Esma's and Sara's Resilience in Grbavica*:* The Land of My Dreams

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse resilience in Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*, a film inspired by the Bosnian war, and which has succeeded to show through the daily lives of its characters, the effects of rape during wartime. The film depicts the resilience that countless of rape survivors and families show as they are left to fend for themselves. In particular, the film brings to the forefront the issues of trauma suffered by victims of rape and that of the discrimination faced by children born as a result. Although said to not be political, the film is a subtle appeal for change on behalf of these women and children.*

Introduction

In this paper, I analyse the film *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams* by Director Jasmila Žbanić from the perspective of transgenerational trauma. The film offers multiple levels of trauma representation. Both Esma and her daughter are victims of the Bosnian war, and I argue that they have succeeded to work through their trauma. Ordinary events in their daily lives reveal that they are therefore models in resilience. To analyse Esma's and Sara's attitudes and their respective responses to their surrounding and to trauma, I use trauma concepts such as Sabine Lee's theory on Children Born of War (CBOW), Dominick La Capra's definitions of 'acting out' and 'working through' to analyze the characters in the film. In addition, I apply E. Ann Kaplan's theories on vicarious trauma to demonstrate the secondary trauma—the indirect exposure to trauma through a firsthand account or narrative of a traumatic event—experienced by viewers. I also analyse specific segments in the film as well as the characters' attitudes and behaviours to demonstrate the above. *Grbavica* is a film that has given a voice to countless women who have survived war rape in Bosnia and in other conflict zones. *Grbavica* raises awareness about the mental, social and economic problems that rape survivors and their families continue to face—issues that are often not easily talked about but that need to be addressed in order to help personal and collective healing.

Filmmaker's Background and Plot Context

Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams is a 2006 film by director Jasmila Žbanić. It is influenced by the legacy of the war in her home country, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Žbanić was born in 1974 in Sarajevo, the city in which the film takes

place. She went to local schools in Sarajevo, before attending the Academy of Performing Arts. Žbanić was seventeen years old when the war broke out in Bosnia. In interviews, Žbanić revealed that she lived a hundred meters from the front line. Her interest in the lives of women who survived rape began when she learnt in 1992 about mass rapes in her home country. From that point on, she read and followed everything that was related to the topic. She worked for a while in the United States filling various roles. In 1997, she founded the artist's association "Deblokada" (translated as “breaking the siege”) and started making documentaries and short films. Her determination to write *Grbavica* came during her pregnancy and days of new motherhood as she wondered about the emotional impact that giving birth to a child conceived in rape might have on a mother. She claims she wrote *Grbavica* between breast feeds.

Grbavica explores the life experiences of women who survived rape and that of their children born as a result. In particular, the film addresses how the war affects their private and public relations, and how the local and global communities will cope with atrocities and the post-war scenario (De Pascalis 365). *Grbavica* is known internationally as *Esma’s Secret*, and has won numerous awards under this title, including the Golden Bear for Best Film at the 2006 Berlin International Film Festival and a Special Ecumenical Jury Award for being the Best Peace Film. The film is spoken in Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles, and was the first feature-length film by director Jasmila Zbanić, who had already made a name for herself with her documentaries *Autobiography, Later, Later*, and *It’s Night and We Burn It*. In 2013, Žbanić received the inaugural Femme du Cinema award at the Les Arcs

European Film Festival for *Grbavica* and *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* which also focuses on the haunting legacy of wartime rape.

Summary: *Grbavica*

The story takes place in Grbavica,[17] a neighbourhood of Sarajevo.[18] Grbavica is known by war crime researchers as the site of one of the Serb 'rape camps', although its existence has often been denied by the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina or concealed in public discourse about the Bosnian War (De Pascalis 369). Aida Vidan notes that the word 'Grbavica' means a woman with a hunchback, or, in this case, a woman who is marked (130). The film's main character Esma (Mirjana Karanović) has been hiding from her teenage daughter Sara (Luna Mijović) a horrible truth about her father's absence. Things erupt when the school organizes an excursion for which Sara needs a certificate attesting that her father died during the war, in order to attend and receive a discounted fee. Esma is unable to produce the certificate. She keeps finding excuses to delay and Sara grows suspicious. Out of desperation, Sara will force her mother to tell her the truth by pointing a borrowed gun at

[17] Grbavica is a district in Sarajevo, which during the two-year long siege by the JNA and Serb paramilitary forces in the 1990s was transformed into a de-facto prison camp for Grbavica's residents. The film alludes to some of the atrocities that took place there, including that 12 years after the war mass graves are still being exhumed in the district's vicinity (Todorova 12).

[18] Sarajevo became the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. It used to also be the capital of Bosnia under the former Yugoslavia; but now it is the capital city of the independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

her. The truth that Sara is a "Chetnik[19] bastard" and that Esma was raped is painful for both of them but offers a departure from the haunting past. Esma decides to take advantage of the group therapy sessions and begins to share her account to work through her trauma. At the end of the film, Sara makes peace with her new identity and joins the other students on the trip. Her gradual recovery is shown by her joining the chorus of singing on the bus.

Analysis: The Neglect of Women in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina

Grbavica has been praised for its simplicity and for some of the decisions made by its director. Firstly, unlike most films dealing with wartime crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and produced during the post-war period, *Grbavica* spares the viewers from scenes of atrocities which, as described by Pavičić, can over-saturate the viewer with bloodbaths, pillage and ruthlessness. Secondly, the director does not adopt an accusatory perspective towards perpetrators. The script does not call for revenge or cry for justice. The director restricts the focus to observing the victims and showing their resilience (Pavičić 49).

Survivors are by no means idealized. As portrayed by Serbian actress Mirjana Karanović, Esma is an unremarkable and tacit woman who could have otherwise been easily disliked by the viewer, if we had not sympathized with her painful past. Sara is a typical adolescent, a stubborn and often ungrateful brat who projects her anger and generational

[19] "While historically 'Chetniks' were Serb Royalist forces during WWII and since the war in the1990's the concept has been associated with the Serb nationalists, 'Chetnik' remains an ideological and political category of identification and differentiation rather than an ethnic one" (Todorova 13).

conflict onto a tired, overworked mother. Neither of them is arbitrarily ill-intentioned or benign. Despite such a terrible secret between them, both are relatable, vivid characters, the kind of people we might find in any working-class neighbourhood of the West or the East. (Pavičić 48-49)

The neglect of women survivors of mass rape in Post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina plays a central role in *Grbavica*, but also represents the actual context in which the film was created. Due to the mass rape and widespread acts of sexual violence perpetrated against women, official estimates place the number of raped women between 20,000[20] and 50,000[21], some observers have labelled the war in Bosnia "a war against women" (Todorova 4), although there were tens of thousands of men killed and some were raped, too.

Pierre Bayard points out, "it is important to distinguish what happened in Bosnia from what happened in other war-torn countries, where the rape of women is frequent among victorious armies. In Bosnia the rapes not only accompanied the advance of the Serbian armies, they were also the result of a concerted policy of cultural eradication and, as such, were often committed systematically, in camps created specifically for this purpose, …" (117). With this in mind, we can safely conclude that the act of rape during the Bosnian war was a strategy by the Serb army to decimate Bosniaks[22] and create a new generation by making Bosniak women and girls pregnant with their babies.

[20] In December 1992, a European Union fact finding mission determined that the Bosnian Serb Army had raped 20,000 women (Strupinskiene 59).

[21] The Bosnian Government estimated the number of raped women close to 50,000 (Strupinskiene 59).

[22] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosniaks

Elissa Helms points out in *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* that there were many forms of gender-based violence, including against men and women of other ethnic groups, and that not all rapes can be considered as ethnic violence. According to Simic, the experiences of the women who were raped have been deliberately silenced in the national and local context in Bosnia-Herzegovina, "only invoked in the abstract as a symbol of the Bosniak nation's collective hurt and suffering" (83). As such, it is not surprising to see that rape victims continue to suffer, given the deliberate efforts by officials to conceal the occurrence of mass rape and to repress the memories of these women. The communal response in the immediate aftermath of the war was characterised by "a conflicting paradox between international legal institutions such as the ICTY[23] which have sought to prosecute perpetrators, and a societal response characterised by silence, the marginalisation of victims, and the pronounced desire to 'forget' about certain aspects of wartime victimisation" (Todorova 13). The silence and desire to forget is well illustrated in *Grbavica* with all the secrecy and lies surrounding Sara's origins. She ultimately resorts to threatening Esma with a borrowed gun in order to find out the truth.

Despite efforts to bring perpetrators to court, the Bosnia-Herzegovina transitional justice process, as described by Simic, has been "slow and arduous, and constantly hampered by the ethnonationalist centrifugal powers with little agreement on the past, present or future" (81). It is not uncommon to see the perpetrators of rape or members of their families to fight by discrediting their accusers or challenging the veracity of the accounts in order

[23] International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

to clear their names and avoid prosecution. In most Bosnia-Herzegovinian cases, as Bayard explains, the perpetrators of rape have not been punished and the victims are denied the symbolic support of the law in their efforts to heal internally (117). Additionally, in Bosnian society, wartime rape is still perceived as a private matter, even though it is formally recognised as a public problem and a human rights issue. The survivors of rape are still not sufficiently physically protected to prevent threats of retaliation, and their rights not fully respected by the institutions such as the police or even the justice system (Simic 82). Subsequently, the silence around the issue gave rise to legacy questions that relate to children born of mass rape:

> Are these children Bosniak, like their mothers, or Serbian, like their fathers? Are they "the enemy within", as the men who conceived them intended them to be, or are these children Bosnian? And if so, what does it mean to be a Bosnian in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina? What cultural legacy should Bosnian children inherit in order to ensure that the violent past does not revisit the future? (Todorova 4)

While *Grbavica* has been acclaimed for succeeding to challenge the status quo, much remains to be done in terms of reparation for raped women and their children. The release of *Grbavica* led, that very same year, to the passing of a law by the Bosnian authorities to award survivors of wartime rape the status of civilian victims, allowing them to receive a small pension (Bayard 118). As Simic notes, *Grbavica* "offers women a reparative sense of recognition as victims as well as the possibility of being active participants in political and social transformation" (81). Simic expands

even further by saying that "the arts and popular culture have developed into alternative realms for raising the concerns that formal institutions have failed to raise" (84). In other words, *Grbavica* has exposed publicly an issue that the Bosnian government, including the police and the judicial system, has not had the courage to address.

Sara: A Child Born of War

In addition to depicting how Esma is coping with her trauma and how the war has affected her private and public life, *Grbavica* also tells of the love between a mother and her daughter. A mother-daughter relationship made complex by the fact that Sara will always be a reminder of painful and unwanted circumstances of her conception. Sabine Lee's study on the impact of trauma suffered by CBOW[24] during and after the Second World War, reveals that the majority of those who participated in her research had strained relations with their mothers and described the family atmosphere as lacking warmth or affection and at times even bordering on abusive (87). In *Grbavica* however, the mother-daughter relationship is completely different. Esma and her daughter seemingly have a normal mother-child loving relationship, and Esma attends to her daughter's emotional and physical needs. For example, she is seen in the film going to the fishery to buy the kind of fish Sara likes. Sara on the other hand, behaves like any normal 12-year old child. She loves her mother, but at times resists her orders. Sara and Esma are seen together at the dinner table talking about what happened at school, and they walk about together in the mall. This shows that they share an emotional bond, which is further

[24] CBOW stands for 'children born of war' in Sabine Lee's book *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century*.

solidified when Sara expresses her fear of being abandoned should her mother marry one day, and makes Esma promise never to leave.

Like most CBOW who participated in Lee's research, Sara is haunted by the silence surrounding the truth about her biological father, and feels the need to find out more about him. Lee describes this as "the one characteristic" that unites almost all CBOW, irrespective of the quality of their relationship with their mothers, families and local communities (87). It is, as Lee describes it further, an "irrepressible need and a purely subjective and intimate expectation" (87). Esma concealed the truth about Sara's origin for twelve years, avoiding questions and telling lies about Sarah's father. She let Sara believe that her father was a 'Shaheed'[25], a war hero whose throat was cut by Chetniks (Serbian nationalists) when he refused to run away from the camp. Esma's secret clearly implies, as Todorova explains, silence and even shame in relation to the past (12). Todorova continues by saying that "secrecy implies that forgetting or even conjuring up a fictional past is preferable to speaking out or about social suffering" (12). These words ring true in most families in the world. The shame felt by victims of rape and their families is such that talking about rape or revealing that a child is born of rape is considered taboo.

The film reaches its climax when Sara's irrepressible need to prove that her father is a war hero grows and becomes an obsession. The fact that her boyfriend Samir, an orphan like her, can provide the proof that his father was killed during the war, and even carries his deceased father's gun, further complicates things for Sara. This development in the film's plot is consistent with what Lee says:

[25] Bosniak Muslim loyalists who fought to the death and are considered martyrs or war heroes.

> Unlike other groups who lost their fathers during the war, who were able to keep their fathers' memories alive with objects, photos or in conversations, the fathers of CBOW were entirely non-existent. More often than not, they did not even exist as a name. If anything, they only had meaning as a cause for the children's experiences of loneliness, rejection and discrimination, or as a reason for the supposed immoral behaviour of their mothers and the resulting stigmatisation of the post-conflict communities (87).

Also evident in Sara's attitude is what Lee calls, "the outright positive feeling" towards the absent father, where CBOW idealize the father about whom they know so little (87). Sara was thought to believe that her father was a war hero. She believed her father died in the line of duty to protect her community. Her immediate reaction once she learned that her father was not a war hero but the enemy, was denial—a normal coping mechanism to deal with painful issues. However, in the last scene, Sara becomes a symbol of courage and resilience. She decides to go to the excursion, knowing fairly well that the school likely knew her family secret and that she could be mocked by the three girls who used to quarrel with her.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to predict whether Sara would have given her mother the same consideration many CBOW showed their mothers later in life. Lee notes that adult CBOW became sensitive to the challenges faced by their mothers. "Awareness grew that mothers often had been traumatised by their own wartime experiences and further harmed by post conflict discrimination and stigmatisation" (87). Lee goes on to explain that as a result, CBOW put their own needs of finding out about their roots second to the

perceived greater needs of their mothers to privacy (87). The scene at the end of the film when Sara raises timidly her hand to wave goodbye to her mother is a good indication of the future of their relationship.

Esma: Between Traumatic Acting out and Resilience

It is difficult to imagine how Esma succeeded to conceal her secret for twelve years, despite constant reminders about her traumatic past. She lies for twelve years in order to protect Sara, the daughter she initially did not want, and provide her a semblance of normalcy. At the end, after her long silence, she describes at the group therapy how she tried to get rid of the fetus when she found out that she was pregnant; then how she rejected her when she was born; and how she finally accepted Sara after holding her in her arms to breastfeed her for the first time.

> I wanted to kill her. I pounded my stomach with fists to make her fall out. I pounded hard. I pounded with all my strength, it was no use. My belly grew with her inside. Even then, they came. In twos, threes every day. In the hospital after I gave birth, I said: I don't want her! Take her away. I heard her crying. I heard her through the walls. The next day my milk started flowing. I said, ok, I will feed her, but only once. Only once. And when they brought her… When I took her in my arms, she was so tiny and she was so beautiful. And I had already forgotten there was anything beautiful in this world. (*Grbavica*)

There is no doubt for the viewers that Esma is haunted by her trauma which keeps her imprisoned in a painful and

shameful past. We see her trying to escape every time she has a traumatic flashback. For example, we see Esma playing with her daughter who comes to wake her up in the morning. They are playing on the carpet on the floor, but as soon as Sara goes on top of her mother trying to spin her, Esma violently stops the play. On the bus, a man with an open shirt exposing his hairy chest stands too close to her. She gets off the bus running. Sara's long fingernails disturb her. She obliges Sara to stop eating her favourite meal and cut them short immediately. In the bar, Esma is disturbed by how clients in uniform treat Jakolba, the dancer. She runs to take her medications. She is out with her new boyfriend in a café and says she can still smell the freshness of the past. These scenes are indications that Esma's body and mind still carry the wounds of her sexual abuse.

Pascalis reminds us that "what is at stake in the film is the evanescent difference between 'before'–dominated by horror, and violence against the helpless–and 'after'–pervaded by weak relationships, scarred by the legacies of war, where anything can trigger traumatic memories" (369). It is in fact evident that Esma is haunted by her trauma and that despite all years that have passed, she remains imprisoned by flashbacks of her difficult past. Pascalis says that "such a trajectory from one situation to the other is neither linear nor fixed, but always renegotiated by each character, from one sequence to the next. The film is based on a few visual and verbal dialectics, which are never stated as binary oppositions but still impose a new choice every time" (369). This quote is illustrated in *Grbavica* by all the instances mentioned earlier, where Esma felt the need to escape at once.

Bayard explains that the sudden reminders of the traumatic past as seen in Esma illustrate Freud's theory of

trauma. “The traumatic eruption is so violent that it can find no place in the psyche and thus cannot be worked through” (78). As such, we can conclude that Esma had no time to think or try to compose herself when traumatic eruptions occurred. Her survival instinct compelled her only to find a way out. Lovatt puts it differently by saying:

> Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor […] is not truly in touch with either the core of his [sic] traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both (180).

Furthermore, historian Dominick La Capra recognizes these traumatic eruptions as ‘acting out’ which he says is related to repetition and even the tendency to repeat something compulsively (142). La Capra explains that acting out is very clear in people who suffer from trauma. He notes:

> They have a tendency to relive the past, to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if one were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. Victims of trauma tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude on their present existence, for example, in flashbacks or in nightmares or in words that are compulsively repeated and that don’t seem to have their ordinary meaning, because they’re taking on

> different connotations from another situation, another place (142-43).

In the film, when traumatic eruptions do not interfere with her day or activities, Esma is reminded of her past ordeal by people making references to it. For example, Esma and Sara are in the mall and meet Esma's aunt. She does not acknowledge Sara, but rather reminds Esma of what her deceased mother would have wished to see her become. Esma ignores her aunt's comments and talks about Sara going on a school trip, but the aunt refuses to help her out. Sabina, Esma's best friend who occasionally babysits Sara when Esma works night shifts, asks Esma to get Sara checked by a 'professional' as Sara is not just any child.

However, in a surprising turn of events, Esma chooses consciously or unconsciously to take a step forward. She falls in love with Pelda, hence accepting to make herself vulnerable again, but also in a wish to heal the past. The real turning point occurs when she is forced to reveal her secret to her daughter. The violent incident helps her break a wall of silence around her, and she decides to take full advantage of the group therapy sessions by finally opening up and speaking about her wartime experience. Initially, she went there only on the days when subsidy grants were given, and she did not speak.

Resilience as defined by Renee Linklater is "the ability to withstand trauma and turmoil and be able to proceed with living and engaging in a productive life" (25). Linklater explains that "resilience is well known to be enhanced by strong relationships with competent and caring adults in family and community, strong cognitive abilities, good self-regulation skills, positive view of self and motivation to be effective" (25). In practical terms, as seen in both Esma's and Sara's situations, resilience requires a combination of

personal desire to move on with the support from family members and community in order to allow the healing to take place and have a productive life. But Linklater also reminds us that resiliency "only operates in response to the presence of risk conditions and the possession of appropriate personal and social assets is not sufficient in and of itself to guarantee a positive outcome" (25). Notwithstanding the violence of the past, the societal rejection and humiliation Esma has overcome, the risk condition that Linklater is referring to in this case, is that Esma might lose her daughter or the relationship with her daughter by telling her the truth after having lied to her all her life. One could thus summarise Esma's experience as manifestations of resilience. Slowly, we see her adapting to life-changing situations and trying to own her life back by taking steps to work through her trauma.

It goes without saying that Sara also displays incredible resilience. After she learns the truth about her origins, Sara shaves off her hair in a fit of anger to cleanse herself of any resemblance or any trait she may have inherited from her alleged 'evil' father. This is where La Capra talks about 'working through' which he describes as an instance where a person "tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future" (143). In every day life, this can be compared to the mental capacity to be able to stop for a moment when a disturbing event occurs, breathe, recognize what is happening, why it is happening and decide on the best possible solution. La Capra explains this further by saying, "for the victim, this means the ability to say to oneself: 'Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can't entirely disengage myself from it, but I'm existing here and now, and this is different

from back then'" (143). In other words, working through means coming to terms with one's trauma. La Capra recognizes that there may be other possibilities, but that "it's via the working through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent" (143). Both Esma and Sara made the personal decision to distance themselves from their painful pasts and move forward with their lives.

Viewers and Vicarious Trauma

It is a well-known fact that the release of *Grbavica* provoked some emotions, positive or negative, and caused a stir in the literary and film community, as well as in public opinion. The film was internationally recognized, which led to numerous nominations and awards for the film itself and its director, as mentioned above, the Golden Bear for Best Film at the 2006 Berlin International Film Festival and a Special Ecumenical Jury Award for being the Best Peace Film. As mentioned above, its release caused the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, although only in the Bosnian Federation, which is one half of the country, to pass a law awarding survivors of wartime rape, the status of civilian victims with a right to a small pension (Bayard 118). But the film also raised a controversy since it was considered by some as a tool of political propaganda. "The controversy that surrounded the making of the film grew after its completion into a paradox of appropriating and then distorting some of its tenets for the sake of a nationalist argument, and could thus be perceived as a further violation of victims and the director's intentions to restore their voice and dignity" (Vidan 130). The fact that *Grbavica* publicly uncovered hidden truths about the mass rape that took place during the Bosnian war, and the resulting circumstance of

children born of war, was not something that everybody accepted readily.

I am interested in demonstrating whether viewers who had very little knowledge or absolutely none about the war in Bosnia and the related atrocities including the widespread rape, may have experienced vicarious trauma when watching the film. Although vicarious or secondary trauma has not been talked about much in the humanities, Ann Kaplan relies on Pearlman & Saakvitne who define vicarious traumatization as the deleterious effects of trauma therapy on the therapist. It is a process of change in the therapist's inner experiences–the normal understandable by-product of personal engagement with clients' trauma memories and narrative descriptions. Pearlman and Saakvitne's questionnaire survey which asked 188 therapists about their exposure to clients' trauma material as well as their own psychological well-being indicated that trauma therapists are negatively affected by their work with patients (cite). They often reported intrusive thoughts, efforts to avoid thinking about their patients' traumas, somatic symptoms such as headaches, nausea, sleeplessness, intrusive imagery triggered by something innocent like a child sobbing; also increased feelings of personal vulnerability, difficulty trusting others, emotional numbing and flooding, sexual difficulties, irritability, alienation, changes in their beliefs about themselves and others, progressive loss of energy and idealism (cite page(s)). Pearlman and Saakvitne's summary of the signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma include: social withdrawal, increased sensitivity to violence, cynicism, generalized despair and hopelessness, and nightmares; also changes in identity, world view, or spirituality; intrusive imagery, dissociation, and depersonalization (qtd. in Kaplan 41).

While it is certainly difficult to argue the degree of sensitivity of each viewer, one known fact is that *Grbavica* did not include explicit and graphic images in its portrayal. Unlike most films dealing with wartime crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and produced during the post-war period, *Grbavica* spares its viewers scenes of atrocities, bloodbaths, pillage and ruthlessness. Outside the secret Esma carries, *Grbavica* is a story about regular people going about their daily business. However, the film indicates that they carry their traumatization.

It is therefore doubtful whether viewers may experience symptoms as severe as those described in Kaplan's suggested definition. There are however poignant scenes in the film, some extremely sad, that may have led the viewers to shift worldviews, and may have invoked in the viewer the need to advocate for change. For example, both scenes of the women's group therapy speak to the extent of the impact of the war, with different women reacting differently to their trauma. In the second scene of group therapy, the choice of song that is used in the film as well as Esma's testimony quoted above, are events that plunge the viewer into extreme sadness.

When Esma describes her past ordeal and her ambivalent feelings toward her daughter born of rape, it is a situation which incites in the viewers much empathy for Esma. Contrary to pregnant women who generally feel much love for and are able to develop a prenatal bond with their unborn child, because of the violence, Esma did not love her unborn baby. However, when Sara was born, despite Esma's wish to be separated, maternal instinct eventually caught up with her. Once she held Sara in her arms, she felt the need to care for her and protect her, and made the extremely difficult decision to keep and raise her.

Another disturbing scene in the film is when Esma is playing (wrestling) with her daughter on the floor. Sara climbs on top of her mother throwing Esma's arms over her head, which leads to Esma experiencing a flashback of the rapes. Esma, who suffocates and whose face shows visible signs of distress, stops the game violently without providing an explanation. This scene takes the viewer by surprise as no one expects this special mother-daughter bonding time to fizzle out. The viewer feels pity for Sara who is confused by her mother's sudden reaction and at the same time, also has sympathy for Esma who remains locked in her secret. Esma is obviously not yet ready to explain her acting out to her daughter who for the time being, is still kept in the dark regarding her conception.

The last scene with Esma's escorting her daughter to the school bus for the excursion, is another example that would certainly not leave any viewer immune to strong emotions and afterward reflections. Both Esma and Sara are walking but not talking to each other. When they get closer to the bus, after a moment of silence, Esma grabs her daughter and hugs her. Emotions run high when Sara waves timidly at her mother while on the bus. Esma shows tears of joy to mark a new beginning for both Sara and her.

Conclusion

My analysis of *Grbavica* shows how war affects women through gendered forms of violence. Be it in Bosnia, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Syria or during the Second World War, women and their children born of war, regardless of their origin and circumstances have suffered tremendously. However, the film also offers a glimmer of hope in showing how resilient rape survivors and their children born of sexual violence can be. The analysis of

Sara's attitudes and her mother's response to trauma demonstrate that when there is a will, love and acceptance, people can, at their own pace, overcome adversity to rebuild a new life.

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