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Yugoslav (Trans)national Memory on Rural Spaces: Short Documentary Films *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (1963) and *The Best Husband* (1968) by Woman Filmmaker Vera Jocić

Abstract

Women directors were scarce in Yugoslav feature-length fiction film production, with only seven of them active throughout the existence of the cinema of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which spanned roughly from 1945 to 1991. In contrast, the court métrage production was somewhat more welcoming for women directors, who seized their opportunity to make short films, including fiction, experimental works, animation, and, especially, documentaries, in professional or amateur cine-club spheres. Vera Jocić was one of them. Her professional short films include the documentaries *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (Devojke bez momaka; 1963) and *The Best Husband* (Najbolji muž; 1968). I will closely analyze them, with particular attention to medium-specific traits, as camera work, framing, editing, and sound. Through examination of form and narrative, I will tackle gender aspects of these films, and their setting in the rural environment. Moreover, I will look into sociological aspects, that is, the lives of Yugoslav women in rural areas. By doing so, I identify research gaps on Yugoslav women filmmakers and Yugoslav documentary cinema and contribute towards closing them.

I seek to understand why Yugoslav women filmmakers are largely overlooked. My findings indicate several reasons, such as: historical revisionism, gender inequality in Yugoslav film industry, festival circuits, and film criticism, the canonization of male auteurs and their works, numerical underrepresentation of Yugoslav women behind the camera, scholarly neglect, and lack of digitization and viewing access. This paper aims to raise awareness of the importance of researching, screening, curating, and digitizing films directed by Yugoslav women filmmakers.

Keywords

short documentary films, woman director, Yugoslavia, rural spaces, gender

Women directors¹⁾ were under-represented throughout the whole existence of the cinema of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which spans approximately from 1945 until 1991. There were only seven of them²⁾ in Yugoslavia's feature-length fiction production, roughly from 1947 to 1991. One of them³⁾ was Gordana Boškov. She noted the presence of sexism in the Yugoslav film industry, especially in the field of feature-length fiction film, where women directors face greater challenges in gaining access.⁴⁾ While she worked on a television station producing films and documentaries, she perceived no envy from her male colleagues. However, upon receiving the opportunity to make her first feature-length fiction film, the situation shifted dramatically, as she began to receive envious and vitriolic remarks from her male peers, including comments like: "You are making a fiction feature-length film? Do you know how hard it is to get a chance to make it?"

Although this article will not focus on Boškov, her testimony illustrates some of the reasons for the under-representation of women in feature-length fiction production and their preference for different forms of film production instead. The TV industry was to some extent more inclusive of women directors. The same could be said for the short film cinema production of socialist Yugoslavia, where a few dozen women directors⁵⁾ got a chance to make films. The short film format enabled women to enter the industry somewhat in higher numbers compared to feature-length films. This may be attributed to its perception as less serious, its status as a less prestigious medium, the availability of smaller budgets, and the provision of more prospects and creative freedom for filmmakers. Women directors made the most of their opportunities to produce a variety of court métrages, including fiction, experimental works, animation, and especially documentaries, across both professional and amateur cine-club contexts.

Vera Jocić (1912/1916–2000)⁶⁾ was a significant yet often overlooked filmmaker who worked in the professional short film sphere.⁷⁾ Jocić's short films include both animation

- 1) The word "director" refers to the role of a person who directs a film, while the word "filmmaker" is a person who makes a film, and it can encompass one or multiple roles undertaken simultaneously. For instance, in Vera Jocić's case the word "filmmaker" implies that she was the director of a film, but it can also mean that she was simultaneously the director and scriptwriter, which is the case in many of her films.
- 2) Petra Belc, "Home Movies and Cinematic Memories: Fixing the Gaze on Vukica Đilas and Tatjana Ivančić," in *Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe*, eds. Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 156.
- 3) Besides Boškov, Yugoslav feature-length film women directors were: Sofija 'Soja' Jovanović, Vesna Ljubić, Marija Marić, Suada Kapić, Ljiljana Jojić, and Eva Balaž-Petrović.
- 4) Vesi Vuković, "Tragom zaboravljenih jugoslovenskih režiserki: In memoriam Gordana Boškov (1936–2024)," *Buka*, 2024, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://6yka.com/kultura-i-zabava/tragom-zaboravljenih-jugoslovenskih-reziserki-in-memoriam-gordana-boskov-1936-2024/>.
- 5) Such as: Biljana Belić, Tatjana Ivančić, Vukica Đilas, Erna Banovac, Divna Jovanović, Tatjana 'Dunja' Ivanišević, Zorica Kijevčanin, Sanja Iveković, Vera Vlajić, Ana Nuša Dragan, Milka Badjura, Polona Sepe, Breda Beban, Bogdanka Poznanović, Vera Kličkova, Todorka Kondova Zafirovska, Afrodit Marković, Lidija Veljanova, Mirjana Zoranović, Vera Crvenčanin Kulenović, Mirjana Božin, Bojana Vujanović, Dubravka Rakoci, Sunčica Jergović, Milica Borojević, Bojana Marijan, Sida Marjanović, Katarina Rundo, Vesna Marić, Vera Ilić, Duška Arežina, and Ines Tanović.
- 6) Kronja states that Jocić was born in 1916, while Alempijević claims that she was born in 1912.
- 7) Ivana Kronja, "Lutka, animacija, dokument: Filmsko umetničko stvaralaštvo Vere Jocić (1916–2000)," in *Zbornik radova: Identitet umetnice u srpskoj modernoj umetnosti/Collection of Papers: The Identity of Female Artist in Serbian Modern Art* (Novi Sad: Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, Akademija Umetnosti, 2024), 244; Milen Alempijević, "Serbian Animation: From Political Joke to Paradigm," in *Propaganda, Ideology, Anima-*

and documentaries. The focus of this article will be on the latter. I will conduct a close reading of two films: *Girls Without Young Men* a.k.a. *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (Devojke bez momaka; 1963) and *The Best Husband* (Najbolji muž; 1968) with a focus on their gender aspects and the portrayal of the rural settings. Besides, I will pay attention to sociological aspects, namely to the lives of Yugoslav women in villages. Furthermore, I will examine (via e-mail) the present archival status of selected films, specifically regarding their digitization, as this has emerged as a decisive factor. Moreover, screening, DVD distribution, online streaming, and subtitling, all collectively influence a film's potential for widespread access as opposed to being stored in the archives. This paper also scrutinizes the reasons why Yugoslav women directors are often left out of the film history. I argue that this exclusionary practice came about due to several reasons (both Yugoslav-specific and widespread), including historical revisionism due to break-up of Yugoslavia, gender inequality within the Yugoslav film industry, festivals, and film criticism, limited access to quality viewing copies and subtitles, the canonization of male auteurs and their works, and scholarly neglect. Some notable scholarly exceptions are, for instance, Petra Belc's research on directors Vukica Đilas, Tatjana Ivančić,⁸⁾ Divna Jovanović, Biljana Belić, and Tatjana 'Dunja' Ivanišević,⁹⁾ and Hanna Stein's¹⁰⁾ piece on the latter. Both scholars focus on the amateur sphere, that is, experimental filmmaking under the wing of cine-clubs. Regarding the professional filmmaking sphere, it is important to note, for example, Dijana Jelača's scholarly work on Sofija 'Soja' Jovanović,¹¹⁾ Ivana Kronja's article on Vera Jocić,¹²⁾ and my own exploration of Vesna Ljubić¹³⁾ and Gordana Boškov.¹⁴⁾ I will engage with a significant portion of this scholarship in my article. My methodological framework combines close film analysis and local historical research with broader feminist film theory, including Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze,"¹⁵⁾ to facilitate the feminist recovery of women's film history.

Yugoslav Film History — Forgetting, Selective Remembering, and Gender

One of the reasons why Yugoslav female directors are forgotten today, in both public discourse and cinematic canons, is historical revisionism. After the break-up of Yugoslavia

tion: *Twisted Dreams of History*, eds. Olga Bobrowska, Michał Bobrowski, and Bogusław Zmudzinski (Krakow: AGH University of Science and Technology Press, 2019), 179.

8) Belc, "Home Movies and Cinematic Memories."

9) Petra Belc, "Women's Cinematic Avant-garde in Yugoslavia: Between Accidental Feminism and Institutional (Anti-)Feminism," *Balkanologie* 18, no. 2 (2023), 1–12.

10) Hanna Stein, "Mapping and Grounding Visual History: Methodological Reflections on Historical Research and Amateur Films," *Research in Film and History*, no. 3 (2021), 1–22.

11) Dijana Jelača, "Towards Women's Minor Cinema in Socialist Yugoslavia," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies* 21, no. 1 (2020), 1–30.

12) Kronja, "Lutka, animacija, document," 240–255.

13) Vesi Vuković, "Transitions and Cinematic Dimensions of In-Betweenness in the Films of Vesna Ljubić: The Last Switchman of the Narrow-Gauge Railway (1986) and Defiant Delta (1980)," *Research in Film and History*, *New Approaches*, 2025, accessed November 1, 2025, <https://film-history.org/index.php/approaches/transitions-and-cinematic-dimensions-betweenness-films-vesna-ljubic>.

14) Vuković, "Tragom zaboravljenih jugoslovenskih režiserki."

15) Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (London: Afterall Books, 2016 [1975]).

into separate nation-states, Yugoslav film heritage and its directors are frequently disregarded and treated as unwanted legacy, unless rebranded as national, such as Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, or Macedonian.¹⁶⁾ Furthermore, as scholars Sanja Bahun and John Haynes highlight, socialist cinemas are typically analyzed through the lens of binaries, reflecting the remnants of “Cold War” discourses, such as opposition and conformity.¹⁷⁾ This implies that in scholarly writings the directors (usually male) identified as dissidents are given preference over those who did not challenge the socialist system. In a similar vein, as Dijana Jelača observes, “socialist women filmmakers [were required] to be political ‘dissidents’ in order for their work to be deemed worthy of attention.”¹⁸⁾ Moreover, according to film scholar Ivana Kronja, in the history of Yugoslav cinema there is an uneven valuation, of women directors’ works compared to those of male directors, due to the influences of patriarchy and gender inequality.¹⁹⁾ This article’s case study director, namely Vera Jocić, who was also a talented painter, was often in the shadow of her more famous husband, writer, painter, and filmmaker Ljubiša Jocić,²⁰⁾ even years after they divorced. With him, she co-authored a few films²¹⁾ during the first decade of her film career, including the first puppet-animation in socialist Yugoslavia, entitled *The Pioneer and the Bad Mark* (Pionir i dvojka; 1949).

Gender equality was established through Yugoslav legislation, starting with the 1946 post-Second World War constitution, which granted women rights, including paid parental leave, voting, equal pay,²²⁾ eligibility for political office,²³⁾ and access to education, healthcare, abortion, divorce, marriage, and inheritance.²⁴⁾ Women in non-aligned, socialist Yugoslavia had more advantageous legislations regarding legal, social, economic, political, and reproductive rights compared to their counterparts in Western countries.²⁵⁾ How-

16) Gal Kirn, “Transnationalism in Reverse: From Yugoslav to Post-Yugoslav Memorial Sites,” in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, eds. Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 314; Nebojša Jovanović, “Gender and Sexuality in the Classical Yugoslav Cinema, 1947–1962” (Doctoral thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2014), 48; Kronja, “Lutka, animacija, dokument,” 244; Dijana Jelača, “Women on the Cutting Edge: Editing in Yugoslav Film, and the Authorship of Olga Skrigin,” *Apparatus: Film, Media, and Digital Culture in Central and Eastern Europe*, no. 20 (2025).

17) Sanja Bahun and John Haynes, “Introduction: Questioning and questing: re-staging state socialist cinema,” in *Cinema, state socialism and society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917–1989: revisions*, eds. Sanja Bahun and John Haynes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 1.

18) Jelača, “Towards Women’s Minor Cinema,” 15.

19) Kronja, “Lutka, animacija, dokument,” 243.

20) Ibid., 244.

21) For instance, they co-scripted the film *A Boy and a Kite* (Dečak i zmaj; Miodrag Nikolić, 1951, puppet animation), co-directed and co-scripted *Her Puppet Little Red Riding Hood* a.k.a. *Her Red Riding Hood Doll* (Njena lutka crvenkapa; Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1951, puppet animation), co-directed *Branko Radičević* (Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1953, documentary) and *Belgrade* (Beograd; Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1955, documentary).

22) Sabrina P. Ramet, “In Tito’s Time,” in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 94–95.

23) Vera Gudac-Dodić, “Položaj žene u Srbiji (1945–2000),” in *Žene i deca: 4. Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XIX i XX veka*, ed. Latinka Perović (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Zagorac, 2006), 34.

24) Mirjana Morokvašić, “Being a Woman in Yugoslavia: Past, Present and Institutional Equality,” in *Women of the Mediterranean*, ed. Monique Gadant (London: Zed Books, 1986), 125.

25) Ana Kralj and Tanja Renner, “Slovenia: From ‘State Feminism’ to Back Vocals,” in *Gender (In)equality and*

ever, as scholar Rada Iveković stresses, the existence of legal rights for women did not necessarily reflect their daily experiences.²⁶⁾ For instance, they were often clustered in lower-paying, unskilled, or semiskilled occupations that were considered “women’s work”, such as in the textile and electronics industries, agriculture, tourism, catering, cleaning, administration, and on conveyor belts.²⁷⁾ Moreover, women had less access than men to higher-paying careers and decision-making occupations.²⁸⁾ We can see this also from the underrepresented position of women who were the creative force behind the camera within the Yugoslav film industry. The underrepresentation of women directors was a phenomenon not limited to socialist Yugoslavia. In socialist countries, despite the existence of laws aimed at promoting gender equality, women filmmakers “were traditionally marginalized and had fewer chances to become directors.”²⁹⁾ Moreover, as Ana Grgić finds, women still nowadays “continue to be marginalized and under-acknowledged in screen industries across the world.”³⁰⁾ In general, Dina Iordanova asserts that the work of women filmmakers receives less critical attention, is less praised, less known, and there is a lower probability of women being acknowledged as auteurs in cinema.³¹⁾ Cinematic auteurs, predominantly male, are usually the main focus of national film historiographies, whereas the inclusion of women remains limited.³²⁾ According to Alix Beeston and Stefan Solomon, an auterist frame represents “a view of film authorship that is highly circumscribed in gendered terms.”³³⁾ The status of auteur is often conferred by male critics, who attribute this label to gifted male directors, track their career and diligently document their contributions.³⁴⁾ My research finds that in socialist Yugoslavia women film critics, such as Mira Boglić, were quite rare. Therefore, as Grgić notes in the Balkan context, “the dominant, deterministic, patriarchal narrative of the lone creative male genius”³⁵⁾ needs to be supplemented, perturbed, and disrupted with a different film history that runs parallel — cinema herstory.

Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice, eds. Christine M. Hassenstab and Sabrina P. Ramet (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 42–43.

26) Rada Iveković, “Women, Democracy & Nationalism After 1989: The Yugoslav Case,” *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* 16, no. 10–13 (1995), 11.

27) Silva Mežnarić, “Theory and Reality: The Status of Employed Women in Yugoslavia,” in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, eds. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 216–218.

28) Ibid.

29) Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The industry and artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 119.

30) Ana Grgić, “There is no such thing as Balkan cinema, and yes, Balkan cinema exists: Ruminations on the past and possible futures of Balkan cinema (and media) studies?,” *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (2021).

31) Dina Iordanova, “Women’s Place in Film History: The Importance of Continuity,” *Panoptikum* 23, no. 30 (2020), 14.

32) Ibid., 15.

33) Alix Beeston and Stefan Solomon, “Pathways to the Feminist Incomplete: An Introduction, a Theory, a Manifesto,” in *Incomplete: The Feminist Possibilities of the Unfinished Film*, eds. Alix Beeston and Stefan Solomon (Oakland: University of California, 2023), 13.

34) Iordanova, “Women’s Place in Film History,” 13.

35) Ana Grgić, “Unpacking my Archival Findings: Thoughts on the Chaos of Memory and Archival Resistance to Historical Legibility,” in *Stretching the archives toward a global women’s film heritage*, eds. Lizelle Bisschoff, Ana Grgić, and Stefanie Van de Peer (Undefined: Archive books, 2024), 231.

In addition to the exclusion of women filmmakers in scholarly literature, film festivals have historically served and continue to serve primarily as platforms for the creation and promotion of male auteurs. Moreover, festivals mostly dedicate retrospectives to them.³⁶⁾ Since the festival practices contribute to long-term canon formation, they structurally privilege male auteurs. Women have received the European Film Awards for European Director (of feature-length fiction film) only four times since its establishment in 1988, spanning over 35 years.³⁷⁾ These awards have been conferred to women directors only in the last 15 years.³⁸⁾ Moreover, among the four winning directors, three are from Western Europe, while only one comes from the Balkans.³⁹⁾ Balkan and Eastern European women filmmakers receive even less professional accolades.⁴⁰⁾ In my view, a notable exception, albeit only recently, is that European Film Academy honored Hungarian Márta Mészáros in 2021 with European Lifetime Achievement Award for her outstanding opus. Also, it is noteworthy that the Thessaloniki International Film Festival paid tribute to Bulgarian director Binka Zhelyazkova in 2021. The European Film Award for the category of European Documentary was given to ten women directors, a slightly higher number than in fiction feature category,⁴¹⁾ but they are still severely underrepresented when compared to the number of male directors who are winners. Thus, attitudes are very slowly changing towards women filmmakers. In general, “[m]ore and more accolades over time get bestowed on men,” while women filmmakers face neglect and oversight throughout their careers, leading to their works being marginalized in film history.⁴²⁾

A key contribution of this article is to expand our global record of women filmmakers. Feminist film history, to borrow from Beeston and Solomon, is “an unfinished project, an ongoing and active process that maps our ineluctably gap-ridden knowledge of the past in the terrain of the present.”⁴³⁾ The feminist recovery within film studies, which focuses on “forgotten” or sidelined women filmmakers and their films, aims to revise established film-historical narratives, particularly regarding the connections between these films and the concept of film authorship.⁴⁴⁾ Furthermore, merely adding “herstory” to the prevailing “history” is insufficient, as “the structures, presuppositions and modes of exclusion prevalent in hegemonic history remain untouched.”⁴⁵⁾ To address this issue, it is essential to

36) Iordanova, “Women’s Place in Film History,” 10.

37) *European Film Awards*, 2026, accessed April 18, 2026, <https://www.europeanfilmawards.eu/award-edition/awards-1988/>.

38) For this and mentioned below see the archive of the European Film Academy Awards editions on their website.

39) From Western Europe are Susanne Bier (won in 2011), Maren Ade (2016), and Justine Triet (2023), while Jasmila Žbanić (2021) is from the Balkans.

40) Iordanova, “Women’s Place in Film History,” 12.

41) Livia Gyarmathy (co-directed with Géza Bószörmény) in 1989, Yasmina Abdellaoui in 1997 (co-directed with Benoît Dervaux), Agnès Varda in 2000, Nino Kirtadzé in 2005, Helena Třeštková in 2008, Anna Zamecka in 2017, Jane Magnusson in 2018, Waad al-Kateab (co-director with Edward Watts) in 2019, Anna Hints in 2023, and Rachel Szor (co-director with Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, and Yuval Abraham) in 2024.

42) Iordanova, “Women’s Place in Film History,” 11.

43) Beeston and Solomon, “Pathways to the Feminist Incomplete,” 10.

44) *Ibid.*, 12.

45) Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), 11.

critically examine the construction of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, along with their normalization.⁴⁶⁾ Although Jocić's films remain within a heteronormative framework — except for her short documentary *A House Without Façade* (Kuća bez fasade; Vera Jocić, 1970)⁴⁷⁾ — this article strives to not only illuminate Jocić's work but also to analyze the gender norms negotiated in her films.

Negotiating gender norms in documentaries

Jocić's films should be also considered in the wider context of the dynamic Yugoslav documentary film production.⁴⁸⁾ The film industry of socialist Yugoslavia commenced with a focus on documentary filmmaking.⁴⁹⁾ Throughout its existence, several hundred of Yugoslav documentary filmmakers⁵⁰⁾ produced approximately 6,000 documentary and short films in total, with around 150 documentary films produced annually.⁵¹⁾ Almost all Yugoslav directors made documentaries, with many either continuing in this field or using it as a pathway to the fiction film industry. Despite prolific documentary output, Yugoslav film histories often overlook documentary filmmaking and animation, notwithstanding their significant production, focusing instead on the more popular feature-length fiction.⁵²⁾ Eastern European documentary filmmaking has largely remained outside the purview of international critical attention and distribution, primarily because it does not conform to Western expectations of dissident cinema.⁵³⁾

Film critic Ranko Munitić places Jocić's work within the framework of the "Belgrade School of Documentary Film."⁵⁴⁾ The term was coined by Italian critics in 1966 at Porretta Terme, to commend a widespread movement of documentary filmmakers, mostly gathered around the production house "Dunav film," as noted by Ilić Momčilo.⁵⁵⁾ To Munitić,

46) Ibid., 12.

47) The film is about women in a Yugoslav prison and it touches upon the theme of lesbian desire.

48) There were also, for instance: "Novosadski dokumentarni kružok"/"Novi Sad Documentary Circle" around production house Neoplanta, "Sarajevska škola dokumentarnog filma"/"Sarajevo School of Documentary Film" around production houses Sutjeska and Studio Film, "The Ljubljana School of Documentary Film" around TV Ljubljana and so on.

49) Rudolf Sremec, "Jugoslavija," *Filmska enciklopedija*, 2026, accessed April 18, 2026, <https://filmska.lzmk.hr/clanak/jugoslavija>.

50) It is important to mention directors: Dušan Makavejev, Dragoslav Lazić, Milenko Štrbac, Aleksandar Petrović, Vladan Slijepčević, Milorad Jakšić-Fando, Želimir Žilnik, Stjepan Zaninović, Krsto Škanata, Jovan Jovanović, Ljubiša Jocić, Miroslav Antić, Branko Milošević, Aleksandar Ilić, Milivoje 'Mića' Milošević, Petar Lalović, Nikola Jovičević, Stefan Stanić, Petko Vojnić Purčar, Prvoslav Marić, Karpo Acimović-Godina, Vlatko Gilić, Nikola Popović, Radoš Novaković, Branko Marjanović, Kosta Hlavaty, Živko Nikolić, Vlatko Filipović, Bakir Tanović, Vefik Hadžismajlović, Ante Babaja, Obrad Gluščević, Krešo Golik, Krsto Papić, Rudolf Sremec, Bogdan Žižić, Zoran Tadić, Gustav Gavrin, and Petar Krelja.

51) Ibid.

52) Kronja, "Lutka, animacija, document," 246.

53) Anikó Imre, *Eastern European Cinemas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xiii.

54) Ranko Munitić, "Beogradska dokumentarna škola," *Danas*, February 7, 2010, accessed April 18, 2026, <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/beogradska-dokumentarna-skola/>.

55) Momčilo Ilić, "Jugoslavija," *Filmska enciklopedija*, 2026, accessed April 18, 2026, <https://filmska.lzmk.hr/clanak/jugoslavija>.

the term “does not refer to its geographical or national character, but its quality, value.”⁵⁶⁾ The school comprised of artistically diverse authors and works that despite the differences share common characteristics, including a distinct, polemical, and personal style, as well as the uniqueness, originality, and quirkiness. Additionally, they use metaphors and prefer a poetic approach over a narrative one.⁵⁷⁾

Globally, according to Lisa French, “documentary is the film industry sector with the largest numbers of women,” in comparison with features or television sectors. She identifies several reasons: (1) the documentary sector pays less, leading male directors to favor the more lucrative fiction films sector, (2) there are fewer gatekeepers (3) the documentary film possesses qualities appealing to women, such as creative freedom, (4) women can undertake multiple roles — director, scriptwriter, director of photography, producer, and/or editor — without reliance on a (big) crew, (5) women directors are more likely to hire women and create films featuring female protagonists compared to their male counterparts.⁵⁸⁾

The above-mentioned arguments — that globally women tend to gravitate towards documentary filmmaking, and that in Eastern Europe documentary filmmaking frequently lacks representation in scholarly discourse — elucidate why talented women directors, such as Jocić, are mostly left out of film history. Besides Jocić, other notable Yugoslav women documentary film directors are, for example, Bojana Marijan, Gordana Boškov, Mira Brtko, Ljiljana Jojić, Milica Borojević, Melita Filipović, Ivanka Forenbacher, Tugomila Sabljčić, Sida Marjanović, Vesna Marić, Vera Ilić, Mirjana Zoranović, Milka Badjura, Polona Sepe, Dorica Makuc, and Vera Kličkova.

From the extensive collection of Yugoslav documentary works, I chose Jocić’s films for my case study due to their negotiation of gender norms in a rural setting and their emphasis on the perspectives of women regarding the roles of both women and men, effectively avoiding the pitfalls of the “male gaze,” which distinguishes them in the field. The notable absence of scholarly writings on Jocić’s documentary works, despite her evident prowess and talent as a film director, has prompted my focus on her and two of her films, both short documentaries. I will closely analyze *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, a black and white film, and *The Best Husband*, shot in color. The reasons for the variation in film stock utilized by Jocić, particularly black and white versus color, are speculative. It can be either attributed to Jocić’s rising reputation as a filmmaker or to the gradual and ongoing transition of Yugoslav film industry from black and white to color.

Girls Without Boy(friend)s presents Smiljka, a young woman from a village, who patiently awaits the visits of her boyfriend, employed at a wagon factory in a nearby town. The film tackles the absence of men in the village, situated beneath Suva planina Mountain, in the (Yugoslav) Socialist Republic of Serbia (SR Serbia). Similarly to Smiljka, several other women anticipate the visits of their partners. This is due to the migration of the

56) Ranko Munitić, “Belgrade School of Documentary Film,” in *Festival kratkog metra — 60 godina: Monografija Beogradskog festivala dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma/The Short film fest — 60 years: Monograph of the Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival*, ed. Dunja Jelenković (Belgrade: Direkcija FEST-a, 2013), 277–279.

57) Ibid., 279.

58) Lisa French, *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An International Perspective* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 26–27.



Fig. 1: The contest in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshot

male work force to urban areas in search of factory employment.⁵⁹⁾ This migration from rural to urban areas was a frequent phenomenon across the rural regions of SR Serbia and other Yugoslav republics, for instance with an estimated 9,000 people relocating annually between 1953 and 1961.⁶⁰⁾ Besides the high rural-urban migration influx, the scarcity of men in villages can be attributed to the “employment of surplus labor abroad.”⁶¹⁾ In *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, the narrative contrasts Smiljka and the other women awaiting their partners, like Stevana, with the “old maids,” Jovanka and Draga. These two sisters, denied the opportunity to marry due to a shortage of men, continue to display their handmade dowry kilims in their courtyard, hoping to attract suitors, yet their efforts remain futile. The majority of village women engage in agricultural work, while a minority participate in a women’s workshop producing souvenirs for a factory. This newfound economic independence enables them to pursue romantic relationships within the village. Nonetheless, the dynamics of village life pulsate with the recurrent arrivals and departures of men, the interplay of male presence and absence, highlighting the physical and social mobility of men, contrasted with the stasis of women. At the outset, Smiljka gets engaged to her boyfriend and leaves the village permanently to reside with him in the town.

Similarly, *The Best Husband*, filmed a few years after *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, depicts the lives of rural women in Donji Dubac village, located in Dragačevo region of (Yugoslav) SR Serbia. In contrast to the previous film, these women experience empowerment, both financially and socially, through their work, facilitated by the foundation and self-management of weaving cooperative that produces woven handcrafts, including kilims. The film’s title indicates that the women’s cooperative organizes the best husband contest (Fig. 1), similar to beauty pageants. There is a slight comical element to this in the

59) See Gudac-Dodić, “Položaj žene u Srbiji (1945–2000),” 91.

60) Dennison I. Rusinow, “Some Aspects of Migration and Urbanization in Yugoslavia,” *Southeast Europe Series* 19, no. 2 (1971), 4–6.

61) *Ibid.*, 11.

film. During the film's production, the remnant of the patriarchal values system from the pre-socialist times "is found almost everywhere [in Yugoslavia] but takes the most oppressive form in the rural and least developed parts of the country,"⁶²⁾ despite the legal ratification of gender equality in socialism following the Second World War.⁶³⁾ According to Mirjana Morokvašić, Yugoslavia was "a country where over half the female population lives in the countryside."⁶⁴⁾ The film portrays changing gender dynamics in a rural area of SR Serbia. It juxtaposes traditional, superstitious rituals, associated with women's fertility and childbirth, with women's progress through employment. It contrasts conventional depictions of masculinity with the emerging archetype of men participating in the best husband contest.

The difference between these two films by Jocić is that the earlier film, *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, features the recurring female inner monologue of the character Smiljka. It sounds subjective and emotional, potentially appealing to viewers' emotions to garner empathy and establish credibility, while simultaneously providing information about the village and its residents. The voice we hear is likely not the actual voice of Smiljka, but rather that of an uncredited actress recorded during post-production. Similarly, film scholar Kronja states that the film was made by filming shots without sound, which were subsequently synchronized with separately recorded voice-over during the editing process.⁶⁵⁾ Furthermore, Smiljka's inner monologue, presented as voice-over narration throughout the film, was written by the renowned Yugoslav male director Puriša Đorđević. The alteration of the voice-over's content and tone can significantly change the film's meaning, as demonstrated by filmmaker Chris Marker in *Letter from Siberia* (Lettre de Sibérie; 1957). Marker's film features a montage sequence that shows how variations in the content and tone of a voice-over can affect objectivity.⁶⁶⁾ He posits that "objectivity is not always the same thing. It does not deform the reality [...] but it arrests the time for judgement, and that is the same thing as deformation."⁶⁷⁾ Marker's experiment with voice-over commentary illustrates the transition from objectivity to subjectivity.⁶⁸⁾ Taking into account the subjective nature of voice-over, which can influence meaning and viewer interpretation,

62) Morokvašić, "Being a Woman in Yugoslavia: Past, Present and Institutional Equality," 135.

63) Ramet, "In Tito's Time," 94–95.

64) Ibid.

65) Kronja, "Lutka, animacija, document," 248.

66) Firstly, Marker introduces a scene (consisting of five shots), while his voice-over hints at his experiment that will soon follow, intended to vary the way that the Yakutsk capital and Soviet Union will be perceived — "as workers' paradise or, as hell on earth." Then he visually repeats the scene (excluding the first shot of playful workers), that is, repeats four assorted shots edited together (1. extreme wide shot of a street with a bus and a Soviet ZIM car, 2. a full shot of the kneeling workers grading with a drag beam, 3. a medium-long shot of a Yakut afflicted with an eye disorder, and 4. a medium long shot of workers grading with a drag beam), which are all shown three times in a row. Every time the scene is repeated, the four images and their editing order remain the same. However, the scene is underscored with a different voice-over each time (in total, with three voice-overs). Besides the changed content in each voice-over, the tone is also altered: the first time it is positive and propagandistic, the second time sinister and negative, the third time normal and seemingly objective, which always affects the meaning and the interpretation of the scene by the viewers.

67) Chris Marker in Jan-Christopher Horak, *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema* (Washington: Smithsonian Institut Press, 1997), 33.

68) Horak, *Making Images Move*, 33.

one must question the extent to which *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* would differ if the voice-over was authored by Jocić rather than Đorđević. Did she contribute to the text without receiving credit for it? To what extent was Jocić's female authorial voice overshadowed by the male-authored voice-over of her more celebrated colleague Đorđević? Was the decision to collaborate with him made by her or by the Dunav film production house as their safety-net, for granting her opportunity to direct a film independently? She may have been judged based on her gender and previous collaborative work, primarily co-directed with Ljubiša Jocić.⁶⁹ Unlike *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, Jocić's subsequent film, *The Best Husband*, does not have a male-written voice-over. Instead, the film features actual dialogues among village women, synchronous with images in the initial segment and then intermittently presented as voice-over dialogue accompanying the visuals of the candidates for the best husband. This approach enables women characters to express their actual opinion without the influence of a male-authored voice-over. Therefore, it is evident that Jocić's creative voice has grown stronger alongside her accumulation of filmmaking experience.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* was screened at the 11. Festival jugoslavenskog igranog filma u Puli (11th Festival of Yugoslav Fiction Film in Pula) in 1964 in Yugoslavia, as it received an award at the XI Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma u Beogradu (11th Festival of Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film in Belgrade), alongside six other awarded films.⁷⁰ Ironically, the award was granted to Đorđević in the "Text" category,⁷¹ rather than to Jocić for the categories of the screenwriter and director of the film.⁷² This raises the question of the extent to which women were (under)appreciated as filmmakers within the Yugoslav film industry and festival circuit.

The Festival of Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film and The Festival of Yugoslav Fiction Film originated from the Filmski festival (Film Festival) in Pula, established in 1954. In 1960, the festival divided into two, resulting in similar mechanisms and juries for both events.⁷³ The Festival of Yugoslav Fiction Film in Pula was the prominent platform for the exhibition and recognition of Yugoslav feature-length fictional films. From 1954 until 1990, when the festival operated within Yugoslav context,⁷⁴ it seldom awarded women's work behind the camera. Women were predominantly recognized for their performances in acting, in front of the camera. Sofija 'Soja' Jovanović is notable for being the sole woman recipient of the "The Golden Arena" ("Zlatna arena") for best directing in 1957, while her film also won the festival's most prestigious award that year, the "Velika zlatna arena" ("The Big Golden Arena"), which was a truly exceptional instance. In 1990, after a

69) To my knowledge, the only film that she directed alone before *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* was *Pillars of Imagination* (Stubovi mašte; 1962), produced by Avala film.

70) See the archive of the Pula Film festival editions on the website *Pula Film Festival*, accessed April 27, 2026, <https://arhiv.pulafilmfestival.hr/37-pulski-filmski-festival/index>.

71) The award was granted for both *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* and *At Coffee, in Maglaj* (Na kavi, u Maglaju; Aleksandar Arandelović, 1963).

72) "Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma u Beogradu," *Filmska enciklopedija*, 2025, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://filmska.lzmk.hr/clanak/festival-jugoslovenskog-dokumentarnog-i-kratkometraznog-filma-u-beogradu>.

73) Ibid.

74) For all mentioned below see the archive of the Pula Film festival editions on their website.

span of thirty-three years, a Yugoslav woman filmmaker was recognized again, with Marija Marić receiving a special award for her directing.⁷⁵⁾ However, the festival's most celebrated directing award, "The Golden Arena," was awarded to a male recipient that year. Furthermore, awards were conferred upon Yugoslav women scriptwriters only on two occasions.⁷⁶⁾ Similarly, women editors were given just two official awards for editing and two special awards, out of which one award was co-shared with two men.⁷⁷⁾ There was a sole woman recipient of an award for sound.⁷⁸⁾ Only one woman film critic has ever won an award, doing so on two different occasions.⁷⁹⁾ No woman has ever received an award for cinematography. Women were occasionally recognized in additional categories such as costume design, scenography, and make-up. Historically, they have been significantly underrepresented or entirely absent in juries and committees of the festival. Only one woman served as a festival director,⁸⁰⁾ during the final six years of the festival's Yugoslav period (1985–1990). Therefore, women experienced limited access to decision making bodies and juries at the festival, resulting in fewer awards for their creative contributions behind the camera. This situation reflects gender inequality, and as a result, the underrepresentation of women and their films in the formation of the canon.

"Women's Minor Cinema in Socialist Yugoslavia"

Thematic and audiovisual parallels can be drawn between *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* and another Yugoslav short documentary film, *Girls' Dreams* (Djevojački snovi; 1975),⁸¹⁾ directed by Yugoslav woman filmmaker Mirjana Živković. In this film, as in *The Best Husband*, women's voices frequently emerge through voice-over. In comparison to the scripted nature of a woman's voice-over monologue in *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, their lines appear authentic and unscripted. *Girls' Dreams* is a black and white film set in a village where, as indicated by the opening intertitle, the population of girls exceeds that of young men by three times. The film shows that the situation with the numerical disparity between men and women in the village Dragovići in the (Yugoslav) Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SR BIH) is comparable to that in a village located under the Suva Planina mountain in the (Yugoslav) SR Serbia, as depicted in *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*. Although *Girls' Dreams* was made approximately ten years after *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, the temporal gap did not alter the limited presence of men in Yugoslav rural environ-

75) I am thankful to Ana Grgić for pointing out the information on Marija Marić.

76) Zora Dirnbach in 1960 and Staša Borisavljević in 1969.

77) Vesna Lažeta received an award for editing in 1981 and Snežana Ivanović shared an award in 1989 with her two male co-editors, who edited different stories in an omnibus film. Prior to the establishment of the official editing award in 1980, special awards were conferred upon Maja Lazarov in 1964 and Olga Skrigin in 1979.

78) Hanna Preuss in 1983.

79) Mira Boglić was awarded the honorary Golden Arena in 1968 and the Golden Feather in 1987.

80) Gorka Ostojić-Cvajner.

81) The Film Centre Sarajevo has a positive copy of this film. Ines Tanović, the head of the Centre, and Ema Muf-tarević, the expert in charge of the digitization, just digitized it this year under the aegis of my MSCA/YUFE-4Postdocs postdoctoral project, and the University of Bremen.

ments, a theme both films address, as men migrated to urban areas for factory employment, or abroad. *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (to a lesser degree) and *The Best Husband* (to a higher degree) convey an emancipatory message by illustrating that through empowerment via work, women's cooperatives, workrooms, and self-management initiative, women can self-organize, become financially independent, and potentially establish romantic relationships. *Girls' Dreams* presents a more somber perspective and lacks the possibility of emancipation through employment, likely due to the absence of a women's cooperative or workshop in the village in question. Both *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* and *Girls' Dreams* indicate a shift in sexual practices, such as premarital sex, as a result of rural men's urban living and the increase of sexual liberties, in contrast to the traditionally upheld expectation of pre-marital virginity, particularly for women. In addition, all films tackle the themes of motherhood and child-rearing.

These three films can be encompassed within the broader concept of "women's minor cinema in socialist Yugoslavia," defined by Dijana Jelača as:

works [that] frequently articulated emancipatory, feminist stances that did not demarcate a dichotomous opposition to the socialist state as such, but rather called for the state to fulfil its original promise of gender equality as tied both to the class struggle and the annihilation of patriarchy.⁸²⁾

"Women's minor cinema in socialist Yugoslavia" aligns the viewer with a female perspective, irrespective of the viewer's actual sex or gender.⁸³⁾ Furthermore, it is important to note that all three films were edited by women. Neva Habić edited *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* and *The Best Husband*, while Blanka Jelić edited *Girls' Dreams*. However, all films were shot by men: Stevo Radović, Milivoje Milojević, and Dragan Resner, respectively. Editing, involving the physical cutting and gluing of celluloid tape, was often perceived as women's work, similar to jobs in the textile industry,⁸⁴⁾ whereas camerawork was viewed as a male domain.⁸⁵⁾ In general, in the Yugoslav film industry women were numerically underrepresented as directors of photography (and directors, as mentioned earlier). In contrast, many of them worked as editors.⁸⁶⁾ Nonetheless, their creative contributions are still overlooked in film histories, with some notable exceptions, such as Jelača's research on editor Olga Skrgin,⁸⁷⁾ Jelena Modrić's study of Radojka Tanhofer,⁸⁸⁾ and my doctoral thesis on Yugoslav New Film which touches upon it.⁸⁹⁾ Gradually and more recently, Jelača finds, there is

82) Jelača, "Towards Women's Minor Cinema," 1.

83) Ibid., 1.

84) Jelača, "Towards Women's Minor Cinema," 5; Jelena Modrić, "Radojka Tanhofer, Croatia's Pioneering Film Editor," in *Apparatus: Film, Media and Digital Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, no. 7 (2018); Vesi Vuković, "Women in the Wave: Representation of Female Characters in Yugoslav New Film and Black Wave" (PhD Thesis, Antwerp, 2022), 69; Belc, "Women's Cinematic Avant-garde in Yugoslavia," 1.

85) Women directors of photography were very rare in Yugoslav cinema industry. I know only of Nevenka Redžić Toth.

86) Vuković, "Women in the Wave," 70.

87) Jelača, "Women on the Cutting Edge."

88) Modrić, "Radojka Tanhofer."

89) Vuković, "Women in the Wave," 70.

“a growing body of scholarly interventions that more consistently recognise women’s work behind the camera in socialist cinema — here specifically the cinema of socialist Yugoslavia.”⁹⁰⁾

Documentary Counterpoints — mobility versus immobility, urban versus rural, new versus old

Jocić’s capacity to juxtapose is one of her most notable strengths as a documentary filmmaker. *Girls Without Boy(friend)s* visually contrasts mobility and immobility within the film. Men are typically depicted with vehicles, such as bicycles and motorcycles, while women are predominantly shown on foot, walking or sitting (Fig. 2a). The physical mobility of men implies both their capacity for wider spatial movement and their social mobility, exemplified by their employment opportunities in urban factories and their relocation to these areas. In contrast, the physical immobility of women stands for their social immobility and sedentism. Although an example is provided of a village girl who relocated to the city for work, she is only mentioned and not shown, so there is no indication of her boarding any vehicle. The only exception to the immobility of women is the main female character, Smiljka, who is shown onboard a horse wagon, at both the beginning and the end of the film. Her inner monologue (written by the male director Puriša Đorđević) is aurally presented to the audience. The horse-drawn wagon symbolizes an outdated mode of transport, indicative of a bygone era, now replaced by motorcycles that possess greater horsepower. Still, Smiljka’s physical mobility foreshadows and underscores her social mobility, specifically her transition to the city at the denouement of the film. Furthermore, women and men exhibit different moving patterns onscreen (Fig. 2b). At the film’s outset, a horse-drawn wagon carrying Smiljka travels in the opposite direction of the mobile men. Her onscreen movement is horizontal and leftward (Fig. 2c). This movement direction contrasts with the left-to-right reading orientation, dominant in many European contexts, which subliminally frames movement from screen left to screen right as the conventional onscreen direction.⁹¹⁾ Since at the beginning of the film the direction of Smiljka’s onscreen movement is right-to-left, which is opposite to the convention, it can potentially imply going against the grain or a difficult journey ahead (with no prospects of her relocation to city yet), while in the context of men the same direction indicates a temporary return home from the city.⁹²⁾ In contrast, at the end of the film, Smiljka’s horse-drawn wagon moves with the flow, together with the men towards the city (where she will relocate), moving from left to right (Fig. 2d). However, her social mobility is enabled by her engagement to her boyfriend, who works in the city, rather than by her own employment merits. Jocić’s attention here subtly hints at the broader issues of women’s limited possibilities,

90) Jelača, “Women on the Cutting Edge.”

91) Tom Barrance, “How to Make a Short Film,” *futurelearn.com*, 2025, accessed May 5, 2026, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/make-a-short-film>.

92) See *ibid.*



Fig. 2a, b, c, d: Mobility and immobility in *The Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (Vera Jocić, 1963), screenshot



Fig. 3a, b: Rural versus urban, old versus new, traditional folk music versus modern rock in *The Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (Vera Jocić, 1963), screenshot

economic emancipation, and independence within patriarchal and rural contexts. Namely, Smiljka previously sought employment at the village workshop for souvenirs, which caters to a factory's requirements, but was informed that there were no vacancies. Still, it is important to note that Smiljka was promised employment there in the autumn, with a friend already employed there, along with other women from the village, which opened economic, romantic, and social possibilities for them, suggesting that Jocić's film offers a degree of hope for women's emancipation. Nonetheless, Smiljka's inner monologue at the film's conclusion, commenting on her ambivalence regarding her relocation to the city — encompassing both happiness and anticipated sadness — contrasts with the images of movement and departure, highlighting gender imbalance. Particularly, Smiljka says that she can think of several girls from her village who would be suitable matches for the village boys who relocated to the town; however, these boys seldom return to live in the village permanently after leaving. It can be concluded that the marriage prospects for village women are limited, consequently restricting their prospects for social mobility through relocation to a town via matrimony, unless they seek employment independently.

The film juxtaposes various aspects of urban life with traditional village lifestyles. Vehicles, such as motorcycles and bicycles, are compared to horse-drawn wagons (at the best), or walking. The film creates counterpoints at both visual and auditory levels. For example, brass traditional folk music (Fig. 3a) is contrasted with modern rock, which is played on a portable radio (Fig. 3b). Since rock music is heard immediately right after folk music, the film suggests the clash of what is considered as urban and rural, modern and

traditional, new and old. In addition, within the film's diegetic world, traditional music is performed live, while rock music is disseminated via portable transistor radios, a novel development at that time, especially in rural settings. A sociological testimony reports that at similar Serbian villages (in SFR Yugoslavia) electricity and radios were introduced from the second half of 1950s,⁹³⁾ while this film was released in 1963, which demonstrates radio's newness. When such sound equipment appear in film, as Winfried Pauleit highlights, "their appearance creates a self-reflexive potential which links the reception of the film back to the cultural actions carried out during its production process."⁹⁴⁾ The presence of a radio consequently opens a space to reflect on the contrast between tradition and modernity, which the director uses to highlight wider gender relations in the village. A man who works in town is the one introducing radio and modernity to the village women, including his fiancée, while the women embody traditional lifestyles and passively receive modern influences (Fig. 3b).

The self-management of a women's cooperative in Yugoslavia

The film *The Best Husband* features Rajka Borojević (1913–1973),⁹⁵⁾ the founder of Dragačevo Women's Cooperative, a significant figure in the region's development and modernization. The opening credits of the film acknowledge her as the expert consultant. Borojević was personally motivated to improve the lives of village women in the village of Donji Dubac, located in Dragačevo region of (Yugoslav) SR Serbia. She was profoundly touched by the hospitality of villagers during the Second World War, when she sought refuge there with her children⁹⁶⁾ after their lives were endangered and her parents were killed.⁹⁷⁾ After the war, her husband Vukašin and she, both former partisans, started regularly coming to the village and eventually built a house there.⁹⁸⁾ Borojević's initiative to hold an annual housekeeping course for village women, starting from 1954, faced significant challenges due to patriarchal structures, as husbands and fathers-in-law often denied permission for their female relatives to participate in the program.⁹⁹⁾ The courses were not organized by the state; rather they emerged as grassroots initiative by Borojević, but still operating within socialist framework and in the spirit of Yugoslav socialist self-management.¹⁰⁰⁾

93) See Rajka Borojevic, *Iz Dubca u svet* (Zrenjanin: Budućnost, 1964), 202–221.

94) Winfried Pauleit, "Sonic Icons in *A Song Is Born* (1948): A Model for an Audio History of Film," in *Music, Media, History: Re-Thinking Musicology in an Age of Digital Media*, eds. Matej Santi and Elias Berner (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), 152.

95) Natalija Herbst, "Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s: The example of Rajka Borojević and the Dragačevo Women's Cooperative," in *Doing Gender — Doing the Balkans: Dynamics and Persistence of Gender Relations in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, eds. Roswitha Kersten-Pejanić, Simone Rajilić, and Christian Voß (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2012), 209.

96) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 40.

97) Herbst, "Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s," 209.

98) Chiara Bonfiglioli, "AFŽ Activists' Biographies: An Intersectional Reading of Women's Agency," in *The Lost Revolution: Women's Antifascist Front Between Myth and Forgetting*, eds. Andreja Dugandžić and Tijana Okić (Sarajevo: Association for Culture and Art CRVENA, 2018), 37; Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 26.

99) *Ibid.*, 39–45.

100) *Ibid.*, 87; Herbst, "Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s," 212.

Borojević's published diary, entitled *Iz Dubca u svet* (From Dubac to the World), which she kept from 1951 until 1957, documents the challenging experiences of women in Dubac.¹⁰¹ Her diary indicates that the village was initially characterized by backwardness, patriarchy, superstition, and resistance to change. Alcoholism and the abuse of women were prevalent. A female child was regarded as less valuable than a male one. A woman occupied a subordinate role within a family, performing agricultural labor from sunrise to sunset, with workload equal to men's, in addition to fulfilling traditional domestic responsibilities considered as "women's work." The houses were old and lacked proper hygiene. Women often suffered complications or fatalities as a result of childbirth in unsanitary conditions and clandestine abortions.¹⁰² In the summer of 1955, Borojević wrote:

Even her own husband doesn't care about a woman in the countryside. It's a rare example that he will come to her aid. However, the truth is that the attitude of husbands, whose wives go through homemaking courses, is changing. Because these women are changing.¹⁰³

The Best Husband explores this issue through a female protagonist who remarks on the initial neglect of wives by their husbands, who treated them as if they were invisible. This dynamic improved over time due to the breakthrough of women's earning power through weaving labor and ensuing advancements in financial status. Under Borojević's aegis, the successful participants of the courses had the opportunity to go on excursions to various cities across Yugoslavia, experiencing new environments, including their first visit to a movie theater.¹⁰⁴ Besides conducting annual courses that improved the lives of village women, Borojević significantly contributed to women's empowerment through the establishment of a women's cooperative and the development of weaving crafts,¹⁰⁵ whose members are shown in the film *The Best Husband*. Borojević's activism, which dates back to *Antifašistički front žena* (the Antifascist Front of Women) — a prominent Yugoslav women's organization — demonstrates how:

A number of women who had come out of partisan experience embraced socialist values and strived to improve women's position, particularly from a social and economic perspective, in line with the idea that overall social progress had to be achieved also through the improvement in women's conditions.¹⁰⁶

In her diary, Borojević also indicates that, over time, husbands are gradually assisting their wives,¹⁰⁷ specifically those of the course attendees and members of the weaving cooperative. During the assembly of the women's weaving cooperative section in spring 1957,

101) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 1–98.

102) Ibid.

103) Ibid., 151 [translated by the author].

104) Ibid., 139.

105) Ibid., 104.

106) Bonfiglioli, "AFŽ Activists' Biographies," 36.

107) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 122.

the cooperative members expressed appreciation for their husbands' assistance with their work.¹⁰⁸⁾ The women members of the weaving cooperative increased their purchasing power, through earnings from carpet weaving enabling them to buy items such as a radio.¹⁰⁹⁾ However, some husbands remained unable to manage the dynamics of having a wife who earns. Some individuals resorted to physical violence against their spouses for this reason.¹¹⁰⁾ In spring 1957, 230 women were members of the weaving section of the agricultural cooperative,¹¹¹⁾ a significant increase from 76 members in 1956¹¹²⁾ and just eight in 1955,¹¹³⁾ despite the challenges posed by entrenched patriarchy. In 1972, there were almost eight hundred members.¹¹⁴⁾ The women's cooperative was expanding and operating in the spirit of socialist self-management. The creations from the weaving cooperation were shown at the applied art exhibitions in Moscow, Frankfurt, and Geneva, as well as in various cities across Yugoslavia, including Belgrade.¹¹⁵⁾ Furthermore, Borojević arranged international excursions for women cooperative members, to destinations in both Eastern and Western Europe.¹¹⁶⁾ Over time, women's voices began to be acknowledged in the village assembly, a forum in which they had previously remained silent.¹¹⁷⁾ Borojević observes the emergence of new women towards the end of her diary in 1957.¹¹⁸⁾

Film director as a viewer

The same year, in 1957, Jocić¹¹⁹⁾ wrote a theoretical piece outlining her perspective on her role as a film director:

A film director, from the moment *he* [emphasis mine] takes a script in his hands, is faced with the task of recounting to us on film tape the history he has become acquainted with. [...] The film director is nothing but a viewer. The viewer who needs to [fore]see the script as broken down into sequences of shots that he will create during the film editing. He alone is the viewer of one event, one history that has not yet been seen anywhere before, that only exists as written in the script. And he needs to [fore]see it, in the way that all viewers will see it later. [...] By working on the storyboard, by developing the script into shots, by filming and editing, the director constantly takes on the role to [fore]see, to shoot the film, in that manner so it would become for all film viewers their viewpoint, which will create artistic pleasure for

108) Ibid., 221.

109) Ibid., 222.

110) Ibid.

111) Ibid., 220.

112) Ibid., 184.

113) Ibid., 153.

114) Herbst, "Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s," 217.

115) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 221.

116) Herbst, "Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s," 216.

117) Ibid., 39.

118) Ibid., 224.

119) Vera Jocić, "Filmski režiser i gledalac," *Polja: mesečnik za umetnost i kulturu* 3, no. 3 (1957), 10 [translated by the author].

them, and spark one artistic sensation in them. [...] The secret of film language is that it is accessible to everyone, because it speaks a universal language, no matter how much the director puts his personal stamp on it. What makes it universal is that the director puts himself also in the position of a viewer.¹²⁰⁾

As we see in this text, Jocić refers to a film director as a *he*, reflecting a common practice in former socialist Yugoslavia of designating many professions exclusively in the masculine form.¹²¹⁾ This highlights how the masculine viewpoints of male filmmakers became normalized in Yugoslav cinema, especially during the *Yugoslav New Film* movement (1961–1972). This is similar to the *French New Wave* (La Nouvelle Vague), a contemporary movement that also represented the “first-person masculine singular” perspective.¹²²⁾

In general, Yugoslav women did not think of themselves as feminists, viewing feminism as an ideology, particularly a capitalist one, originating from the West.¹²³⁾ Jelača, building on Adriana Zaharijević’s¹²⁴⁾ and Zsófia Lóránd’s¹²⁵⁾ studies, observes that the relationship between feminism and the socialist state — characterized by foundational principles of gender equality and women’s emancipation through work — is complex and endemic, diverging from the trajectories, definitions, phases, or “waves” associated with Western feminisms.¹²⁶⁾ The concept of “reluctant feminists” as utilized by Iordanova¹²⁷⁾ in reference to East Central European women filmmakers, can be applied to Jocić’s oeuvre. Her work seems to be infused with feminist thought, even though she did not necessarily perceive herself as a feminist filmmaker or explicitly identify as such. Belc refers to this phenomenon as “accidental feminism,” due to its gender emancipatory dimension.¹²⁸⁾ Jocić’s feminist perspective is evident to Rajka Borojević’s granddaughter, Ana Džokić, in her research archive publication on Borojević’s life, which includes a segment on Jocić’s film *The Best Husband*:

Choosing the best husband has stirred quite a sensation, not only in the villages around Dragačevo but across Yugoslavia. Dunav film sent their crew to shoot a documentary about it. For the female director Vera Jocić the emancipation of women is the main motive for the movie “The Best Husband.”¹²⁹⁾

120) The translation is of the author.

121) The same, non-gender-aware language is often still used in post-Yugoslav states.

122) Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.

123) Anikó Imre, “Gender, Socialism, and European Film Cultures,” in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, eds. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan, and Patrice Petro (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 89.

124) Adriana Zaharijević, “The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism: Feminism and Socialism in the ‘East,’” in *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and Its Other*, eds. Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 263–283.

125) Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

126) Jelača, “Women on the Cutting Edge.”

127) Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 123.

128) Belc, “Women’s Cinematic Avant-garde in Yugoslavia,” 3.

129) Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen, “Taking Common Matters into One’s Own Hands,” in *Exposures: Where Everything is yet to happen*, 2nd chapter, eds. Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača (Banja Luka and Zagreb: Protok and DeLve, 2010), 296–321.



Fig. 4: A country-side man taking care of his baby in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshot



Fig. 5: Women with their earnings in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshot

The Best Husband (1968) demonstrates Jocić's perspective of a film director as a viewer. Jocić puts herself in a woman's perspective as a director and an active spectator (as opposed to being passively gazed at), despite the fact that she wrote about the profession of a film director in male gender. Moreover, her female protagonists are not subjected to "male gaze," which Laura Mulvey defines as a gaze that is common in films that scrutinizes women as objects of look and desire.¹³⁰⁾ Jocić's film explores gender equality, women's work empowerment, and the reversal of patriarchal gender stereotypes. For instance, women are shown nominating, voting and choosing the best husband. Also, a newborn baby's father is caring for it (Fig. 4), which was traditionally thought of as a woman's job, particularly in rural areas.

130) Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*.

The possibility to join women's cooperatives transforms women from housewives into workers. They began earning money by working in the production of handwoven goods like carpets. The fact that they earned a salary gave them the power of decision-making. They now have the ability to make choices with their spouses about what to do with the money and how to spend it, something they did not have when the husband was the sole breadwinner (Fig. 5).

In a particular scene, Jocić juxtaposes the image of a woman weaving a carpet, assisted by her husband, with the sound of piano music being played (Fig. 6). The woolen warps making up carpet resemble the strings and keys of a piano. Moreover, a specific detail shot depicts a woman's foot deliberately entangled in rope to facilitate the function of the table loom for weaving. This reminds us of a piano pedal, which is similarly operated by foot. The actual instrument is audible but not visually shown. The piano is situated in the domain of urban culture and progress. The auditory comparison between the piano, prevalent in Yugoslav cities, and the weaving loom, located in villages, not only attributes artistic value to the weaving craft but also suggests that the rural inhabitants attain emancipation and advancement through labor, thereby becoming cultured. This film portrays women as having agency: they weave, they nominate, and they vote.

Representations of gender

The trajectory of Jocić's work can be analyzed through the lens of gender. Scholars such as John Berger¹³¹⁾ note that women are often perceived through the lens of beauty, portrayed as sights to be looked at. They are frequently represented as vain, engaging with mirrors, while focusing on their own image, as exemplified in Western classical paintings. Jocić's earlier film, *Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, seems to adhere to this gender stereotype, depicting an environment that aligns with it, whereas *The Best Husband* challenges this notion. In the earlier film, it is mostly women, with the exception of one elderly man, who are depicted engaging in beautification (Fig. 7). Conversely in the latter film, it is mostly men, with the exception of one very young girl, who are shown preparing for the contest (Fig. 8). Such changes in gender dynamics and representation suggest that women's emancipation is linked to employment, enabling them to transition from being objects to subjects in their own right.

The film also explores gender norms by frequently showing cenotaphs *krajputaši*,¹³²⁾ which often feature pictorial representations of a soldier. Jocić uses tombstones as a leit-motif throughout the film. These old tombstones, marking empty graves, were erected by mourning families outside of graveyards and along roads, as found in contemporary Serbia.¹³³⁾ Their dedication was directed towards the combatants who fell in wars, notably during the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the First Serbian Uprising and the Sec-

131) John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977), 47–51.

132) "Krajputaš" in Serbo-Croatian means [a cenotaph] "beside the road."

133) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 93.



Fig. 6: Carpet weaving as piano playing in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshot



Fig. 7a, b, c, d: Women beautify themselves in *The Girls Without Boy(friend)s* (Vera Jocić, 1963), screenshot



Fig. 8a, b, c, d: Men beautify themselves in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshots

ond Serbian Uprising, the Balkan Wars, and the First World War.¹³⁴ Their place of death remains unknown and bodies were never recovered.¹³⁵ These sideroad monuments are rectangular monoliths, frequently depicting a soldier in an upright position, typically rendered in low-relief that is painted in color, such as blue.¹³⁶ They habitually include an epitaph regarding the soldier, aimed at those who pass by.¹³⁷ *Krajputaši* were therefore intentionally placed at spots visible to passers-by to serve as a memorial for the fallen soldiers.¹³⁸

The film juxtaposes cenotaphs depicting soldiers, whom could be interpreted from today's perspective as militarized masculinity, with the best husband candidates on two occasions. Jocić establishes the link between them during the preparations for the best husband competition for the first time. A scene depicts a candidate for the best husband, with his wife shampooing his hair and bathing him in a river (Fig. 8a). A non-diegetic *a cappella* traditional singing performance by a group of women's voices starts alongside a camera zoom, transitioning from a close-up to a big close-up of the candidate. The camera then tilts down to his chest as he washes. It

134) Zorica Rajković, "Roadside Memorial Signs for Traffic Accident Victims," *Narodna umjetnost*, Special Issue, no. 2 (1988), 177.

135) Ibid.

136) Jelena Stojković, "Abe Nobuya in the Balkans: Ethnography, Travel, and the Japanese Avant-Garde," in *Globalizing the Avant-Garde*, eds. David Ayers, Margarida Brito Alves, Joana Cunha Leal, and Benedikt Hjartarson (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2025), 193.

137) Milan B. Gromović, "Krajputaš i četiri antička kulta: Branko B. Radičević i Fisel de Coulange," *Pesnici kao esejisti: Kulturni konteksti druge polovine 20. veka* (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2024), 123–133.

138) Stojković, "Abe Nobuya in the Balkans," 193.

is followed by a detail close-up of his chest, including a nipple and body hair, which tilts rapidly to his ear. This is accompanied by a wide shot of his wife pouring water on him from a clay jar. The traditional love song being sang is titled *Look, my darling* (Pogledaj de mala moja) and its lyrics discuss a dialogue between two lovers, presumably in a bed, contemplating whether dawn has arrived. A sequence follows, depicting a woman carrying a round cake for the best husband competition festivity, accompanied by a female child carrying a glass bottle with a small bouquet of real flowers, as the singing continues to underscore the images. The woman and her daughter, featured onscreen, take a short break by sitting on the grass beside two *krajputaši*. This framing facilitates a dialogue between the present and the past, honoring fallen ancestors, while simultaneously challenging the past through the perspective of the present. This is followed by a scene with another best husband candidate, accompanied by his son, who applies shaving foam with a brush and then shaves (Fig. 8b and 8c). In this segment of the film, women are shown in wider shots, ranging from medium long shots to extreme long shots, whereas two best husband candidates, who are beautifying, are primarily presented in close-ups. This technique gives them prominence while subjecting them to closer scrutiny by the camera and the film viewers. The gaze is not merely reversed in contrast to the “male gaze,”¹³⁹⁾ but it also does not apply the same oppressive objectification to men, as the “male gaze” does to women, because men are not represented as passive and dehumanized. A *cappella* singing continues uninterrupted, serving as a sound bridge and creating unity among these scenes. A wide shot reveals a different setting, of the best husband contest location, where two other women arrive on a tractor driven by a man, who then stops to enable them to descend. They are carrying gifts, such as round cake, bottles presumably containing *rakija*, and flowers, as their contribution to the contest organized by their women’s weaving cooperative. The tractor stands for progress, industrialization, and modernization. The women who rode on the tractor connote social mobility attainable through membership in a cooperative.

In the next scene, a long shot depicts a group of four men on a horse-drawn wagon, passing by *krajputaši*. The horse-drawn wagon stands for the rural life, signifying a bygone era. The framing and composition, which include the living men and a deceased soldier’s relief on the cenotaph (along with an epitaph on another cenotaph), highlight the traditional aspect of village life. This image is underscored by a *cappella* singing and a voice-over dialogue among a group of women, posing the question of whether all candidates will attend the best husband contest. The dialogue continues alongside the image of the previously shown woman and her daughter, who is once again represented sitting on the grass, this time while combing the child’s hair, thereby enhancing her appearance. The film juxtaposes traditional values, which suggest that women are socialized from childhood to focus on beautification, with modern values that, to a somewhat comical degree, position a man as a beautified spectacle. Then, they rise with the gifts (a round cake, a glass bottle, and flowers) and leave the frame, while the bottom half of *krajputaš* featuring the lower part of a soldier’s body briefly remains visible in the shot, as the camera tilts upward to reveal the top part of *krajputaš* with the upper part of the soldier’s body. The subsequent shot

139) See Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*.

depicts the woman and her daughter in a medium long shot as they walk past another *krajputaš*, which portrays a soldier in uniform, buttoned to the neck, standing at attention. Over the visual content, the voice-over of village women continues to be heard; they discuss the requirement for each village's candidate to wear a scarf around their neck during the upcoming best husband district contest, a gift received upon pre-selection at their respective village contests. The contrast between the images onscreen, in particular the framing that includes *krajputaši*, and the accompanying sounds, specifically the voice-over, highlights the distinction between past and present. In this segment, the film subtly establishes a link between the fallen soldiers and best husband candidates. In conclusion, the visual elements are counterpointed with the aural components of the scenes: a *cappella* singing and occasional dialogue of female voices in voice-over, in which the candidates for the best husband are mentioned.

Later in the film, during the best husband contest ceremony, Jocić reinforces the connection between the representations of soldiers on *krajputaši* and the candidates for the best husband through the technique of intercutting their respective shots; therefore, by the creative usage of editing. A long shot featuring all ten candidates for the best husband (Fig. 1) is followed by a detail of a torch being lit up, and then by a shot of the burning torch in the foreground and a portrait of a soldier on *krajputaš* in the background, framed in medium close-up shot. Later in the film, cenotaphs are visually juxtaposed with the medium close-ups and the close-ups of the highest-ranked husbands after the announcement of the winners, especially focusing on the individual who is placed second, and the one who is placed third. Incidentally, the three highest-ranked husbands are being photographed by a photographer present in the audience. The camera framing in this sequence sometimes resembles portrait photography in medium close-ups, particularly as the winners at times break the fourth wall by looking directly at the camera. When contrasted with the shots of men illustrated on tombstones, the best husbands seem to become "frozen," petrified, and transformed into monuments and specters (Fig. 9). The depictions of soldiers on tombstones represent traditional patriarchal masculinities, whereas the shots of best husbands, which they are intercut with, can be interpreted as "new masculinities." Furthermore, while there are shots of the audience featuring enchanted women gazing at the best husbands, the accompanying shots of the competing men that are gazed at during the contest are neither sexualized nor dehumanized. Consequently, these representations do not subject men to the same scrutiny or objectification typically associated with the "male gaze" in the portrayal of women. Moreover, the tendency of best husbands to break the fourth wall and establish eye-contact with the viewers dispels the illusion-making properties of the film medium, its seamless reality, and the voyeuristic nature of viewing.

Regarding the sound, the best husband contest features diegetic brass music,¹⁴⁰⁾ which has a military tone to it, especially evident when it accompanies shots of soldiers' tombstones. The brass music was influenced by the instruments and sounds of military bands from both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires (the colonizers), which were gradually fused with Serbian national folk music, and eventually incorporated Roma play-

140) I am thankful to Dr Eleni Sideri for this observation.

ing style, resulting in a unique musical phenomenon.¹⁴¹⁾ The music is performed as the cheerful atmosphere of the audiences is shown, who are buying and eating round cakes and socializing prior to the contest ceremony. The musicians also play as contestants, holding their numbers, stand on the stage decorated with a large handwoven carpet hung in the background, while voting continues with both women and men placing ballots into a box. Following the bugle call performed by trumpeters, which serves as a brief musical signal for the military to initiate a charge, the winners proceed onto the stage. Historically, the trumpet holds special meaning in that region, as its sound accompanied soldiers during the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the Second World War with the Dragačevo Partisan Battalion and the 10th Regiment.¹⁴²⁾ Throughout periods of wars and peace, the trumpet music has served to cheer people up. Therefore, its sound produces an ambivalent effect, elucidating both cheerfulness and saddens.¹⁴³⁾ The sequence when the trumpet is heard in *The Best Husband* exemplifies “sonic icons,” a concept described by Pauleit as “self-reflexive moments in specific films where the sound comes to the fore and reveals specific references to history and contemporary history.”¹⁴⁴⁾ The sonic icon engages with the military past and the film’s present, consequently re-evaluating the notion of hegemonic masculinity.

141) Catherine Anne Kilroe-Smith, “Marko Markovic and the Serbian Brass Tradition” (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Georgia, 2010), 23.

142) Borojević, *Iz Dubca u svet*, 99.

143) *Ibid.*, 100.

144) Winfried Pauleit, “Sonic Icons: Prominent Moments of Cinematic Self-Reflexivity”, *Research in Film and History: New Approaches*, no. 5 (2018).

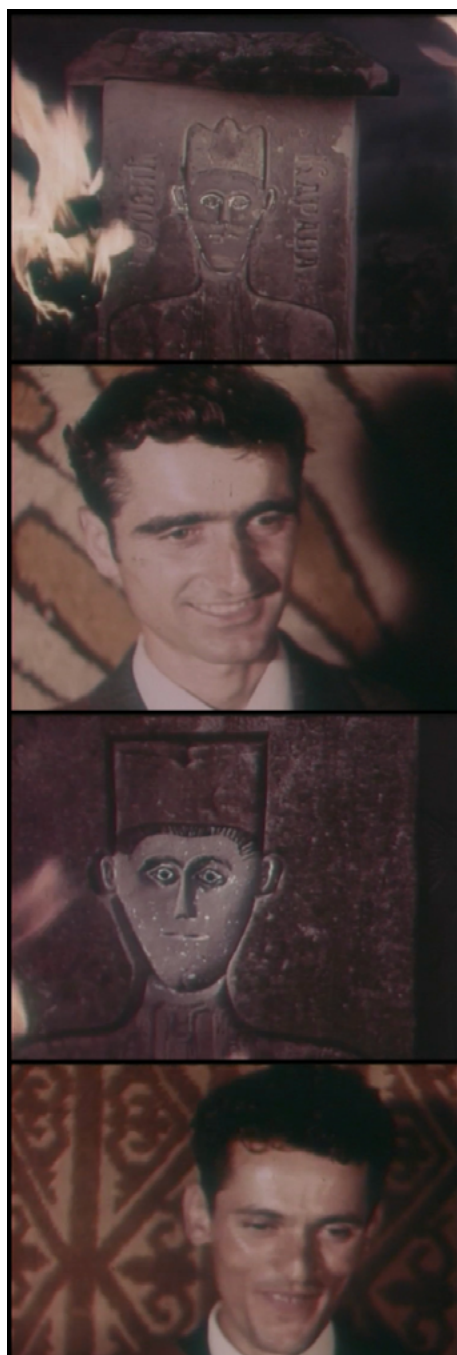


Fig. 9: The best husbands juxtaposed to the depictions of fallen soldiers on tombstones “krajputaši” in *The Best Husband* (Vera Jocić, 1968), screenshot

A film's digitization in post-Yugoslav times

The Best Husband highlights the women's cooperative founded by Rajka Borojević through her pioneering efforts during the Yugoslav era. Ana Džokić (*STEALTH.unlimited*)¹⁴⁵⁾ undertook a resourceful initiative to digitize *The Best Husband* in 2010, reflecting socialist self-management during capitalist post-Yugoslav times. Džokić's involvement in the digitization was driven by a personal connection, as both her grandmother, Rajka Borojević, and her mother, Branka Borojević Džokić, appear in the film.¹⁴⁶⁾ Borojević Džokić, a newly graduated designer in 1960s, began designing products for a women's cooperative, including hand-woven carpets, curtains, bed covers, table cloths, fabrics, bags, and men's ties.¹⁴⁷⁾ The film's digitization in 2010 was possible due to the possession of one copy of *The Best Husband* on 16 mm positive by the family, specifically the mother (Fig. 10). The film's significance and the initiative by Borojević Džokić's daughter were acknowledged by Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine (Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina) and Arhiva radio-televizije Vojvodine (Archive of Radio-Television Vojvodina), whose staff undertook the digitization on a voluntary basis.¹⁴⁸⁾ The digitized film was screened at *SPA-PORT Biennial: Where Everything is Yet to Happen*, held in Banjaluka (Bosnia and Herzegovina).¹⁴⁹⁾ Džokić participated in the *SPAPORT Biennial*, presenting a series of open talks and a research archive titled *Taking Common Matter into Your Own Hands* (Uzeti zajedničku stvar u svoje ruke).¹⁵⁰⁾ By "taking common matter into her own hands" in order to digitize the film, she continued the legacy of self-management and ensured its availability for posterity.

Džokić's initiative is important due to the infrequency of digitization and restoration of films by Yugoslav women film directors.¹⁵¹⁾ Digitization enhances the visibility to film and facilitates renewed access. So, digitized films reach significantly wider audiences than non-digitized films, which are then consequently marginalized.¹⁵²⁾ In her article on Eastern European film archives, film scholar Ewa Mazierska highlights the decisive role of film archives in the construction and formation of national and regional film canons.¹⁵³⁾ To Mazierska, the staff of Eastern European film archives, positioned to impact the process of canonization of films, were influenced by a modernist perspective that perceived film directors as auteurs, thereby promoting an auteur-centric approach.¹⁵⁴⁾ In socialist Yugoslavia, the primary film archive operating at a national level, where copies of new productions were deposited, was Jugoslovenska kinoteka (Yugoslav Cinematheque) in Belgrade, founded in 1949. Mazierska finds that this archive, through its efforts in preservation and

145) An artist duo consisted of Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen.

146) Ana Džokić, personal communication via e-mail (April 8, 2025).

147) Ibid.

148) Ibid. (April 9, 2025).

149) Ibid.

150) Džokić and Neelen, "Taking Common Matters," 296–321.

151) Especially feature-length fiction films.

152) Ewa Mazierska, "The Role of Film Archives in Creating Canons of Eastern European Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 45, no. 4 (2025), 823, DOI: 10.1080/01439685.2025.2574099.

153) Ibid., 811.

154) Ibid., 817.



Fig. 10: Positive copy of *The Best Husband*, on 16 mm film tape, personal belonging of designer Branka Borojević Džokić. With the courtesy of the author of photograph Ana Džokić

exhibition, “was aware from early on of its role in canonization.”¹⁵⁵⁾ After the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the archive kept the collection. According to Saša Banjović, a staff member at the institution, the archive has a copy of *The Girls Without Boy(friend)s*, and a copy of *The Best Husband*, both in 35 mm format positives.¹⁵⁶⁾ The films¹⁵⁷⁾ have not yet been digitized by the archive.¹⁵⁸⁾ I find that several reasons may contribute: insufficient funds, staff, equipment, and time. As Mazierska states, digitization is a complex, costly, and extremely selective process, resulting in larger Eastern European archives being able to digitize only a limited number of films per year, with smaller archives and countries facing even greater challenges.¹⁵⁹⁾ Collaboration among multiple countries is needed, such as between former Yugoslav republics and their respective archives.¹⁶⁰⁾ The correlation be-

155) Ibid., 815.

156) Saša Banjović, personal communication via e-mail, February 19, 2026.

157) Kinoteka also safekeeps Jocić's films: *Apel* (1964), *Beograd* (1955), *Pionir i dvojka* (1949), *Zvuci mermera* (1971) and *Kuća bez fasade* (1970), all on 35 mm positives, and none of them have been digitized.

158) Ibid.

159) Mazierska. “The Role of Film Archives,” 823.

160) Ibid., 826.

tween digitization and canonization is evident, as digitization reinforces the narrow selection of films that have historically constituted the national canon.¹⁶¹⁾ Therefore, in my view, when digitization of films occurs under resource constraints, the works of renowned male directors, regarded as auteurs, are given precedence over those directed by women. The digitization of *The Best Husband*, driven by Džokić's personal initiative, demonstrates the importance of contributions made by post-Yugoslav women and men artists, scholars,¹⁶²⁾ and curators.¹⁶³⁾ Their efforts focus on preserving, safeguarding from obscurity, and showcasing films by Yugoslav female directors, thereby functioning as a counter-archive for works of these overlooked and marginalized women.

Conclusion

The Yugoslav film industry exhibited a significant gender disparity, with a markedly lower number of women filmmakers compared to their male counterparts, who are frequently neglected in academic discussions. This article has questioned the exclusion of woman filmmaker Vera Jocić and her films from scholarly attention, despite their aesthetic and narrative qualities being comparable to those of her male counterparts, and thus warranting study and recognition. I have argued that the reasons for the marginalization of women filmmakers include historical revisionism, gender inequality within the Yugoslav film industry, film criticism, and the festival circuit, numerical underrepresentation due to unequal opportunities for women in behind-the-camera roles, scholarly neglect due to primary focus on male auteurs, and the insufficient digitization of their films, leading to limited accessibility for viewing, such as on DVDs or online platforms, and exclusion from the canon of (trans)national cinema. The films by Yugoslav women directors are part and parcel of Yugoslav (trans)national memory, which has been jeopardized following the breakup of Yugoslavia. They are at risk of total relegation to obscurity or permanent loss if not subjected to research and discourse.

This article used close film analysis, film history, archival research, film aesthetics, contextual history, and film feminist theory in order to conduct feminist recovery of an overlooked woman director and the lesser-known corpus of women's filmography. The objective was to develop a film historiography that subverts and enhances male-dominated narratives, in which women filmmakers are still absent, marginalized, insufficiently researched, or excluded from wider European cultural memory. The limitations of feminist historiography include its potential lack of widespread readership, as it often exists alongside male-auteur centered historiographies.

161) Ibid., 823.

162) For example, scholar Sanja Bahun, who for the sake of exhibition "Aktivitet — 100 godina nadrealizma"/"Aktivitet — 100 Years of Nadrealism," shown in 2024 and 2025 in Belgrade (Serbia), initiated the digitization of the first Yugoslav animated film *Pionir i dvojka* (1949), and documentary *Beograd* (1955), which Vera Jocić co-directed with her husband Ljubiša Jocić.

163) Such as Ana Grgić, Hana Miletić, Ivana Momčilović, Marijana Terzin Stojić, Petra Belc, Aleksandra Sekulić, Branka Benčić, Sunčica Fradelić, Teodora Kosanović, Diana Nenadić, and Borjana Gaković.

Furthermore, documentary filmmaking in Yugoslavia has received comparatively less critical attention than fiction filmmaking. This article aimed to identify and address the existing research gap. In addition, it provided an insight into the representation of rural spaces on screen, the infiltration of urban influences, and the changing gender roles. Also, it highlighted the lack of urgency hitherto shown in addressing the digitization of the films by Yugoslav women filmmakers, which are often solely available in perishable physical formats, such as analogue film reels. This paper has further emphasized the importance of researching, screening, curating, and digitizing films directed by Yugoslav women filmmakers, with the potential to enhance their visibility and accessibility for viewing.

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Filmography

- A Boy and a Kite* (Dečak i zmaj; Miodrag Nikolić, 1951)
- A House Without Façade* (Kuća bez fasade; Vera Jocić, 1970)
- Appeal* a.k.a. *The Roll Call* (Apel; Vera Jocić, 1964)
- At Coffee in Maglaj* (Na kavi u Maglaju; Aleksandar Aranđelović, 1963)
- Belgrade* (Beograd; Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1955)

Branko Radičević (Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1953)

Girls' Dreams (Djevojački snovi; Mirjana Živković, 1975)

Girls Without Boy(friend)s (Devojke bez momaka; Vera Jocić, 1963)

Her Puppet Little Red Riding Hood a.k.a. *Her Red Riding Hood Doll* (Njena lutka crvenkapa; Vera & Ljubiša Jocić, 1951)

Letter from Siberia (Lettre de Sibérie; Chris Marker, 1957)

Pillars of Imagination (Stubovi mašte; 1962)

Sounds of Marble (Zvuci mermera; Vera Jocić, 1971)

The Best Husband (Najbolji muž; Vera Jocić, 1968)

The Pioneer and the Bad Mark (Pionir i dvojka; Vera Jocić, 1949)

Biography

Vesi Vuković is YUFE4Postdocs — Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral Fellow, co-funded by the European Union. She is hosted by University of Bremen, under the supervision of Prof Dr Winfried Pauleit, and co-hosted by the University of Essex, under the co-supervision of Prof Dr Sanja Bahun. Vuković's postdoctoral research project is on Yugoslav women filmmakers, closely analyzing their films, their memory as a part of Yugoslav heritage, that is, the state of their preservation and the prospects of digitizing their works. Vuković is also the holder of Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg: Institute for Advanced Study (the HWK) Associate Junior Postdoctoral Fellowship.

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