




COOP and DEBLOKADA in co-production with **noirfilm** and JADRAN FILM present

GRBAVICA

A FILM BY JASMILA ŽBANIĆ

Festival
 **56^e** Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin 09.10.04
Competition

A woman is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the window, which casts a warm, yellowish glow. The wall behind her is covered in dark, floral-patterned wallpaper. A circular decorative object, possibly a mirror or a framed picture, is visible on the wall to the left. The woman's hair is dark and styled in a bun. She is wearing a dark-colored top.

GRBAVICA is a story about contemporary Sarajevo...

Single mother Esma wants to grant her twelve-year-old daughter Sara's wish to participate in a school trip. A certificate proving her father is a war martyr would allow her a discount. But Esma continues to avoid Sara's requests for the certificate. She would rather find a way to pay full price for the trip. She believes not telling the truth about Sara's father is a way to protect both her and her daughter.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am fascinated by everyday life, but compared to war, it can seem ordinary, non-dramatic, even banal. Yet when the surface of this everyday life is scratched, the whole power of human emotions - past, present and future – starts to leak out.

GRBAVICA is first of all a story about LOVE. About love that is not pure, because it has been mixed with hate, disgust, trauma, despair. It's also about VICTIMS who, though they did not commit any crime, they are still not entirely innocent in relation to future generations. GRBAVICA is also about TRUTH, a cosmic power necessary to progress, and very much needed by society in Bosnia and Herzegovina who must strive to reach maturity.



INTERVIEW

Grbavica is a word which foreigners will probably break their tongues on. What is Grbavica?

Grbavica is a neighborhood just across from the building where I live. During the war this area was held under siege by the Serbo-Montenegrin Army, and transformed into a special war camp where the population was tortured. When you walk through Grbavica today you can see typical buildings from the socialist regime, local residents, shops, children, dogs... but at the same time you can feel the presence of something unspoken and invisible, this strange feeling that you have when you are in a place that was marked by big human suffering. Grbavica is a microcosmos that Esma, and other heroes, belong to. Etymologically, the word Grbavica means woman with a hump. Although it is a bit difficult to pro-

nounce - I thought that these unattractive letters give a very good sound picture of Esma's world.

What is the origin of the story?

When the war started, I was happy because my maths test was cancelled. What interested me most, as a teenager, was sex, or it was more talking about sex, dreaming about sex as the highest realisation of love. But in 1992 everything changed and I realised that I was living in a war, in which sex was used as part of a war strategy to humiliate women and thereby cause the destruction of an ethnic group! 20.000 women were systematically raped in Bosnia during the war. I lived 100 metres from the front line and was most afraid of this kind of fight. Since then, rape and its consequences have become an

obsession for me: I read and followed everything that was related to this topic. I still didn't know why I did this, or what I wanted to do with this. When I gave birth to my child, that was a fruit of love, motherhood - which triggered a whole set of emotions in me - this shocked me completely. I asked myself, what emotional significance does this have for a woman that has a child who was conceived in hate. That was the moment I knew what I wanted from Grbavica and I wrote it - between breast feeds.

You directed the film and wrote the screenplay... What was important to you in developing the characters?

Once, when a very dear person died, I got up in the morning and brushed my teeth. I asked myself if this world still exists, is it possible that I still exist and brush my teeth, that everything is still in the same place as it was yesterday, as if nothing had happened. Because of my personal suffering, no leaf will fall from the tree. I thought about Esma in the same way. Her tragedy did not make the world stop turning. Her life goes on, she is making a sandwich for her child, she laughs and makes jokes, irons, uses public transport...Whilst writing the screenplay for the film, and later while I was directing it, I observed things from that perspective. Christine Maier, the DOP, and I felt that the photography, with its movement and composition, should be non-dramatic in order to lead us into this world of everyday life under which volcanos are gushing. We are as close to Esma as she allows us to be, at a distance she wants to keep us. What was also very important to us was to portray Sarajevo as one of the characters.

To the international audience, Mirjana Karanovic is probably best known for her roles in films directed by Emir Kusturica. But maybe for a long time she did not have a role that would give her the opportunity to express her full acting ability and her personal charisma.

Mirjana is a great artist. She is like the most secret instrument that is playing every flicker of the human soul and that is hurt by every, even the smallest false tune. She is always playing in more than one dimension. As it happens Esma is a woman with a secret, her every sentence is a lie, almost everything that she utters has a completely different meaning. Mirjana has many different colors. I have learned a lot from her, and the more I worked with her, the more I admired her. One of my favourite films is Emir Kusturica's





"When Father Was Away on Business", where Mirjana portrayed the mother Sena. If we compare these two characters that Mirjana is playing, one from the socialist period and the other from present day, we can notice the transition that happened within a society and a woman in one country.

To all the actors, even those with smaller roles, you seem to have given them the opportunity to make them shine..

Grbavica is first of all an actor's film. I was aware of the fact that I could only make this film alive if I had great actors, especially the mother and daughter characters. That is why we took a lot of time working on the casting. For example, we went from school to school and interviewed over 2000 children. Then we made a close selection of 200 children who I spoke to personally, and then we selected 20 children who we worked with for seven days - to see which child had acting talent, but also the ability to progress, to concentrate and to listen to indications. As for the other actors, after a very long and careful selection, we had many rehearsals, some of which took place on real locations, so that actors would be able to get used to the world we were supposed to create. What made me very happy, beside the fact that the actors were perfect professionals, was that they loved their characters, the screenplay and the crew. Everyone wanted to give everything from themselves. To me personally, they were very supportive.

What is it like working with children on a shoot?

Thirteen-year-old Luna Mijovic (who plays Sara) and 14-year-old Kenan Catic (who plays Samir), and the other young actors were not treated as children, but as equal authors of our project. And this is how they understood their roles, they were very serious, responsible and creative. And besides that professional part, the whole crew was in love with them and they felt that they had our full support.

Is it true that Luna broke her leg during shooting?

Unfortunately, yes. We were shooting the scene in which Sara is playing football with Samir. Because of a false bomb threat to the OHR building (The Office of High Representative) near our location, shooting was late. Trucks had to drive through half the city, actors were late and everything started very chaotically. When it began we had made a few takes on the hard snow. In the meantime, the snow started to melt and Luna's leg fell through the snow. Kenan fell over her and... crack. The sound crew claimed that they heard the sound of bone breaking. It was horrible. Luna's leg was in pain, and I couldn't forgive myself, for although I did have one good take, I requested another one! We stopped the shooting and continued two months later once Luna's leg was usable again, and when she felt that she could continue with the shooting. Spring came... some of the locations had to be changed, so that we could edit the film. For the football scene which is partly from March during the snow, and partly from May, we had to "fake" the distance of the children from the building in order to hide the blossoms.

Music and songs play very important roles in your film. A couple of different songs appear in very significant moments in the film: the film starts with an Ilahija, and ends with a hit from the 70's. In between, there are levels of turbo folk hits...

Esma's inner life is non-verbal and can be expressed most deeply with music that has a dramatic function. Ilahijas, which are songs dedicated to God, expressed her feelings and provoked Esma to speak. Contrasting with the sensitivity of Ilahijas, is the aggressive and inconsiderate turbo folk music, specific to the Balkans today. (Turbo folk is a music genre originating in Serbia. It was a dominant style during the Milosevic era, and is often associated with war, mafia and macho culture which has accompanied it. It is very popular today as well.)



In other scenes music is used to contrast Esma's and Sara's emotions or it is a part of their environment. The film ends with a popular song "Sarajevo, My Love", which is often sung on school-trips. It's upbeat and contrasts Sara's feelings. When Sara sings along with the others, it helps her to fit in with her peers. The song's lyrics hint of Sara's return, although I wanted the ending to remain ambivalent.

Although the story about Esma and Sara is essentially sad, it is also very optimistic. Is it possible there is a hidden possibility for forgiveness toward Sara's father?

I think that first there must be penitence from the side of war criminals, and then forgiveness from the side of victims. One of the problems in BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina) is that not many people feel repentant for what has happened. Over 100.000 people were killed, 1,000.000 expelled - and there has been almost no penitence. On the upside, it is very interesting that revenge almost does not exist which is a huge achievement for this society . I think that Esma is thinking neither about forgiveness nor revenge. Sara is a victim, but also a reminder of the criminal. Our future is made up of recognition of both components, because they both belong to us. They are inside us.

What are the conditions in BiH for filmmaking?

BiH is the only country in Europe that does not have a 35 mm camera, or film laboratory. This absurd fact is incorporated into the very creation of film in Bosnia. We lack many professionals, and try to make up for it with crew members from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia, or in this case from co-production countries. But I believe that there is a huge need to tell our stories, which overcomes all our other defects.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a brown coat with a fur collar, is smiling and looking down. She is surrounded by falling snow. In the background, a person in a red coat is visible, though out of focus. The scene is set outdoors in winter.

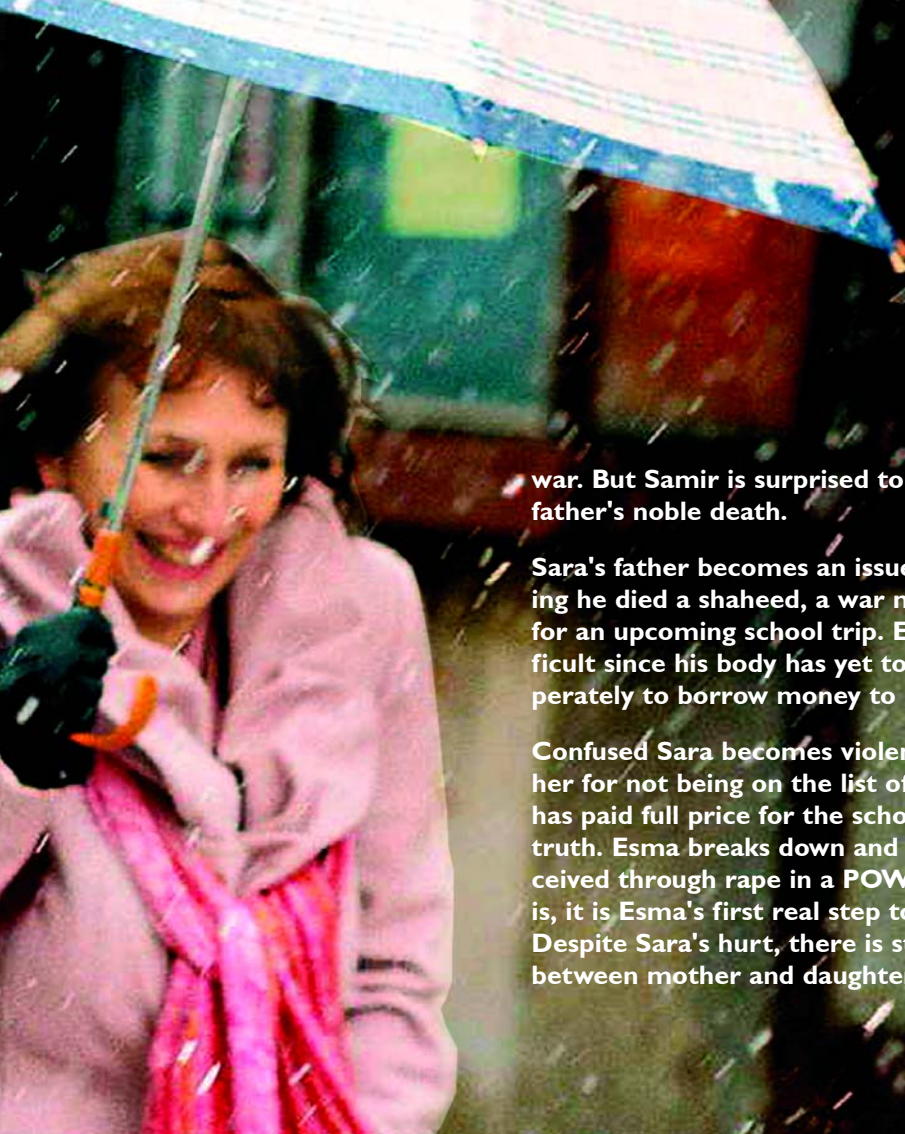
SYNOPSIS

Single mother Esma lives with her 12-year-old daughter Sara in Sarajevo's Grbavica neighborhood, where life is still being reconstructed after the 1990s Yugoslav wars.

Unable to make ends meet with the meager government aid she receives, Esma takes a job as a cocktail waitress in a nightclub. Working all night is difficult for Esma and it also forces her to reluctantly spend less time with her daughter.

Still haunted by violent events in her past, Esma attends group therapy sessions at the local Women's Center. In addition to relying on her best friend Sabina, Esma also finds a kindred spirit in Pelda, a compassionate male co-worker from the nightclub.

Feisty tomboy Sara begins to put soccer aside as she develops a close friendship with classmate Samir. The two sensitive young teenagers feel a strong bond because both lost their fathers in the



war. But Samir is surprised to hear Sara doesn't know the details of her father's noble death.

Sara's father becomes an issue when she requires the certificate proving he died a shaheed, a war martyr, so that she can receive a discount for an upcoming school trip. Esma claims acquiring the certificate is difficult since his body has yet to be found. Meanwhile, Esma searches desperately to borrow money to pay for Sara's trip.

Confused Sara becomes violently upset when some classmates tease her for not being on the list of martyrs' children. Realizing her mother has paid full price for the school trip, Sara aggressively demands the truth. Esma breaks down and brutally explains how the girl was conceived through rape in a POW camp. As painful as their confrontation is, it is Esma's first real step toward overcoming her deep trauma. Despite Sara's hurt, there is still an opening for a renewed relationship between mother and daughter.



JASMILA ŽBANIĆ, screenwriter and directress

GRBAVICA is Jasmila Žbanić's first feature film.

Žbanić began making films in 1997 when she founded the artist's association "Deblokada", through which she produced, wrote and directed numerous documentaries, video works and shorts. Her work has been screened in film festivals and exhibitions worldwide. Highlights include her short BIRTHDAY (part of the omnibus film LOST & FOUND), a look at the different paths taken by two young girls - one Croatian, one Bosniak; the 2002 documentary RED RUBBER BOOTS, which follows Bosnian mothers searching for their children; and documentary IMAGES FROM THE CORNER, a moving personal account of a young woman seriously wounded during the war who watched in pain as a foreign photographer snap pictures of her.

Born in Sarajevo in 1974, Žbanić is a graduate of the her native city's Academy of Dramatic Arts, department for theater and film directing. Before filmmaking, she also worked as a puppeteer in the Vermont-based "Bread and Puppet" Theater and as a clown in a Lee De Long workshop.



MIRJANA KARANOVIĆ (as ESMA)

Mirjana Karanović is perhaps best known to international audiences for her roles in films by Emir Kusturica: 1985's WHEN FATHER WAS AWAY ON BUSINESS, 1995's UNDERGROUND and 2004's LIFE IS A MIRACLE. Her other film credits include Ahmed Imamović's GO WEST, Vinko Brešan's WITNESSES, Dušan Milić's STRAWBERRIES IN THE SUPERMARKET, Goran Paskaljević's THE POWDER KEG/CABARET BALKAN and Mirjana Vukomanović's THREE SUMMER DAYS. Karanović also works extensively in theater and TV, credits including the 1988 US mini-series MARIO PUZO'S THE FORTUNATE PILGRIM, starring Sophia Loren. Karanović was born in Belgrade, where she also graduated from the Academy of Dramatic Arts. She made her screen debut in 1980 in Srdjan Karanović's PETRIA'S WREATH. Karanović continues to live in Belgrade, where she is a professor at the "Braća Karić" Academy of Arts. She will soon be seen in Andrea Staka's feature film DAS FRAULEIN.



LUNA MIJOVIĆ (as SARA)

GRBAVICA is Luna Mijović's acting debut.

Luna was born in 1991 in Sarajevo, but she has also lived in Russia and Slovenia.

LEON LUČEV (as PELDA)

Leon Lučev is perhaps best known to international audiences for his roles in films by Vinko Brešan: 2004's WITNESSES and 1998's HOW THE WAR STARTED ON MY LITTLE ISLAND.

His other film credits include Hrvoje Hribar's WHAT IS A MAN WITHOUT A MUSTACHE?, Krsto Papić's INFECTION and Lukas Nola's CELESTIAL BODY and ALONE,.

He also works extensively in TV and theater. For the past six years he has participated in some 10 productions with the "it&d" Theater.

Lučev was born in 1970 in Šibenik, Croatia. His early work was with the independent theatre group "Montaž Stroj" in Zagreb, before attending the Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1994.



Technical details:

Title: **GRBAVICA**

Duration: **90 min**

Format: **35 mm**

Original language: **Bosnian**

Year of production: **2005**

Genre: **Drama**

Cast:

Mirjana Karanović (Esma)

Luna Mijović (Sara)

Leon Lučev (Pelda)

Kenan Ćatić (Samir)

Jasna Ornela Berry (Sabina)

Dejan Aćimović (Čenga)

Bogdan Diklić (Šaran)

Emir Hadžihafizbegović (Puška)

Crew:

Director of Photography: Christine A. Maier

Art Direction: Kemal Hrustanović

Costume Designer: Lejla Hodžić

Make Up: Halid Redžebašić

Editor: Niki Mossböck

Sound Design: Igor Čamo, Tom Weber

Casting Director: Oriana Kunčić

Producers: Barbara Albert, Damir Ibrahimović, Bruno Wagner

Co-Producers: Boris Michalski, Damir Richtarić

**Comissioning editor: ZDF-Das Kleine Fernsehspiel zu Handen,
Jörg Schneider**

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arte



THE MATCH FACTORY

