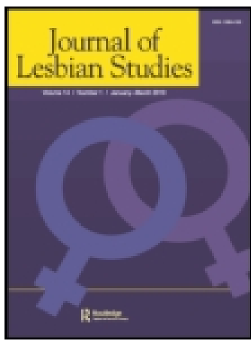

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Post-Communist Lavender Menace: Lesbians in Mainstream East European Film

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The article examines four films—Károly Makk's Egymásra nézve *(Another Way, Hungary, 1982), Maja Weiss's* Varuh meje *(Guardian of the Frontier, Slovenia 2002), Dalibor Matanić's* Fine mrtve djevojke *(Fine Dead Girls, Croatia, 2002), and Dragan Marinković's* Diši duboko *(Take a Deep Breath, Serbia, 2004)—as post-communist or dissident national allegories. In all of these films by straight directors the lesbians represent a metaphorical threat to the hetero/sexist national order, but they are unfortunately little more than simulacra. They can be emotionally real (and fun for the straight male audience to ogle), but that ultimately works against them, because instead of representing real lesbian communities, they still have to affirm the stereotype of tragic lesbian destiny straight audiences find comforting.*

KEYWORDS *nationalism, film, queer, Hungary, Yugoslavia*

Fredric Jameson's (1986) assertion that all third world texts are necessarily allegorical, and specifically national allegories, was of course overly broad and controversial. We will risk an equally broad assertion that all mainstream Eastern European films about lesbians are also national allegories and use the lesbian as a metaphor to challenge the implicitly heterosexual political institution of the nation. While feature films with queer content are often made by queer directors or screenwriters eager to present their subjective

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experience to an audience, this has rarely been the case in Eastern Europe. If, as Vito Russo (1987) suggests, queer filmmakers attempted to conceal the queer content by claiming their films were not really about homosexuality, in the case of Eastern Europe films that overtly feature homosexuality do not, in fact, represent the subjectivity of real queer people of the region, but use queerness as a metaphor for something else (see Moss, 2006). This situation is similar to what Dina Iordanova says about the use of Gypsies in Balkan films: "Balkan films abound with Gypsies, but they are not made by Gypsies or for Gypsies but by and for the dominant groups" (Iordanova, 2001: 215), for whom they act as a metaphor for the marginalization of the Balkans.

Given that nationalism is produced through heteronormativity, it is not surprising lesbianism would be seen as a threat to the nation (Žarkov, 2007: 8). Early lesbian feminists, radical lesbians, and lesbian separatists harnessed the power of this threat in establishing their own organizations in opposition to the heterosexist state. Charlotte Bunch proclaimed, "Lesbianism is a threat to the ideological, political, personal, and economic basis of male supremacy" (1972). In "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Adrienne Rich, too, pointed to lesbian existence as a threat to the violent political institution that has to be "imposed, managed, organized, propagandized and maintained by force" (1993: 238). In the 1970s some radical lesbians embraced the term "lavender menace" that had been hurled at them by straight feminists anxious to distance themselves from the charge that feminists were lesbian man-haters. Rita Mae Brown and Karla Jay organized a zap of a Congress to Unite Women in New York City in 1970 (Jay, 1999) in which they wore T-shirts with the words "lavender menace" stenciled on them. Some women embraced lesbianism in part because it was a "lavender menace" and the ultimate challenge to patriarchy. In films from Eastern Europe it is straight directors and screenwriters who depict threats to the nation through the figure of the lesbian, of whom they often have little personal knowledge themselves, and whose real life they have no interest in depicting. We will discuss four mainstream feature films, each of which was the first in its country to focus primarily on lesbian characters. The first dates to the Communist period, but its presentation of lesbians in many ways acts as a precursor for later post-Socialist films.

The first mainstream film from Eastern Europe to portray a lesbian relationship was Károly Makk's *Another Way* (*Egymásra nézve,* Hungary, 1982), which was made in Kádár's Communist Hungary. Makk's groundbreaking film was also the first film from Hungary to refer to the events of 1956 as a revolution, rather than a counter-revolution. The screenplay by Erzsébet Galgóczi was based on Galgóczi's 1980 novel, *Another Love* (Galgóczi, 1991, original title: *Törvényen belül,* Galgóczi, 1980). Galgóczi was herself a closeted lesbian, so in this case there was at least one lesbian involved in the production. She was at the time the head of the Hungarian Writers' Union. Makk was an established and well-known director at the time, and the film went on to win the FIPRESCI critics award at Cannes. It may have been

Galgóczi and Makk's privileged positions that permitted them to tackle two topics—political and sexual dissidence—that were taboo for other writers and filmmakers in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe at the time. Such a film could never have been made in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, for example, where political and sexual dissidence were even more taboo.

Another Way is framed by the death of Éva at the border as she attempts to leave Hungary. We learn that she was a journalist intent on reporting the truth about abuses in collectivization of the villages. She insists, among other things, on calling the events of 1956 a "revolution" instead of the officially sanctioned "counter-revolution." Éva, who is more masculine and outspoken, falls for her more traditionally feminine colleague Lívia, who is married to a doltish officer named Dönci. Éva is played by Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieślak, who has short hair and a boyish figure, while Lívia is the more voluptuous Grażyna Szapołowska. Éva challenges her editor, and she also talks back to the police when they find the two women kissing on a park bench. The police send Lívia back to her husband and threaten the single Éva with arrest. When she protests, they remind her that "we are not in America," where, unlike in Hungary, such activities would be tolerated. Lesbianism is thus portrayed as foreign to Hungary, and it provokes a reaction from the state. When Dönci learns of the affair he first attempts to rape Lívia to teach her a lesson, then shoots her, paralyzing her. When Lívia finally rejects Éva, the latter leaves for the border. Confronted by a guard and told to stop, she continues walking and is shot.

Éva threatens to transgress the border of the state just as her sexual practices transgress the border of Lívia's body. (This is made clear in a scene in which the police investigator mimics Makk's ignorance of how lesbians "do it," and Éva eventually blurts out, "We do it with our fingers, we stick them in there, one finger or two or three.") Her editor tells here there is a limit/border (*határ*) to the truths they can tell in their paper, appropriately titled *Truth (Igazság)*. Spatial metaphors are central to the construction both of lesbian identity and of political correctness in the film and in Hungarian. Galgóczi's novella was originally titled *Törvényen belül,* literally "Within the Law." Lesbians and dissidents are presumed to be outside. To live abroad is *kint él*, literally "live outside"; and the connection between dissidence and physical crossing of the border is seen in the usual Hungarian for "defect": *disszidál*. Éva effectively does both, becoming a martyr for both political and sexual dissidence.

In a recent article on lesbian representation in Hungarian cinema, Aniko Imre argues that Galgóczi wrote the novel "to bring her own unrepresentable subjectivity into representation. But the only way she could do so was by putting the smoke screen of national allegory in front of the highly autobiographical story of the tragic lesbian" (Imre, 2008: 265). That sounds like a typical Hollywood attempt to smuggle queer subjectivity onto the screen. Imre further claims the audience does not identify with Éva and that Makk's

camera "refuses to eroticize contact between the women" (264). In fact, it appears to us that the opposite is true: the suicide and homophobic violence in *Another Way* are not meant to confirm heterosexual values. Dönci's actions are meant to turn the audience against brutal homophobia, and Lívia calls Éva a "martyr"—Andrew J. Horton is right that our sympathies are with Éva as a political dissident *and* a lesbian (1999). Makk's film in fact cuts back the political dissidence of the novel and expands the lesbianism, including showing soft-focus love scenes between two actresses, whose chemistry works so well onscreen that one of them earned a best actress prize at Cannes. Yet we should point out that the audience sympathy comes with a price: Lívia is shot, but survives; Éva is shot dead.

Instead of using the political allegory as a smokescreen for presenting a lesbian plot, Makk does the opposite. His goal is to challenge the regime, and he uses the lesbian narrative to smuggle his politics onto the screen. Galgóczi's novella was already more about politics than about lesbian subjectivity. Makk's film version is even more political, even if the politics is less overt onscreen than on the page: Hungarian viewers were accustomed to reading silences and hints that pointed to both political and sexual dissidence (Moss, 1995). Although he expands presentation of lesbian bodies, Makk is not at all interested in lesbian subjectivity. In a film that broke two taboos, political and sexual, the sexual taboo may have been equally controversial, but it was less politically risky than calling the events of 1956 a revolution. The lesbian plot served both as a distraction from the fact that Makk's film was pushing the political envelope and as a metaphor for political dissidence itself. Balázs Varga suggests that while the film should have been forbidden for political reasons in 1982 like Mészáros's *Diary for my Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)* and Erdély's *Version (Verzió)*, "paradoxically the breaking of the second taboo, the depiction of a lesbian relationship, 'defused' the bomb" (Varga, 1999: 116). Critics of the day focused on the lesbian theme while remaining silent about the fact that the film was unequivocally critical of the system.

For Galgóczi, homosexuality was part of her life. For Makk, it was not. Even if he knew Galgóczi, as well as a number of homosexual men, it was not a topic he had discussed (Bagota, 2000). For Makk, sexual dissidence is a metaphor for political dissidence, which he was more interested in. Makk's ignorance of homosexuality is revealed in several ways. In his interview with Edit Bagota he says homosexuality was illegal in Hungary until 1953 (Gréczy and Balogh, 2000). In a later letter he says it has been legal since 1956 (Bagota, 2000). In fact laws against homosexual acts as "perversion against nature" remained on the books until 2002, although homosexuality between consenting adults was not prosecuted after 1961, which means homosexuality was indeed illegal at the time the film was set (Takács, 2007: 35). Makk admits that he was as ignorant as his male characters about how lesbians do it: "I would never in my dreams have been able to guess what two women do

with each other in bed" (Bagota, 2000). He sent a researcher to find out (one wonders why Galgóczi herself could not tell him). Although some viewers may have been attracted to the film because of the lesbian theme (Gréczy, 2000), for Makk, as Andrew J. Horton puts it, it was a metaphor: "Makk, a heterosexual male, is clearly not interested in gay rights in 1950s Hungary *per se*. Homosexuality for Makk is a metaphor for the weakness of human identity in restrictive external circumstances" (Horton, 1999). Katherine Gatto goes even further: she reads even a scene in which an investigator insists on learning about lesbian sex as a metaphor for politics: "The party can 'screw' you anytime with one finger, or two fingers, or three fingers" (Gatto, 1996: 78). *Another Way* became something of a cult film for Hungarian lesbians, in part because it was the only "lesbian" film. Hungarians are fond of claiming that Hungary was an exceptionally homophobic country, yet the release of this film would appear to belie that idea. There is a persistent myth that Makk cast Polish actresses in the lesbian roles because "no Hungarian actress would dare to play a lesbian" but Makk himself insists this is mere gossip (Bagota, 2000), and it would be a surprise to the Poles to hear that their country was any less homophobic than Hungary in 1982.

As in *Another Way*, where the Hungarian border frames the film, the border of the nation plays a significant role in Maja Weiss's *Guardian of the Frontier, Varuh meje*, which could be translated as "Guardian of the Border" (Slovenia, 2002). Here three girls leave the city to take a canoe trip down the Kolpa river, which forms part of the border with Croatia. While the border is mostly unmarked and undefended, we do see one scene in which a handful of Chinese illegal immigrants are caught sneaking across the river into Slovenia. They are arrested by the police, who are soon joined by a man who is, as we eventually learn, a right-wing politician at a local village.

Alja, who has left her boyfriend at home, finds the other two girls competing for her attention. Žana is butch and apparently a lesbian, while Simona is a virginal goody two-shoes. There have been mysterious murders lately in the forest nearby, which contributes to the suspense as the girls float down the idyllic river. At one point Alja and Žana remove their shirts and drift topless downstream. They take photos of each other at the Croatian border sign. Weiss wants us to identify with the more adventurous Alja and Žana, who kiss and caress each other, while Simona looks on in horror. It is the squeamish Simona who runs from the gay household the girls stumble upon on the Croatian side, and it is she who is tempted by the mysterious man in the woods—the right-wing politician, whom she alone has seen in sexually suggestive poses in the woods. At the village festival the politician makes a speech in which he makes clear that homosexuality is incompatible with Slovene nationality. He wants to defend his country from it, to draw a boundary between good and evil, Slovene and foreign, straight and gay. He specifically draws a parallel between the corrupt girls who come from the city (who have piercings and use obscenities and cut their hair short)

and the Chinese refugees caught trying to cross the border: both are Other (*tujci*) and have no place in the Slovene village.

Weiss sets up an opposition between the urban/multicultural/Yugonostalgic/gay-positive girls and the rural/xenophobic/Slovenia-for-Slovenes/homophobic politician and his redneck henchmen. The audience is meant to sympathize with the girls, but the politician feels threatened by them, and the threat seems to come more from their sexuality and gender presentation than from their politics. There is no sexual contact between Alja and Žana until the climax, but for the politician and his boys the fact that the girls are an all-female homosocial group is enough for them to be treated as a threat. In his speech at the village festival, the politician says, "girls should be mothers, mothers should be at home, and girls should not behave like boys." The village boys take umbrage at the girls' foul language and refusal of typical Slovene hospitality; as punishment, they turn that same language against the girls and threaten them with rape to put them in their place. The threatened rape and violence may or may not actually occur: the film slides into fantasy at this point, and there is no photo evidence to prove Simona's claim that a rape actually occurred.

It is not surprising that *Fine Dead Girls* (*Fine mrtve djevojke*, Dalibor Matanić, 2002), the first (and so far the *only*) Croatian feature film to depict a lesbian couple and place it in the center of the narrative, follows an almost identical formula in its representation of lesbianism—even more so in the way it harnesses protagonists' sexuality/queerness to criticize the dominant (patriarchal, nationalistic, religious/Catholic, hetero/sexist) discourse of the post-war era. Because of the main characters' relationship, *Fine Dead Girls* has often been called the first Croatian lesbian film, but there are several compelling arguments to contest this claim. For one, the film touches upon lesbianism very superficially, revolving around neither the characters' attitude towards their sexuality nor their relationship, as a "real" lesbian film would. Instead, it is a film about a society that crushes and destroys those in the position of least power, without ever questioning the limits of its influence or allowing any room for female, feminist, or queer resistance. Consequently, the film submits lesbians/women to the violence and exploitation of patriarchal society, misrepresenting the post-war Croatian lesbian subculture for added effect. We should mention that the lesbian protagonists are educated young women, one of them a student of medicine, with possible access to the Internet, Zagreb gay venues and/or organizations fighting for the rights of sexual minorities—of which there were three at the time of the narrative. Of course, none of these is shown in a film that wants to employ lesbianism as a metaphor only.

Tragedy strikes the very moment our heroines Iva and Marija move into an apartment building which, we are to understand, is an allegory of Croatian society; each of the tenants the girls meet represents a different social type, bringing into the narrative issues relevant for the Croatian sociopolitical

context of the time. Croatian nationalism (and the violence related to it) is probably the most prominent issue in the film: the first shot of the building when the girls arrive shows the Croatian flag hanging out of a window. Extreme and violent nationalism is embodied in the character of a former defense force soldier who years after the war has ended still wears his uniform, shoots his gun, and terrorizes the tenants by playing war songs, without any legal repercussions for his violent acts, which include beating his wife. Croatian nationalism shows its fascist face in the episode where two skinheads tie a Roma man to the train tracks and leave him to be run over by a train. The hypocrisy of Croatian ultra-Catholic society and the Church is criticized by nuns having abortions, the wife-beater taking his family to Sunday mass, and the rapist wearing a cross around his neck. The fact that no one answers for any of the crimes and violence committed against what Matanić obviously deems the weakest and most fragile in society—ethnic minorities and women—is a further critique of the same society, of the corruption, inefficacy, and impotence of the state apparatus which should be protecting its vulnerable citizens. And the two helpless lesbians (Matanić calls them "two fragile persons" in an interview; Sagasta, 2004) are something of a litmus test for this society—to make it reveal what it is made of. To be sure, the lesson is best learned when taken to the extreme, so the society needs to punish the lesbian protagonists severely for their transgression in order to accelerate the narrative and produce the most emotionally effective criticism of patriarchy and nationalism. Marija, the only female character who refuses to be victimized, is punished by death. Her femme girlfriend Iva is raped. Iva is also the bisexual half of the couple, so her punishment pushes her back into heterosexual marriage, the building block of the hetero/sexist nation.

With all this in mind, it indeed comes as a surprise that homophobia, a very potent and relevant social issue, is not the focus of the film. Putting lesbians in the spotlight and in the title of the film for the very first time without giving them a proper political treatment, and reducing them to yet another site of his social critique proves the director is not really interested in what queerness *is* or *can be*, but rather what it can *stand for*. Although "identity is strategically essential to the struggle of the oppressed groups" (Wilton, 1995: 42), not only is lesbianism not presented as a political problem, but the whole political (as well as private) Croatian context of real lesbians is completely effaced in order to victimize our heroines further. Paradoxically, to "protect" the heroines in the eyes of the audience, to keep their metaphorical quality "virginal," the politics of queerness and queer politics must disappear completely from the film.

The fact that Croatia is still a profoundly patriarchal and sexist society makes lesbian practice a site for identity formation in opposition, which then threatens that very society. It is exactly because of this potential threat of self-identification and self-naming that, in order to remain sympathetic to the Croatian spectator and remain a powerful and functional metaphor, Iva and

Marija are not allowed to name themselves as lesbians. The positive term, lesbian, is never spoken in the film. Instead, the only naming authority is the one on the outside, in this case the straight landlady, who uses the term "dyke" and similar derogatory expressions. Furthermore, the two protagonists treat their own sexual practice just the way society and Matanić want them to: as something accidental, what Andrea Weiss calls the "'happen to be gay' syndrome": their sexuality need not and should not have any broader implication for society at large, as "there is no gay culture, identity, or history beyond the bedroom" (1993: 63). The only reason a mainstream spectator sympathizes with the two lesbian characters is because they are women, because they are victims, because they keep their sexuality private. Would a regular Croatian moviegoer/citizen shed a tear for a lesbian activist—one who advocates social change and a revision of existing "family" values—who is raped and murdered? Would they consider a woman raising a child in a lesbian relationship (had the surviving Iva opted for this at the end of the movie) to be courageous, or scandalous and immoral? The point we are trying to make here is that Matanić himself (who is the creator of this universe) cannot allow for such a threatening change. Could audiences handle any other kind of an ending? And, indeed, could this film have ever been made if it lost the metaphor and decided to go straight about matters queer? Could it allow the queer subject to write her own ending, rather than conform to the stereotype, serving as an empty shell to be filled with the content required by the straight director, a critique of nationalism and patriarchy?

A final film from Serbia rounds out our survey. *Take a Deep Breath* (*Diši duboko*, Dragan Marinković, 2004) is a family drama set in Beograd in which Saša decides to emigrate to Canada with her boyfriend, Stefan, but then unexpectedly falls in love with his sister, a photographer named Lana, who has returned from Paris. Saša's father, the strict judge Miloš, tries to break up the girls' relationship, whereas her mother shows more sympathy, since she also had a platonic homosexual experience in her youth. Miloš dies of a heart attack brought on by a chance meeting with a man who sexually molested him when he was a boy. There is, however, no future for Lana and Saša, since, as Saša says herself, Beograd is not Paris. Just as in *Another Way*, where the policeman reminds Éva that lesbianism belongs abroad, here too it belongs elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that in both *Fine Dead Girls* and *Take a Deep Breath*, as in *Another Way*, half of the homosexual relationship is actually bisexual, and the restoration of the heterosexual order is either fully established through marriage and children (in *Fine Dead Girls*), or suggested by the stated impossibility of being homosexual *here* (in *Take a Deep Breath* and *Another Way*). The bisexual half also "survives"—whether literally, or by remaining at the center of the narrative after the homosexual half is removed from it. Moreover, the narrative *authority* (Iva in *Fine Dead Girls,* who narrates the whole story) and/or the function of the dominant focalizer

(Saša in *Take a Deep Breath*) belongs to the bisexual character, while the exclusive homosexual, unredeemable, is uprooted—symbolically admitting that in this kind of a celluloid universe queerness is completely (perhaps justifiably, as a mere metaphor) disposable. Éva is shot by a border guard, Marija murdered by the tenants, and Lana dispatched to Paris.

It is also worth noting how these post-war films, themselves springing from cultures traumatized by war, unmistakably link homosexuality to some sort of a trauma. Iva and Marija will suffer rape and death respectively, and Iva—to avoid dwelling in this (homosexual) heart of trauma—will return to the heterosexual world. Saša's lesbian experience is also tightly intertwined with the trauma of her father's death, for which she feels responsible (his heart weakened because of her lesbian affair)—and even though her short relationship with Lana is depicted as liberating, her father's death marks the kind of guilt she will not rid herself of easily. There is also an important mirroring narrative line in which Saša's father is sexually abused by an older boy, which is the implied cause of his latent homosexuality. Seeing the naked butt of his young male protégé reactivates his (homo)sexual trauma, and the inner conflict between trauma and desire can be resolved only by heart failure.

Take a Deep Breath, like all of the films we have been discussing, is equally uninterested in (homo)sexual politics—here it is a metaphor for a dysfunctional heterosexual/national family unit. The mother has a lover; the father has a past he conceals and has extramarital sex with a cleaning lady; the daughter embarks on a lesbian affair and breaks up her promising hetero-relationship. Here homosexuality—much like in *Fine Dead Girls*, only in a more "realistic" setting—serves as an amplifier for familial miscommunication, and, on a national allegorical level, as an indicator of the instability of Serbian post-lost-war identity, rotten at the core, marked by a suppressed trauma.

As we have seen, none of the directors of these lesbian-themed films had any interest in exploring the queer underground of the urban centers in which their heroines dwell. However, although they disregard queer ethics, they all seem to be quite keen on exploring and exploiting lesbian "aesthetics"—or, rather, the stereotypical (mainstream) celluloid representations of lesbian sex. Although these films are typically about "something else" and ignore the political significance of the lesbian subject(s), their authors do not miss the opportunity to exploit the voyeuristic potential of (pop-cultural) lesbianism. Even Maja Weiss, a female director, shows scenes of the girls languidly floating downriver in their canoes, topless. Long sequences of sensual caresses—with bathtubs and candles and other requisites borrowed from the collective imaginary on lesbian practices—defuse potential queer politics further by fetishizing its subjects. *Fine Dead Girls* is the only film that fails to display the women naked in a bathtub, yet it compensates with a central long scene of the girls naked in bed making love—shot from overhead. As

if to excuse himself for tackling this still quite unspeakable subject in Serbia, the director of *Take a Deep Breath* gushed: "The *males* in the audience will enjoy my film very much" (Marinković, 2004). Perhaps he, too, is aware of the fact that lesbians will not buy it.

Instead of real lesbians, what these directors are selling are simulacra, mere metaphors, which serve only to construct national allegories. As such, they are ultimately disposable as lesbians once they have fulfilled their purpose of providing a symbolic threat to the hetero/sexist national order. In the case of the three newer films, it is clear that the directors had no interest in portraying an actual lesbian subculture, and the films were all roundly criticized by local lesbian groups, who did not see themselves represented in them. The reaction to Makk's *Another Way* is more complicated: Hungarian lesbians did identify with the film, and the film and Galgóczi's novel were reworked into the first postcommunist Hungarian novel about lesbians, Agáta Gordon's *Goat Lipstick* (*Kecskerúzs*, 1997), which then itself inspired pilgrimages to a lesbian community in the countryside, which became the subject of the documentary by Maria Takács, Zarándokút a Kecskerúzs Földjére [it] (*Pilgrimage to the Land of Goat Lipstick*, Budapest Lesbian Film Collective, 2005). (Imre, 2008: 266–29, Sándor, 1999) If the relationship between Éva and Lívia was emotionally real enough to inspire real Hungarian lesbians to make *Another Way* something of a cult film, that does not mean that they are autonomous and real lesbians whose subjectivity could somehow escape the bounds of Makk's (and Galgóczi's) predictable plots. As Vito Russo demonstrated in the necrology section of his Celluloid Closet (1987: 347–49), the lesbian must die. Unlike Galgóczi, who survived the '50s and lived long enough to become head of the Writers' Union and pen *Another Way*, and unlike Gordon's heroine, who also lives to write the novel *Goat Lipstick*, Éva dies. One could even say, since the world of the film is a fictional universe where the director calls the shots, that she is killed off by Makk. Lesbians can be shown in mainstream films in pre- and post-Communist Eastern Europe only to the extent that they conform to mainstream stereotypes, one of which is the tragic victim-martyr. In all of these films the women either "return" to heterosexuality if they are "lucky" enough to be bisexual (Lívia in *Another Way*, Iva in *Fine Dead Girls*), or are killed (Éva in *Another Way*, Marija in *Fine Dead Girls*) or at the very least separated from their partner if they are exclusively lesbian (Lana in *Take a Deep Breath*, Žana in *Guardian of the Frontier*). The real lesbian is a menace, too much of a menace to be allowed to write the plot herself, to take a lesbian subject position.

After Fredric Jameson, we should not be surprised that all four films can be read as postcolonial/postcommunist (or dissident, in the case of *Another Way*) national allegories. It is these allegories the directors focus on, not the complexity of lesbian reality, which would be too disturbing for a "straight" (real) narrative. *Another Way* exploits sexual dissidence as a metaphor for

political dissidence, at the same time providing cover and a smokescreen for the politics Makk is really interested in. In *Guardian of the Frontier* we see the conflict between urban European values (including feminism) and right-wing Slovene fetishization of the village. *Fine Dead Girls* presents the apartment house as a microcosm of all modern Croatian conflicts under one roof: our home as our homeland. Finally, *Take a Deep Breath*, while ostensibly an urban tale that avoids politics, shows a patriarchal family led by Miloš which rebels against him and splits up: how big a stretch is it from this family under Miloš to the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav family of peoples under Milošević, which also split violently? In all of these films the lesbians represent a metaphorical threat to the hetero/sexist national order, but they are unfortunately little more than simulacra. They can be emotionally real (and fun for the straight male audience to ogle), but that ultimately works against them, because they still have to affirm the stereotype of tragic lesbian destiny straight audiences find comforting. Real lesbians are not represented in mainstream films from Eastern Europe.

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