson Vets Charge 'Neretva' Distorts Chetnik Heroics', in *Variety*, New York, 6 May 1970.
 55. "'Yesterday' Brisk \$9,900, Denver; 'Neretva' \$7,000", in *Variety*, New York, 24 March 1971.
 56. Tomislav Šakić, 'Filmski svijet Veljka Bulajića: poprište susreta kolektivnog i privatnog', *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*, 57–58 (2009): 14–26; Nemanja Zvijer: 'Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu: prilog analizi filma na primeru Bitke na Neretvi Veljka Bulajića', in *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*, 57–58 (2009): 27–40; Nemanja Zvijer, 'Presenting (Imposing) Values through Films: The Case of the Yugoslav Partisan Films', in *IMAGES - Journal for visual studies* 2 (2014): 1–21.
 57. While a socialist Italy never came to exist, the representation of a longing for socialism on the part of an Italian officer represented in a Yugoslav film visually integrates the cultural memory of anti-fascism that was almost as crucial to Italy's post-war history and the cinematic representations of partisans in post-war Italian cinema. Studying cross-cultural representations of anti-fascist struggle, especially between Yugoslavia and Italy, is worth exploring beyond this article. For further reading on the development of Yugoslav and Italian cinemas after the war, with special reference to co-productions and the work of Veljko Bulajić, see Francesco Di Chiara: *Ibid.*
 58. This notion of estrangement was developed by Andrea Gelardi in his 'Songs from the Battlefield, Disrupting the Cinematic Narratives of War', presented jointly with my paper at Goldsmiths, University of London. Gelardi argues that interdiegetic songs challenge the teleology of a conflict and uses the case of Neretva to show the way in which disruption works, then comparing it with instances in world cinema, such as the final songs in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, USA, 1957) and Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, France, 1937). Andrea Gelardi, 'Songs from the Battlefield', in *Goldsmiths Literature Seminar* (London: Goldsmiths, University of London, 2019).
 59. Andrea Gelardi, *Ibid.*
 60. The effect of external warfare on the internal life of the person is something examined throughout Yugoslav cinema and is especially pronounced in the work of Živojin Pavlović and Mladomir Puriša Đorđević, as well as finely in the masterpiece *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (Srđan Dragojević, FR Yugoslavia, 1996).
 61. Examining the subversive potential of such portrayals merits a separate study which goes beyond the scope of the present text.
 62. Vlado Vurušić, 'Bitka za 'Bitku na Neretvi' Bulajić: 'Ne negiram jugoslavenski dio, ali rad je hrvatski!', in *Jutarnji List*, Zagreb, 12 March 2013.
 63. 'Bitka oko "Bitke na Neretvi" se nastavlja', in *Blic*, Beograd, 10 March 2013; Also see Andrea Virginás, *Cultural Studies Approaches in the Study of Eastern*

European Cinema: Spaces, Bodies, Memories (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 88.

64. Krešimir Žabec, 'Bitka za 'Bitku' Je li 'Bitka na Neretvi' Slovenski film? Slovenci traže svoju kulturnu baštinu, na popisu i Bulajićev ratni spektakl', in *Jutarnji List*, Zagreb, 15 January 2018.

Notes on contributor

Mina Radović is a doctoral researcher and associate lecturer (2020–2021) in language, literature and film at Goldsmiths, University of London. A film historian, curator, and archivist, he is the founder and director of Liberating Cinema UK, a non-profit charitable organization committed to the representation, restoration, and exhibition of world cinema heritage. His research expertise is in film history and historiography, archiving and restoration, world cinemas with special focus on Yugoslav cinema and Serbian cinema, early cinema and culture, cinematic representations of the Holocaust and the study of totalitarian ideologies through language and film.
