Karadjordje (1911) and *With Faith in God* (1936): Representations of National History in Early Serbian Film

Dario Vidojković
Independent Researcher

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the representation of national history through cinema as exemplified in early Serbian film. It examines how major events from the history of Serbia, such as the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 and Serbia's struggles in WWI, have been represented by two early Serb feature films Karadjordje *(Čiča Ilija Stanojević, 1911) and* Sa verom u Boga/With Faith in God *(Mihajlo Popović, 1932). By drawing mainly on the German film theorist Helmut Korte and his Systematic Film Analysis, the article discusses the production, the plot and the aesthetics of the two films in relation to their contemporary historical and cultural context. Particular emphasis is given to the films' reworking of pre-existing representations of history by earlier media and to the incorporation in the film narratives of contemporary public discourses in order to become evident that both films dealt with topics that were important at the time of their production as well as that they had contributed to the process of the Serbian national-identity formation.*

KEYWORDS

history
Karadjordje
national representation
Serbian Cinema
Systematic Film analysis
With Faith in God

According to Ewa Mazierska "[c]inema is part of history, namely a discourse on the past (2011: 1). However, how this "discourse on the past" can be articulated in cinematic terms or, in other words, how history can be transferred to film? Given cinema's wide technical and representational capabilities in portraying persons and events, Hayden White argues that "cinema (and video) are better suited than written discourse to the actual representation of certain kinds of historical phenomena – landscape, scene, atmosphere, complex events such as wars, battles, crowds, and emotions" (1988: 1193). Reflecting on Robert Rosenstone's assertion that compared to written historical accounts, cinema can "better" represent "certain kind of conflicts between individuals and groups" and other "collective events", White clarifies that "better" means "not only with greater verisimilitude or stronger emotive effect but also less ambiguously, more accurately" (ibid: 1994). Moreover White identifies certain similarities between written history and cinematic representations of historical events stating that "[e]very written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification exactly like those used in the production of a filmed representation" (ibid). In that respect we are legitimized to study a "historical film" as a form of history writing.

However, as Rosenstone has pointed out, we cannot consider "the historical 'film' in the singular because the term covers a variety of ways of rendering the past on the screen" (1995: 2). Rosenstone has proposed several subcategories how history can be put in a movie, such as history as drama, history as antidrama, history as spectacle, personal history and so on, with the "historical film" as history as drama being the most common and oldest type that appeared among the first movies ever made in any place around the world (ibid). According to Rosenstone, the "historical film" can be further divided into two broad categories: on the one hand, "films based on documentable persons or events or movements" and, on the other, "those whose central plot and characters are fictional, but whose historical setting is intrinsic to the story and meaning of the work" (ibid). In the present article[1] I will focus on the "historical film" as history as drama to deal with the representation of national history in early Serbian cinema. I will discuss two feature films, *Karadjordje* (Čiča Ilija Stanojević, 1911) and *Sa verom u Boga*/*With Faith in God* (Mihajlo Popović, 1932). The former depicts real events, the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, and is a portrait of a documentable person, Karadjordje, one of the most celebrated founding figures of the Serbian nation-state. The latter portrays a real historical setting, WWI in

[1] This article is based on a paper presented during the International Conference "Early Cinema in the Balkans and the Near East: Beginnings to Interwar period", hosted by Hellenic Open University, *altcine* and *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies*, in Athens, 5-7 June, 2015.

Serbia, to address the painful war experiences of Serbs as a people featuring, however, fictitious characters.

My discussion of the two films is primarily from the perspective of a historian and draws on "Systematische Filmanalyse" (Systematic Film Analysis) developed by German film theorist Helmut Korte (1999). Korte, similarly to other film scholars, such as Mark Ferro, argues that the reality depicted in a film is strongly interwoven with the film's historical context. He focuses on questions such as why a film with a certain plot has been made at a certain time attempting to unearth the relation between a film's narrative and its socio-historical environment (ibid: 21). Following Korte's argument I will discuss the production, the narrative and the aesthetics of the two films in relation to their contemporary historical and cultural context. I will pay particular emphasis a) on how these films rework pre-existing or contemporary representations of history by earlier forms of art, such as painting, theatre and photography, and b) on how the film texts incorporate contemporary public discourses contributing to the process of the Serbian national-identity formation. The article makes evident that both films were products of their time dealing with themes which were highly relevant to Serbian society prior to and after the Great War. Feature films, after all, are construing "collective historic images", and as such myths do not arise in a vacuum, but are supplied by specific historical experiences (Riederer 2006: 104).

KARADJORDJE (1911)

Karadjordje or *Karadjordje ili Život i dela besmrtnog vožda Karadjordja/The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Leader Karadjordj*e was made by Čiča Ilija Stanojević in 1911 and is regarded as the starting point of Serbian film history. Today it is considered not only the first feature film made in Serbia,[2] but also the first in the wider area of the Balkans (Radenković 1996: 119; Tucaković 2004: 31). Thought long-lost, it resurfaced in 2003, when a nitrate print was discovered in the Film Archive Austria[3] and partially restored by the Yugoslav Film Archive in Belgrade. The titular hero of the film is Djordje Petrović Karadjordje (1762-1817) (Fig. 1), a former Austrian soldier and merchant, who was the leader of the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 and who set the path for the modern Serbian state[4]. He received his *nom de guerre* "Kara" (in Turkish "black", so he is the "Black" Djordje) by the

[2] In fact, Čiča Ilija Stanojević had directed the Serb feature film *Ulrih Celjski and Vladislav Hunjadi* earlier than *Karadjordje,* however it was premiered later (Ranković 1996: 119; Erdeljanović 2004: 13).

[3] See Zelenović (2004) and Erdeljanović (2004).

[4] See Ljušić (2003). Further reading on Karadjordje see Antonijević (2007) and Ljubinković (1994).

Ottoman Turks, who he was fighting against, first as a *haiduk*[5] at the end of the 18th century and later as the leader of the Serbian Uprising from 1804 to 1813. By that time the uprising was violently crushed by the Ottoman Turks, and Karadjordje was forced to flee from Serbia. When he returned in 1817, the new Serbian leader, Miloš Obrenović, who led the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815, ordered his men to kill his rival, fearing for his own position, and starting thus a century-long feud between the two Serbian dynasties of Karadjordjević and Obrenović (Hösch 2008: 164-166).

Fig. 1: *Karadjordje* (1816) by Uroš Knežević, after a painting by Vladimir Borovikovsky (1852)[6]

Karadjordje was produced by Svetozar Botorić (1857-1916),[7] owner of the renowned Hotel Paris in Belgrade, who had entered film business a couple of

[5] A *haiduk*, from the 16th century onwards and under the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans, was widely understood as a bandit. Initially, *haiduk* was a term for cattle herders and foot soldiers. Much later, besides the meaning of bandit, the term also meant a rebel, notably a social rebel and finally a freedom fighter (D. Vidojković 2015: 211).

[6] Oil on canvas, 95,5x76 cm, Inv. No. 031_548, Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia, with friendly permission by the National Museum in Belgrade.

[7] For further biographical information on Botorić, see Kosanović (2000: 34).

years earlier responding to the growing popularity of cinema (Kosanović 2004: 21). Possible motives for screening movies in one of the salons of his hotel were to seize the opportunity to be ahead of his competitors and earn additional money (Ranković 1996: 116). In 1909 Botorić set up the "Grand bioskop pozorišta bioskopa Pariz" (The Grand Cinema Theatre Paris) (ibid: 117) while by 1911, he was the representative and distributor of films for Pathé Frères, the biggest film company in Europe at the time (Kosanović 2004: 22). Soon later, he came up with the idea of producing Serbian feature films on his own. Until then, only some documentary material had been made in Serbia by various cameramen, such as the coronation of King Petar I Karadjordjević, filmed by British Frank S. Mottershaw in 1904 (Volk 1996: 26). But in 1911, Botorić felt, that it was the right time for Serbia and the Serbs, to produce their own feature films and by that to follow "great" European nations, such as France, Germany, Great Britain or Italy, which were already on the path of becoming great film-producing nations as well (Ranković 1996: 117; Volk 1996: 27).

In Serbia, by the turn of the 20th century, the coup d'état and the restoration of the former liberal constitution, which was banished by Petar's predecessor (assassinated King Aleksandar Obrenović) were perceived as the beginning of a new era marked by an atmosphere of change. Which path to modernization Serbia had to follow was the source of much public debate evident in many Serbian periodicals published after 1903 with titles such as *Novi vek*/*New Century* or *Novi svet*/*New World* (Sundhaussen 2007: 207). The main question centred on whether there was just the Western way of modernization or there were alternative forms to be chosen. A sharp antagonism between Traditionalists and Russophiles and those who aspired to see Serbia being transformed into a Western style modern country also took place (ibid: 194-195, 199-201). In any case, Serbia seemed willing to shake off its oriental coat to become a European country (ibid: 207-209). Such a longing for Europeanization can be perceived as a serious motivation for Botorić. If the young Balkan state of Serbia followed the paradigm of the already established European film nations, then it would associate itself with what was believed to be modern Europe and would become a "more European" and modern country. This can be regarded as a conscious search for national self-identification, expressed through the new medium of cinema. However, it required "assignation of a particular set of meanings" (Higson 1989: 37), which in Botorić's film were topics from Serbia's national history.

Let us now take a closer look at the historical context of the time. The Serbs were, beside the Germans and the Italians, the third belated nation in the 19th century who struggled for a united national state, but unlike them, did not quite succeed in reaching this ambitious goal (Vidojković 2015: 252). Nevertheless, on the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Serbia – comprising some portions of the lands

that were inhabited by Serbs – was recognized internationally for the first time as an independent country (Hösch 2008: 136), while in 1882 it was proclaimed Kingdom. In the next two decades, the country experienced instability: The governments changed very often and sometimes very quickly, while the scandals about King Milan and his affairs prompted the rest of Europe to disregard Serbia. Also, a futile war with Bulgaria took place in 1885, and the Serb economy was nearly strangled by Austria-Hungary, with Serbia having been reduced to a pawn of Vienna. That was the background when the "palace coup" happened in 1903, during which King Aleksandar (Milan's son and successor) and his wife Draga were killed by officers of the Serb Army, who felt offended by the couple's behaviour and policy, while Petar Karadjordjević, the grandson of Djordje Petrović Karadjordje, came to the throne. Although turmoil did not end here, the country entered a more stable period, and during the so called "Pig War"[8] Serbia managed to free herself from the Austro-Hungarian preponderant influence. This time was a period of national pride and the country longed for reforms and modernity, aspiring to become a modern state (Vidojković 2015). Transferring this pride into the new medium of cinema seems to be – as mentioned above – the motivation of Svetozar Botorić for his decision to produce Serb feature films.

From what we can see in the restored film today, *Karadjordje* is an early example of biopic that follows the life and deeds of the eponymous hero, from his birth to his violent and sudden death in 1817, a narrative that corresponds to the original title of the film. Moreover, the title refers to Karadjordje as "immortal" ("*besmrtni*"), namely not dead, and in that way it prolongs the life of the historical figure into the present (when the film was made) establishing a connection between the historical past and the Serbia of 1911. The film is fiction and not documentary, although it follows the known events in Karadjordje's life "creat[ing] and offer[ing] a vision of an unseen world, a world of their own" (Ferro 1988: 15). The sources, on which the film was based, are not clear but we can assume that the film's director Čiča Ilija Stanojević, who came from the Serb National Theatre, where he was a renowned actor and director, based the script on *Karadjordje* written by Miloš Cvetić, a theatrical play that was very popular at the time (Ranković 1996: 119). As another possible source we can consider incidents from the epic song *Početak bune na dahije*/*The beginning of the revolt against the dahije*[9]), sung by the legendary blind *gusla*[10] singer Filip Višnjić, who was a contemporary of Karadjordje (Erdeljanović 2004: 15-17). The emphasis on

[8] Customs war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary (1906-1909), during which the Austrians imposed high tariffs and even blocked the import of mainly Serbian pigs (hence the name).

[9] The *dahije* or *dahijas* were renegade Janissary officers, formerly serving in the Ottoman army.

[10] A bowed and stringed musical instrument with a belly and mostly with one horsehair string, traditionally used in the Balkans.

the heroic figure of Karadjordje can be regarded as part of prominent discourses of the time (Crofts 2009: 3) that aimed to highlight the importance of the dynasty in general and of the new King Petar in particular. Petar came to power by a bloody coup d'état and the promotion through film of his heroic ancestor and founder of modern Serbia, as he was widely regarded, can be seen as a vehicle for legitimizing Petar and strengthening his public image. At the same time, the film can be perceived as articulating a discourse on the Ottoman past of Serbia, by "documenting" (Mazierska 2011: 1) how life in Serbia was experienced under the Ottomans. By this, Serbia's fight for liberation were vividly explained and glorified, as Ferro would have it (1988: 14), a fact that is very true for the titular hero as well.

The original length of the film was 1,800 metres and its running time about 80 minutes, which made *Karadjordje* stand out from the usual film production of mostly short films produced internationally, in the years preceding Italy's epic sword-and-sandal films and the over two-hour-long epics of D. W. Griffith. Today, the surviving print has a much shorter running time of approximately one hour, which means that about 20 minutes are missing and perhaps lost forever. Among the lost material are some battle scenes depicting the famous battle of Mišar,[11] between the Turks and the Serb army under the leadership of Karadjordje in 1806, scenes showing Karadjordje's flight after the crush of the Serb revolt in 1813, and his life in Russia (Erdeljanović 2004: 15, 18). The film was clearly made in the tradition of the French Film d'Art, and it is very likely that both Botorić and Čiča Ilija Stanojević were able to see the French film *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise* (Charles Le Bargy & André Calmettes, 1908). However, *Karadjordje* is not entirely photographed theatre, as the Film d'Art used to be. We can see slight camera movements (Erdeljanović 2004: 15), especially during the battle scenes, while the film was shot at various locations in and around Belgrade, a fact that differentiates it from the studio-bound Film d'Art (Tucaković 2004: 29-31). Moreover, in some scenes the acting is not always that theatrical (Volk 1996: 259). Nevertheless, *Karadjordje* consists mostly of tableaux vivants rather than of elaborated cinematic scenes.

The film begins with the birth of Karadjordje, presenting some images of surreal fantasy. A Turkish *spahija* (landlord) arrives at the house of Karadjordje's parents and, during his prayer for the new-born boy, has a dreamy vision: Miloš Obilić[12] (a heroic figure of the Serbs coming out of epic folk songs) is christening Karadjordje with his sword while two angelic women stand next to the cradle (Fig. 2). It comes as no surprise that a respected mythological figure like Miloš

[11] See Ljušić (2003: 146-155).

[12] Miloš Obilić was one of the heroes in the numerous epic folk songs about the Battle of Kosovo, which took place in 1389. During the battle Miloš succeeded to kill the Ottoman Sultan Murat, for which he was shortly afterwards decapitated (Hösch 2008: 80).

Obilić appears in the film (and reappears later), considering the popularity of many epic folk songs and stories in Serbia at the time (Volk 1996: 30). Karadjordje is depicted and certainly glorified as being sent by God, like a Messiah, to liberate the Serb people and, at the same time, as receiving the torch from a heroic legend to become a legend himself. In this scene there is a symbolical interplay between religion (Messiah), myth (Miloš Obilić) and history (Karadjordje) that contributes to the formation of the Serbian national identity at a time when Serbia, as a modern independent state, existed only for 33 years. *Karadjordje* can be seen as a very good example of how the "national myth-making" (Higson 1989: 37; Ferro 1988: 14)[13] process works through film.

Fig. 2: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 04:26, Miloš Obilić (2nd left) christens Karadjordje.

[13] Following Ferro's argument on *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), it can be said that *Karadjordje* is "the appearance of truth" (1988: 68). *Battleship Potemkin* recounts the mutiny of the eponymous ship in 1905, presenting the incident as an early starting point of the ensuing Communist revolution. In *Karadjordje*, the film's character was an authentic historical figure, and such was his end, the violent death, too. As a matter of fact, Karadjordje did not win Serbia's independence as Serbia gained it finally many decades later, in 1878, at the Congress of Berlin. Karadjordje himself failed in 1813 and fled the country, only to be assassinated when returning back to Serbia in 1817. However, the movie gives the audience the impression that Serbia's liberty and independence would not had been possible without him, without his role in the uprising in 1804 and his sacrifice. The film seems to work similarly to *Battleship Potemkin*, as described by Ferro (see Ferro 1988: 68-70).

In the process Karadjordje appears as a little boy, who proves his skills in tactics and warfare by leading his comrades in children's games where Serb *hajduks* fight against Turks. A similar approach can be found much later in Abel Gance's masterpiece *Napoleon* (1927), where Napoleon as a young boy demonstrates all the leadership and military skills which made him a great commander. Later, the young Karadjordje is depicted to eagerly listen to a *Gusla* singer (Filip Višnjić) who performs a song of how the old Serb Empire had been defeated by the Ottomans. In this scene the heroic deeds of already mentioned Miloš Obilić, who killed Sultan Murat, had a huge impact on young Karadjordje (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 09:50, Karadjordje as a boy (center, left to the *Gusla* player) listens to a *Gusla* singer resembling Filip Višnjić. At the background, Miloš kills the Sultan.

Later, while young Karadjordje is contemplating and obviously mourning over the Serb fate, a Turk is approaching him with a threatening sword. After shooting him, Karadjordje engages in guerrilla warfare against the Turks. Because of that, the now mature Karadjordje must flee Serbia, while in the course he kills his stepfather, who threatens to betray him and his comrades to the enemy. Before he becomes elected leader of the First Serbian Uprising, Karadjordje serves in an Austrian Free Corps. He is unhappy away from his motherland and soon returns to Serbia secretly. As soon as he steps again on Serbian soil, he knees down and kisses the earth (Fig. 4). So far, the film follows the official biography of Karadjordje (Ljušić 2003).

Fig. 4: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 23:08, Karadjordje kisses the Serbian soil when returning home.

In the above mentioned return scene Karadjordje demonstrates his great love for his country that would be highly appreciated by moviegoers since patriotism was of high regard prior to the Great War, not only in Serbia but also elsewhere. Moreover, we can identify traces of other dominant discourses of the time the film was made (Crofts 2009: 3). Such discourses in Serbia was the longing for stability and the question of legitimation of and loyalty to King Petar as there was fear for a possible new coup d'état against him. At the same time there were new challenges for Serbia as Petar's regime brought about a "general reorientation, both domestic and foreign" (Petrovich 1976: 536-537). Serbs began to dream of their "unliberated brothers" especially in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia (Pavlowitch 2002: 78, 81-83), which were still under Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, while the demand for the liberation of the "'unredeemed' territories" and for Serbian unification was strongly voiced (ibid: 82). According to these discourses, Serbs had to rally behind the new King, no matter how he came to the throne, and be united in order to liberate their brethren. Karadjordje can be regarded here as a powerful symbol that encapsulates these dominant discourses and simultaneously as a national symbol to identify with.

The film carefully constructs the image of Karadjordje as having an exceptional position, as being the "chosen one". For example, the boat man (an ordinary man and representative of the people) who brought Karadjordje secretly back to Serbia, appears to be emotionally overwhelmed and to make the orthodox sign of

the cross after Karadjordje left him. Similarly when the renegade *dahije*, who had started a terror regime in Serbia, discuss how to cope with the danger of a possible Serb uprising, Karadjordje is mentioned – according to an intertitle – as being the "most dangerous" of the Serb rebels. In the election of the leader of the Uprising, when Karadjordje arrives, all the gathered Serbs happily rejoice and greet him (Fig. 5). Almost instantly he is chosen to receive the blessing by a Serb priest (Fig. 6) and to be legitimized by the church as the true leader of Serb people (Petar had repeated this ritual with his coronation in 1904). Moreover after his victory over the Turks, Karadjordje is crowned by an angel. It becomes clear therefore that Serbs belong to the orthodox-Christian faith, and the film establishes the Christian religion as an important constituent of the Serb national identity, further distinguishing Serbs from the Muslim Turks. Karadjordje, the leader of the Serb nation, is strongly linked to the Christian faith and he is transformed to messiah. Interestingly, both the election and the blessing of Karadjordje as a leader take place not in a church but in an open space and are witnessed by a mass of fighters representing Serbian people. Karadjordje can easily be regarded as a modern cult figure for the Serbs of the time, and in that respect it is not surprising that Botorić choose him as the subject of his first feature film (Volk 1996: 30, 259). This scene makes clear to the audience that Karadjordje was a popular figure and a popular hero, who became a leader by popular will. That narrative restores the image of Karadjordjević dynasty and King Petar, in particular, who by contrast ascended the throne of Serbia after a military coup d'état.

Fig. 5: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 31:40, Karadjordje arrives at the summit in Orašac.

Fig. 6: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 33:09, Karadjordje accepts being the leader of the uprising and is blessed by the priest.

Fig. 7: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 39:14 (left), the start of the Battle of Mišar (1806) with the attack of the Turkish cavalry.

Then Karadjordje, the blessed and the "chosen one", leads the "chosen people" – as Serbs like to regard themselves – into the fight. Of all the victorious clashes and battles which Karadjordje won, the film depicts his greatest triumph, the battle of Mišar in 1806 (Fig. 7). Here, Karadjordje is not shown to be directly involved in the combat (at least considering the surviving scenes), but rather to observe as commander the ongoing battle. Here Karadjordje is mythologized as a dominant and skilful leader resembling to Napoléon who often observed battles from a distance. After the winning of the battle, Karadjordje is cheered by his

men, and in an allegorical tableau vivant he is crowned by God through an angel who holds a laurel wreath over his head (Fig. 8) – the ultimate representation of national pride in the film.[14] In that respect the fight of Karadjordje and the Serb people against the Ottomans is legitimized as a holy fight, and the Uprising is transformed into a holy crusade against the non-Christian believers.

Fig. 8: *Karadjordje* (1911), TC 42:42, after the battle, Karadjordje as mythical victor.

The costumes and some of the scenes of the film clearly show the influence of Serb paintings, lithographs and photographs of the 19th and early 20th century, most notably of the famous paintings of Paja Jovanović (1859-1957) (Fig. 9). The costumes were borrowed mainly from the Serb National Theatre, and they were historically accurate. Stanojević and his crew not only revived the historic atmosphere of the time and the depicted events in the film, but they also tried to re-enact in a certain way events that portrayed in folk songs and paintings, attempting to establish a link between the new art form of cinema with the traditional national cultural heritage. In terms of representation, this demonstrates also the very strong ties of Stanojević to historic paintings and the theatre, particularly evident in the death scene of Karadjordje at the end of the film. The famous painting *The killing of Karadjordje* (1863) by Tan Mor, most likely, served as a model for this scene (Fig. 10, 11). Although in the movie

[14] Similar scenes could be found in Italian films of the time dealing with the Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy, like Filoteo Alberini's *La presa di Roma/The Taking of Rome* (1905) or Mario Caserini's *I Mille/A Sicilian Heroine* (1912).

Karadjordje lies in front of a hut (in Mor's painting in front of a tree) the similarities are evident: the composition of the death scene is quite identical, with Karadjordje's murderer being placed on the left side of the frame, while Karadjordje, lying on a carpet and trying to pull his sword in vain, is murdered by an axe. Mor's representation follows the epic songs and tales of Karadjordje's death, while Stanojević draws on both. A similar approach can be found in D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), in which Griffith recreates several scenes based on photographs and lithographs made during the Civil War, like the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Fig. 9: Paja Jovanović, *Takovski ustanak* (The rise of Takovo, 1898).[15]

Compared to other contemporary film productions, *Karadjordje* occupies an important place in film history. It became quite usual in those times to make films dealing with national history, while many adaptations of history-related novels can be also found such as Mario Caserini's *Last Days of Pompei* (1913), Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), or D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1914/15), to name only a few. More or less, these movies represent history as drama or history as spectacle (Rosenstone 1995: 2). At the same time, the German actor and director Paul Wegener made *Student of Prague* (1913) and *The Golem* (1914), dealing not with history but with fantasy set in a historical background.[16] In that respect *Karadjordje* follows a much wider cinematic

[15] Oil on canvas, 160x256 cm, Inv. No. 031_1207, Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. Friendly permission by the National Museum in Belgrade.

[16] For films made about the time of *Karadjordje*, see Tucaković (2004: 31).

tendency with the slight difference that the central character of the film is a real person from Serb national history, brought to the big screen for the very first time.

Fig. 10: Tan Mor, *Ubistvo Karadjordja* (The killing of Karadjordje, 1863).[17]

Fig. 11: *Karadjordje*,TC 54:22, the assassination of Karadjordje, center.[18]

[17] Oil on canvas, 110x 142 cm, Inv. No. 031_108, Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia, with friendly permission by the National Museum in Belgrade.
[18] Fig. 2-8 and 11: Screenshots from *Karadjordje* (1911), with the friendly permission by Aleksandar Erdeljanović, Yugoslav Film Archive, Belgrade.

In terms of production *Karadjordje* was a highly ambitious and prestigious project. The cost of the film was 20,000 Dinars, of which 12,000 Dinars were spent on filming the battle of Mišar (Volk 1996: 259; Zelenović 2004: 5), while most of the actors in the leading parts were renowned actors from the Serb National Theatre, like Milorad Petrović, who played Karadjordje[19]. Moreover, meetings of the ruling Radical Party were often held in Botorić's Hotel Paris, and there is some indication that the Government supported the film. For example, soldiers of the Serb Army acted as extras in the battle scenes (Ranković 1996: 119). It seems that Botorić, Stanojević and their crew did not simply depict the life and fate of a historic figure in a biopic, but they were commissioned to a 'national cause' mirroring the political ideas of the ruling Radical Party (Volk 1996: 32).

There is little information about the impact of *Karadjordje* on the Serb public. The film was premiered in Belgrade on October 23, 1911, and in November was screened for four consecutive days. According to Ranković, it was also screened in other Serbian towns while the surviving contemporary reviews were positive, praising the clarity of the film's images (1996: 120). The Serbian Court bought one print of the film, and there is a written report that the Prince Heir Aleksandar Karadjordjević saw *Karadjordje* in 1911. According to his son Tomislav, he liked the film and allegedly gave some money from his personal funds to support it (Erdeljanović 2004: 18), proving the interest of the State officials in the film. Nevertheless, King Petar himself seemed pretty indifferent, a fact that was noticed by his contemporaries. As the political situation in the country was unstable and complicated, Petar had his reasons, for not wanting to see the film as a dynastic propaganda piece. The film was produced just a couple of years after the bloody coup d'état during which the rival dynasty of the Obrenović perished and by which Petar was brought to the throne. There were still followers of the Obrenović in Serbia, whom he might have feared of. That in turn guaranteed a certain level of creative freedom and independence for Botorić and his film (Volk 1996: 33).

SA VEROM U BOGA/WITH FAITH IN GOD (1932)

Let me turn now to the film *Sa verom u Boga/With Faith in God* (Mihajlo Popović,[20] 1932/ shown in 1933) which deals with the WWI[21]. Although after 1930, talkies started to successfully replace silent films in Serbia, *With Faith in God* was made as a silent film with intertitles due to limited budget and lack of state funding. That was presumably the main reason why, although praised by the film critics, it was not successful with Serbian audiences (Kosanović 1996:

[19] For biographic details on Petrović, see Kosanović (1996: 174; 2004: 27).

[20] For biographic details on Popović, see Kosanović (1996: 179).

[21] On Serbia in the Great War see Mitrović (2007).

179; Volk 1996: 299). Compared to *Karadjordje*, *With Faith in God* lacks an epic scale, it is shorter (running only 41 minutes[22]), its settings are quite simple and low budget, while all the actors were amateurs, unlike the professional actors of the Serb National Theatre in *Karadjordje*. However, it remains until today as one of the finest films made in Yugoslavia in the interwar period.

Although the historical context of the film was marked by turmoil, there is no mention of the big politics of the time. It is important to note that the years after the end of the Great War did not bring peace and stability to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. There were unrests in the South, especially in Kosovo, and in 1920 a peasant revolt in Croatia took place. In Croatia a separatist movement was growing, and the political clashes between Zagreb and Belgrade reached a climax with the assassination of the Croat Peasant Party leader Stjepan Radić in the Skupština, the National Assembly, in Belgrade in 1929. It was also in that year, that King Aleksandar abolished the Constitution and introduced a dictatorship, while the country itself was now officially named as Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[23] However, none of these turbulent events and problems can to be found in Popović's film, who deliberately – perhaps – avoided all those difficult topics to circumvent censorship. It is noteworthy also that there are no hints in the film to the assassination in Sarajevo, the pretext for the outbreak of the war, as it is widely seen.

[22] The running time of the restored film version available today on DVD, provided by the Yugoslav Film Archive.

[23] Importantly in October 1934 King Aleksandar was assassinated during his visit in Marseille (Sundhaussen 2007: 264-268).

Fig. 12, 13: *With Faith in God* (1932), the happy peasant life, TC 07:11 (left), TC 10:05 (right).[24]

Compared to *Karadjordje*, the film is not that "historical" as there is no mention of historic persons. Moreover *Karajordje* presents history from the perspective of a "great man" who writes "great history" to paraphrase the famous dictum of the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke. By contrast, *With Faith in God* shows the effects of "great history" on the "little man" as the main protagonists are not distinguished individuals or mythical heroes but ordinary people. The opening of the film includes lengthy depictions of the idyllic life in the Serbian village Kumodraž, prior to WWI, where young and handsome Serb peasants (as clearly identified by their clothes)[25] are laughing, joking, flirting and falling in love (Fig.: 12, 13). Notably this representation bears some iconographic influences from photographs and postcards of the time, on which the rather romantic and idyllic scenes of the village of Kumodraž are modelled. The hardships of peasant life in rural Serbia in the interwar period are not depicted in the film, which provides an idealized and glorifying view on the countryside similarly to contemporary postcards showing rural Serbia as an idealized and romantic scenery.

When finally the war breaks out, it appears as an intrusion into the happy and simple lives of plain and likeable people. The main character of the film, Ivan, a young family man, enlists to fulfil his duty in the field willing to defend his country as his ancestors had previously done (Fig. 14, 15). Before Ivan leaving his house, Popović skilfully establishes a sense of continuity with the deeds of the

[24] Fig. 12-24: Screenshots from *With Faith in God* (1932); friendly permission by Aleksandar Erdeljanović, Yugoslav Film Archive, Belgrade.

[25] The main protagonists of the film are Serbs, wearing the distinct *šubara* and *šajkača* caps.

ancestors by including a scene, where both Ivan and his father glance at the wall where some medals are hanging below a portrait of a dead family member.

Fig. 14, 15: *With Faith in God* (1932), TC 14:30 (left), TC 14:32 (right): Fulfilling the duty, remembering the heroic ancestors.

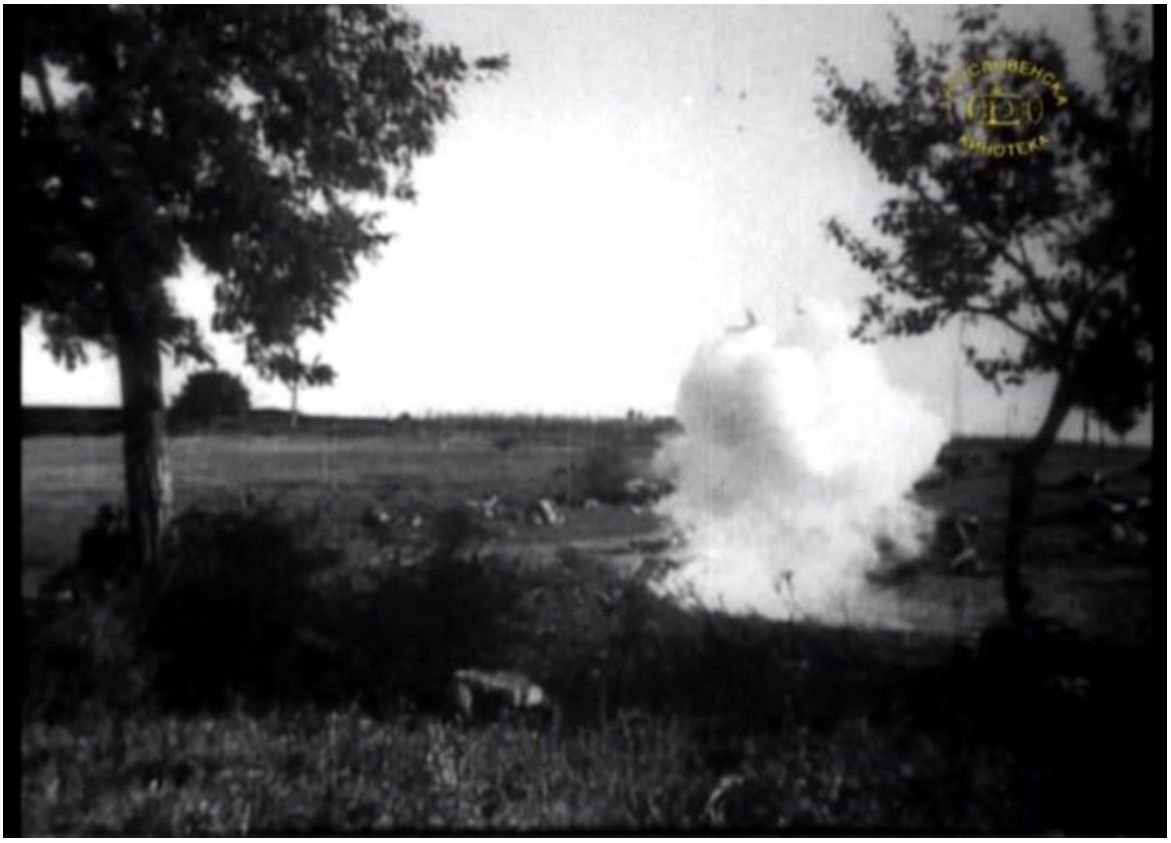

Fig. 16, 17: *Sa verom u Boga*, Depicting the war and its casualties: TC 22:14 (left), TC 22:50 (right).

In the process Ivan joins the Army chanting. Notably the scenes depicting the march and the resting of the Serb soldiers remind of contemporary photographs from WWI, which were reproduced, for example, in 1926 in Andra Popović's[26] *Ratni Album 1914-1918*. It reminds also of the old Serb song *Rado Srbin ide u vojnike/Merrily the Serb is joining the Army* constructing an image of the Serbs as warriors who bravely face the war. Soon, however, Ivan will lose his illusions about what a war is: While Ivan and his comrades marching, they are attacked by an enemy plane and one of his friends is killed in the attack (Fig. 16, 17). This is Ivan's first encounter with modern warfare and with random, unheroic death.

Meanwhile, Serbia is occupied and life for the villagers becomes hard. While Ivan was retreating with the Serb Army and fighting in trenches, his wife is killed by Austro-Hungarian soldiers, when she and his father try to escape from a prison camp. His father barely manages to reach the village and begs a young woman and friend of Ivan's wife to take care of Ivan's son while Ivan's mother dies vainly awaiting him to return. In the meantime, Ivan himself is heavily wounded. In a series of brief scenes, Popović shows the horrors of modern warfare and the desperation of the wounded (Fig. 18, 19): Having lost an arm, Ivan lies in a hospital; a mortally wounded Serb soldier dies; a nurse cries for him. These scenes must have been familiar to contemporary Serb audiences who shared similar experiences from WWI and personal drama. They may have been also disturbing or even shocking to them, as Ivan had been previously portrayed as a joyous and loveable young man now gravely wounded.

[26] Not related with Mihajlo.

Fig. 18, 19: Modern warfare takes its gruesome toll: *With Faith in God* (1932), TC 31:58 (left), TC 32:44 (right).

After the end of the war, Ivan wearing his uniform returns home to be united with the remnants of his family. He meets a little boy in the yard, at first not realizing that he is his son and is greeted by his old father. Ivan later takes his son to a cemetery full of graves where his face reveals grim and earnest determination while the boy asks why all these people died. Ivan contemplates for a moment, but then explains to the kid that he will understand later why all those had fallen and for what cause, and smiles, obviously not to leave the audience too saddened and thoughtful (Fig. 20, 21).

Fig. 20, 21: *With Faith in God* (1932), TC 39:39 (left), TC 40:29 (right).

Remarkably, before this scene an intertitle says "the seeds of the Golgota" alluding to the Serb Golgotha (Ilić Marković 2014: 185), the Serbs' flight across the Albanian mountains in the winter of 1915/16 after Serbia had been invaded and occupied (Schanes 2011: 205-212). The huge numbers of victims the Serbs had suffered during the flight must still have been vivid enough in people's memory and even the mentioning of the word "Golgota" seemed capable of bringing to mind this national catastrophe. The mass graves as depicted in the scene (Fig: 20) illustrate the huge human loss for the defence of the country which became then part of Yugoslavia. The use of the word "Golgota" clearly connects the suffering of the Serbs with the martyrdom of Christ.

Fig. 23, 24: Ivan's mother envisioning her son in the war: TC 25:41 (left), TC 25:18 (right).

Moreover there is another powerful sequence where in a vision of Ivan's dying mother, who longs for her son, Popović himself impersonates a sorrowful Jesus being crucified (Fig. 23, 24) and compared to Ivan standing in the battlefield. This scene establishes a strong link between Ivan's and Jesus' martyrdom, while Ivan can be regarded as representing the Serbian people as a whole. The film depicts the ordinary Serb people as having the will to endure and survive and carefully constructs a portrait of a nation who cope with sorrow and personal losses and do not give up; who stoically and composed go to war, being highly aware of their sacred duty of fighting against the oppression and slavery of the country, and if necessary of dying for this holy cause.

The powerful image of Jesus Christ standing on a crucifix and, similarly to Ivan, being surrounded by flames and with shells exploding around him reminds of the "Christ of the trenches", a statue of Christ which was left on the battlefield after the battle of Neuve Chapelle in 1915. This image of Christ must have been familiar to the viewers as it had been widely reproduced by contemporary postcards. It can be regarded as a strong message against the war and the suffering it causes, but also a message of hope (notably the Crucifixion is followed by the Resurrection). In any case, the appearance of the fate of Christ in Popović's film, connected to the fate of Serbs, aims to convey something of the agony and the hopes of the nation and contributes to the process of "national myth-making" in the sense of Higson (1989: 37). The importance of Religion and the proximity to God as part of the Serb national identity is emphasized also by the title of the film, *With Faith in God*, a popular Serb war slogan, which attributes the survival of Serbs to their belief in God. Thus similarly to *Karadjordje*, elements of the Christianity and its symbolisms can be traced in the

film, and can be considered as recurring narrative motifs of self representation in early Serbian cinema.

Moreover in the film certain discourses on WWI, prevalent at the time, can be traced. The emphasis on the mutilation of human bodies in a modern industrialized warfare as WWI had been and the huge losses in life this war brought about are characteristic examples. It is noteworthy that all these had been important topics in many novels of the time, for example, by Erich Maria Remarque or Ernest Hemingway. Remarque's famous novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* was adapted into an eponymous shocking film, directed by Lewis Milestone in 1930, just a few years before the making of *With Faith in God.* Possibly Popović had seen Milestone's critically acclaimed movie, which won an Oscar for best picture in 1931, and had been inspired by it in creating the battle scenes and the scene in the hospital of his own film. However this is only a speculation as no clear evidence exists that Popović actually saw Milestone's movie.

Fig. 22: *With Faith in God*, the optimistic ending, (1932), TC 40:48.

Before the end of the film, three happily smiling boys, wearing the national costumes of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, appear on the screen to rally around a huge Yugoslav national flag (Fig. 22). Notably the boy in the middle – in the most privileged position – is a Serb, wearing the distinct *šubara*[27]. The three boys

[27] That is a conical hat of mostly black lamb or wool fur, worn by Serb farmers.

in union represent the recently liberated and united Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes[28], which was already renamed as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Actually, this is the only incident in the whole film that hints towards Yugoslavia. It is clear that the film was made from the Serb perspective and only at the end representatives of the other constituent nations of the Kingdom are shown. However, this final scene does not only provide a hopeful end – in which the three boys look optimistically at a desired bright future – but by representing the three leading Yugoslav nations, it also articulates a powerful political message appealing to a transnational unity in Yugoslavia. The three smiling boys, standing together, obviously demonstrate the unity of the country, at a time, when it already was severely shaken by the Serbo-Croat political antagonisms and was developing into an authoritarian monarchy and dictatorship.

Let's take a look now at the relation between the film's plot and the depicted historical events, following Korte's Systematic Film Analysis. There are little hints of politics in the film, with the above mentioned final scene of the three boys being perhaps the most evident one. However, politics was not the intention of Popović, who started his career as a cameraman (Kosanović 1996: 179).[29] After he was struck by the sight of an old Serb veteran begging on the streets of Belgrade, decorated but disabled, he decided to make a film dealing with the horrors of the war as they were experienced by the Serb people. At the same time, by making such a movie Popović hoped to recover from his shock of seeing the impoverished man (Volk 1996: 298). The Serbs in the film are no regicides, no politicians or plotters, as they were often depicted, for example, by German or Austro-Hungarian newspapers of the time. Ordinary Serb people, as pictured in the film, are simple-minded, joyous, handsome and loveable. By this, it can be said that Popović constructs a counter-image to the negative representations of the Serbs prior to the outbreak of WWI, most notably in Germany and in Austro-Hungary. Moreover, although the film is about WWI, there is not much of it as a war event. Instead most of the plot concentrates on the villagers and the consequences of the war on their life. This could be well explained by the small budget of the film that could not afford the depiction of trench battles on a grand scale, as in other war films of the time, such as King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925), Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) or G. W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930). Compared to those films, *With Faith in God* does not look like a war movie but certainly is an anti-war film, like

[28] In Serbian, *Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata I Slovenaca*, or short: *Kraljevina SHS*.

[29] *With Faith in God* was the only one film Popović managed to complete since a few years later his own production company, MAP Film, which he founded to produce the film, went bankrupt and Popović returned to his work as a cameraman (Kosanović 1996: 179).

the others, since it highlights the grim consequences of the war on innocent everyday people. [30]

With Faith in God was not the only Serbian film of the interwar period that dealt with WWI. About the same time, Krakov and his collaborators made a documentary, entitled *Golgota Srbije*/*Serbia's Golgota*, which centred on the Serb's struggles and numerous victims they suffered at the war. For many Serbs and several Croat and Slovene intellectuals and politicians as well, Serbia's participation in the war was an attempt not only to liberate herself from Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian occupation, but also all South Slavs, something which was a difficult and contested topic in the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom. The government in Belgrade and the ruling elites considered the war long over while fears of further national tensions and rivalries, mostly between the Serbs and the Croats, caused the prohibition of the film (Volk 1996: 54-56). Earlier, however, in 1930, the film *Kroz buru i oganj*/*Through Storm and Fire*[31] (Milutin Ignjačević and Ranko Jovanović, 1929) focusing on the fight of Serb soldiers with the German and Austro-Hungarian occupying forces during the Great War was released (Volk 1996: 57). Popović worked in the production of that film (Volk 1996: 298; Kosanović 1996: 179) and he might have been influenced by it embracing nevertheless the dominant model of cinematic representation of WWI in Europe and the US. He made a thoughtful movie about WWI, which does not glorify the war or depict heroic deeds but focuses on how everyday people and their families experienced the cruelty of the war. It seems that in 1930, more than a decade after the end of the WWI, the time was ripe not only for anti-war novels like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), but also for anti-war films. In *With Faith in God* history is presented as a drama, the personal drama of common people engulfed in the maelstrom of a modern industrial war. The audience can easily identify with an ordinary and vulnerable man like Ivan, who is not a superhero as was the legendary figure of Karadjordje portrayed in Botorić's film. Moreover compared to a movie such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* the style of *With Faith in God* significantly departs from that of Hollywood. It is a quiet, poetic film, and not a spectacle. Although we are presented with the

[30] According to the Serb film historian Petar Volk, *Karadjordje* influenced the new generation of Serb filmmakers, such as Popović, who emerged after the Great War and in the interwar period (Volk 1996: 57). However, it seems that although for Popović national themes were still important, as they were for Botorić and Čiča Ilija Stanojević twenty years ago (when they made *Karadjordje*) and despite the main characters of the film are Serbs, Popović did not use the theme of war to promote nationalist purposes, but as a vehicle to present in an "universal cinematic language" what was important and dear to the people of his country (Volk 1996: 58).

[31] This film does no longer exist. From press releases and other publishing material we are informed that in the centre of the film are war atrocities with a focus on a strong female character (Dimitrijević 2015: 533).

horrors of modern warfare, we are not exposed to them fully, as they were vividly shown in Milestone's or Pabst's films. In that respect, Popović, may have captured the contemporary spirit, just as Eisenstein did in his *Battleship Potemkin* (see Ferro 1988: 68-69), where he presented more a personal vision of the war than the cruel reality, building a legend on how this war looked like and how it should be perceived and remembered by the public. However, *With Faith in God* is not entirely free from any glorification, as we have previously discussed on the scene of Ivan and the graveyard.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have discussed the representation of national history in two early Serbian films, *Karadjordje* and *With Faith in God* dealing with Karadjordje (leader of the First Serbian Uprising in 1804) and the participation of Serbia in WWI respectively. By using the Systematic Film Analysis introduced by the German film theorist Helmut Korte, I attempted to bring the films and their contemporary socio-political and cultural context into a meaningful relation. My analysis has demonstrated that both films were not only products but also, and more importantly, documents of the time they were produced, as they incorporate in their images and narratives important contemporary public discourses, political topics and cultural material (such as legends, songs, photographs and films), contributing, at the same time, to the process of the Serbian national-identity formation.

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