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Searching Tito Between Myth And Reality: A Short Criticism Of Tito I Ja Movie

Tito'yu Mit ve Gerçek Arasında Aramak: Tito ve Ben Filmine İlişkin Kısa Bir Kritik

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ABSTRACT

In the present day, film industry might be considered as a natural extension of politics. In some case movies aim to distribute the national thesis of states, while some movies might aim to remind a specific historic event or personality. In this context, the products of Yugoslav film industry in the very beginning of 1990's was trying to find solution recites in order to prevent the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Needless to mention that according to this goal, the myth of Tito was most effective tool in order to keep the Yugoslavs together. A Yugoslav movie classic Tito I Ja (Tito and Me-1992) constructs a great example of politic sophisticated movie which gives aims to alarm the Yugoslav people in the focus of Tito and re-connect the broken relations with Serbs and Croats. This paper offers a critic approach to Tito I Ja movie by simultaneously analyzing the developments in Yugoslavia in the very beginning of 1990's.

Key Words: Josip Broz Tito, Tito and Me, Yugoslavia, Conflict, Film Industry

ÖZET

Günümüzde sinema endüstrisi politikanın doğal bir uzantısı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bazı filmler devletlerin ulusal tezlerinin yayılması için bir araç olarak kullanılırken; bazı filmlerde tarihsel bir olayı veya şahsiyeti yeniden hatırlatma misyonunu yüklenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, 1990'ların hemen başlarında Yugoslav film endüstrisinin odak noktası Yugoslavya'nın çöküş sürecini önleyici çözüm reçeteleri geliştirmek olarak görünmektedir. Şüphesiz ki Yugoslavları bir arada tutma amaç doğrultusunda kullanılabilecek en rasyonel enstrüman Tito miti olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bir Yugoslav film klasiği olan Tito I Ja (Tito ve Ben-1992) bu amaç doğrultusunda hazırlanmış ve odak noktasına Tito'yu yerleştirmiş olan özellikle de o dönemde ortaya çıkmaya başlayan Sırp-Hırvat gerginliğini önlemeyi amaçlayan politik içerikli bir sinema filmidir. Bu çalışma, Tito I Ja filmine eleştirel bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın daha anlaşılabilir olması adına filmle ilişkin analizler o dönemde Yugoslavya'da meydana gelen olayların analizi ile birleştirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Josip Broz Tito, Tito ve Ben, Yugoslavya, Çatışma, Film Endüstrisi

1. INTRODUCTION

In their study, Engert and Spencer argue that film industry is a major instrument that shapes the knowledge of people in the form of cultural and political communication. (Engert and Spencer, 2009) Despite of the fact that at first sight the enormous economic potential of film industry comes to people's mind, such as Hollywood or Bollywood; on the other hand the political side of films should not be under estimated. *Operation Argo* (2012) which focuses on the Islamic Revolution in Iran, *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) that reminds the horrific genocide years in Rwanda or *The Pianist* (2002) which relives the Jewish Holocaust to audiences are only a few striking samples of political movies. As a result of the globalization's intense effects, in particular regarding the increasing communication skills of states', film industry is started to be used as an instrument which rapidly distributes the messages of "decision-makers." In other words, besides its artistic features, today most of the films effect the life, thoughts and cultures of people by creating images, illustrations and characters (Quart, 1991) which seem to people very exciting and persuasive. In this respect, in spite of not being as popular as Hollywood, Bollywood or Latin America's soap operas; Yugoslav film industry also should be considered as a "building stone" of global film industry. According to Oleg Parenta, Yugoslav film industry was a state-controlled and centralized tool which mostly focused on some specific historical developments respectively: Yugoslavia- URSS split, Yugoslavia's liberation from

Nazi Germany and post-war developments in Yugoslavia. (Parenta, 2015) Between 1945 and 1980, the person who pulled the wires of Yugoslavia was Marshal Josip Broz Tito. On the other hand, interestingly, almost all the Tito oriented major movies are produced after his death respectively: *Tito and Me* (1992), *Marshal Tito's Spirit* (1999), *Cinema Komunista* (2011) or *Tito On Ice* (2012). In addition, except *Tito and Me* (1992) and *Marshal Tito's Spirit* (1999) all the mentioned movies are non-Yugoslav productions. Despite of the fact that there is no clear argument regarding the non-existence of Tito's name and pure personality in Yugoslav era movies; according to this question, two rational arguments might be counted. In the first place, it might be argued that the name Tito and his efforts are "melted" within the first Yugoslav heroic movies such as: *Zastava* (1949), *Ciguli Miguli* (1952), *Kozara* (1962) and *Battle of Neretva* (1969). In other words, the personality of Tito had already become identical with People's Liberation War period. In the second place, it might be argued that the name of Marshal Tito is desperately re-discovered after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and due to ongoing unstable and intense conflictual structure of the former Yugoslavian territories. (Uysal, 2016) In this context, in the very beginning of Yugoslav Wars, the mythization of Tito, who was born from a Croat father and Slovene mother, is considered as a solution recite in order to prevent the coming dissolution of Yugoslavia. According to Alemdaroğlu, mythization serves the ideological re-construction of history. (Alemdaroğlu, 2016) On the other hand, the mythization process might function to the contrary. More clearly, a de-ideologization of controversies that are surrounded by old or new doctrines by the emotionalization of problems also should be considered in the sense of mythization. (Ellul, 2009) In the light of these information, it might be argued that *Tito I Ja* was aiming to neutralize the ethnic and religious fanaticism of Slobodan Milosevic's policies and retailing to Tito's *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity) policy. Before analyzing the role of *Tito I Ja* movie, the following chapter will advert the political developments in Socialist Yugoslavia in the very beginning of 1990's in the respect of disengagement from the Titoism.

2. 1990's YUGOSLAVIA: A GATE OPENING TO HELL

In spite of passing more than a quarter century from the collapse of Yugoslavia, still the reasons behind the dissolution are very contentious. While some academics claim that major economic problems should be counted as the primary reason of the dissolution (Marolov, 2013); others claim that the adaptation of 1974 Constitution should be considered as the beginning of the end due to this constitutional arrangement evoked the growing role of the army and dramatically disturbed the political and governmental harmony in national level in contrast to positive expectations. (Bunce, 1995) On the other hand, without any doubt the "exposed face" of the dissolution was the tremendous ethnic and religious sentiments between the founder elements of Yugoslavia. In other words, it might be claimed that the output of these aforementioned reasons had externalized in the sense of brutal ethnic and religious armed conflict series. In order to comprehend this deadly tension, it is necessary to briefly analyze the construction and the destruction of ethnic and religious harmony in Socialist Yugoslavia.

In 1945, Socialist Yugoslavia was founded as a result of long lasting People's Liberation War which left for Yugoslavia two different legacies. While the *Chetniks* were in the favor of Serb-controlled nationalistic Yugoslavia in the leadership of Dragoljub Mihailovic; Marshal Tito's *Partisans* were trying to establish a supra-nationalist and non-territorial socialist Yugoslavia. As soon as the *Partisans* declared their absolute glory over the Chetniks, Marshal Tito consolidated his power over every single corner of Yugoslavian territory and cherished the golden era of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980.

Despite of the fact that Tito was boasting to be transparent and "clear cut", in fact his governance methods were not that easy to comprehend. While one hand, Tito was adapting socialism to his economic and political administration; on the other part, his close and coherent relations with western capitalists were making him "a little bit of everything" leader. In parallel to this argument, Stevanovic describes Marshal Tito as a very interesting, fascinating but very controversial person. Yet, according

to her, his people was never lukewarm to Tito. (Stevanovic, 2016) Such that, Vilko Vinterhalter who was a very close person to Tito describes him as a one of us person who never wants to change. (Vinterhalter, 1976) There is no doubt that, his nation's kindness to Tito was stemming from his famous and well-functioned *bratstvo i jedinstvo* policy which established a great ethnic and religious harmonization between the components of Yugoslavia regardless of majority- minority distinction. In particular, relatively passivation of Serbian nationalism within the other ethnic groups of Yugoslavia and convincing the well-developed Slovenian and Croatian economies to take responsibility within the very heterogenous Yugoslav economy should be considered as the greatest success of Tito. Needless to mention that this "unusual" order within the territories of Socialist Yugoslavia had transformed Tito from an ordinary state leader to an unquestionable "national leader". On the other hand, "The Yugoslavia Dream" had ended on 4th May 1980 when Marshal Tito passed away and left his country to great darkness of a "black hole".

The late of 1980's was the beginning of the end for Socialist Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milosevic who had become the president of Serbia in 1989, quickly he had started to show his nationalist fanaticism and intention to melt Socialist Yugoslavia in the pot of Serbian nationalism. In this context, very soon after the actions of Milosevic and the Yugoslavia's/Serbia's state of mind had transformed into pure violence. (Clark, 2005) As it is expected, the remarkable radicalization of Serbian nationalism, had triggered other nationalistic tendencies in Yugoslavia primarily Croatian, Slovenian and Albanian nationalisms. Due to the expression of Albanian nationalism over Kosovo exploded in the late of 1990's; in the very beginning of 1990's, Croatia and Slovenia were in the agenda of accusations for Yugoslavia's dissolution process. Even in the present day the political decisions of Croatia and Slovenia are very questionable in the respect of whether they "betrayed" the Yugoslavia or separation was their only option for surviving. On the other hand, independently from this question, 1990's political developments in Yugoslavia never changed the "doom".

In the first place, it should be mentioned that even in 1980's, anti-socialist and anti-Titoist ideologies were becoming quite popular in Croatia for the sake of liberalization. Stipe Suvar who was the chief party ideologue was holding the Tito opponents in high esteem for the new tendencies in Croatian politics. (Vladislavljjevic, 2004) The situation was not different in Slovenia either. On the other hand, without any doubt by breaking off from Titoism, both Croats and Slovenes were not wishing what was approaching.

The 14th Congress of the League of Communists in Yugoslavia which was held between 20-22 January 1990 was the most critical extraordinary congress of Yugoslavia. After the absolute manner of both Milosevic and Croatian/Slovenian delegates, the congress came to a deadlock. The leaving of Croatian and Slovenian delegations not only officially declared the failure of the congress but also it was meaning the *de facto* collapse of Socialist Yugoslavia. The 1992 referendums in both countries in the favor of national independency were only the declaration of inevitable.

After this date, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) had become the decisive actor in Yugoslavian politics. Due to Slovenia's homogenous ethnic structure and its dominant western identity, JNA could not take remarkable action in Slovenia; but in the very beginning of the war, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina had become the "target board" of Serbia's/Yugoslavia's angry and violent state of mind. In this context, between 1991-2001 Balkans has witnessed one of the most destructive wars of the Europe after the 2. World War. Definitely, in order to end the civil war in Yugoslavia countless national and international political initiatives took place. On the other hand, even the cinema industry took action in order to remind the beautiful old days in Yugoslavia.

3. TITO I JA: A MOVIE ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE CIVIL WAR



Illustration 1

Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105602/>

Tito I Ja which is considered as one of the cult movie of Yugoslav political film industry was produced in 1992 by Goran Markovic. Despite of the fact that the movie does not specify a certain time slice, within the movie the visit of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie to Tito, gives some clue that the movie refers to 1954. On the other hand, it is quite difficult to identify the type of *Tito I Ja*, yet; it might be argued that the movie should be considered as a combination of drama and romanticism with comic elements. Briefly, the movie animates both dramatic and comic events within a typical extended Yugoslav family by focusing on a small kid call Zoran At the movie, Zoran is a ten years old child who deeply admires Marshal Tito. Due to his strong bonds of love with Tito, in various scenes Zoran is called by his aunt and small cousin Svetlana as “bigot” or “nasty communist” whom play an anti-Titoist ideology. On the contrary, in the same scenes, Zoran’s mother calls her sister as “nasty capitalist”. Zoran’s mother animates a ballerina who several times presented her artistic skills to Tito and awarded by him with venison which is considered as a meal of aristocracy by her sister and her husband. It might be argued that the intrafamilial scenes of the movie directs some class criticism to Tito’s sociological policies. In particular, aunt of Zoran’s ironic sentence to her sister: “*Look at his proletariat*” while eating the venison describes a strong criticism to class distinction within the socialist regimes. Besides this, Zoran and his friends’ conversation with a former prisoner who was an art historian also directs a criticism to mythization of Tito. During their friendly chat, the art historian warns Zoran with the following sentences: “*In this country, there is somebody who is more important than God. Maybe, one day, you understand this...*” On the other

hand, beside these partial criticism to Tito, without any doubt the movie honors the personality of Marshal Tito. For instance, during a Tito's public manifesto within a cinema scene, Zoran's sincere imitation of Tito's hand motions and gestures can be considered as one of the most striking scenes of the movie. Not only that, the singing of a jazz song in English in a bar constructs an unusual scene for a socialist country. On the other hand, it might be argued that with this scene Goran Markovic aims to emphasize the partial western identity of Yugoslavia which used to make Yugoslavia different from the other socialist countries.

The second part of the movie describes the school life and sentimental feelings of Zoran who can be considered as a lazy student. On the other hand, this part of the movies prepares the main topic of *Tito I Ja* which starts from a composition contest for Tito. In the school scenes, Zoran hallucinates Tito several times as entering him to the classroom and winks to him. One day in the class, the teacher announces a composition contest under the name of "*Do you love Tito? Why?*" Zoran writes a poem to Tito instead of a composition and (un)expectedly, he wins the first place not only in his school but in whole Belgrade. This success warrants him a place within a student group for visiting Tito's birthplace Kumrovec, a very small town within the borders of today's Croatia. Zoran's poem to Tito also serves as a great model of Tito's mythization:

"You are asking me if I love Tito/ What a senseless question it is/ Everyone worships Tito from Chinese and Spanish to Indians and black people/ Soldiers only think of him/ When shepherds play their pipe, short grasses that feed calf look at Tito .../ Swallows only sing for him/ If you ask me who is the most beloved one in my life, I tell them I love Tito even more than my mother and father..."

During the movie, in spite of being in the favor of Tito, even Zoran's father and mother concern from the enormous love of Zoran to Marshal Tito. In a scene, in order to check his sentimental life, his father asks to Zoran to write down the most beloved and indispensable person in his life. While he was expecting the name of his girlfriend Jasna's name, Zoran goes out and writes to wall "*Voli Tita*" which means "*Love you Tito.*"

The last part of the movie subjects the Zoran and his friends visit to Kumrovec and this part of the movie particularly focuses on the tension between Serbs and Croats in a very constructive manner. Before departing to Kumrovec, their companion teacher Raja sings the following anthem with his students:

"My country is beautiful/ Your country is beautiful/ The white Zagreb is in our country/ What a nice place is our white Zagreb." Not only at their departure but also immediately after their arrival to Croatia, another person welcomes the student group by singing another Croatia oriented anthem:

"Sister city Zagreb welcomes us/ Zagreb, Zagreb, Belgrade's best friend Zagreb"

As soon as the group starts their marching towards the Tito's birthplace; the first disagreement emerges between Zoran and Raja. Raja suggests his group to follow the natural signs to find their way how the *Partisans* did during the People's Liberation War and wastes the time of his young group. On the other hand, Zoran arrives the destination point with his friends earlier. Needless to mention that during his solo marching, Tito's hallucination appears one more time and shows the Zoran right way. Exactly at this point of the movie, an unclear refer takes place for the Islamic identity. A student in the group whose name is Sinisa Karamehmedovic, a common Muslim surname in Bosnia and Herzegovina, get his reward to hoist the Yugoslavia Flag. On the other hand, the movie does not give any further tip for the religious beliefs of Karamehmedovic. On the other hand, this scene of the movie is also "blended" with another anthem with these words: "*Viva Slav soul.*" On the other hand, despite of this positive atmosphere within the group an unexpected development raises the tension between Zoran and Raja which causes the suicide of Raja at the end. In the dormitory of the students, Raja aims to make a joke by masquerading a ghost and causes a great fear between the students. Ironically, the ghost introduces himself as Franja. It is believed that this scene constructs a reference to Franjo Tudjman who was the nationalist president of Croatia in 1992. In particular, after

the fall of many iron knight figures as a result of student chaos, the calling out of the security person to Franja supports this argument: “*You ruined a priceless heritage.*” In here it is believed that the “priceless heritage” and iron knights symbolize the Socialist Yugoslavia. On the other hand, despite of the fact that the movie does not contain too many religious references, the church visit of Zoran and his question before donating, exert the sectarian conflict between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs during the fall of Yugoslavia: “*Does Catholic God transfer this money to Orthodox God?*”

In the final minutes of the movie, Zoran returns back to home after their visit to Kumrovec and finally he gets a real invitation from Marshal Tito for president’s birthday. The movie ends with a comic scene when Zoran secretly starts to eat the birthday cake of Tito before the presidents cuts it.

4. CONCLUSION

For a long time, cinema industry has been one of the most important entertainment of people. On the other hand, immediately after its emergence, the sector has started to take on political/ideological mission beside its artistic feature. Billions of audiences and speed of cinema should be considered as the major reasons of this transformation. In the sense of giant film industries such as Hollywood or Bollywood, Yugoslav cinema industry should be also taken into account especially in the sense of political movies. In the first years of Yugoslav film industry, most of the films subject the liberation war of Yugoslavia from the Nazi Germany. Without any doubt the Tito figure also had a very important role in that kind of movies. On the other hand, in the very beginning of 1990’s when Yugoslavia had entered its dissolution process, Marshal Tito was re-discovered both by the Yugoslavs and Yugoslav film industry. Without any doubt, even the name of Tito was considered as a preventive element to stop the fall of Yugoslavia and re-unite the country. In this context, *Tito I Ja* constructs a great sample of war preventative and constructive movie of Yugoslav film industry. Especially, Zoran’s innocence and his pure loyalty to Marshal Tito composes the main theme of the movie. On the other hand, one of the other visible venture of *Tito I Ja* was repairing the Serbian-Croatian relations which were forming a very negative profile in the very beginning of 1990’s. In the final analyses, it might be argued that *Tito I Ja* was an unsuccessful attempt to neutralize the nationalistic tendencies in Yugoslavia, mostly stemming from Croat leader Franjo Tudjman and Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic by transforming the country into Titoist line again. On the other hand, the contents of the Yugoslavia problem were not simple to be resolved by a single movie. So that, developments in Yugoslavia after 1992 got worsen and armed conflicts turned into genocides and slaughters which had cost thousands of people’s life.

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Movies

Zastava (1949)

Ciguli Miguli (1952)

Kozara (1962)

Tito I Ja (1992)

Marshal Tito's Spirit (1999)

The Pianist (2002)

Hotel Rwanda (2004)

Cinema Komunisto (2011)

Operation Argo (2012)