

<https://doi.org/10.58193/ilu.1838>

Dunja Jelenković  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4626-1244>
(Concordia University, Canada & University Ca' Foscari of Venice, Italy)

In the Empty Archives of the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival

Curating Conflicting Memories of War

Abstract

This article compares archival, programming and editorial practices of the Yugoslav/Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival across three phases: its socialist Belgrade years when it endorsed the values of Yugoslav federalism (1960–1991), its post-socialist transformation when it retained its Yugoslav name, but abandoned its Yugoslav profile (1991–2004), and its contemporary development as an international event in a neoliberal context (since 2004). Founded in 1954 in the city of Pula, the festival initially presented the full spectrum of Yugoslav film production. In 1960 the documentary and short film segment was transferred to Belgrade to provide it with a dedicated platform. This Belgrade-based festival has continued without interruption ever since, taking place even during the 1990s, as the country in whose interests it had been created was collapsing. The article investigates how war influenced the choice of screened films, archived documents, and their representation in the catalogues, and how, in turn, these choices contributed to the construction of conflicting memories of war. By looking into the dynamics of continuities and ruptures within these two interrelated processes, the analysis highlights the use of invented traditions for shaping favorable cultural memories in turbulent political circumstances of post-war state formation, wartime state deconstruction, and the contemporary cultural positioning of a small nation-state in the post-Yugoslav context.

Keywords

film festivals, archives, cinema, war, cultural memory, Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, socialism, post-socialism

Introduction

In 2014, the City of Belgrade shut down the Direkcija FEST-a (FEST Head Office) — an institution created in 2001 to oversee the city's public film festivals — and merged it with CEBEF (Centar beogradskih festivala), a centralized agency for both film and music festivals.¹⁾ This institutional restructuring followed a major political shift in 2012, when the center-left Democratic Party lost power to the right-wing, populist Serbian Progressive Party. Subsequent cultural budget cuts prompted the closure. Direkcija FEST-a had previously managed the International Film Festival FEST (est. 1971), Yugoslav/Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival (est. 1954), and Sopot Film Festival (est. 1972), while also publishing cinema-related books. The transition to CEBEF involved a physical downsizing; staff and their documents were moved to a shared space. Before the move, the institution's director Gradimir Dimitrijević organized a large-scale purge, and the three festivals' catalogues and documents were discarded with no organized or systematized transfer to an archive.²⁾ This archival loss was not a new practice but rather the culmination of a long history of institutional neglect dating back to the 1990s — a reflection of shifting identity politics and changing priorities around film programming, document preservation and catalogue presentation.

Considering the political and identity frameworks shaping institutional decision-making, this article compares archival, programming and editorial practices of the Yugoslav/Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival across three phases: 1) its socialist Belgrade years when it served as the official window into Yugoslav short film production (1960–1991), 2) its post-socialist transformation when it operated as a Serbian event under a Yugoslav name (1991–2004), and, 3) its post-2004 period, when it became international and was renamed the Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival (hereinafter: the Festival).³⁾ While this periodization coincides with wider political transformations, it is defined by key shifts within the festival itself, reflecting the premise that no change in its profile occurred without a reorganization of its structure; notably in 1960, when it became a separate event in Belgrade; 1991, when non-Serbian production houses began withdrawing, and 2004, when it officially abandoned its Yugoslav profile, more than a decade after doing so in practice.

The analysis examines film festivals as sites of memory, showing how the legacy of war shaped archival selection, catalogue presentation and film programming, and how these choices in turn contributed to the construction of memory of the Second World War and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s: Slovenia (1991), Croatia (1991–1995), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), Kosovo (1998–1999), and the NATO bombing of Serbia and Monte-

1) Decision on Changing a Cultural Institution's Founding Act, *Službeni list Grada Beograda*, 37/2014, 51/2014.

2) I worked as the programmer for the Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival from 2009–2011. Under the pretext of collecting personal belongings from my former office, I was able to transfer part of the documentation to the libraries of the Jugoslovenska kinoteka (Yugoslav Film Archives) and University of Arts.

3) The article is developed within the MSCA project "Film Festivals and War: a Fe-Male Perspective" (FEST-WAR FM), funded by the European Union (GA number: 101149227). Views and opinions expressed are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

negro (1999).⁴⁾ Central to this study is the Festival's documentary section which accounted for most of the screening time and catalogue space.⁵⁾ Documentary cinema's close association with real people, places and situations furthermore encourages audiences to perceive it as reality, as reflected in journalists' descriptions of "reality as such" and "a copy-paste from reality" in their festival reporting.⁶⁾ Against this backdrop, the analysis asks what kinds of war and revolutionary "realities" were constructed through the Festival's programs, catalogues and archives during the country's socialist reconstruction (1960–1991), its war-time deconstruction (1991–2004), and contemporary development as a small nation-state in the post-Yugoslav context (since 2004). By examining the continuities and ruptures within the Festival's history, the article highlights the use of invented traditions for shaping cultural memories, while also addressing the methodological challenges of history writing in the context of fragmented archives.⁷⁾

Film festival studies are a rapidly evolving research field, despite their relatively recent establishment within academia. Over the past few decades, scholars have examined film festivals' structural elements while also uncovering their broader sociological, cultural, historical, and political dimensions.⁸⁾ Through this interdisciplinary lens, film festivals serve as sites for analyzing various developments in the humanities and social sciences, from Cold War diplomatic exchanges⁹⁾ to borderlands and migrations,¹⁰⁾ to rethinking film projection in the (post-)pandemic era.¹¹⁾ Festival archival practices have been explored both in research focused on archival film festivals and in studies addressing archival practices across diverse festival contexts.¹²⁾ Within this framework, Antoine Damiens discussed archiving in the context of Covid-19,¹³⁾ while Maria Paz Peirano discussed the lack of festival archives in Chile.¹⁴⁾ The most comprehensive historical overview of the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival to date is the monograph *Festival jugosloven-*

4) Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. I–III (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1984]).

5) Animated films were more numerous, but they only lasted a couple of minutes, whereas documentaries averaged 15–22'.

6) Aco Štaka, "Stvarnost kao takva," *Oslobodjenje*, March 30, 1987; Bogdan Kalafatović, "'Prepisana' stvarnost," *NIN*, March 19, 1978. For the misinterpretations of the links between documentary and reality, see Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 7–14.

7) Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

8) See Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck, "FFRN Bibliography," *Film Festival Research*, 2025, accessed July 24, 2025, <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/>.

9) Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine, eds., *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017).

10) Rachel Johnson, "On Studying Film Festivals and Migration: Borderlands and Beginnings," in *Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World: Practice and Methods*, eds. Dorota Ostrowska and Tamara L. Falicov (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025), 117–133.

11) Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens, *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After* (London: Palgrave MacMillan Cham, 2023).

12) See "Part 1 — Archival Turn," in *Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World*, eds. Ostrowska and Falicov, 31–80.

13) Antoine Damiens, "Festivals, Covid-19, and the Crisis of Archiving," in *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After*, eds. de Valck and Damiens, 291–305.

14) Maria Paz Peirano, "Mapping histories and archiving ephemeral landscapes: strategies and challenges for researching small film festivals," *Studies in European Cinema* 17, no. 2 (2020), 170–184.

skog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004. Od jugoslovenskog socializma do srpskog nacionalizma (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, 2023).¹⁵⁾ While the present article builds on the research conducted for this monograph — which primarily examined the Festival's programming — it extends the analysis by incorporating its archival and editorial dimensions. In doing so it seeks to provide a more inclusive understanding of the complex process of cultural memory creation in turbulent political circumstances.

Positioned at the intersection of film festival studies and memory studies, this study combines methods from historical research (archival investigation), film studies (film content analysis), and film festival studies (program analysis). The research involved a detailed examination of 71 festival catalogues, 214 journalistic articles (1954–2025) and the available documentation relative to the Festival's founding, complemented by interviews and research in personal collections of individuals involved with the festival.¹⁶⁾ Of the 430 films examined, the focus was on those that were endorsed through awards, press attention, or placement in high profile screening slots.¹⁷⁾ As several production houses involved with the Festival have been dissolved, the films were sourced from Jugoslovenska kinoteka, the production houses Zagreb Film and Dunav Film, and filmmakers' personal collections.¹⁸⁾ Some were located on YouTube and unofficial websites where they were often not listed under their original titles but with descriptors. In such cases, identifying them required detailed keyword searches and cross-checking credits with festival catalogues.¹⁹⁾ Combining information from these diverse sources compensated for the absence of the Festival's own archives and helped fill the gaps resulting from films' inaccessibility and the partial loss of administrative records.

The article opens with a brief historical overview of the circumstances that led to the Festival's creation and outlines its original structure. It then examines how the choice of screened films, archived documents, and their representation in the catalogues, have contributed to the construction of conflicting memories of war, from 1960 to the present.

15) For publications in English, see Dunja Jelenković, "The Film Festival as a Vehicle for Memory Officialization: The Afterlife of WWII in the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954–2004," in *Documentary Film Festivals: Methods, History, Politics*, vol. I, eds. Aida Vallejo and Ezra Winton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 101–122; and Dunja Jelenković, "Politics, Ideology and Programming Practices: How Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival Abandoned the Idea of Yugoslavia," *New Review of Film and Television Studies: Special Issue: Film Festival Origins and Trajectories* 14, no. 1 (2016), 76–92.

16) The catalogs are available at Jugoslovenska kinoteka, which also holds partial press-clippings. Additional press-clippings are available at National Library of Serbia and Belgrade City Library. The Archives of Yugoslavia hold fragmented documentation relative to the Festival's founding and relocation to Belgrade (1954–1960). I obtained invaluable documentation and information unavailable in official archives from: Dejan Kosanović, festival director from 1963–1968; Nikola Tolja Vučinić, head of Dunav Film in the 1970s and 1980s; journalist and critic Zorica Jevremović; and filmmakers Želimir Žilnik, Miroslav Jokić and Janko Baljak (the Festival's artistic director from 2009 to 2014).

17) For the full list of consulted materials and films from 1954–2004, see Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 485–558.

18) I am especially grateful to filmmaker Puriša Djordjević who entrusted me with his personal collection of Betacam tapes, featuring both his own and his colleagues' short films.

19) Over the years online access to these films has improved as increasing numbers of titles have been digitized by Jugoslovenska kinoteka.

National Film Festival(s) as the Crown of a Decentralized Cinema Landscape

Emerging in 1932 in Venice, film festivals became a recurrent phenomenon in the immediate postwar years with the establishment of the festivals in Cannes (1946), Locarno (1946), Karlovy Vary (1946), and Edinburgh (1947). Socialist Yugoslavia was among the pioneering countries in film festival activity, largely due to its transformation into a socialist republic under communist leadership in 1945.²⁰⁾ Like their comrades around the world, the Yugoslav communists saw film as the most direct way to communicate their values to broad, often illiterate audiences.²¹⁾ Thus, even before taking power at the end of the Second World War, they began building an organized film sector — something that had not existed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1941). In 1943 they formed a film unit within the Partisan resistance movement and made lists of documents to be safeguarded and used in future documentaries about the war: personal journals, administrative documents, war literature, photographs, etc.²²⁾ In doing so, they initiated memorial and archival practices within cinematic production already at that early stage of setting up the film sector. After the war, they founded the first production houses, film schools, specialized magazines and film archives, making sure that each republic gradually developed the infrastructure necessary for film production, education, distribution and archiving.²³⁾

Although similar in some respects to investments made by the Soviet Union across its republics, Yugoslavia organized its film sector according to country-specific needs, rooted in its Non-Aligned status and post-war identity policies. In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 rupture with the Soviet Union, the communists began decentralizing state institutions, marking a departure from Soviet-style models.²⁴⁾ In the 1950s the main federal film institution, Komitet za kinematografiju, was dissolved and the republics emerged as autonomous film centers that collectively constituted a unique cinema system.²⁵⁾ The decentralization was also linked to the effort to establish a nationally diverse society, setting the socialist state apart from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which had promoted a unified national identity.²⁶⁾ The new federation granted its six constituent nations and local non-

20) Declared on November 29, 1943, Socialist Yugoslavia effectively became a state in 1945. It consisted of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Serbia had two autonomous provinces: Vojvodina in the North, and Kosovo and Metohija in the South.

21) Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. IV: *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

22) "Osnovni plan rada Filmske sekcije propagandnog odeljenja Vrhovnog štaba NOV i POJ" (December 13, 1944) available in Stevo Ostojić, ed., *Rat, revolucija, ekran* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977), no page number.

23) Production houses established in 1946: Avala Film (Belgrade), Jadran Film (Zagreb); 1947: Triglav Film (Ljubljana), Bosna Film (Sarajevo), Vardar Film (Skopje); 1949: Lovćen Film (Cetinje). The earliest film academies were in Belgrade (1948) and Zagreb (1950). The specialized magazine *Film* was launched in Belgrade in 1946. The central institution for film archiving, Jugoslovenska kinoteka, was founded in 1949. In 1951 it became a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP).

24) See Milivoj Bešlin and Petar Žarković, "The Rise and Fall of Democratic Socialism in Yugoslavia 1948–1972," *Filozofija i društvo / Philosophy and Society* 34, no. 4 (2023), 550–570.

25) Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 32–60.

26) For the development of the Yugoslav idea and its variants, see Dejan Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003).

South Slavic national groups the liberty to freely develop their own identities.²⁷⁾ The aim was to resolve the complex national question that had destabilized the country since its creation in 1918, and ultimately resulted in a civil war during the Second World War (1941–1945). This civil war opposed several military and ideological formations, most of which were right-wing, racist, and xenophobic, and collaborated with the occupying forces (e.g. Croatian Ustashes, Serbian Chetniks, Slovene Bela garda, Bosnian Handžar division). The Partisans, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito represented the only leftist, supra-national, and antifascist resistance movement. They emerged from the war as dual victors — militarily, by defeating the enemy, and politically, by transforming the country into a republic. This transformation, carried out through the Socialist Revolution, aimed to overcome social, ideological, educational and gender inequalities, while mitigating national(ist) divisions that had led to the civil war.

It is in this atmosphere that the first Yugoslav film festival was established in Pula, Croatia, in 1954, as the crown of the newly organized film sector. The aim was to showcase the achievements of a rapidly expanding film industry, which grew from 6 films produced in 1945 to 161 films in 1953.²⁸⁾ On a practical level, an annual gathering enabled filmmakers and critics from across the country to network, collaborate and learn about the films made in republics other than their own. On the symbolic level, such a gathering allowed the decentralized film sector to unite under the common Yugoslav label. The choice of location also had symbolic value, this time in the realm of international politics. Pula is located in a borderland region that was the subject of a diplomatic conflict with Italy between 1945 and 1954; thus, a national film festival positioned in the heart of this contested area symbolically reaffirmed the region's Yugoslav character.²⁹⁾

Within just a couple of years the Festival became a high-profile event, with movie stars, red carpet, flashing cameras, and an audience numbering in the thousands. In 1955 President Tito became its official patron and regular guest.³⁰⁾ In this glamorous context, the visibility of documentary and short films was disproportionate to the volume of their production. By the end of 1953, 625 such films were produced, however only a few were screened at the main venue, the Roman Arena, typically as preludes to feature films.³¹⁾ The remainder were relegated to smaller cinemas across the city, often during the day, thereby limiting their public exposure.³²⁾ The marginalization of these films led, in 1959, to the decision to split the national festival into two events. Feature films remained in Pula, while documentary, short fiction, animated, and experimental films were relocated to Belgrade,

27) Constituent status was reserved for the South Slavic peoples who formed the majority in the six federal republics: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Muslims, which was a term reserved for the Islamic Slavs from Bosnia and Herzegovina (first used in 1961, institutionalized in 1971). Non-South Slavic groups, such as Italians, Germans, Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Albanians, etc., had minority status.

28) By the end of 1953, a total of 657 films were produced in Yugoslavia. See Momčilo Ilić, ed., *Filmografija jugoslovenskog filma 1945–1965* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1970).

29) Dunja Jelenković, "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Film Festivals and the Trieste Crisis," *Cinergie — Il cinema e le altre arti*, no. 22 (2022), 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2280-9481/14925>.

30) Croatian weekly *Vjesnik u srijedu*, 1954–1959.

31) Ilić, ed., *Filmografija jugoslovenskog filma 1945–1965*.

32) Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 70–73.

where in 1960 they received their own platform: the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival.

In line with the socialist Yugoslav identity policies, the new festival was conceived as a reflection of the country's federalism. Most of the staff were of Serbian origin, as the event was hosted in Belgrade, but the council and juries came from across Yugoslavia. Production houses from all the federal units took part in proportion to the size of their output. The names of participating filmmakers suggest a regular presence of all the constitutive peoples, as well as national groups with minority status, typically Albanians (e.g. Besim Sahatciu, Isa Qosja, Selami Taraku).³³⁾ The catalogues consistently specified the republic of origin for each film, presenting their films as their "representation." Thereby, the Festival underscored the country's multiethnic and federal composition and actively promoted the diverse nature of its film production. In doing so, it embodied the country's official slogan of "brotherhood and unity" — that is, the principle of cultural and national diversity (brotherhood) that results in a common supranational identity (unity). Building on the memory policies initiated during the Second World War, the organizers from the socialist period engaged in systematic cataloguing and archiving, as evidenced by the current state of the Festival's archives, outlined below.

Constructing a Socialist Vision of War and Revolution (1960–1991)

Although archival absences are a widely acknowledged methodological challenge in contemporary scholarship, the question remains: how to write a history of a festival that does not have its own archives?³⁴⁾ As no original administrative documents are systematically available in any public archive, the Festival's catalogues, preserved in their entirety in Jugoslovenska kinoteka, constituted the primary corpus for reconstructing its past. Edited by the members of organizing teams, those published between 1960–1991 reveal a sustained continuity in endorsement of socialist values, despite periods marked by more critical filmmaking, particularly between 1967–1972 and, again, in the late 1980s.³⁵⁾ The choice of visual and textual materials included in the socialist period reflect the organizers' effort to preserve both the memory of the Festival, and of the cinematic and political culture of the period.

In terms of visual materials, the catalogues regularly commemorated the war and revolution as the historical moment from which the socialist state emerged. Several covers drew on the symbolic palette of socialist Yugoslavia, with the red, white and blue national colors (1960, 1961, 1969, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1978). The 1985 cover celebrated the 40th anniversary of October 20, 1945, by featuring an image of two women welcoming a group of

33) Albanians were the only non-Slavic group in Yugoslavia to form a majority within a federal unit (Kosovo), making their position distinctive. Their visibility at the festival was also reinforced by local production, notably Kosova Film in Priština, a production house specializing in documentary and short films.

34) Michael Moss and David Thomas, eds., *Archival Silences: Missing, Lost and Uncreated Archives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

35) See the end of this section and Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 201–264.

Partisans during the liberation of Belgrade. The 1986 cover showed President Tito among Partisans, recalling his role as the resistance leader.³⁶⁾ Photographs of Tito along with his statements about cinema appeared throughout various catalogue editions, either to illustrate special occasions (such as his designation as the festival patron in 1978) or to illustrate films about him. In such cases his photographs often occupied full pages. Given his triple role, as President of the State, of the Party, but also of the Army, Tito's glorification in the catalogues also served as a reminder of his status as the wartime leader and national liberator. Furthermore, this reminder was continuous, because the catalogues serve as lasting commemorative records and remain accessible for future generations. In terms of textual materials, they included both film related and administrative information: film synopses and credits; lists of council members, the jury and the team; an introductory note by the festival director reflecting on the previous edition; data on the number of films submitted, screened, and produced in each republic; excerpts or entire speeches delivered at the opening and closing ceremonies; and reports on earlier editions, especially in anniversary years. The detail and diversity of this information suggest that during this period a variety of archival materials were likely preserved, enabling the creation of such extensive records.

Access to complete original archives would have made it possible to compare the broader body of documentation with what was eventually published, shedding light on the processes of selection and reinterpretation. However, the meticulous editing and commemorative style of the catalogues reveal a deliberate effort to extend the Partisans' wartime archiving efforts and preserve both the memory of the Festival and of the country's socialist traditions. While we lack definitive proof, it is possible that archives were discarded also during the institutional transfers from the socialist period, especially knowing that the Festival changed organizers three times between its first Belgrade edition in 1960 and its last multinational edition in 1991.³⁷⁾ However, the detailed nature of the catalogues, combined with press-clippings and safeguarded administrative records on the Festival's creation and relocation to Belgrade, helped fill these gaps.³⁸⁾ Ultimately this means that the Festival's socialist leadership's commemorative efforts fulfilled their purpose: decades later, the Festival's socialist history can be almost fully reconstructed based on the materials that they safeguarded.

In terms of programming, these materials confirm the Festival's aim to showcase the full spectrum of the annual short film production. Between 1960 and 1991 production companies submitted most of their output, of which only a small part was excluded, typically due to late submissions or insufficient artistic merit. On occasion, such exclusions served to conceal political censorship, particularly during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period marked by acute political and economic crises.³⁹⁾ Yet even during this time many

36) For the Tito's glorification through images, see Maja Brkljačić, "Tito's Bodies in Word and Image," *Narodna umjetnost* 40, no. 1 (2003), 99–127.

37) Institutions in charge of the Festival: Festival jugoslovenskog filma (1960–1975), Beograd publik (1975–1978), Sava Centar (1978–1990), Jugoslavija film (1990–2003), Direkcija FEST-a (2003–2014), CEBEF (2014–2017), Dom omladine (since 2017).

38) Arhiv Jugoslavije: record AJ 405 (Savet za kinematografiju).

39) See Hrvoje Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2012), 19–27.

of the provocative films, labeled by their opponents as part of the Black Wave, were screened before being banned from further circulation.⁴⁰⁾ Within this framework, a hierarchy among films was established through their inclusion or exclusion from competition, assignment to favorable or obscure screening times, and distribution of awards.⁴¹⁾ Observing these patterns offered valuable insight into the Festival's thematic and mnemonic priorities. For instance, out of approximately a dozen films typically shown at every opening evening, at least one was about the Second World War.⁴²⁾ In contrast, only one documentary devoted to an earlier historical period, the First World War, opened the Festival during its three decades of socialist history, and it did so in the mid-1980s when the political climate was already shifting toward nationalism (*Marš pobjede* [The March to Victory; Miki Stamenković, 1986]).⁴³⁾

The films with the most favorable screening slots and media coverage typically presented the Second World War as a Partisan struggle uniting antifascists from across Yugoslavia within a supranational revolutionary movement under Tito's leadership. This cinematic narrative had three main characteristics. First, it granted more screen time to victors and their triumphs than to victims and their sufferings. Consequently, except for the documentaries about the death camps in the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH),⁴⁴⁾ more space was accorded to the fallen Partisans than to the civilian victims.⁴⁵⁾ In both cases, when victims were portrayed, tragic tones were usually avoided. Instead, these films celebrated the sacrifice for the greater cause of national liberation. This is illustrated by the title of the documentary about national hero Rade Končar, executed by the Italians in 1942, which states, *Heroji ne umiru* (Heroes Do not Die; Vojdrag Berčić, 1962), Zora Film.⁴⁶⁾ Second, the narrativization of the civil war, which unfolded within the Second World War, insisted on its ideological rather than national aspect. This applied both to the representation of the victims and the villains. Victims were most often depicted as anti-fascists "from all over Yugoslavia,"⁴⁷⁾ while villains were typically described as "traitors and war criminals" (*Izdajice i ratni zločinci*, Stole Janković, FRZ 1941, Avala Film, The "Belgrade" Medal, 1977) — a designation that took precedence over their ethnic origin. When

40) Vladimir Jovičić, "Crni val u našem filmu," *Borba*, August 3, 1969, 17–24.

41) For more on these dynamics, see Dunja Jelenković, "The Socialist Yugoslav Paradox: Documentary Cinema Exhibition Opportunities and the Meaning of 'Dissent,'" *Dissent and Dissidents in Central and Eastern European Film* 41, no. 3 (2021), 559–577. See also Greg De Cuir, Jr, *Yugoslav Black Wave: Polemical Cinema from 1963–1972 in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2019).

42) Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 98.

43) The film is about the Serbian Army's WWI sufferings. See *ibid.*, 110, 258–259, 352–253.

44) The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was a collaborationist puppet state led by the fascist Ustasha movement in the territories of contemporary Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and part of Serbia (1941–1945).

45) See *Nepodijeljeni darovi* (The Ungiven Gifts; Rajko Djukić, Filmski studio Titograd, 1971) about three sisters from Montenegro who all died in the Battle of Sutjeska; *Pesma palog partizana* (The Fallen Partisan's Song; Milan Ljubić, Viba Film, 1973) about the heroic death of the Slovenian poet and partisan Karel Destovnik; *Pogibija Bate Jankovića* (Bata Janković's Death; Puriša Djordjević, Dunav Film, 1967) about the death of this partisan and his wife; *Crveni sneg na Pohorju* (Red Snow in Pohorje; Jože Pogačnik, Zastava Film, 1974), about the annihilation of an entire battalion in 1943, etc.

46) All stated years refer to the festival editions in which the films were screened; production dates match or precede them by one year.

47) Synopsis of the documentary *Jasenovac* (Bogdan Žižić, Zagreb Film, 1967), Catalogue 1967, 142.

the victims' nationality was mentioned, it was presented as secondary to the ideological framing of crime and victimhood. For instance, the narration of the documentary about the Jasenovac camp, *Blood and Ashes of Jasenovac* (Krv i pepeo Jasenovca; Lordan Zafranović, Grand Prix 1984) describes the casualties as "honest Croatian patriots, communists, Serbs, Jews and Roma."⁴⁸⁾ However, the most numerous victims in the camp were Serbs (racial victims) — a fact not reflected clearly in the order of appearance, which places political opponents (ideological victims) ahead of national and racial categories.⁴⁹⁾ Third, the depictions of the older past were often used to reinforce the glorified memory of the Second World War. For instance, the documentary *Cerska bitka* (The Battle of Cer; Sveta Pavlović, awarded for script and directing in 1965) about the famous 1914 battle concludes by juxtaposing images of the First World War veterans with those of the contemporary Yugoslav People's Army, asserting an alleged continuity between the legacy of the Royal Serbian Army and socialist Yugoslavia.⁵⁰⁾ Crafted to prevent future national tensions considering the country's complex ethnic landscape and conflicted history, the memory of the war constructed in such a way enabled former war enemies to identify as members of the same "imagined community" in the time of peace.⁵¹⁾

While the dominant memory of the war forged its invented traditions by reinterpreting the older past to serve the socialist narrative, the memory of the Socialist Revolution followed an inverse temporal logic. The Revolution was typically presented as a continuous process, initiated during the war and extending into the present. Films on contemporary themes of postwar reconstruction, both physical (youth work actions, rebuilding of the industrial infrastructure) and political, social and intellectual (new educational, cultural, social, and gender politics) reflected the state's commitment to uphold key socialist ideals, such as equal access to housing, employment, healthcare, and education regardless of one's region, ethnicity or gender. However, these political promises were only partially realized, especially in terms of housing and employment.⁵²⁾ Several documentary filmmakers responded by exposing these inconsistencies, particularly during the period of the New Yugoslav Film (1961–1972) and Black Wave (1967–1972).⁵³⁾ Directors such as Želimir

48) Italics by the author.

49) One of the first and most profound changes in the program in the 1990s was the shift from ideological to national framing of war crimes, in both Second World War and ongoing war narratives. For details, see the next section. For the history the Jasenovac camp, see Ivo Goldstein, *Jasenovac* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018).

50) The idea of Yugoslav unification dates to the late 19th century. However, separatist and nationalist ideas have always existed in parallel.

51) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]).

52) For the paradox of the socialist unemployment, see Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–29.

53) Unlike other socialist and communist countries, Yugoslavia's cultural scene was Western-oriented and relatively open, allowing for critical cinema to emerge within a state-funded framework. See Gal Kirn, "New Yugoslav Cinema — A Humanist Cinema? Not Really," in *Surfing the Black...: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments*, eds. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academic, 2012), 10–46. See the section "New Yugoslav Film" in Pavle Levi, *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetic and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2007), 13–18. See as well Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 62–82; Jelenković, "The Socialist Yugoslav Paradox," 559–577.

Žilnik, Dušan Makavejev, Karpo Godina, Karolj Viček, Krsto Škanata, etc. regularly presented socially engaged works that challenged the mainstream memory of war and the alleged success of the Socialist Revolution. Frequently assigned less favorable screening slots and limited catalogue space, these films nonetheless generated heated media polemics and shaped the Festival's most artistically and politically dynamic years.⁵⁴⁾ Yet these filmmakers expressed criticism within a socialist framework rather than in opposition to the socialist state itself. As Žilnik remarked, they simply called for the communist party to stick to its own program.⁵⁵⁾ Thus, rather than signaling a rupture, their inclusion in the program reflected a continuation of the Festival's socialist curatorial logic. Just like the mainstream films, the programmed critical films from the 1960s and 1970s typically upheld antifascist and antinationalist values rooted in the Second World War legacy. However, they did so differently, calling for a more genuine implementation of the Socialist Revolution.

The Festival first began to move away from its socialist values in the late 1980s, by including documentaries which emphasized Serbian victimhood in the shared Yugoslav framework.⁵⁶⁾ Although limited to isolated instances, the screening of these films is significant as a precursor to more substantial changes that would unfold in the Festival's profile in the early 1990s, once structural changes made them possible. This programming evolution reflected wider political changes, marked by the rise of nationalism and the growing prioritization of each republic's individual interests. Tito's death in 1980 contributed to this process, yet its foundations had been laid earlier, by the new Constitution adopted in 1974. This Constitution granted greater autonomy to all the federal units, and within them the two autonomous provinces of Serbia, leading to tensions between Serbia and the other republics, specifically over the status of Kosovo.⁵⁷⁾ This initiated a gradual erosion of shared objectives, a process which intensified during the economic crisis of the 1980s. However, the evolutions in dominant ideology alone were not sufficient to bring about substantive changes to the Festival's profile. Not only were they happening beyond the institution's framework, but filmmakers of various origins and political views were still participating. This enabled the Festival to largely maintain its supranational and left-oriented programming and editorial policies, directed towards constructing a memory of war, which was designed toward a peaceful future together.

54) See Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 203–239; and Dunja Jelenković, "Film Festivals as an Arena for Political Debate — Yugoslav Black Wave in Belgrade and Oberhausen Film Festival, 1967–1973," in *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War*, eds. Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017), 47–62.

55) Statement made in the documentary *Zabranjeni bez zabrane* (Censored Without Censorship; Dinko Tucaković and Milan Nikodijević, Art & Popcorn, SRB, 2007).

56) E.g. *Strah od istine* (The Fear of Truth; Milorad Bajić, Art Film 80, 1988) about the Martinović affair in Kosovo. For details see Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 259–263.

57) Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija: Država koja je odumrla* (Zagreb: Prometej, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003), 258.

Reshaping the Memory of War During New Conflicts (1991–2004)

The first major rupture within the Festival's structure occurred in 1991 when several Croatian filmmakers and production houses boycotted it in reaction to the tense pre-war climate.⁵⁸⁾ After an initial, partial boycott in 1991, the Croatian and Slovenian production houses stopped participating in 1992, and the Festival was gradually reduced to a Serbian-Montenegrin event.⁵⁹⁾ Previously, in 1990, the organization was transferred to the distribution company Jugoslavija Film, a former federal institution that by late 1989 had become a Serbian institution. However, the Festival kept its original name and actively emphasized its alleged historical continuity, and thus in 1992 it took place as the 39th Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival. The Serbian press celebrated that it "remained Yugoslav."⁶⁰⁾ Claiming a Yugoslav identity within the framework of nationalist regime in power was in line with Slobodan Milošević's self-proclaimed role as the protector of state borders, but it was also a way of inventing tradition.⁶¹⁾ This is because as of 1992, apart from its name, there was nothing Yugoslav about this festival, neither in its structure, nor in the values it promoted through its archiving, cataloging and programming practices.

As the Festival narrowed into a predominantly Serbian event and the country transitioned from socialist Yugoslavia to its post-socialist successor, the organizers' approach to archival preservation changed.⁶²⁾ The catalogues no longer included additional information, such as number of films produced or submitted, but were limited to film credits and synopses. These editorial changes were partially driven by the economic crisis, which affected the physical quality of the catalogues: they were printed on lower-quality paper and had fewer pages. However, this shift also signaled the organizers' distancing from the socialist past, as evidenced by the catalogues' omission of materials and iconography associated with the socialist era. For instance, the program of the jubilee 40th edition in 1993 did not include any supranational retrospectives, thus ignoring almost the entire non-Serbian history of this Yugoslav festival. Also in 1993, the catalogue was for the first time published in Cyrillic rather than Latin alphabet, thereby symbolically positioning it outside Croatian and Slovenian cultural traditions.⁶³⁾ These changes were in line with the process of disin-

58) See "Hrvatski bojkot," in Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 292–296.

59) Until the late 1990s dominant Montenegrin and Serbian politics promoted the idea of sameness of Serbian and Montenegrin peoples.

60) Anon., "Ostaje jugoslovenski," *Večernje novosti*, December 14, 1991.

61) Milošević rose to power in the late 1980s. He became President of Serbia in the first elections, in 1991. He was head of the supposedly leftist Socialist Party of Serbia, which in fact implemented nationalist politics.

62) The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia fell apart in 1991 when war broke out in Slovenia and Croatia. The two republics that remained together during the wars, Serbia and Montenegro, declared the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, which in 2003 became the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006 Montenegro left this Union. The process of Yugoslav disintegration ended in 2008, when the Serbian province of Kosovo declared independence.

63) Croatian and Slovenian use the Latin alphabet; Macedonian uses Cyrillic; Bosnian, Serbian and Montenegrin variants use both Latin and Cyrillic, with Cyrillic being widely regarded as Serbian traditional script.

tegration of Yugoslav cinema, following the disintegration of the common Yugoslav state, but they were in contradiction with the Festival's name and alleged values.⁶⁴⁾

Broader war narratives and political objectives also influenced how the organizers re-defined the festival's national scope. In 1993 a few Macedonian films were screened, but in a special international program, introduced due to the lack of films. As a major contradiction, films from the Serbian entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serb Republic (Republika Srpska), were also included, however, as part of the national competition.⁶⁵⁾ Through different treatment of films from the territories unclaimed in the war (labeled as "international"), and those from claimed territories (labeled as "national"), the organizers implicitly recognized the Drina River as a natural boundary within the Serbian space rather than a political border separating two distinct states. By including films from Serb Republic in the national competition on a purely ethnic basis, the festival — held under a Yugoslav, i.e. heterogenic and multinational, label — adopted a greater Serbian narrative.

With the withdrawal of filmmakers from territories other than Serbia, Montenegro and Serb Republic, a balanced cinematic portrayal of the war was hardly possible. This narrowing of perspectives was also a result of the growing presence of television productions in the program. As the country was reduced in scope, so was the range of films available for selection. Hence, non-cinematic works became more prominent, especially with the spread of video technology, which was formally recognized through the introduction of a dedicated video section in 1993. Television journalists had access to the frontlines and were authorized to film in the conflict zones. Consequently, countless hours of war footage entered the Festival through this newly established section. Films from Serb Republic contributed in large part to this, as they were often produced by the local TV station Kanal S/Srpska RTV and filmed in the war zone. These structural changes marked a change in dominant war-narratives, both historical and contemporary, from one of victory to one of victimhood, as outlined below.

Most of the screened films focused on Serbian suffering, particularly on refugees from Croatia (e.g. *Krajina, bez oproštaja* [Krajina, Without Forgiveness; Milivoje Nestorović, 1996], Zastava Film) and war victims in Bosnia (e.g. *Više od zločina* [More than a Crime; Miloš Marković, 1993], RTS TVB). These films typically showed the ongoing war as a noble action carried out in defense (*Moj Milane* [My Milan; Dušan Andjić, 1995], Srna Film, award for best directing, video section). Just as the filmmakers active in the socialist period depicted the Revolution as a continuous process rooted in the past and extending into the present, the filmmakers who were involved with the Festival during the 1990s tended to portray the allegedly continuous nature of war — that is, of crimes against the Serbian peoples. They often described the Croats as a "centuries-old" enemy, thus portraying the Serbian suffering as a continuous historical experience.⁶⁶⁾ Older history (medieval period, WWI) was likewise a recurrent point of reference: while the socialist filmmakers insisted

64) See Nikica Gilić, "Post Yugoslav Film and the Construction of New National Cinemas," *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 4, no. 2 (2017), 102–120.

65) Declared in 1992, Bosnian Serb Republic a.k.a. Republic of Srpska is separated from the Republic of Serbia by the Drina River, which forms a natural and political border between the two states.

66) *Krajina, Without Forgiveness*, Synopsis, Catalogue 1996, 38.

on continuity between the older and contemporary Yugoslav ideas, in the 1990s the older history was invoked to suggest a line of continuity between Serbia's heroic past and its contemporary suffering.⁶⁷⁾ The footage made in the war-affected areas included disturbing images of the dead and wounded and was typically framed as a counter-narrative — a more “authentic” truth in opposition to the versions broadcast by enemy or Western media. Or, as claimed by the narrator of the propagandist war documentary from Bosnian frontlines, *Dragi Džo*, “I am just showing you the truth” (Dear Jo; Dušan Andjić, 1993, Kanal S). Some of these scenes were filmed at collective burials of Serbian soldiers, like in the documentary *Egzodus, ponovo* (Egzodus, Again; Snježan Lalović, 1999, Srpska RTV Pale) about the Serbian departure from Sarajevo after the signature of the Dayton Agreement (1995). Such scenes carry a strong symbolic weight: the death of a young person evokes the country's future cut short, while the images of mourning mothers embody the grieving nation itself, woman being a well-known symbol of nation.⁶⁸⁾ By framing the nation as perpetually endangered, these representations served to rationalize Serbia's involvement in the wars. They were proportionally reflected in the Festival's catalogues, which thus, represent a commemorative trace of Serbian war victimhood.

Some films diverged from dominant, one-sided, nationalistic war representations. Critical films were present at the Festival throughout its entire history, but their visibility varied depending on broader political and production trends. In the early 1990s, when Milošević still enjoyed electoral support, such films remained marginal.⁶⁹⁾ One example is Nikola Lorencin's documentary *Sa tugom i bolom u srcu* (With Sadness and Pain in our Hearts; RTS TVB, 1992), based on obituary images from the Croatian and Serbian press. Showing goodbye messages to young men aged 18 to 20 who were killed at the front, the film highlighted the conflict's senselessness. However, it provoked harsh polemics at the press conference because it included non-Serbian victims, revealing the limited readiness of the festival participants at that early stage of the war to engage with a more inclusive perspective.⁷⁰⁾ In the second half of the 1990s, amid political disillusionment and prolonged crisis, critical voices became more visible within the Festival, although not dominant. The first programmed film entirely devoted to crimes committed by a member of the Serbian forces was Janko Baljak's documentary *Etnički čisto* (Ethnically Clean; B92, 1998). Baljak received the main award in the documentary section, but the award was shared with Mihailo P. Ilić, a documentary filmmaker with a fundamentally different vision of the war. Ilić's documentary *Presuda* (The Verdict; EXP Produkcija) argued that the widely circulated images of starved prisoners in the Serbian-run camp in Trnopolje, broadcast by international media in previous years, were in fact manipulated through editing techniques. Placing responsibility for the ongoing wars on Western political actors and media

67) Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 102–110, 406–425.

68) This stands in contrast to socialist war representations, in which women were commonly portrayed as political agents. Here, they are represented primarily as powerless tragic figures, endowed only to the power to mourn. For more on women as symbols of nation see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: SAGE, 1997).

69) Milošević's regime remained in power until October 5, 2000. He enjoyed broad electoral support in the early 1990s, while in the second half of the decade his rule relied on electoral manipulation prompting regular mass protests from 1996 onward.

70) Saša Radojević, “Rat bez imena,” *Borba*, March 30, 1992.

outlets was in line with the dominant media narratives in Serbia. Blame was also commonly directed at two historical sources: the Ustasha, responsible for crimes of genocide against the Serbs in the Second World War, and the communists, accused of allegedly concealing these crimes.⁷¹⁾ Featuring and awarding filmmakers with radically opposing views on the conflict demonstrates that the Festival remained a site of power struggle between divergent political and aesthetic positions. However, the balance of power changed. The new political climate of nationalist domination, the context of an ongoing war, and the new structure of the Festival itself allowed for greater programming space for the tragic victimizing narratives focused on Serbian suffering.

These narratives culminated in 1999, when the war reached Belgrade and the Festival took place during the NATO bombing. The catalogue cover featured a target, a widely used protest symbol that served as a unifying sign among festival participants and audiences across different political positions. Films critical towards the government became increasingly visible after the bombing, reflecting the near-total collapse of public support for the regime. In 2000 Janko Baljak received an award for the documentary *Anatomija bola 02.06* (The Anatomy of pain, 02.06), about the strike on the national TV station that killed 16 people, mostly technical crew. Baljak portrayed the event as a double crime: blaming NATO for the attack, and Milošević's regime and the television station leadership for deliberately sacrificing the crew to secure a high civilian death toll to be used to further condemn NATO. This marked a turning point in the Festival's history, as the film openly accused the regime in power of murder. Valorizing this film by awarding it at the national film festival while Milošević was still in office further encouraged the curation of critical films. Within this development, the dominant critical stance of participating filmmakers — previously focused on the history of Yugoslavia and its breakup — shifted toward assessing the situation within Serbia, after years of hardship under Milošević's government that fell on October 5, 2000, amid mass protests that led to his overthrow.

Looking Back Anew: Yugoslav Memory in an International Festival Setting (since 2004)

The ultimate step in the disintegration of the Festival's Yugoslav identity came in 2004, when it became international and its name changed to Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival, following the declaration of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. The renaming of the state ended the formal grounds for keeping the "Yugoslav" label in the names of cultural institutions. Somewhat paradoxically, it was precisely this final abandonment of the Festival's Yugoslav profile that allowed filmmakers from the region to gradually return, through international competitions and special programs, thereby shaping an informal neo-Yugoslav identity through their renewed presence. Today, a regional panorama is an important program component, reflecting the organizers' understanding that the Festival cannot survive without engaging with its regional context —

71) Mark Thompson, *Kovanje rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 1995), 50.

the local Serbian scene being too limited to sustain the program, and the global scene too vast for the Festival to gain greater international visibility.

The 2004 rebranding, coupled with repeated changes of organizing institutions, contributed to further neglect in archival practices. While an archive is not technically lost if a single copy survives, it is evident that no systematic preservation efforts took place during this period. For instance, while all the catalogues from the 1990s and later years were preserved in Direkcija FEST-a before its dissolution, earlier materials appeared sporadically — sometimes in multiple copies for a single year, sometimes not at all. Random documents — photographs and minutes from the meetings — were frequently left in the drawers and storage space among unrelated items, effectively forgotten. The incompleteness of the archival holdings became evident in 2012/2013 when the team preparing the Festival's 60th anniversary book had to seek out the catalogues outside their own institution, in Jugoslovenska kinoteka.⁷²⁾ These patterns suggest institutional neglect rather than total loss, but they also echo a broader rejection of the country's socialist and supranational legacy amid wartime and early post-wartime conditions.

As temporal distance from the war increased, the Festival gradually reintroduced references to the socialist past in its programs and catalogues. Concurrently, the participating filmmakers' attitudes toward this shared past have evolved along generational lines. Filmmakers born in the 1980s who were children or adolescents during the war tend to engage with the shared past differently than those active during the wars of the 1990s, often through more explicitly critical engagements with war or nostalgic framings of the socialist state. For instance, Ognjen Glavonić's documentary *Dubina dva* (Depth Two; Non-Aligned Films, 2017) addressed the issue of hidden mass graves of Kosovo Albanians murdered by the Serbian police in 1999, while Mina Djukić in her docu-fiction film *Yugo, kratka auto-biografija* (Yugo, Short Auto-Biography; Kiselo dete, 2010) spoke about the most famous Yugoslav car brand. Elements of Yugonostalgia are also observable in films addressing hardships of life after the post-socialist transition, such as Srđjan Keča's documentary *Muzej Revolucije* (Museum of the Revolution; Uzrok, 2021, screened in 2023) about homeless people living in an unfinished structure originally planned in 1961 as the museum of the Socialist Revolution.

The new generation of filmmakers, born in the 1990s and 2000s, are typically unburdened by the region's conflicted past and often explore global and contemporary themes, such as the migrant crisis (*Deca ne plaćaju* [Kids Don't Pay; Sara Kolar, 2023]), life with a disability (*Vuk* [Wolf; Bo Stamatović, 2023]), sense of isolation during Covid (*Povratak kući* [Return Home; Nikola Polić, 2023]), personal family stories (*Drugi avgust* [August 2; Nadja Petrović, 2023]), etc. These filmmakers are engaging with themes that resonate with their own struggles within global capitalism and its Serbian variant under the non-democratic right-wing rule of Aleksandar Vučić (since 2012), a system combining authoritarian neoliberal tendencies with clientelist state control.⁷³⁾ However, the rise of new media

72) Dunja Jelenković, ed., *Kratki Metar — 60 godina / The Short Film Fest — 60 Years* (Beograd: FEST, 2013).

73) For the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism, see Ian Bruff, "The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism," *Rethinking Marxism* 26, no. 1 (2014), 113–129. For its rise in contemporary Serbia, see Aleksandra Piletić, "The Role of the Urban Scale in Anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: a Look at the post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia," *Globalizations* 19, no. 2 (2022), 285–300. For the chronology of Vučić's power consoli-

has connected them more closely with global contexts, directing their attention toward universal issues and reducing the focus on the local. All of this resulted in (local) war themes losing primacy in the program. Yet, although the program appears to engage less with the Yugoslav history, a sense of shared cultural space persists. This is evident in shared languages, numerous co-productions and the circulation of films across the region's now segmented markets. Against this backdrop, in recent years the Festival began acknowledging its Yugoslav past by showing retrospectives of its laureates from various former republics (2023), a custom that had disappeared during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, archival efforts have remained limited. For instance, under the management of Dom omladine websites from 2017 onward have been made available online, but no systematic digitization has yet occurred.⁷⁴⁾ At the time of the writing, in 2026, the festival team appears primarily concerned with maintaining the event's continuity, with archival and digitization initiatives regarded as non-essential. This must be understood in the context of the major political crisis affecting Serbia since November 1, 2024, when a canopy at Novi Sad's railway station collapsed killing 16 people. The tragedy provoked mass student protests and demands for governmental change.⁷⁵⁾ In response, government pressure on cultural institutions has included leadership reshuffles and further funding cuts.⁷⁶⁾ Amid this uncertainty, the 2025 Festival was postponed for seven months and ultimately held in a reduced format.⁷⁷⁾

The history of the Festival is a history of shifting continuations and ruptures: ideological (from dominantly socialist, to nationalist, to the contemporary mix of ideologies within a neoliberal context), structural (changes of organizers and shifts in regional focus from Yugoslav, to Serbian, to international), geographical (change of venue from Pula to Belgrade), and formal (change of name from Yugoslav to Belgrade). Still, the Festival's team continues to emphasize its allegedly uninterrupted continuity, dating back to 1954, a claim used to position it among the oldest festivals in Europe while obscuring any instances of rupture within this long tradition.⁷⁸⁾

Conclusion

The history of the Yugoslav/Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival's archiving, editorial and programming practices illustrates how cultural memory can be created and

dation, see Jovan Jovanović, *The Vučić System: An Analysis of the Consolidation and Concentration of Power* (Belgrade: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Western Balkans, 2021).

74) "Dvostruko izdanje Martovskog festivala u septembru," *martovski.rs*, accessed February 14, 2026, <https://martovski.rs>.

75) See Aleksandra Jerkov, Milivoj Bešlin, and Branislav Radeljić, "The depoliticization of protest: understanding the 2024/2025 Serbian students' uprising," *Cogent Social Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2025), doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2583748.

76) See Stefan Miljuš, "Kulturna scena Srbije pod pritiskom: Kako vlast guši kritičku kulturu u Srbiji (VIDEO)," *insajder.net*, October 6, 2025, accessed February 16, 2026, <https://www.insajder.net/prenosimo/kulturna-scena-srbije-pod-pritiskom-kako-vlast-gusi-kriticku-kulturu-u-srbiji-video>.

77) *ritammedia.com*, accessed February 16, 2026, <https://ritammedia.com/martovski-festival-2025-program-u-domu-omladine-beograda/>.

78) "Istorijat martovskog festivala," *martovski.rs*, accessed February 16, 2026, <https://martovski.rs/istorijat/>.

systematically rewritten in periods of political upheaval, particularly during instances of war-time transitions from one state to another. Following decades of promoting socialist and supranational values, the re-emergence of the nation-state ideal during the territorial wars of the 1990s imposed new imperatives on memory policies. As a result, following the Festival's structural transformation in the early 1990s, the program saw a marked increase in propaganda content and a shift in the ideological objectives of this propaganda. The Festival's socialist representation of the Second World War was largely shaped by the fact this conflict encompassed a civil war that confronted the very peoples who would later constitute the multi-ethnic socialist Yugoslav state. Thus, in socialism, propaganda sought to promote cohesion and solidarity among the Yugoslav peoples. In the 1990s, it was oriented towards the deconstruction of their common identity, the consolidation of the Serbian national identity and the promotion of the idea of the Serbian nation as perpetually threatened. The ethnocentric memory of the Second World War and the ethnocentric readings of the ongoing wars were conditioned by these wars themselves, whose aim was to dismantle the multiethnic state and establish nation states on the largest possible territories. The inclusion of films from Bosnian Serb Republic in national competitions during this period reveals the shift from the Festival's identification with the state to an alignment with the nation, clearly signaling its changed ideological orientation and profile. Beyond the shift in identification from one to another reference group, the very act of identifying with the nation rather than the state signals a broader transition — from socialist to anti-socialist and nationalist rhetoric, and from (supranational) Yugoslav to (national) Serbian identity.⁷⁹⁾

By adopting predominantly nationalist programming and neglecting its archives, the Festival began to forget its socialist heritage in the early 1990s, despite continuing to invoke Yugoslav traditions until 2004. This shift stands in contrast to the organizers' ongoing emphasis on the Festival's long history, which is still promoted in its materials as one of the oldest in Europe. While such claims serve marketing purposes, they are not matched by efforts to preserve documentation that would allow future generations to reconstruct the Festival's legacy. By establishing orderly documentation, the communists sought to demonstrate the (alleged) traditions of the new state that they were building. In contrast, the actors engaged in constructing the post-socialist Yugoslavia on the ruins of the old country, preferred to celebrate the traditions predating socialist history. Consequently, the festival's archives from the socialist period held little value for them, as did the idea of preserving contemporary records for future generations, a practice tied to modernist ideals. This approach continued into the contemporary period — since 2004, the festival has struggled within an unstable political environment characterized by minimal investments in culture and cinema, where preserving archives for future use is regarded as a marginal concern.

The contemporary chaos, gaps and lack of systematization in archival holdings highlights the crucial role of networks in archival research. Combining information obtained from the catalogues, press clippings, internet and individuals involved with the Festival helped to overcome various methodological challenges linked to archival losses in the

79) Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004*, 455.

context of frequent institutional transfers and turbulent political circumstances. The contemporary state of the archives further underscored the socialist catalogues' importance as a systematic source of historical data. Yet Jugoslovenska kinoteka, which holds all the festival catalogues, has almost no administrative documents such as reports on ticket sales, internal records, reunion minutes, etc. This means that some aspects of the festival history can never be reconstructed. Instead, the information about the missing archives can be used to shed light on the Festival's evolving relationship to its own identity and past, mapping the actual contours of its continuities, ruptures, memory policies and (invented) traditions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Greg de Cuir Jr., Irina Tcherneva and the two anonymous reviewers for invaluable comments on the drafts of this article.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]).
- Anon. *Manifest Komunističke partije i Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*, 1958.
- Anon. "Ostaje jugoslovenski," *Večernje novosti*, December 14, 1991.
- Bešlin, Milivoj, and Petar Žarković. "The Rise and Fall of Democratic Socialism in Yugoslavia 1948–1972," *Filozofija i društvo / Philosophy and Society* 34, no. 4 (2023), 550–570.
- Brkljačić, Maja. "Tito's Bodies in Word and Image," *Narodna umjetnost* 40, no. 1 (2003), 99–127.
- Bruff, Ian. "The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism," *Rethinking Marxism* 26, no. 1 (2014), 113–129.
- Damiens, Antoine. "Festivals, Covid-19, and the Crisis of Archiving," in *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After*, eds. Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens (London: Palgrave MacMillan Cham, 2023), 291–305.
- de Cuir, Jr, Greg. *Yugoslav Black Wave: Polemical Cinema from 1963–1972 in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2019), second edition.
- de Valck, Marijke, and Antoine Damiens, eds. *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After* (London: Palgrave MacMillan Cham, 2023).
- Djokic, Dejan, ed. *Yugoslavism: Histoires of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003).
- Gilić, Nikica. "Post Yugoslav Film and the Construction of New National Cinemas," *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 4, no. 2 (2017), 102–120.
- Goldstein, Ivo. *Jasenovac* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018).
- Goulding, Daniel J. *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
- Hauser, Arnold. *The Social History of Art, vol. IV: Naturalism, Impresionism, The Film Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

- Ilić, Momčilo, ed. *Filmografija jugoslovenskog filma 1945–1965* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1970).
- Jelenković, Dunja, ed. *Kratki Metar — 60 godina / The Short Film Fest — 60 Years* (Beograd: FEST, 2013).
- Jelenković, Dunja. *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004: Od jugoslovenskog socializma do srpskog nacionalizma* (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, 2023).
- Jelenković, Dunja. "Film Festivals as an Arena for Political Debate — Yugoslav Black Wave in Belgrade and Oberhausen Film Festival, 1967–1973," in *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War*, eds. Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017), 47–62.
- Jelenković, Dunja. "Politics, Ideology and Programming Practices: How Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival Abandoned the Idea of Yugoslavia," *New Review of Film and Television Studies: Special Issue Film Festival Origins and Trajectories* 14, no. 1 (2016), 76–92.
- Jelenković, Dunja. "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Film Festivals and the Trieste Crisis," *Cinergie — Il cinema e le altre arti*, no. 22 (2022), 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2280-9481/14925>.
- Jelenković, Dunja. "The Film Festival as a Vehicle for Memory Officialization: The Afterlife of WWII in the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954–2004," in *Documentary Film Festivals: Methods, History, Politics*, vol. I, eds. Aida Vallejo and Ezra Winton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 101–122.
- Jelenković, Dunja. "The Socialist Yugoslav Paradox: Documentary Cinema Exhibition Opportunities and the Meaning of 'Dissent,'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 41, no. 3 (2021), 559–577.
- Jerkov, Aleksandra, Milivoj Bešlin, and Branislav Radeljić. "The depoliticization of protest: understanding the 2024/2025 Serbian students' uprising," *Cogent Social Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2025), doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2583748.
- Johnson, Rachel. "On Studying Film Festivals and Migration: Borderlands and Beginnings," in *Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World: Practice and Methods*, eds. Dorota Ostrowska and Tamar Falicov (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025), 117–133.
- Jovanović, Jovan. *The Vučić System: An Analysis of the Consolidation and Concentration of Power* (Belgrade: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Western Balkans, 2021).
- Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija: Država koja je odumrla* (Zagreb: Prometej, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003), 258–259.
- Jovičić, Vladimir. "Crni val u našem filmu," *Borba*, August 3, 1969, 17–24.
- Kalafatović, Bogdan. "'Prepisana' stvarnost," *NIN*, March 19, 1978.
- Kirn, Gal. "New Yugoslav Cinema — A Humanist Cinema? Not Really," in *Surfing the Black...: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments*, eds. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 10–46.
- Klasić, Hrvoje. *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2012).
- Kötzing, Andreas, and Caroline Moine, eds. *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017).
- Kuljić, Todor. *Prevladavanje prošlosti* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2002).
- Levi, Pavle. *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetic and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- Loist, Skadi, and Marijke de Valck. "FFRN Bibliography," *Film Festival Research*, accessed July 24, 2025, <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/>.

- Moss, Michael, and David Thomas, eds. *Archival Silences: Missing, Lost and Uncreated Archives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).
- Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 7–14.
- Nora, Pierre, ed. *Les Lieux de mémoire, vol. I–III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1984]).
- Ostojić, Stevo, ed. *Rat, revolucija, ekran* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977).
- Ostrowska, Dorota, and Tamara L. Falicov, eds. *Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World: Practice and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025).
- Peirano, Maria Paz. “Mapping histories and archiving ephemeral landscapes: strategies and challenges for researching small film festivals,” *Studies in European Cinema* 17, no. 2 (2020), 170–184.
- Piletić, Aleksandra. “The Role of the Urban Scale in Anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: a Look at the post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia,” *Globalizations* 19, no. 2 (2022), 285–300.
- Radojević, Saša. “Rat bez imena,” *Borba*, March 30, 1992.
- Štaka, Aco. “Stvarnost kao takva,” *Oslobodjenje*, March 30, 1987.
- Thompson, Mark. *Kovanje rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 1995).
- Vallejo, Aida, and Ezra Winton, eds. *Documentary Film Festivals: Methods, History, Politics, vol. I* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 101–122.
- Woodward, Susan L. *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender and Nation* (London: SAGE, 1997).

Biography

Dunja Jelenković is a historian specialising in film festivals in conflict situations. A two-time Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow, her current project FESTWAR FM deals with film festivals and war from a gender perspective (Concordia University & University Ca' Foscari of Venice). Her previous project CBA TRIESTE analysed cinematic practices related to the conflict over the Italian-Yugoslav borderlands (University Ca' Foscari of Venice). She received her PhD in cultural history from the University Paris Saclay (2017) with a doctoral thesis on the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954–2004. This research resulted in the monograph *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004. Od jugoslovenskog socijalizma do srpskog nacionalizma* (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2023). She has published extensively on cinema, film festivals, and cultural practices in twentieth and twenty-first century Europe.

Email: dunja.jelenkovic@unive.it

