

Nena Močnik

SEXUALITY DETAINED: THE NARRATIVES OF SEXUALITY UNDER DETENTION IN ANGELINA JOLIE'S "IN THE LAND OF BLOOD AND HONEY"

ABSTRACT

Existing scholarship has generally omitted the essential theoretical angle and interest in non-violent sex and women's sexual power and desires in times of war have largely been ignored and excluded from the dominant narrative. The following paper uses narrative analysis based on Angelina Jolie's "In the Land of Blood and Honey" as a source for debating these under-addressed positions and the rejection of her narrative among the general audiences and professional communities. By studying consensual sexuality under detention, the author wants to shatter the common consideration where sex in war equals rape and abuse and therefore aims to open an understanding of sexuality in war beyond those narratives.

KEYWORDS: *sexuality, narratives, docu-art, In the Land of Blood and Honey*

Seksualnost v priprtju: Naracije seksualnosti v priprtju skozi film Angeline Jolie "V zemlji krvi in medu"

IZVLEČEK

Obstoječa raziskovalna zanimanja in prispevki se izogibajo pomembnemu teoretskemu premisleku nenasilne seksualnosti v vojni, ženska seksualna moč in želje pa so v kontekstu dominantnega narativa običajno spregledane. Pričujoče besedilo na podlagi narativne analize filma Angeline Jolie V zemlji krvi in medu poskuša odpirati, reflektirati in razumeti tovrstne spregledane vidike ter splošno negacijo filma s strani publike in strokovne javnosti. S študijo konsenzualne seksualnosti želi avtorica prispevati k razbijanju vsesplošno sprejete tega narativa, kjer se seksualnost med vojno enači s posilstvom in zlorabo, ter predstaviti tudi druge potencialne izraznosti intimnih medosebnih odnosov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *seksualnost, naracije, docu-art, V zemlji krvi in medu*

1 Introduction

Substantial sociological and anthropological research on sexual violence and rapes during the war in Bosnia has focused on social constructions of gender roles with regards to ethnic/nationalistic politics (Stiglmeier 1994; Allen 1996; Jalušič 2004; Helms 2014). Very particular (if not limited) narratives of war rapes and rape survivors have been created that speak to us rather in a paraphrased Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of *imagined communities*; despite the plentiful evidence-based research, the leading narrative of a survivor is pretty much framed by what appears to be the morally appealing picture of the silenced, vulnerable, and devastated woman.¹ At the first glance, one could easily say that the established victimhood portrayal reached its narrative peak in Angelina Jolie's 2011 *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. One of the most prominent art productions on the topic, Angelina Jolie's visual depiction was acknowledged because of its 'celebrity' notion rather than sparking some deep and augmented discussions. Attacked from different sides, it opened a series of questions, particularly referring to the "historical truth" (see: Ben-Yehuda 1995) and particularly who is in charge of telling this 'truth'. The concise overview of the existing sources (see: Zimonjić-Perić 2010; Sherweel 2011; Helms 2014) shows widespread reluctance toward Jolie's work, generally criticizing her incapability of framing the 'real' horror of crimes and simplifying the contextual complexity of historical events. As a matter of fact, it has never been precisely addressed *what concrete images and portrayals* in this movie are so harmful and insulting that it needs to be discouraged from being screened or must even be banned². Instead of accepting the written agreements about 'good' and 'bad' narratives on violent pasts, this paper commits to a narrative analysis of Jolie's movie and hence, an individualized and a personalized visualization of those pasts. Therefore, I want to look beyond this superficial criticism but remain critical while considering some very provocative and previously non-discussed angles. Irrespective of the media hype surrounding the movie's production and background that has been addressed elsewhere (see: Helms 2014), the present paper aims to understand the artist's depiction of *sexuality and sexual relationship under detention in war context* better.

The existing scholarship (see for instance: Copelon 1995; Hayden 2000; Dedić 2008; Skjelsbaek 2012) has omitted this essential theoretical angle and interest. Non-violent sex and women's sexual power and desires in times of war have been largely ignored and excluded from dominant narratives (Engle 2008: 951), easily leading us to the common consideration where sex in war equals rape and abuse. Moreover, studying women and sexuality in terms of gender and gender roles (Copelon 1995; Cocburn 1998; Slaščak 2000; Helms 2013) mostly supports reducing women to victims instead of liberating them from such essentialisms. This paradigm of avoiding positive notions on sexuality under detention could be well reasoned by the set of moral imperatives concerning *victimhood and innocence* (see Helms 2013) and how rape as an academic subject has evolved over time (Dworkin 1989; MacKinnon 1994; Hesford 1999). The identity of rape survivors is

1. More about these images in Helms (2013). This motif repeats in: Žbanić, Jasmila (2006), *Grbavica*; Braddock, James (2012), *The Soul Shattering*; and Drakulić, Slavenka (2001), *As if I am not There*.
2. See: CBS/AP 2011; Borger 2012.

shaped by moral imperatives of purity (Heru 2001; Helms 2013), innocence (Marcus 1992; Helms 2013), and total destruction (Engle 2008). The victim's narrative, too, is built up on the *ethos of compassion* (Fassin 2005): it is only those who have gone through exceptionally difficult circumstances but are not responsible for the harm they have experienced deserve the sympathy of others (Leisenring 2006: 308). This is probably one of the most theoretically-based and -asserted paradigm that can explain why the concept of consensual sexuality is being ignored in the current research on war rapes and sexual crimes during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The idea of the following paper, therefore, is to use Angelina Jolie's movie as the source for debating these under-addressed positions and the general rejection of her narrative. It does not presuppose any finite conclusions or arguments made solely on the movie; rather the movie and its disputing background can serve as a sparking introduction into some thoughts on sexuality under detention and moral questions related to the topic. Along with academic contribution, *docu-art* [as it could be understood in Adorno's sense of *committed art* or art addressing oppression and speaking for the oppressed (Adorno 1965)] has always been in charge of different agency spectrums and have, most importantly, brought several topics from narrow academic spaces to broader audiences. These artistic narratives eventually have contributed to the awareness and public recognition of crimes but are not necessarily educative in terms of ideological deconstructions and critical understanding of the collective past. Along with the potentials of opening alternative perceptions and understandings of certain social phenomena, *docu-art* always risks the repetition of social myths, stereotypes, and dangerous ideas.

Prior to the narrative analysis, this paper also offers a short note on understanding the narrative and narrator's role in the *docu-art genre*. The movie has been subjected to serious judgments for a supposedly misleading interpretation of historical events and an over-simplistic explanation of the political complexity of the Bosnian conflict. This makes the clarification of the narratives' role in the arts and the power of narrator's voice highly important, if not obligatory. Even though Jolie has never distanced herself from the assumed attempt to create a 'true history' portrayal, I propose reading the movie as a fact-fiction and thus bearing in mind all limitations that using this media brings with it.

2 Notes on the narrative in *docu-art*

Jasmina Husanović (2009), a Bosnian feminist scholar, suggests that art, with a particular reference to Jasmina Žbanić – who was the first to portray rape in war related trauma in *Grbavica* (2006) – is the only path that allows Bosnian women to recover from their traumatic past. According to her, Žbanić's movie represents a "collective endeavor that renders art into a transformative model of communication and engages the subject in dialogue and reflection on the traumatic contents of Bosnian realities" (Husanović 2009: 106-9). She believes that women's art empowers female victims, giving them a voice and forming a visible community. "This community," stated Husanović (2009: 109), develops a "new symbolic framework for the negotiation between silence and speech that reduces marginalization at the hands of the metanarrative". In contrast to the mostly positive wel-

coming of Žbanić's interest in committed arts³, Angelina Jolie, also a *woman artist*, but with a Western and contextually radically different background, was mostly accompanied by objections and pompous responses all the way from academics' narratives "Rejecting Angelina" (Helms 2014), to gossiping media titles such as "Angelina banned from Bosnia" (Sunday Express 2010). The academic and public response that followed those two wartime rape related portrayals in both movies has proven that the narratives are not only about *how*, but also about *who*: "it is a matter of cultural power in the most mundane, materialistic sense: who controls the means of symbolic production?" (Alexander 2002: 202). Ongoing disputes on *who* is in position to tell the *truth* about rapes, and the ownership of testimonies, have been continuously present, since the movie was released. As Peter Beaumont (2010) reported after his interview with *Women Victims of War Association*, its leader Bakira Hašević claims how they considered making a movie on their own in order to tell the "real stories", because there is "no way anyone can turn the trauma of Bosniak women into a film." (Hašević in Beaumont, *ibid*).

All these aspects are crucial in the narrative analysis that presents the leading methodological tool in this study. Its approach is closer to social constructivism than positivism, as it observes different narratives beyond the 'true' or 'untrue' facts about the world (Riessman 1993; Polkinghorne 1995). According to the theories of narratives (Bal 1985; Kincheloe 1997; Crossley 2000; Nash 2004; Holley and Colyar 2009), people produce accounts of themselves that are 'storied' (i.e. that are in the form of stories/narratives). However, not only are the *stories* of people, so are the *interpretations of those stories* social products; by analyzing them, therefore, we strive to understand the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations but as well as the narrators and their backgrounds. As constructivism has implied, nothing represents a 'neutral' perspective, and even what appears to us as objective reality is merely what we construct on the basis of what we know and are accustomed to see (for more see: Leshan and Margenau 1982; Bohm and Peat 1987). What we analyze through narratives here is no longer 'what are the facts', rather how do the facts describe our social reality "in order to validate one way of explaining them over another" (Kincheloe 1997: 70). In this way, we can understand narratives as both, as a relationship and a process. They are not isolated author's ideas that have been brought to the passive audiences, but rather embodied through the relationship between the author, the text, and the audiences (Potter 1996). If not the author, it is the audience that brings particular cultural knowledge to their understanding of the production, and it is the audience who raises and internalizes the expectations (Boler 1997: 211).

For the purpose of this study, the narratives in 'In the Land of Blood and Honey' are analyzed in the frame of the *docu-art* or *fact-fiction*. By both terms, I want to refer to the artists that narrate their completely fictional and fully-personalized stories on the basis of particular fragments of historical/past events. The concept of *docu-art* embraces Hall's

3. Adorno wrote his 'Note on Commitment' as a response to Sartre's debate and artist's role in social engagement (see: Sartre 1948). He sees differences between art that is committed and art he considers to be autonomous. Overtly apolitical work, hence with no artists' commitment to address the audience, are by his argument aesthetically better (for more see: Adorno 1977).

definition of intentional representation, where "it is the speaker," claims Hall (1997: 25), "the author who *imposes* (emphasis added) his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean." Because of its reference to the 'real stories', *docu-art* is often subjected to the critics, in terms of reinforcing social myths and stereotypes. According to James Snead "although films are not necessarily myths (...) certain films have managed to remain repeatedly compelling and thus to assume a permanent, quasi-mythic status in a society's consciousness" (Snead 1991: 53). In fact, it is particularly vulnerable in drawing a line between the fiction and the free artistic expression, namely, the power of author's voice contributing in re- or deconstruction of existing social myths.

Having this in mind, we want to proceed with the narrative analysis of the movie by the following question: Can the *docu-art narrative* offered by Angelina Jolie open up a space for discussing different layers of sexuality under detention rather reinforcing the myth of women rape victims only? With this question I want to encourage the paradigmatic move from the focus on the historical fragments depicted in the movie toward alternative understanding of sexuality under war circumstances. This would help unpacking the hegemonic discourse that tends to maintain the narrative of "women's experience of war" (Sorensen 1998: ix), that includes testimonies on war rape, violence against women, mass mobilizations of women, and has been sufficiently covered by scholars from different disciplines in the past years (see: Brownmiller 1994; Andrić-Ružičić 2003; Engle 2005; Hromadžić 2007; Husanović 2009).

3 Sexualities detained: narrative analysis of sexuality under detention in 'In the land of blood and honey'

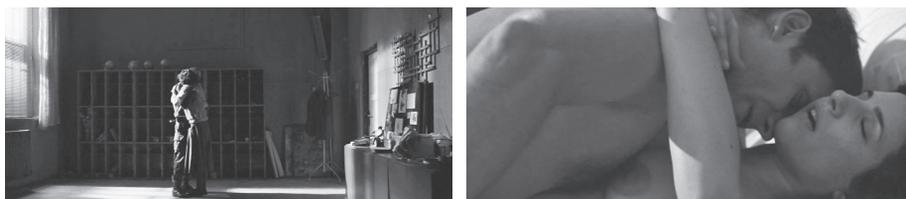
Aside from the misleading accusations of the plot (discussed in the media even before the movie was released!⁴), careful watching of the movie and the development of the romantic involvement between Ajla and Danijel suggests way more complex idea than relationship between (unknown) rapist and his victim.

The story begins with Ajla and Danijel, meeting on an incredibly romantic date (we are not informed whether this is a first date, or they have known each other for a long time). While they dance, Ajla's head resting on his chest, the bomb hits the dance floor, killing and injuring many; this sudden cut announces the beginning of the war. Four months later, Ajla is captured by the soldiers, loaded on a bus and together with other women transported into a detainee camp. Subjected to night-time visits from the soldiers, women are repeatedly abused, tortured and raped.

4. Before the release, Jolie obtained eight sentence synopses to Independent. Rape is not mentioned at all. It reads: "The young characters Lejla and Danijel are separated by the war, and meet again later, under changed circumstances. Danijel is a prison camp commander and Lejla an inmate. Danijel tries to find the best solution that would be acceptable for all. The question is if such a solution exists at all" (in Perić Zimonjić 2010).

Ajla, however, is saved from the brutalization in the camp by Danijel, who throughout the movie protects her as his property.⁵ From here onwards, we can understand Danijel and Ajla's relationship in terms of their mutual captivity and shock, still not being clear about their new roles and new context of their relationship. This uncertainty of their roles is once expressed by Ajla, asking Danijel: "Am I your prisoner" and his response: "You are a prisoner only if you don't want to be here." This is, despite their very complicated love, a very strange and odd answer, since it is more than obvious that Ajla is a detainee in a war camp and her presence there is not even close to be called as 'voluntary'. He protects her, but she still is a detainee, and he is a guard. After being humiliated in the camp canteen, Ajla hurries to Danijel's embrace, seeking his support, shield and empathy (Fig. 1). The scene is followed by a long sequence of tender and consensual love-making, clearly communicating that it is not about rape or a violent act by Danijel, but a romantic moment for both. The scene communicates a safe space after escaping the threat from other soldiers: so even if both characters engaged in obviously consensual sex, rather the reading could suggest the need for the protection, safety and trust than sexual desire and passion only.

Figure 1 & 2: *After humiliation in the camp canteen Ajla hurries to embrace Danijel (left); the scene is followed by a long sequence of tender, consensual love-making (Jolie 2011)*



At the end of the scene Danijel urges Ajla to escape through the window in the bathroom, warning her that the war situation is getting worse. We are informed that he in fact tries to protect and save her, but as he states, it is not all in his hands. Danijel eventually keeps the promise and exchanges the guard next to the bathroom window, but for unknown reasons, Ajla does not take advantage of this and stays in the camp. Later, he is assigned elsewhere, and once again encourages Ajla to escape as soon as possible, since without his protection things will get worse for her. She attempts to escape, but she is caught and brutally beaten up and then sent back to the camp.

Scene after scene, Danijel gets more aggressive and his personality is split – between loyalty and tender feelings for Ajla's love and her trust, to the ultimate role model and authority of his ultra-nationalistic father. In this perspective, we can see their relationship

5. For the discussion on women as possession or symbolic property and how these ideas play the role in the war, see more: Brownmiller 1994, Copelon 1995, Allen 1996

changing from voluntarily and mutual to *The Night Porter*⁶-like sadistic and hegemonic male dominance from Danijel, playing with his power over Ajla. Eventually, we can see the shift from their mutual exchange of love becoming more one-sided, full of fear for Ajla and aggressively-manifested by Danijel, trapped in their complex context. Ajla in fact, is raped by one of Danijel's soldiers as an order commanded by his father, who later puts pressure on Danijel to get rid of her: "Your mother would turn in the grave if she knew what you are doing. You think screwing this Muslim whore is the right thing to do? (...) Danijel, son, get rid of her. She is not for you. Trust me. This blood among us is devastating" (Jolie 2012). This statement implicates another layer of the war, the straight division between ethnic and religious identities that started to play the visible role not earlier than in 90s with the start of the war. Here we can find another level of academic resistance toward the investigation of the consensual sex and love under detention; the only distinction is not only in the power relationship, ie. camp guard/perpetrator versus detainee/victims. More important, rejecting love and consensual sex under detention rejects also any possibilities of mixing the members of different ethnic/religious groups.⁷ Moreover, in camps perpetrators usually were of one, and victims of another ethnic/religious group affiliation.

After Danijel's encountering his father, we can witness the violent, one-sided sexual intercourse between the main protagonists. Danijel enters Ajla's room and pushes her toward the bed, where he ties her up violently, Ajla resisting with her whole body. In a short dialogue, Ajla's fear of Danijel is clearly expressed on her face and with her sudden kiss. When Danijel responds, kissing her passionately and devotedly, it is obvious that her kiss was solely her panic reaction and acted out of fear; she does not respond to Danijel's kisses, neither is she engaged in the intercourse that follows in the next scene. Ajla does not resist, she is rather a passive and disconnected object of Danijel's acts. The scene finishes with Danijel, asking "Why weren't you born as Serbian?" revealing once again Danijel's division between his intrinsic feelings and his father's ideologies. Ajla, though, does not silently sit back, but at some point consciously reflects their antagonisms. During dinner, Danijel is commenting about the army's success on the battlefield, and Ajla states that she feels guilty for spending time with him:

*Danijel: It doesn't have anything to do with it (the war situation, authors notice).
Nothing would have changed if you would have been with others.*

Ajla: Yes, but I don't need to sleep with a murderer.

6. *The Night Porter*, a controversial 1974 film by Italian director Liliana Cavani, has opened similar controversies and disagreements on the freedom of art expression, sensationalism and exploiting memories of suffering.

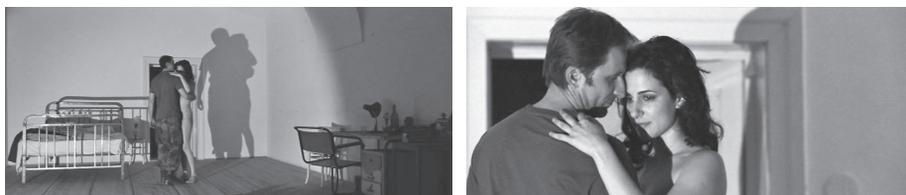
7. By 1994, leading Muslim figures in Bosnia stated how mixed marriages were "worse than rape" (in Spahić 1994): "Even though these rapes [of Muslim women] are difficult, unbearable, and unforgivable for us all, from the standpoint of Islam, they are easier and less painful than mixed marriages and the children and friendships that result from them" (ibid: 22).

Figure 3: From top-left to the bottom-right: (1) Danijel aggressively tying up Ajla after his father's pressure put on him; (2) Ajla's tied to the bed, (3) Ajla's fearful face, (4) Allegedly out of fear, Ajla kisses Danijel, (5) Danijel responds with a kiss, but Ajla does not accept it, (6) Danijel having intercourse with Ajla: she is not resisting, but we can't see her engagement either (Jolie 2011).



Danijel almost hitting Ajla, he storms out and throws things on the floor and finally leaves the room. However, in the next sequence, he returns to the room and we can see him regretting his outburst, his head laid down on her knees. Ajla, lying naked in the bed, and Danijel putting on his clothes, suggests they again had been sexually engaged, and the scene ends up with them dancing in the middle of the room. The moment is tender, with soft lighting and Ajla's head resting on Danijel's face, she flashes back to the happy and hassle-free moments when they had been dating before the war (Fig. 4 & 5). Visually, this scene attracts Ajla's and Danijel's unbalanced power relation. While Danijel is wearing his army uniform, Ajla is naked. It suggests men's control over women's bodies; while Danijel's affiliation is clearly stated through his dress-code, Ajla is nothing but her womanly body, with no role, no meaning beyond, and no power.

Figure 4&5: Danijel and Ajla dancing; Ajla getting flashes from their pre-war relationship (Jolie 2011).



4 Debate on narrating sexuality under detention

To sum up the narratives offered by Jolie, we can underline the following ideas. First, with the progress of the movie, we can follow the impact of the war and the context on sexual intercourse between the protagonists. Even if the relationship starts on a consensual basis, and seemingly with the agreement of both, sequence after sequence, the presence of violence and aggression increases. As in any other narrative, Ajla becomes an archetype of the victim: at certain point, she stops resisting – she is not opposing Danijel when he touches her, but she is also not actively engaged. Her body expressions are grey, transparent, she is indifferent – as this sex would happen or not, she would feel, express, think the same. This goes along with the decrease of the trust between each other. More chaotic that war is becoming, less trust and reliability Ajla shows. On the other hand, sex and intimacy can in fact help to rebuild this and we can see this in several scenes, while it implies a way to reconnect, to relax, and also to rebuild and/or normalize the regular life rituals during the war (see: Bar-On 1998; Bašić 2015b).

The relationship between protagonists goes up and down throughout the movie, from Danijel's taking actions and decisions, to Ajla's totally passive and victimized attitude most of the time. This narrative goes in hand with the victimhood imaginary that have not only been studied elsewhere (Bael 1997; Heru 2001; Jalušič 2004; Helms 2013; Bašić 2015a) but also questioned and critically positioned. The victimized images and the vague, yet very well-established collective identities are supported by predominantly fixed, monolithic, homogenous dominant narrative on female victimhood (Hayden 2000: 172). Paraphrasing Benedict Andersen, *victimized cautiousness*, has been formed on a presumed 'collective experience' (Engle 2005: 959) of rape and sexual abuse, perceived and interpreted by all of the women in the same way; we can clearly see this in Jolie's narrative too.

Besides, the plot development shows the increase of a fear and mistrust from Ajla's side. This is probably one of the most important angles that have to be discussed in the context of the narrative analysis. Contrary to the doubts about the 'consent' between the two, the affectionate and compassionate sex shows us the need of this trust, an emotional shelter, intimate connection, and generally, a space for intimacy. Under the detention circumstances, *the private* and *the intimate* are taken away, and there is no safe space or a place to escape to, either physically or emotionally. For this reason, we can read the sexual relationship between Ajla and Danijel beyond the very limited and determined positions of perpetrator and victim. Especially because of Danijel, a perpetrator, full of fears, uncertainties, and internal conflicts. He, too, needs this space of trust, love, and the illusion of normality, as if 'nothing has changed.'

At the same time, it is important to note the narrative shift in Ajla's sexuality before and after the scene, when the camp guard rapes her. The relationship toward her body and intimacy with Danijel changes crucially. As we can read in some other studies (see: Skjaelsbaek 2012), the distance and indifference toward the body occurs very visibly. After this event, Ajla is what Slavenka Drakulić in her novel would call "if I am not there" (1999) – absent and not interested in intimacy or sexual intercourse. This narrative shift also alters in terms of how we can read the sexuality in the movie. In her book, *War Violence*,

Trauma and the Coping Process (1998, 218), Libby Tata Arcel writes how the majority of survivors “cannot continue living with what happened to them without splitting their mind from their body (...) they can only live with their body on the condition that it is not seen as belonging to the ego.” The body of the survivor becomes an inanimate object with no integrity or self-identity. Arcel exposed this very contradictory fact about rape and sexual torture, where the act itself is “eminently physical, face-to-face and person-to-person,” but the “perpetrator and victim are nonetheless depersonalized” (Arcel 1998: 207). The violent intercourse by Danijel, which can easily be seen and understood as rape, has more layers to it. I would argue that it is not enough to see it solely in terms of ‘rape’ under detention or even war rape but rather the violent manifestation of frustration and the context where it happens. This explains also why Ajla is barely resisting: at this moment, she becomes a ‘rape victim’ but not because of Danijel: detachment of her body and her being has happened before. Her body, now the body of a victim, is a mere instrument, a target of intentions that are not her/his own. The survivor’s disability to differentiate between herself “as an object of violence and as a subject who had no complicity in what happened” (Arcel 1998: 186) withdraws from her any possibility to activate and engage in coping with her post-rape situation, especially when the war is still going on and also Daniel, her (ex) ally is not the trust-worthy person anymore.

5 Conclusions

Due to the ‘moral purity’ and untouchable status of women rape survivors that was mentioned in the beginning of this text, the public rejection and academic anger over Jolie’s work, is easy to understand and to the certain extent even to accept. But according to the narrative analysis provided here, I still did not answer what particular narrative used in the movie is harmful and why exactly is ‘sex for pleasure’ in the context of war detention problematic, unimaginable, and even insulting (in Simić 2012)?

Let me try to approach this complex question from two positions: from the position of the audience and the respective society (including survivors, NGO activists and other interested audiences) and, on the other hand, from the position of survivors’ sexuality as such.

The format of the movie *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, the ‘docu-art’, bases on the facts of historical events, but without any stated ambition claiming that it intends to be the portrayal of real life, or a documentary aiming to search for and display the particular truth. Jolie has intended to shoot a “love story” set in a war environment, and not a “political statement” (Sherwell 2011); yet with every reference to the real life and to the events that happened – not necessarily in this way – the artist gives a political statement too. Instead of searching for the universal ‘truth’, the spectator can find fragmented personalized ‘truths’; and only the big number of personalized truths may help to articulate the chaos of horror and evil that really happened (Didi-Huberman 2003). Nonetheless, Dino Mustafic, a Bosnian movie and theatre director has pointed out the difference between the ‘artistic truth’ and the literal truth:

“Art is not life, but the emotional shape and thought about a particular topic. War movies do not have to necessarily involve the author’s personal experience, but it

needs serious research, interviews, an analytical approach and full ethical responsibility in order to avoid manipulation of the victims of war" (in Sherwell 2011).

However, the very moment when historical facts inspire the artistic work, they risk the misconceptions and misunderstanding: "no journalist, writer or filmmaker – can venture into Balkan storytelling without controversy" (Gjelten 2012). Jolie's attempt to frame the historical events in fiction works consists of two elements: firstly, of the author's ethical responsibility to insist on historical truth and the available evidence; and at the same time, that kind of insight only happened through the individualized perception and new meaning construction, which can easily be manipulated and ambiguous (Didi-Huberman 2003). The survivor bears the atrocity in his/her body and is therefore a reminder, but the narrator – the writer, the movie maker, the journalist – takes over the role of the witness to this reminder. The fictionalized aspects of the created narratives consequently change the events and experiences as they were lived by the survivors.

Now, to move our interest to the very specific narrative of the (consensual) sexuality under detention, let us debate the main objections and consider the narrative analysis from above to accept or reject them. According to the narrative analysis, one thing is for sure: this movie is not about a Bosniak heroine falling in love with her Serb rapist, as some sources (in)directly imply (in Helms 2014). The relationship that was in existence before the war, is evolving in a very complex and inconsistent way, where at some point Danijel plays Ajla's protector, and at other points her enemy. Possessing Ajla in detention camp, is with no question (ab)using one's human being's power over another; yet Jolie's depiction of this possession does not suggest violence or repetition of rapes that were happening to women in such camps.⁸ Having said that, much of the public debate was focused toward the question, whether it is possible for any kind of love and sexual affection – except the one between a mother and child (Hašević in Welcome to Bosnia 2010) to blossom in such circumstances. For the lead actress, Žana Marjanović, "situations described in the script are absolutely realistic" (in Arslangić 2010). She describes her character as a "heroine... smart, brave, emotional, wonderful woman, a very strong personality" (ibid). On the other hand, Bakira Hašević, herself a rape survivor and a leader of the Women Victims of War Association, admitted she had not read the script, but from what she had heard about the plot, such a storyline would be an "an outrageous and humiliating misrepresentation of our ordeal" (Arslangić 2010a). The discourses surrounding victims and the image of the rape in our society legitimate the position of women survivors as being unavoidably and eternally shamed by the community, rejected by their families and intimate partners, and unable to establish and stabilize a normal life again. Thus, victimhood is not just "descriptive" but also "prescriptive" (Sharratt 2011: 29). But with homogenizing raped women under the

8. The very documentary, testimonial portraits of war rapes are framed in three sequences: firstly, in the very beginning, where one of the women is raped in front of the others; secondly, when Ajla lays cold pads on the wounds of raped woman; and thirdly, when Ajla herself is raped by one of Danijel's soldiers. There is also a scene showing the abuse of elderly women, being forced to undress and dance naked in front of the soldiers. Testimonies, confirming such events might be found in academic works of Stiglmayer 1994; Allen 1996; Vranić 1996

victimhood umbrella, we reject not only the stories of resistance, but the whole diversity in the individual woman's experiences, as well as varied and contextualized factors that influence their reactions, understandings and recovery from trauma. From this point of view, narrating Ajla's sexual desire and participation under detention, and prescribing her an active role in the story, moves her away from the (female) powerless situation. It was not her story, her actions, but the pre-release rumors and the dogmatic determination to follow the rumors instead of an individual, independent and critical reflection of the movie as such, that has done a lot of harm to any alternative reading but the 'victimized' one.

Bakira Hašević, has eventually welcomed the idea of screening the genocide and torture against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the

"idea of love in this hell of crime is simply out of the question. I cannot think of sexuality and love between a man and a woman in the camp environment; the love toward the commander of Chetnik's camp, where this same Chetnik commander allows killing and abuse (genocide)" (in Čudić Kanka 2012).

According to Slavenka Drakulić's review of the movie, the argument against love and sexuality in such circumstances lays in denying the humanity of the perpetrators. For victims, says Drakulić (2010), the perpetrators were and are only "inhumane beasts and monsters". Dehumanization of the perpetrators is thus equivalent to dehumanization of the victims: in order to rape and kill them, perpetrators reduced their identities to non-human, scum and trash. Hence the question is not Danijel's role and his morality, because the bestiality is attributed to him as Serb and as perpetrator, but more the moral reputation of the victims. The distinction between innocence and moral purity of the victims is bigger, and the responsibility and justified blaming is greater. "The more 'bestly' and distanced from 'normal men' the perpetrators were," says Helms (2014: 625), "the less likely it was that the morality of conduct of their victims could be questioned." From this perspective, Jolie's antagonist *Danijel* is, on the contrary, very likeable character and there are few other characters, who take over those role of real, 'bestly' rapists.

As I mentioned in the beginning, academic interests in previous years show almost no existence of a memoir or testimonies that would centralize sexuality and eroticism as the focal point of the narratives among rape survivors. Narrative of love and the consensual sexuality in these circumstances is therefore very fresh, unique and alternative narrative that Jolie actually has offered by her work. From all other angles, the movie did not challenge any conventional narratives of collective victimhood and moral righteousness (Helms 2014: 613). By Elissa Helms statement, "it ultimately leaves unquestioned the usual expectations of gender roles in war, the depictions of female vulnerability and male violence, even though its ethno-national allegory, of (Serb) male sexual aggressiveness and (Bosniak) female sexual passivity" (Helms 2014: 634). However, my doubt here is as follows, is it the narrator to blame, for offering assumingly limited representations, or is it more the way how this particular piece have been accepted by the environment it addresses. Acceptance of the consensual relationship between Ajla and Danijel would shatter also many accepted ideas on victimhood and innocence and start questioning several recognized (academic) paradigms on vulnerability, dignity and honor of the survivors. It

would jeopardize tendencies to preserve the victimhood and question the ownership over the 'truth' and generalization of 'victims' (dis)agreement about the movie. Peter Beaumont writes how Jolie's movie "divides Bosnian rape victims" (2010), where "Bosnia's raped" have been monopolized by the single voice and how she [Bakira Haščić, as the single voice] should not 'talk in our [victim's] voice'; however on the other side of these polarized reactions, Beaumont also records women who state "we are all Bakira" (ibid), referring to the collective past experience and shared struggle for victims' rights. Jolie's work therefore opens fight on two opposite frontlines: firstly, she is criticized by affected victims to even introduce love and romantic sexual relationship in camp and therefore to insult their dignity and honor. At the same time, academics blame her for preserving the images of collective victimhood and not questioning it. But wouldn't exactly the recognition of Ajla's and Danijel autonomy under the war circumstances, hence their love story beyond the machinery of war ideologies, challenge the conventional narrative and offer some new paradigms in understanding sexuality and violence in war?

Despite the great potentials, the Jolie's docu-art genre, with eventually fresh paradigmatic angle, did not inherently worked as empowering or helping to raise awareness. Rather, the moments of 'truth' are used in the manner, that they can easily reinforce particular morals, and social and political values. But perhaps it is about the time, to start thinking on responsibility of the spectators too. We do not only need to search for the reconstructions of the social myths in the arts. We can always also use these myths to deconstruct them. And in this sense, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, has offered a lot of alternative narratives that can work beyond the established and publically agreed historical and present-days 'truths'.

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Author's data

Nena Močnik, PhD, Research Assistant
 Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
 nena.mocnik@fdv.uni-lj.si
 +38651845909