

REVIEW ESSAY

In the Land of Celebrity Humanitarianism: Reflections on Film and Transitional Justice in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Journal of Human Rights Practice, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom

Following a special Sarajevo screening of Angelina Jolie's *In the Land of Blood and Honey* for representatives of Bosnian war victims' associations, a woman who had been raped during the conflict said of her initial response to the film: "I first vomited, from the sheer force of my suffering...Angelina touched our souls" (Hopkins, 2011b). In another news report about the screening, this same woman added that "from the moment the film began, I was back in April 1992. My life passed through this film completely" (Hopkins, 2011a). Referring to the central character of the film, a second woman, also a victim of sexual violence in the Bosnian war, declared: "I am Ajla...This is what I went through in the rape camp in Vlasenica in 1992" (Hopkins, 2011b). The leader of a group of women whose sons were murdered in the 1995 Srebrenica massacres likewise praised the film and expressed gratitude to Jolie "for her intellectual and financial investment in making this movie that will tell the world the truth about Bosnia's war" (Smajilhodžić, 2011). Similarly, the male head of a group of former prisoners of war explained that "this movie is deeply moving for the victims who experienced all of these things...It is completely objective and it really tells the facts of what happened during the war" (Smajilhodžić, 2011).

These impassioned responses to Jolie's film immediately give rise to a number of questions concerning the possibilities for film and other cultural forms to contribute to long-term processes of truth-seeking and justice in the wake of violent conflict. On the surface, at least, the above responses

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ISSN: 1911-4788

of victims to *In the Land of Blood and Honey* may suggest that filmmaking (among other forms of culture production) has considerable potential to serve as a vital additional vehicle for post-war transitional justice (in the broadest sense of that term). In recent years, scholars and activists have frequently charged that judicial processes dealing with crimes of this magnitude are chiefly focussed on “legal requirements (that) may bypass the individuality of the victims, including their needs as traumatized persons” (Dembour & Haslam, 2004, p.154). Such critics suggest that victims of these crimes may therefore “need an entirely different platform” to tell their stories (Dembour & Haslam, 2004, p.154). In this quest for alternative platforms for testimony, how might creative works like films, plays and novels help to fill in something of that painful gap left by limited judicial processes? Can the production and distribution of films like *In the Land of Blood and Honey* which aim to tell representative stories of suffering and loss help to secure that all-important sense of recognition and the validation of personal and community experience sought by many victims as an essential component of what they understand to be justice?

The literature cataloguing the numerous insufficiencies of international and national judicial mechanisms and the inability of these bodies alone to deliver justice to victims of violation or atrocity in the wake of the 1992-95 Bosnian conflict is now a sizeable one (Clark, 2009; Delpla, 2007; Dembour & Haslam, 2004; Henry, 2009, 2010; Hodžić, 2007, 2010; Mertus, 2004; Stover, 2005; Subotić, 2009). Indeed, even as the transitional justice boom gathered its incredible momentum over the past couple of decades, some scholars working in this field were moving well beyond assessments of the specific merits and flaws of *ad hoc* judicial mechanisms like those created to deal with crimes committed during the wars of the former Yugoslavia or the Rwandan genocide - raising more wide-ranging questions about the overwhelmingly dominant discourse of legalism in the emerging discipline (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2002; McEvoy, 2007; Osiel, 2000).

With regard to the experiences of rape and other sexual violence during the Bosnian conflict that are at the heart of Jolie’s film, numerous scholars have dwelt on the limitations of what are otherwise lauded as the groundbreaking trials and judgements of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) dealing directly with these crimes. Writing of the ICTY’s track record in these proceedings, Henry (2010), for example, speaks for a number of analysts of the Tribunal when she asserts that “language, particularly legal language, cannot adequately capture the pain and trauma of rape” (p. 1113). Henry notes that, as a result, “courts have struggled to accommodate the experiences of survivors of rape” (p. 1113). Mertus (2008) likewise maintains that the ICTY processes dealing with rape and other sexual violence have shown that “squeezing women’s experiences of abuse into the narrow confines of traditional legal cases requires a willingness, on the women’s part, to give up on telling the whole story, i.e. in their words and with their individual priorities” (p. 1298).

What these critiques and others like them have in common is an emphasis

on the need for complementary processes and forums running alongside the necessary judicial proceedings—a variety of initiatives and approaches aimed at promoting what McEvoy (2007) has called “a thicker understanding of transitional justice” (p. 414). In addition to discussions of the potential of state-established bodies such as truth commissions to provide complementary vehicles for victim story-telling and acknowledgement, the desirability of various forms of what Jeffrey and Jakala (2012) have described as “informal practices of transitional justice” (p. 3) have also been much contemplated by both scholars and activists inside and outside the post-Yugoslav region in recent years¹. In their critique of the ICTY as a vehicle for victim and witness story-telling, Dembour and Haslam (2004) have, for example, stressed the need for “the development of other forms of memory in the wake of mass atrocity and trauma” (p. 176), arguing that “these should be fostered both at individual and collective levels, for example through therapy, film-making, art production, literature, history research, school textbooks” (p. 176).

Two decades on from the start of the Bosnian conflict, local filmmakers have arguably taken up this challenge in earnest. Among films produced by artists working in Bosnia-Herzegovina itself, Jamila Žbanić’s *Grbavica*, Aida Begić’s *Snow* and *Children of Sarajevo*, and Danis Tanović’s Academy Award-winning *No Man’s Land* and *Cirkus Columbia* stand out as accomplished works that tell powerful stories of the war, its origins and its aftermath. Each of these films has resonated with audiences both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and globally. But filmmakers not native to the region have also been drawn to the cinematic potential of this war and its legacy, and to the ongoing struggles for justice for its victims. Interestingly, among films dealing with the 1992-95 conflict and its aftermath produced outside the country, three of the most recent of these focus specifically on rape and other crimes of sexual violence against women. Given widespread criticism of many aspects of the ICTY’s handling of these crimes—from the treatment of witnesses taking the stand in the Trial Chamber (Henry, 2009; Mertus, 2004) to the Tribunal’s failure to involve Bosnian women’s NGOs more thoroughly in its work (Mertus, 2008)—it is especially interesting to consider whether this trio of international films can somehow be said to “do justice” to the stories of women who experienced and survived these horrors in ways that the ICTY either has not or could not have done. Given the reported cathartic impact of the film on at least some victims of rape and other sexual violence in the Bosnian conflict, a more sustained critical appraisal of Angelina Jolie’s *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011) is surely in order. Indeed, a consideration of this much-publicized film’s potential as a catalyst for remembrance and reckoning—in tandem with a brief look at Juanita Wilson and Hans-Christian Schmid’s related feature films, *As If I Am Not There* (2010) and *Storm* (2009)—may offer us some initial sense of what potential, if any, film might have to “fill out” some of the requirements of justice not adequately met by courts of law alone.

In the Land of Blood and Honey

In the Land of Blood and Honey tells the story of Ajla, a gifted young Bosniak² painter, who shares an apartment with her sister in Sarajevo in the spring of 1992. As the country moves toward war, she meets Danijel, an initially charming Bosnian Serb police officer, one evening at a café where they dance and flirt and discover a mutual attraction. But suddenly, their budding romance is interrupted by the emerging conflict. Several months later, Bosnian Serb troops raid the apartment complex where the sisters are living - murdering many male residents and selecting numerous women and girls for transport to a military installation outside the city. There the women are required to cook and serve and clean for the soldiers stationed at the barracks. One particular group of younger women, including Ajla, will be forced to become sex slaves for the troops. Just as Ajla is about to be raped by a soldier, Danijel recognizes her and intervenes to stop the assault. He is the captain in charge of the facility and clearly a rising star in the Bosnian Serb forces, where his father is a renowned general. Danijel's attraction to Ajla proves stronger than his identification with the murderous Bosnian Serb nationalist project. When he can, without raising suspicions amongst his colleagues, Danijel offers Ajla protection in what has effectively become a rape camp. Ajla is torn between her fear and repulsion at everything around her, and her own lingering attraction to Danijel. After enduring humiliation and torture at the hands of another soldier at the base, Ajla throws caution aside and takes refuge in a covert relationship with the captain—giving rise to a highly-charged, endlessly ambivalent (and hugely improbable) combination of sanctuary and imprisonment that continues over the next two and a half years and that will ultimately have tragic consequences for them both.

Jolie's film is directed with great fluidity, and she elicits powerful performances from a number of her excellent Bosnian and Serbian actors—most particularly from Zana Marjanović in the central role of Ajla. Two decades of acting in Hollywood movies have certainly taught Jolie how to shape and edit a scene effectively. The decision to shoot the film simultaneously in both Bosnian and English, producing two separate versions to guarantee a wider audience in the region and elsewhere, was an ambitious and entirely commendable one. But frankly stated, Jolie's screenplay is fairly artless. The film is burdened by ludicrous plotting from the start and a kind of crassness that includes presenting Danijel and Ajla's first moment of physical intimacy in a soft focus sex scene, their encounter scored with the kind of sensitive piano music you might expect to hear in a fragrance commercial. Jolie has said that she wanted the film to be about the lost possibilities of this relationship—the way in which (but for the absurd conflict that arbitrarily divides them) this might have been a happy couple, making a shared life and raising a family together. She has said that she wanted an audience watching the scene to consider whether Ajla and Danijel are “trying to hold on to something beautiful when everything around them has turned so ugly” (Borger, 2012). But given the grave issues with which she is dealing in the

film, this very Hollywood-flavoured scene comes across as crude and entirely inappropriate.³ No less tasteless is a later scene where a conflicted and angry Danijel is shown subjecting Ajla to a much more brutal sexual act—an assault which culminates in his whispering into Ajla’s ear: “Why couldn’t you have been born a Serb?” Historical exposition and political comment in this film is not just plodding, but positively thudding. Characters speak whole paragraphs of background information to one another in casual conversation. For example, when Danijel visits his father early in the film, the grizzled warrior instructs his son as they walk along: “One million Serbs were killed during the Second World War. This land is soaked in Serbian blood. And now they want us to live under Muslim rule? In a Muslim state?” The film is more than a little tone deaf to the ways in which families and communities might actually discuss politics and history.

There are also some very basic improbabilities regarding the degree of movement which would have been possible for these characters in and around Sarajevo (where much of the film is set) during the siege. In the summer of 1995, for example, Danijel gives his soldiers a “night off” and drives his captive mistress, Ajla, into the centre of town to what is said to be the “Sarajevo Municipal Art Gallery”—one of Ajla’s favourite places in the city before the war. When a subordinate arrives to inform Danijel he is needed immediately at a meeting of senior officers, he tells Ajla to simply find her way back “home” to the barracks where she is a prisoner (“Just follow the road up the hill”).

But it is Jolie’s casual deployment of historical image for sensational effect that begs the most pressing questions about the depth of her research and her insistence that she “tried to bring as much information and as much truth and as much reality” to the making of the film (Cooper, 2011).⁴ While one cannot doubt the sincerity of Jolie’s commitment to the *idea* of making this film and to engaging with the issues it explores so graphically, the result definitely demands a much more rigorous ethical critique than it was given by mainstream media on release. Jolie’s decision to graft an image of atrocity from a very specific time and place elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina into her own narrative, presumably with the well-intentioned aim of underlining further for the audience the scope of cruelty and suffering experienced in the conflict, is especially disturbing. Thus in a scene where Danijel is travelling from his Sarajevo base to a meeting with his father, meant to be taking place in the winter of 1994, he drives past a recreation of the infamous 1992 images of emaciated and terrified detainees held in the Trnoplje and Omarska camps near Prijedor in Northwest Bosnia. Of course, Jolie has never said that her film is a documentary. Her stated aim is clearly to raise awareness about what people endured during the long conflict, and the film is stocked with a catalogue of real offences about which Jolie must have read and heard about in what she says were her many conversations with victims. Her point, as she has emphasized again and again in interviews, was to educate herself and her audience about the Bosnian conflict, to get her audience to ask how these things could have happened in the 1990s and why was it allowed to go on for

so long with no one intervening to stop them.

So do any of these jarring inaccuracies matter when most if not all of them are likely to go completely unnoticed by a non-specialist audience? After all, there is a long tradition of producing historical drama that pays scant attention to the accuracy of detail while bringing the spectator to what are said to be larger truths about a period and its protagonists. Nobody goes to see Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* or Schiller's *Mary Stuart* for a scholarly account of internal conflict in the Roman Empire or the machinations of the Tudor court. But scrupulous attention to historical accuracy surely matters more when we are dealing with a very recent conflict—one that has been thoroughly documented and carefully chronicled in a now vast and very accessible literature produced by academics, journalists, non-governmental organizations, and courts of law. The men and women in those 1992 images of Trnoplje and Omarska suffered very real and very specific crimes in that particular time and place. To simply appropriate what Jolie must have decided was a defining image of the truth of the war in Bosnia is to somehow turn the unique sufferings of victims in that context into a kind of generic symbol of cruelty, “bypassing the individuality of the victims” just as surely as Dembour & Haslam (2004, p. 154) have suggested that courts have sometimes done. Arguably, in the transposition of that image, the men and women who suffered in Trnoplje and Omarska have been done yet another kind of injustice.⁵

And yet, if even a few of those who have suffered most from the unspeakable horrors of the Bosnian conflict have found a measure of satisfaction in seeing a film that bears at least some resemblance to their own experience, isn't it clear that Jolie has indeed offered victims of wartime rape and other sexual violence some “thicker” sense of justice? Those unqualified endorsements of the film (included at the start of this essay) are surely a sterling example of the much-heralded imperative of “giving voice” to victims—incontrovertible evidence of the remedial impact of a broader conception of justice that understands how “the adversarial process alone does not honor their assertion of agency, their resistance to power and their will to survive” (Mertus, 2004, p. 125). But while one's first instinct may be to affirm these positive responses, it does not follow that our empathy with these individuals and their histories should muzzle critical disagreement with their conclusions about the film's merits. I would argue that intellectual honesty in this instance requires that one say emphatically that this film does not “do justice” to its subject. Given the film's explicit recreation of scenes of rape and other forms of violence, Jolie's film quite understandably prompted visceral responses from some victims. But those responses should certainly not trump lingering concerns that aspects of the film are actually exploitative of victims' sufferings. Rejecting the verdict of these particular individuals on Jolie's film should not be confused with callousness or a lack of respect toward victims. Tough minded as it may seem, human rights practitioners and scholars need to be able to assert that the victim does not necessarily have a kind of ultimate authority here in judging the film's strengths and

weaknesses. *In the Land of Blood and Honey* is simply *not* a good film, and it raises serious aesthetic and moral concerns about the recreation of scenes of atrocity in cinema and the retelling of a particularly tragic chapter in Bosnia's recent history. The recreation of violent acts like rape in a film such as *In the Land of Blood and Honey* are *not* in themselves perform a vindication of the victim's experience, and any claim that the film adds something crucial to our deeper understanding of what constitutes justice after war should therefore be vigorously disputed. It is certainly worth considering, too, whether the assumed "therapeutic" function of this form of victim recognition actually becomes a diversion from more pressing concerns facing those who have survived wartime atrocities. As Pupavac (2004) has argued with reference to postwar Bosnia:

The interpretation of justice in therapeutic terms has been cultivated by Westerners and projected onto populations who do not necessarily share the precepts, even where they have adopted therapeutic models in their claim-making. Therapeutic justice aspires to reconcile people with the past rather than materially transform people's lives. Yet, when asked about their priorities in reconstruction assistance, populations persist in emphasizing substantive social justice, including material issues, rather than symbolic justice. (p. 392)

Many if not most scholars and practitioners working in the field of transitional justice would agree that justice conceived of exclusively as an "adversarial process" does not adequately account for or recognize victim agency, resilience and resourcefulness. Transitional justice experts now regularly draw a distinction between the inevitably partial justice of the courtroom and a more inclusive concept of justice that is usually understood as being grounded in individual victim experience and in what some scholars have termed "the everyday" (Alcalá & Baines, 2012, pp. 385-393). This approach to transitional justice is more inclined to focus on "the practices and processes with which people live through violence and seek to make sense of and resist violence" (Alcalá & Baines, 2012, p. 387), and one might then argue that those powerful victim responses to Jolie's film indicate that a cultural product can indeed become a vital part of that process of sense-making. There is no doubt that there is much to be gained in this "locational shift away from the high-altitude, immobilized and abstracted view of mechanisms, mandates and processes that has characterized standard transitional justice interventions" (Alcalá & Baines, 2012, p. 387). But at the same time, those victim reactions to *In the Land of Blood and Honey* should also remind us that this shift brings with it its own risks of an uncritical over-valorizing of those "perspectives and practices of survivors and ordinary people" that is at the very least condescending—and at worst a misguided notion that "the victim is always right." Furthermore, invocations of agency, of resilience, and of everyday processes as hitherto neglected dimensions of justice can also be very vague—involving a kind of ritual sounding of academic buzz words about the various "performances" and "spatial practices" (Alcalá & Baines, 2012) of victims that at their most theoretical can paradoxically seem

just as remote from the daily lives they are meant to describe and celebrate as any room full of gowned adjudicators pronouncing on truth in narrow legal terms. Whatever the limitations of justice conceived of primarily as the rather distant business of securing convictions and handing down sentences at the ICTY or at the War Crimes Chamber of the Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is arguably a concreteness to that definition that sometimes eludes those who insist (and not without reason) that “the privileging of the rule of law, human rights and democratization in the dominant transitional justice discourse sidelines the perspectives and practices of survivors and ordinary people” (Alcalá & Baines, 2012, p. 386).

The still unmet need for recognition one hears expressed in the voices that greeted Jolie’s film so effusively may help to remind us that transitional justice discourse must always move beyond the courtroom and out into the city streets and back roads of post-conflict societies. But that movement toward more localized, victim-centered definitions of justice must be coupled with an awareness of what anyone who has worked with victim communities in post-conflict settings knows well. Victims’ voices, perspectives and analyses can indeed be enlightening, generous, wise and impartial. But they can also be confused, biased, or at times manipulative or subject to manipulation by others. Many victims are indeed resilient, committed, and noble in thought and deed. But in those everyday “spatial practices” in these communities, one person’s empowered, resourceful individual might even become another person’s autocrat, bully or bigot. If that which “the everyday renders visible and audible” (Alcalá & Baines, 2012, p. 389) is to be given due regard in thinking and speaking about transitional justice, scholars and practitioners must be no less rigorous in interrogating these localized alternative conceptions of justice than they have been in relation to more restricted definitions focussed on legal institutions and their proceedings.

It is important to note here, too, that the effusive praise for the film from some Bosnian war victims was by no means shared by every victim of rape or other sexual violence in the country. In a much-publicized 2010 conflict of views among Bosnian women war victims’ associations about Jolie’s announced intention to make what would become *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, the leader of one group, Bakira Hasečić, attracted international headlines with her strenuous objections to the idea of what was then rumoured to be a film about a romantic relationship between a rapist and his victim. Initially, Hasečić’s highly controversial campaigning persuaded the Bosnian-Croat Federation Minister of Culture to deny Jolie permission to film in the Federation—a decision then reversed after the official had been allowed to read the screenplay. Much of the film was subsequently shot in Hungary (Beaumont, 2010; CBC News, 2010). But Jolie had waded into the highly-politicized and sometimes very divisive world of war victims’ associations in the region. One group (founded after a 2006 split with Hasečić’s association) attacked Hasečić’s domineering leadership (and alleged close links to Bosniak nationalist politicians) and denied she had the authority to speak on behalf of all women victims. Hasečić’s group formally protested to the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that Jolie's "ignorant attitude to victims" (Child, 2010) made her unfit to continue in her role as a goodwill ambassador for that organization (Beaumont, 2010; Child, 2012). Bolstered by the support she had received from the rival women's group, Jolie herself dismissed Hasečić as "one person who has a gripe" (CBC News, 2010). But Hasečić remained stridently unreconciled to the project, and in November 2010 was quoted as saying that "as far as we are concerned a love story could not have existed in a camp. Such an interpretation is causing us mental suffering" (Child, 2010).

Not surprisingly, Hasečić was not invited to attend the December 2011 Sarajevo special screening for war victims. Having watched only the trailer for the film, Hasečić still believed she had seen enough to tell *The Guardian*: "A love story between the captured Muslim and a Serb war criminal never happened during the war in Bosnia; it is impossible, a concept unthinkable, even as the idea that it displays. And from the clips from the movie—and I could not even watch the full two minutes—what she has done is hard and disgusting. It became painful to watch, and still is. I felt like I was beaten, tortured and raped again, like I have once again returned to the camp. As if they raped me again. It is shameful!" (Hopkins, 2011b). In another 2011 report, Hasečić adds that she "saw pictures of the film on the Internet. I do not know what the film is about, but what I have seen is that the victim is in a five-star hotel, she paints, enjoys freedom. This did not exist!" (Smajilhodžić, 2011).

It is perhaps doubtful that anyone external to the Bosnian context could have untangled and fully comprehended the complicated public and personal politics of local victims' associations in that country today. Nevertheless, one would have liked to see Jolie do more to pre-empt this painful clash among survivors over the project by first establishing some sort of consensus among victims' groups about an appropriate approach to issues of rape and other sexual violence in the film. Jolie is perhaps correct when she says that "there's no safe way to tackle this subject matter" (Amanpour, 2011). Yet in spite of her invocations across various interviews of the enormous burden of responsibility she felt making the film, what seems clear here is that Jolie might have taken still more care not to inflame these internal conflicts further before embarking on such a controversial project. Of the 2010 conflict over the permit and between women war victims' groups, Jolie insisted in an interview on the CBS News program, *Sixty Minutes*, that she "didn't know it was going to be as sensitive" at the time she was first writing her script (Simon, 2011). But it doesn't seem sufficient then to brush the matter off (as Jolie did in some interviews) by saying it was all only a minor misunderstanding—an unfortunate case of people jumping to conclusions about the content of the film based only on rumour and before they had had the chance to read the screenplay (Smiley, 2011). In the era of "Kony 2012"-style populist campaigning, there may be little one can do to infuse the juggernaut of celebrity humanitarianism and human rights witnessing with a greater sense of the need for sustained reflection before any action is taken

or intervention is made. But when filmmakers and other artists like Jolie announce their wish to make use of the stories of victims and witnesses in their work, human rights advocates everywhere should be much more vocal in continually calling on individuals like Jolie (who appear to believe they are doing *all* the homework necessary before launching out into projects like *In the Land of Blood and Honey*⁶) to become much more self-aware and to take ever greater pains to avoid stirring complex local animosities of the kind discussed here.

In various interviews recorded at the time of her film's premiere, Jolie repeatedly struck a humble pose regarding her intentions in making *In the Land of Blood and Honey*—speaking, for example, of her cast of *local* actors and insisting that “it’s their film, it belongs to them, it’s their country, it’s their history, their language” (Cooper, 2011). But one cannot help but wonder whether such laudable conviction might have been better directed toward Jolie using her global profile and financial resources to enable more Bosnian filmmakers lacking funding for their projects to create their own films about the conflict and its aftermath? While Jolie’s frequently expressed deep affection for her local cast may be very real, why not devote your abundant resources to enabling these gifted artists to appear in more films produced in the region itself?

When Jolie appeared on American journalist Anderson Cooper’s talk show along with several leading actors from the film, Cooper encouraged the cast to share some of their personal reminiscences and experiences of the conflict in their country. After actress Vanesa Glodjo (who plays Ajla’s sister in the film) relates her story of being injured by shrapnel after a direct hit by a shell on her Sarajevo home, Cooper declares: “Angelina, you’re giving these people a voice, who haven’t really had a voice before” (Cooper, 2011). Ironically, the time allotted in the program to these cast members’ memories and reflections was rather short compared with Cooper’s much larger interest in the details of Jolie’s family life with Brad Pitt and how “possibly the biggest star on the planet” (as Cooper refers to Jolie) balances her career with the demands of motherhood.⁷ The “voices” of her Bosnian actors were in actual fact relatively little heard on this occasion. With regard to raising awareness of the issue of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women during the Bosnian war, why did Jolie not simply use her superstar status to bring larger audiences to a domestically-produced film like *Grbavica* (screened as *Esma’s Secret* in the United Kingdom)—Bosnian director Jamila Žbanić’s acclaimed 2006 work about a young girl being raised in Sarajevo by a single mother and coming to understand that she is the product of her mother’s rape during the war? Set alongside Žbanić’s powerful film (which was awarded the Golden Bear at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival), *In the Land of Blood and Honey* looks a rather pale companion piece indeed. Some might argue that at a time when Bosnia is no longer a highly visible issue in the media and much less central to the work plans and budgets of international NGOs, it is enough that an actress of Jolie’s standing has attempted to bring attention back to this now-neglected corner of Europe. But celebration of the mere fact of a

celebrity director choosing such a project (which was certainly the prevailing storyline in North American media markets on the film's release in December 2011) should in any case not preclude much greater consideration of these and other urgent queries.

As If I Am Not There

Any viewer of both *In The Land of Blood and Honey* and Irish director Juanita Wilson's *As If I Am Not There* cannot help but be struck immediately by the fact that the two films cover rather startlingly similar ground. Curiously, in discussing her film in the media, Jolie never seems to acknowledge this earlier film or to offer any insight into why she felt she needed to make her own film about the systematic rape of women in Bosnia just a year after the release of Wilson's work. Closely based on a 1999 novel by Croatian author, Slavenka Drakulić, *As If I Am Not There* begins with an idealistic schoolteacher's journey from her native Sarajevo to a remote mountain village in the spring of 1992.⁸ Just as Samira (called simply "S." in the novel) sets out on what was to have been a temporary assignment at the local school, she finds herself in the midst of the country's rapid descent into violence. Bosnian Serb forces take control of the village and carry out a brutal expulsion of its Bosniak inhabitants. As in Jolie's film, they first murder many of the village's men and then load women and children onto buses bound for a detention camp at a military installation. Once at the camp, a group of young women (and a girl) are likewise selected to become the sex slaves of the soldiers based at the site. Confined to a single room with an armed guard at the door, the women effectively become the property of the soldiers—taken out, raped and beaten at random for days and nights on end. During this ordeal, the commander of the camp chooses Samira for his exclusive, personal use. This new "role" offers Samira a degree of protection from the routine indignities and violence heaped upon the other women confined to the room, but leaves her deeply conflicted about playing the role of mistress to her captor. When the detention camp is closed down and its surviving prisoners (including the women held as sex slaves) are released in an exchange, Samira eventually makes her way to Sweden as a refugee. There, Samira learns that she has become pregnant while in the detention camp. On being told by a doctor that it is too late for her pregnancy to be terminated, Samira initially resolves to give the child up for adoption once it has been born. But the powerful encounter she has with the child in the days after its birth—and her recognition of something of her lost sister's face in the face of the infant—results in Samira choosing a new life with her son.

Wilson's film is a much more credible and compelling piece of work, and superior to Jolie's film on just about every level. Hers is a surprisingly quiet film—generally more intent on an almost dispassionate witnessing and recording of the violent dissolution of a community and the terror and torment of a group of captive women than stoking up the drama and piling

on images of atrocity. Much of that tone of stunned detachment, so central to Drakulić's novel, is communicated through the performance of Macedonian actress, Nataša Petrović, whose haunted eyes effectively become the central actor in this story. In showing us Samira's fixation on a fly crawling lazily across a wall in the squalid room where she is being raped in succession by three of her captors, Wilson underlines the character's reliance on a kind of willed self-removal as a strategy for survival in the unimaginable hell in which she finds herself.

However, that immensely painful-to-watch scene does once again raise nagging questions about precisely how much atrocity we need to have concretely re-created for us in a film in order to grasp the horrific reality of a crime being perpetrated? In such an assured, well-crafted film as *As If I Am Not There*, one at least feels confident that Juanita Wilson has herself given serious thought to the representations of violence here, and the degree to which it may be necessary to include such graphic scenes in order to communicate the truth about these crimes. But it still feels important to ask whether we really need to see Samira serially raped in real time by all *three* men in the room to understand fully what is taking place in the camp. Regardless of what appears to be the authenticity of this kind of graphic scene, we ultimately always know that what we are watching is an *enactment* of the violence. There is then an attendant danger that critics and spectators and those who bestow awards on films will end up focussing more on the skill and "bravery" of the actors and directors in "putting themselves through" the enactment than on the real-life violence (and on those directly affected by it) upon which the scene is based. The actor's skill in simulating such intense suffering often becomes our chief conversation point as we exit the cinema. One certainly heard something of that shift happening in one interview with Angelina Jolie and a cast member in advance of the US release of *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. Speaking of the impact on her cast of recreating scenes of violence and degradation, Jolie recalled how "every actor at one time or another had to just separate themselves and cry because it was reminding them of something or it was just too much...Even the men who had to be the aggressors—they just didn't want to do it. They just couldn't do what they had to do" (Smiley, 2011). Speaking with Jolie and her team of actors on his daytime talk show, Anderson Cooper expressed similar interest in how making a film about wartime rape had affected the cast—given, as he said, that "it's obviously such a heavy subject" (Cooper, 2011). "What was it like," Cooper asked, "day in and day out to be that person, to be in that role" (Cooper, 2011)? Viewers of *As If I Am Not There* (and *In the Land of Blood and Honey*) certainly ought to reflect on these issues of representation at length, considering afresh those crucial questions asking how we *know* about human rights abuses and how we respond (or not) to that knowledge.⁹

Not surprisingly, Wilson's largely faithful adaptation of the source novel follows author Slavenka Drakulić's resolution of Samira's dilemma about keeping her newborn son. But is that hard choice to raise the child born of rape presented here in a way that "does justice" to what such a decision

might actually mean in the life of a victim? In her critique of the novel, Magdalena Zolkos takes issue with what she sees as Drakulić's perhaps too easy option for a kind of closure here—turning Samira's choice into a "story of redemption" and a decision clearly meant to signify "hope for a new individual, and consequently, for a collective future achieved through confrontation and reconciliation with the past" (Zolkos, 2008, p. 224). For Zolkos, the novel's ending is especially problematic in so far as it "offers no space or inclusion to those individual stories and experiences that do not conform with or distrust its redemptive promise" (pp. 224-225), the effect of which is "...to close up or delegitimize alternative stories—individual stories of rejection, resentment, lack of forgiveness and lack of reconciliation" (p. 224). Given the vivid sense of Samira's agony over this choice that is clearly there in both the novel and the film, Zolkos may be pushing her charge of the exclusion of tougher, "alternative stories" a little too far here. But the risks of an artist reaching too quickly for a story of uplift (customarily held up as a testament to the "resilience of the human spirit to overcome the bad things that can happen," as Wilson indeed does describe her film in one interview) with which to end what is otherwise an unblinking tale of enormous suffering are certainly grounds for vigilance.¹⁰

Storm

After watching the unsparing focus on crimes of sexual violence at the time of their commission in Jolie and Wilson's films, it is fascinating then to consider how Hans-Christian Schmid's film *Storm* seeks to examine and even to judge how effectively the ICTY has dealt with these atrocities (and with those individuals directly affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina) in the succeeding decades. As *Storm* opens, a no-nonsense, tough-talking ICTY prosecutor, Hannah Maynard, has just assumed responsibility for seeing to its conclusion what appears to be an open-and-shut case against a former Bosnian Serb general. General Goran Đurić has been charged with the "ethnic cleansing" of the Bosniak population of a town called Kazmaj at the start of the war. When the testimony of a star witness, Alen Hajdarević, is called into question and then proved to be less than wholly accurate, what had been the expected successful outcome ("a piece of cake," as another prosecutor describes it) of this key case suddenly appears to be in doubt. Frustrated at the Tribunal's dismissal of his continuing insistence that the general is indeed guilty as charged (despite the credibility of his own "eyewitness" account having been disproved) Alen commits suicide after an enraged Hannah upbraids him for having wrecked the case with his "idiotic testimony" just as a conviction was within reach. Desperately keen to rescue the case against Đurić from total collapse, a guilt-racked Hannah embarks on a personal quest to discover more about Alen and his determination to see the general convicted at any cost. ("I believe in this Court. It's the only thing I have left" Alen tells Hannah shortly before

taking his life). Hannah soon learns that Alen had been driven by a search for justice for his sister, Mira. It had been his wish to see Đurić convicted not only for the “ethnic cleansing” of his family’s hometown, but to bring to the world’s attention the crimes committed against Bosniak women (including Mira) at a hitherto unknown rape camp in a resort hotel complex called Vilina Kosa, where deported women from Kazmaj had been taken.

A grieving Mira is initially reluctant to cooperate with Hannah in her search for the truth about the camp and Đurić’s command of the facility. Having survived the camp and the war, Mira has built a new and happy life for herself in Germany, where she has married and now lives with her husband and son. Back in Sarajevo for Alen’s funeral, her first contact with Hannah leads to a terrifying reminder that those keen to protect Đurić’s secrets are more than willing to use violence to ensure Mira’s continuing silence. But Mira’s reservations about revisiting the horrors of the war and her imprisonment in the rape camp are soon pushed aside by Hannah’s relentless appeals for justice to be done in this case. Mira eventually agrees to testify against Đurić and to reveal his role in running the Vilina Kosa rape camp.

But back in The Hague, the Tribunal’s bureaucracy quickly moves into high gear with a sharp refusal to agree to the introduction of the Vilina Kosa crimes into a nearly completed case. Prolonging the trial, Hannah is told, would impede the Tribunal’s completion strategy. That insistence on “exchanging justice for convenience,” as Hannah’s outraged assistant describes the decision—plus a convoluted bit of maneuvering involving domestic politics in Republika Srpska and the European Union (EU) enlargement process—all combine to derail Hannah’s plan to deploy Mira as an irrefutable witness to the full scope of Đurić’s crimes. Initially defeated by the institutional forces ranged against her, Hannah is forced to tell Mira that a deal has been done that will restrict her testimony to the “ethnic cleansing” of Kazmaj alone. The truth about the Vilina Kosa rape camp, and Đurić’s command there, is to go unmentioned in the trial. Feeling betrayed by those she has trusted to relieve her of the terrible burden of the past, an embittered Mira asks Hannah: “What kind of court is this? What the hell is it actually for?” But once Mira is on the witness stand, Hannah’s determination to secure full justice returns. Going against all agreed procedure, she cues Mira to uncover the full story of General Đurić’s crimes and the atrocities at Vilina Kosa to a stunned courtroom. Hannah’s core conviction wins the day—that in Mira “we have a woman who needs to be heard. She has to tell her story”.

Schmid is a highly skilled director, and his film certainly moves at the pace of a cracking political thriller. Particularly notable here is his creation of a convincing atmosphere of menace, of imminent physical and moral danger in settings as disparate as a small town with much to hide in Republika Srpska and in charmless offices and hotel rooms in The Hague. There is undoubtedly much intelligence on display here, and some fine performances from actors like Kerry Fox, Stephen Dillane, and most especially, from the luminous Romanian actress, Anamaria Marinca, as Mira. *Storm* does have a few rough edges in its relationship to historical and political realities. For example, it

seems highly implausible that the existence of a rape camp on the scale of the fictional Vilina Kosa would have remained completely unknown to the outside world, and to the Tribunal's investigators, as late as 2007 or 2008 when the film would appear to be set. Likewise, an official representing Republika Srpska in EU accession talks describes his entity as "a sovereign state" during a tense meeting with an EU negotiator. This may well be wishful thinking on the part of this particular character, but it is a phrase unlikely to have been spoken aloud on such an occasion. Nevertheless, one feels a measure of sheer gratitude for a director (Schmid was also co-screenwriter here) committed to making an accessible, literate film about an institution like the ICTY and its complex inner workings.

But does *Storm* ultimately "do justice" to this particular strand of "justice," as it were—"justice" in terms of what a highly imperfect, sometimes stumbling, often inadequate, and yet arguably indispensable body like the ICTY has actually achieved in spite of all its many faults? For the portrait of the ICTY in *Storm* is not just a critical or even unflattering one, but one that more often than not presents "an international judicial system that is failing its fundamental mission, getting lost in politics and bureaucracy" (Film Movement, 2010), as one of the film's global distributors puts it. It is at times not difficult to imagine a non-specialist audience watching *Storm* and concluding that the ICTY was a hopelessly political and ethically compromised body—one that for the last twenty years had largely done its job indifferently if not very poorly indeed.

This is not to argue that Schmid ought to have painted a picture of the Tribunal as a kind of shining judicial knight in armour—slaying dragon-like warlords and culpable state officials efficiently and unflinchingly, and always compassionately rescuing victims and witnesses from their trauma and a fearful future. The literature chronicling and analyzing the Tribunal's many sins of commission and omission is an abundant one. As mentioned earlier in this essay, there is ample ground for detailed criticism of everything from the Tribunal's sentencing policy (Clark, 2009; Hodžić, 2012; Stover, 2005) to its lapses in care and courtesy regarding victims and witnesses (Dembour & Haslam, 2004; Henry, 2010; Hodžić, 2012; Mertus, 2004; Stover, 2005); from its sluggishness in recognising that it was not connecting very well with its prime constituencies on the ground in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Hodžić, 2007, 2012) to its uncertain contribution to longer term processes of reconciliation in the region (Clark, 2009, 2012).¹¹ But Schmid rather consistently applies a fairly broad brush to his canvas in *Storm*, and one wonders whether he could perhaps have subtly but pointedly done a bit more in the film to make plainer that the ICTY's record is not an altogether blemished one.

Of course, there is much evidence to support Richard Wilson's assertion (2005) that "the ICTY has left us with a qualitatively distinctive historical record of the origins and contours of mass atrocities" in the post-Yugoslav region (p. 940). It is especially worth noting again that with regard to the issues of central concern in each of the three films under discussion here,

“the ICTY (has) delivered several landmark decisions expanding the understanding of sexual violence under international law” (Mertus, 2008, p. 1318)—and that “each case bears the imprint of women acting in very public positions as judges, prosecutors, investigators, and witnesses and behind the scenes as advocates” (Mertus, 2008, p. 1318). By its own accounting, in the Tribunal’s history to date, “more than seventy individuals have been charged with crimes of sexual violence including sexual assault and rape. As of early 2011, almost thirty have been convicted” (ICTY: Crimes of Sexual Violence - Landmark Cases, 2012). *Storm’s* take on this history is generally less than nuanced, however—never more so than in the especially negative impression that it gives of the Tribunal’s treatment of victims and witnesses. When Hannah protests to her superior that it is unacceptable to tell Mira at the last minute that she will not in fact be permitted to speak about the rape camp in her testimony, that appeal to a victim-centred approach to justice is met with her colleague coldly replying that “she’s not the first witness to feel a bit hard done by by this Court and she won’t be the last. It’s not meant to be fucking therapy”. While the experience of victims and witnesses cooperating with the Tribunal is in part a tale of numerous oversights and insufficiencies, there is alongside those disappointments a parallel record of satisfactions and even, in some instances, real gratitude (Stover, 2005). In trials for crimes such as rape, as the ICTY’s web site explains, “a number of innovative procedures...were introduced to cater to the specifics needs of survivors of sexual violence. These procedures became part and parcel of modern international criminal justice, with the creation of special guidelines for the presentation of evidence, protective measures for vulnerable witnesses, and support and counselling from trained professionals’ (ICTY: Crimes of Sexual Violence - Innovative Procedures, 2012).

But Schmid seems eager to push aside what is at the very least a mixed report card on the Tribunal’s performance in favour of the dramatic punch of an emphasis on its occasional heartlessness and self-interest. There is in some sense a classic movie storyline at work here (think *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, think *Dead Poets Society*, or perhaps even *Top Gun*). Hannah, the fierce and often clumsy maverick, does battle with a sclerotic and unresponsive institution that wants to thwart her pursuit of the good at every turn. She becomes the archetypal moral crusader against a complacent, unfeeling system and its self-serving minions. As Schmid himself has written, Hannah is “a woman for whom the fulfillment of duties had been the highest priority for years, who all of a sudden finds herself an outsider because of her persistence; who is confronted with the fact that a system, which she had always believed in and passionately supported, turns against her” (Schmid, Film Movement, 2010). The spectator’s pleasure in seeing that narrative of steadfast opposition unfold, and then reach its inevitable conclusion, is in part what makes *Storm* such an engrossing couple of hours’ viewing. And Hannah’s bucking the system with her triumphant facilitation of Mira’s testimony in that climactic courtroom scene is indeed thrilling to watch. But it’s an odd experience watching a film set at the ICTY where the villainy of

the war criminal ultimately feels a little bit overshadowed by the alleged indecency of the court established to bring individuals like him to account. When the film ends with Mira (somewhat tentatively) thanking Hannah for what she has done to make this release from her hidden past possible, it seems clear—whatever Schmid’s intention—that in this particular story of “justice done” it is the moral heroism of the prosecutor and her ultimate vindication rather than the victim’s experience and agency that is actually the main event.

Concluding Reflections

In an interview about her adaptation of *As If I Am Not There*, Juanita Wilson has said that “the aim of the film...is to try and, naïve as it sounds, to make sure that (the mass rape of women during the Bosnian conflict) doesn’t happen again” (McMahon, 2011). Each of these three films under discussion here is unquestionably infused with that same robust spirit of advocacy. In very different and sometimes less than subtle ways, each film is appealing to its audience: “Look at this! How could this happen? Isn’t this unjust? We must not look away. We must honour victims by acknowledging their experience and by ensuring their stories are heard”. But can these films in some way be said to “offer an alternative module of justice in the former Yugoslavia structured around a sense of shared public narrative of events of the past” (Jeffrey & Jakala, 2012, p. 1)? That’s a very great weight of expectation to place on any cultural product, and there are many now well-established historical truths reflected upon in each of these three films that are more than likely to remain unacknowledged by significant portions of the region’s communities for some years to come. The evolution of any kind of “shared public narrative” about the tragic events of the 1990s is at the very least a multi-generational project, to be sure.¹²

Furthermore, if a critical appraisal of these three films tells us anything about the likelihood that a creative work can serve as a catalyst for dealing with the past and “doing justice” to the stories of war victims, it may be that (despite the best intentions of their creators) such offerings are just as likely to displace or re-direct our attention away from the actual crimes and the victims of those crimes as they are to bring satisfaction or a sense of vindication to those whose pain is being represented and whose stories are being told. As directors and screenwriters interpret and package victims’ experience and then hit the festival and art house circuits, the unmediated voices of those victims are apt to become muffled in the process. In films such as these under review here, incomprehensible tragedy and grief without end are sometimes turned to a more audience-friendly mix of promise and catharsis, while the producing artists themselves are almost ritually showered with awards and congratulated on their “humanitarian” efforts. Try as these artists might to steer the conversation elsewhere, the incalculable pain and loss of the victims often ends up as the occasion for someone else’s walk down the red carpet.¹³

In Jolie's film, above all, it was the sheer fact of a Hollywood star choosing to make a film about a "difficult" subject that became the centre of attention. In the end, it was Jolie who was duly praised for her "moral leadership" (Kristof, 2011), for being "brave" and "courageous" (Amanpour, 2011)—and feted by the Hollywood industry with its Stanley Kramer Award for having produced a film which "illuminates provocative social issues in an accessible and elevating fashion" (Pond, 2011). In Bosnia itself, the hugely popular Sarajevo-based daily newspaper, *Dnevni Avaz*, named Jolie as its "Person of the Year" and called the American actress and director "the Angel of Bosnia." The paper even ventured that the film should be considered "a historical document"—as significant a contribution to the country's recent history as the 1995 Dayton Agreement itself (Drakulić, 2012).¹⁴

So what does this very twenty-first century instance of adulation and celebrity humanitarianism tell us? I have written elsewhere of the contemporary trend in artistic and media circles of granting disproportionate attention and bestowing rapidly-multiplying accolades on "human rights messengers" rather than on "human rights defenders facing truly life-threatening risks in their work" (Phillips, 2010). In that discussion, I also noted that the standard script for the acceptance of such kudos by the celebrated artists in question also seems to include an obligatory reference to the way in which they have been "humbled" by their contact with victims and witnesses. Accompanying (and at the same time perhaps undercutting) that posture of humility, the garlanded "human rights messenger" then frequently seeks to establish the authority of his/her play or film with what I have called "human rights product endorsement"—the assurance that "the victims themselves have vouched for the veracity of your work" (Phillips, 2010). Conforming to this pattern, a number of Jolie's interviews publicizing her film contain just those elements of expressed humility and victim-certification. On the American television network PBS, for example, Jolie spoke of her intense anxiety before the Sarajevo screening of the film for war victims, and her subsequent relief at discovering that "they've embraced it" (Smiley, 2011). Jolie's lead actor, Zana Marjanović, likewise added that in Bosnia "people are very happy that this film is being made" (Smiley, 2011).

In the round of media appearances for the US premiere of *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, members of Jolie's cast were frequently called upon to effectively join the ranks of victims in proffering an endorsement of the film's authenticity. Almost always pointedly introduced by Jolie as individuals coming from communities on all sides of the Bosnian conflict who had lived through the war themselves (and therefore best qualified to pass judgement on the film), her actors were then often asked by interviewers to share their views on the script and on what it was like to work with Angelina—an inevitable cue for praise for their director and confirmation of her skill and dedication. "She was protecting and guiding us," one of her actors testifies when thus prompted in a television interview (Cooper, 2011). I am certainly in no position to doubt the sincerity of these actors' views regarding Jolie's commitment, kindness and support for them throughout the filmmaking

process. But that there might also be a distorting power dynamic at work affecting the agency of these local artists here was of course never mentioned. Listening to these conversations, one cannot help wondering: if you were a chronically under-employed Bosnian actor given a plum role and a rare, decent paycheck for appearing in a film directed by one of Hollywood's hottest properties, would you be inclined to say anything remotely critical about your experience of working on the film—or indeed, about the quality of the script itself? Certainly, given the script's numerous improbabilities and indelicacies, hearing one of Jolie's actors exclaim that when she first read the script she felt that it was "so true...(it) had to be written by a Bosnian" (Amanpour, 2011) is cause for some bewilderment.¹⁵

Responding to the 1956 Berlin premiere of the theatrical adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, British critic Kenneth Tynan famously argued that this event had been one of those occasions when the historical and moral significance of a particular cultural product was so great that the aesthetic criteria by which we would customarily judge a play, film or book needed to be set aside. Following the performance, Tynan wrote that he had "survived the most drastic emotional experience the theater has ever given me. It had little to do with art, as the play was not a great one, yet its effect, in Berlin, at that moment of history, transcended anything that art has learned yet to achieve...I tried to stay detached, but the general catharsis engulfed me... All of this, I am well aware, is not drama criticism. In the shadow of an event so desperate and traumatic, criticism would be an irrelevance. I can only record an emotion that I felt, would not have missed, and pray never to feel again" (Tynan, 2000, pp. 147-148).¹⁶ This phenomenon of the play, book or film which renders criticism "irrelevant" on the grounds that it deals with an incredibly grave subject or an urgent contemporary issue will be familiar to anyone who has tracked the reception of human rights-related work in the theatre, the cinema and in literature in recent decades. When presented with such works, audiences and critics too often slip obediently into a kind of default reverential mode—simply because the work on view seeks to represent or interpret historical events involving great human suffering or loss. At times, it is as if the mere fact of a novel, play or film being *about* atrocity or violation secures for the work an automatic exemption from any sort of real scrutiny of its artistic merits or shortcomings. The question of whether or not the work is actually any good is apt to become smothered in a heap of critical pieties about the overwhelming value of the kind of "general catharsis" and "drastic emotional experience" which Tynan claimed to have had while watching *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Much of the 2010 discussion around Jolie's proposed film centred on the question of whether or not anyone has the right to say who can or cannot make a film about any given subject—including one as sensitive as a film about mass rape in wartime. That's a debate likely to continue as more and more contemporary artists mine the dramatic potential of victim and witness testimony and choose to place those stories on stage and screen, with varying degrees of attentiveness to crucial ethical matters like obtaining the informed

consent of their sources. But regardless of whether the producing artist is an “insider” or an “outsider” to the context at hand, those conversations must also give ample room for fundamental questions about the *quality* of the final product. Few human rights practitioners would argue that Angelina Jolie had no right to make her film on the basis that she herself never experienced sexual violence in war or that she is not native to the region and therefore cannot truly know its history or culture. But practitioners certainly need to sharpen their critical tools and avoid rushing to capitalize on the media attention invariably given to such starry cultural enterprises. Human rights organizations should be much more wary of reflexively championing projects like *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (or perhaps even the somewhat more deserving *As If I Am Not There* or *Storm*) simply because they may at least for a fleeting moment raise a bit of awareness about a neglected issue or provide the occasion for lucrative benefit performances and high profile publicity events. Badly written films which sensationalize, simplify or sentimentalize the pain and loss of victims ultimately do little to honour that experience or to satisfactorily “tell the parts of their story which do not interest the law” (Dembour & Haslam, 2004, p. 156). Vulnerable individuals convinced that full justice has been denied them may for a time feel grateful for the solidarity of a global celebrity—the “angel” who swoops in and for a moment appears to illuminate their ongoing sufferings with the glow of his or her superstar wattage. But isolated and often forgotten victims and witnesses of atrocity left disappointed by the results of limited judicial processes deserve much more than the dubious consolation of imagining they have seen themselves in somebody else’s mediocre movie.

Whatever their more modest faults, both *As If I Am Not There* and *Storm* will most likely retain a degree of enduring value as films which at the very least prompt serious reflection on what constitutes justice after extreme violence and the place of the victim’s experience in both legal and extra-legal processes of accountability and memory. But not even the most gripping or insightful moments in those two well-made features illuminate the victim experience more starkly or pose more profound questions about post-conflict justice than one unforgettable sequence in American filmmaker Pamela Hogan’s 2011 documentary, *I Came To Testify*. The film chronicles the experience of 16 Bosnian women who agreed to appear as witnesses for the prosecution at the historic 2000 ICTY trial dealing with the enslavement and systematic rape of women and girls in the town of Foča in 1992. At the close of *Kunarac et al*, three Bosnian Serb army officers were found guilty of rape as a crime against humanity. Throughout the documentary, these women—their faces obscured and their names withheld—recall their difficult but determined journeys to see justice done in The Hague and speak of their subsequent, still-haunted lives in Bosnia in the decade since three of their captors and tormentors were convicted.

But it is the further efforts of a group of these women to secure a very specific form of extra-legal acknowledgment at the site of their suffering which underscores how the justice inscribed in the court’s findings in

Kunarac et al cannot by itself bring full redress for the horrific wrongs done to those who survived the rape camps of Foča. In September 2004, a group of these survivors travelled to Foča to place a plaque commemorating their painful history at the town's Partizan Sports Hall—a building which had been used as one of the rape camps in 1992. Footage incorporated into Hogan's film shows how upon arrival in Foča that day the women were met with a line of local policeman at the site—their linked arms forming a barrier between them and an angry mob bent on preventing the installation of the memorial at Partizan. The mob hurls insults at the survivors, with one local woman reportedly saying of them: "They must have had such a great time. They had to come back for more" (Hogan, 2011). That terrifying moment suggests that rather than imagining that a film can by itself offer some alternative form of justice for victims through the recreation of their experience, the real potential of film as a contribution to the transitional justice toolkit perhaps lies in its capacity to shred the comforting, formulaic prescriptions about dialogue, dealing with the past, and reconciliation that are too often voiced in peacebuilding enterprises—those wishful strategies for social reconstruction that show little understanding of just how long and hard the road to post-conflict justice can be in a place like Foča.

Notes

- ¹ As Jeffrey & Jakala (2012) have noted in their work, the efforts of NGOs in several post-Yugoslav states to create a Regional Commission for Establishing Facts about War Crimes and Other Gross Violations of Human Rights Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia (RECOM) an example of just such an extra-judicial enterprise—one that has generated much debate in the region. One of the virtues of this particular initiative, they suggest, is that it "pluralizes the targets of transitional justice by orienting attention on victims and seeking to cultivate a longer-lasting public dialogue" (p. 2). One of the activities of RECOM mentioned in Jeffrey and Jakala's article is "a small-group regional consultation with artists in December 2006" (p. 2).
- ² "Bosniak" refers to an inhabitant of Bosnia-Herzegovina who identifies as a Bosnian Muslim with regard to nationality, "ethnicity" and/or religion.
- ³ In his conversation with Jolie following the Sarajevo public premiere of the film in February 2012, *Guardian* journalist Julian Borger commented that while the audience had indeed given the film a standing ovation at the end, during this particular scene "everyone around me was very uneasy". He suggested that the way Jolie had depicted Danijel and Ajla's intimacy here clearly "made people feel very uncomfortable" (Borger, 2012). The conversation is available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/15/angelina-jolie-threats-land-of-blood-and-honey>.
- ⁴ In her accounts of the film's evolution, Jolie stresses the contribution of her company of local actors throughout the process: "We all spoke about every speech, every scene, and made sure that it was right and true... We all adjusted the script together" (*Sixty Minutes*, 2011). "We had the good fortune that all the actors are from the area and lived through the war, so they could call us on it if it wasn't right" (Eastwood, 2011). In the film itself, however, Jolie is given sole screenwriting credit.
- ⁵ Interestingly, in an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty following the 2011 Sarajevo screening for representatives of war victims' associations, one Omarska survivor and the leader of the Association of Camp Prisoners of Bosnia-Herzegovina reportedly expressed regret for his earlier opposition to the making of *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. Murat Tahirović is quoted as saying that "it is a very good movie,

extraordinarily well done. It deals with the very substance of the war in Bosnia. All the main points are there—camps, torture, crimes, and—worst of all—crimes against the honor of women” (Arnautović, 2011). But do we assume Tahirović speaks for all Omarska survivors here? What place do we give to the victim as film critic in our assessment of a cultural product dealing with atrocity?

- ⁶ In an interview with Reuters at the 2012 Sarajevo Film Festival, Jolie said: “I think it’s important for film-makers to know what they are trying to say when they make a film. If you’re gonna do something about another country, make sure to surround yourself with extraordinary people from that country and really know that country and let that country speak through you. Don’t try to give the country your own voice” (Zuvela, 2012).
- ⁷ Likewise, in her interview with Jolie on “ABC Nightline,” journalist Christiane Amanpour appeared just as interested in Jolie’s private life as in her work on the film, posing such questions as “Do you plan to get married to Mr. Brad Pitt?...Do you guys have date night?...What’s the key to keeping it all together?” The celebrity lifestyle agenda again sat rather uncomfortably alongside the discussion of rape in wartime Bosnia (Amanpour, 2011).
- ⁸ See Drakulić, S. (1999) *As If I Am Not There: A Novel of the Balkans*. London, UK: Abacus.
- ⁹ See the classic study of these questions, Cohen, S. (2001). *States of denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Cambridge and Oxford, UK: Polity.
- ¹⁰ With regard to the risks of uplift and the temptation to comfort an audience in the telling of this harsh story, in another interview Wilson says that “what I loved most about the book was that it starts and ends with the birth of a baby and for me that just gives hope which I think is really important so you’re not just asking people to sit through very difficult and grim circumstances but you are at the end offering them hope that the human spirit is strong enough and has enough love to survive without turning it into hate and giving up” (McMahon, 2011).
- ¹¹ Refik Hodžić, whose publications are cited here, also co-wrote and co-directed (with Aldin Arnautović) a brilliant documentary on these same concerns in 2004, *Justice Unseen (Slijepa Pravda)*, produced by XY Films (Sarajevo). For further information about the film, see <http://www.xyfilms.net/content/view/19/31/lang,english/>
- ¹² Underscoring the scope of that culture of denial, in her 2011 *Balkan Insight* article on *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, journalist Valerie Hopkins noted that “Branislav Dukić, president of the Republika Srpska (RS) Association of Detainees, told reporters that he is ‘exasperated by the fact that the Serbs are once again assigned the role of main villain’, and pledged that he and other members of his organisation would lobby the RS government to ban the film. Dukić has not seen the film, but said ‘the response from Bosnian (war victims’) associations and their enthusiasm testify that the main message of this film is to re-charge the Serbs as the sole culprits for the war’” (Hopkins, 2011a). At the time of *In the Land of Blood and Honey*’s February 2012 Sarajevo public premiere, *Guardian* journalist Julian Borger reported that Jolie and some of her Serbian actors in the film had been threatened online—with one actor also having a car window smashed and another having his mobile phone hacked (Borger, 2012). In its October 2012 report on the lack of reparations in Republika Srpska (RS) for those who experienced wartime rape, Amnesty International states that “in the RS, the true extent of sexual violence during the conflict has never been acknowledged by the authorities or society more broadly. Survivors of wartime sexual violence are not recognized in law and their needs are not being met in practice” (Amnesty International, 2012). However, Bosnian Serb ex-detainee and leader of the Association of Prisoners from Visegrad, Dragisa Andrić, attended the special December 2011 screening of *In the Land of Blood and Honey* for war victims and was quoted as saying that “people, especially young people and those who did not live through the war, must watch this film to see what war brings, that is, nothing good. They must realize war is an evil, so that it never happens again” (Hopkins, 2011a).
- ¹³ In addition to the awards given to Jolie and to *In the Land of Blood and Honey* discussed in the succeeding paragraph, *Storm* received the Amnesty International Film Prize and the Guild of German Art House Cinemas Prize at the 2009 Berlin Film

Festival, the award for Best Narrative Feature at the 2009 Flyway Film Festival, and was nominated for the 2009 “Prix Lux”—the European Parliament Film Prize. At the 2011 Irish Film and Television Academy Awards, *As If I Am Not There* received awards for Best Film, Best Director, and Best Screenplay.

- ¹⁴ Jolie was also made an Honorary Citizen of Sarajevo at the 2012 Sarajevo Film Festival (Zuvela, 2012). What was described as the first public appearance of her \$500,000 engagement ring also made headlines on this occasion (Huffington Post, 2012).
- ¹⁵ On the Anderson Cooper talk show, actress Zana Marjanović likewise stated that the script was “so Bosnian, so true, so authentic”—and that it was “quite unbelievable that you (Jolie) would know so much about Bosnians and what we went through” (Cooper, 2011). In a variation on the victim-certification process, even some of those interviewing Jolie were eager to display their “I was there—so I know how it was” credentials for the audience. Both Anderson Cooper on his daytime talk show and ABC’s Christiane Amanpour included clips of their own coverage as reporters during the siege of Sarajevo in their programs about Jolie and *In the Land of Blood and Honey*.
- ¹⁶ I am grateful to Professor Andrea Most of the University of Toronto for bringing the Kenneth Tynan review and its implications for the reception of cultural products like the theatrical adaptation of Anne Frank’s diary to my attention.

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