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# CINEMA AS SOCIAL PROTEST: THE CASE OF KUKUMI AND THE REPRESENTATION OF REVOLT AGAINST INJUSTICE IN POST-CONFLICT KOSOVAR SOCIETY

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## ABSTRACT

*In post-conflict societies of the Western Balkans, cinema has also served as a means of reflection and peaceful protest, addressing some of the most sensitive elements of cultural, social, and political transition. This study aims to analyze cinema as a form of social protest in post-conflict societies, specifically examining Isa Qosja's film 'Kukumi' as a representation of revolt against injustice in post-war Kosovo following the 1999 conflict. The study adopts a qualitative research approach combining film analysis with in-depth semi-structured interviews. Five interviews were conducted with key informants including the lead actor, a film critic, a director and producer, a sociologist, and a psychologist/psychotherapist, providing multidisciplinary perspectives on the film's social significance. The analysis reveals that 'Kukumi' employs metaphor and symbolism through three central characters to penetrate the collective consciousness of Kosovar society. The film exposes structural problems within the post-war social welfare system and highlights systemic failures in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations during the cultural, social, and political transition period. The film 'Kukumi' functions as both a sharp critique and a reflective mirror for post-war Kosovar society, demonstrating cinema's capacity to serve as a medium for peaceful protest and social commentary in post-conflict contexts of the Western Balkans. Practical Implications: The findings underscore the urgent need for more inclusive infrastructure and comprehensive social welfare reforms in building functional post-conflict societies, while affirming cinema's role as a valuable tool for social advocacy and collective healing in transitional contexts.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Cinema, Protest, Post-Conflict Society, Kukumi, Kosovo.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Films are more than entertainment. They inspire, inform, and have even become part of our daily lives and culture. With all their components, films also encompass a broader social, cultural, and societal dimension. One could even say that film provides unique opportunities to faithfully translate the psychology of our time. It is an admirable art form—one might even argue it was invented to equip each era with its own distinctive tool of expression (Clair, 2020). Many memories, experiences, stories, and fragments of our human history have been presented to audiences through the art of cinema. While historians are frequently confronted with questions about the culture of memory, film studies are dominated by the idea that films are a medium for “storing,” “recording,” or “disseminating” collective memory. Experiential approaches toward the relation between film, history, and memory, by contrast, are largely neglected or marginalized, even **though we perceive film images and memories in a similar way** Both are glimpsed only as they “whizz” or “flash” by, remaining fragmentary yet still possessing a “hyperreal” quality (Greiner, 2021). When it comes to cinema in Kosovo, a decisive role in the development of Albanian cinematography was played by the country’s only film production house of the time, Kosovafilm, which began its activity in February 1969. It served as the leading institution in the country for the production and distribution of feature films, documentaries, short films, and animated films. Over its history, Kosovafilm produced more than 35 feature, documentary, and animated films, several of which were presented at international festivals. Some of these films also received international awards.

Despite its long period of operation, film production remained limited, constrained by difficult material conditions and technological shortcomings. The small number of films produced did not allow for the establishment of an adequate typology for the development of film as an art form. Among the films produced were several feature films directed by Isa Qosja, one of Kosovo’s most renowned filmmakers. His oeuvre includes a number of feature films, most notably “Proka” (1985) and “Rojat e mjegullës” (Keepers of Fog) (1987). His third feature, “Kukumi” (2005), went on to win numerous awards at international festivals. With this film, Qosja succeeded in speaking a symbolic and metaphorical language that touched and reached deeply into the collective consciousness, attracting the attention of both audiences and international critics. Following “Kukumi”, Qosja proceeded to

direct **two other films** “Tri dritare dhe një varje” (Three Windows and a Hanging) (2014) and “Lejlek” (The Stork) (2024), a Montenegrin-Kosovar co-production. Given the role and influence this film has had on Kosovar society, the purpose of this study is to present and examine the post-conflict situation through the lens of “Kukumi”, with particular attention to its representation of a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena. Accordingly, this paper is structured **as follows** abstract, introduction, literature review, and a comparative analysis addressing the psycho-social dimensions of film and art; the research methodology, including design, methods, techniques, and instruments; the results and discussion; the conclusions and implications; and finally, the references used.

### 1.1. Aim

This study aims to analyze cinema as a form of social protest in post-conflict societies, specifically examining Isa Qosja’s film ‘Kukumi’ as a representation of revolt against injustice in post-war Kosovo following the 1999 conflict. In addition, the paper aims to analyze the entire dramaturgical line of the film as presented through its central characters.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The research questions posed in this article focus on the role and importance of film in representing revolt against injustice in post-conflict Kosovar society, as well as on the message it sought to convey as a bitter reality within Kosovo’s social context at the time. Through this study, the broader artistic and academic community, students, and society at large will gain additional insight. Questions raised during the research, also formulated as hypotheses, include the role and significance of the film in representing revolt against injustice in post-conflict Kosovar society, as well as the message it seeks to convey regarding the harsh realities within Kosovo’s social context. 1. What is the artistic, cultural, and socio-psychological profile of the film “Kukumi”? 2. What does the film represent in post-conflict societies, using Kosovo as a case study? 3. What message does the film communicate to a broader audience? These questions have generated important insights, which can be further elaborated and developed in the context of future research, both in terms of artistic analysis and socio-cultural study.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The social study and analysis of the film “Kukumi” undoubtedly requires a holistic approach

that intertwines perspectives from sociology, psychology, art, and culture in order to grasp the film's complex dimensions. The literature review explores the theoretical contributions of prominent scholars who provide analytical frameworks for interpreting film as a mirror of reality in post-war Kosovar society. One of the key theoretical perspectives directly relevant to the content of this film is the theory of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who introduced the concept of anomie—a state of detachment from social norms that emerges from rapid societal transformations and disruptions. The French sociologist Durkheim pointed out in his important book *Suicide* that the so-called anomie of society refers to the lack of norms in a certain society, or although there are norms, they lose (or do not have) the due binding force, so that the behavior of members of the society presents such and such disorder (Xinyu, 2023). Anomie would characterize social situations where the individual's desires can manifest freely without being bound by rules (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018). According to Durkheim, anomie emerges when traditional social structures collapse without being replaced by clear new norms, leaving individuals in a state of confusion and social isolation. In other cases, he introduces anomie as a "moral disease" or "anti-ethics", contradictory to any ethics and the opposite of moral health. According to Durkheim, morality is nothing but commitment (that is, a sense of responsibility, duty, and commitment to rules) and utility, that is, a sense of value, usefulness, and usefulness of rules, and both are damaged in anomie. For this reason, he states that anomie is a state in which the social rules [norms] are not binding for the actors and following them is not beneficial for them (Gonzales, et al, 2024). From Durkheim's perspective, Kosovar society has transitioned from a form of mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, whereby old norms have been replaced by new ones. Unfortunately, these new norms have produced a type of "social deadlock" that has generated consequences ranging from social isolation and the lack of socio-economic development to instances of suicide. His theory of a state of normlessness or a breakdown in social order can be observed in the digital age, where individuals may feel disconnected from societal norms or unclear about their place in the world. The constant bombardment of idealized lifestyles, the pressure for social validation, and the overwhelming amount of information can create a sense of disillusionment and meaninglessness, similar to what Durkheim described. People may feel disconnected from their communities, leading to feelings of isolation and confusion about their

identity and purpose (Gaikwad, 2025). This theory bears a direct connection to the main characters of the film "Kukumi" (Kukumi, Mara and Hasani), as they embody precisely this state of anomie. The characters are products of a post-conflict society marked by the absence of social norms and rules (particularly at the time of the film's release), the lack of social institutions such as agencies of socialization, including mental health hospitals and care facilities, as well as weakened social support networks like family and community, which were at that time shrouded in uncertainty. From Durkheim's perspective, in conditions of anomie, individuals lose orientation and their sense of connection to society, becoming prone to deviance, self-isolation, or disordered behavior. The portrayal of the characters in the film thus symbolically reflects the condition of Kosovo during that period.

Another significant framework is the theory of Social Capital, developed initially by Pierre Bourdieu and later by Robert Putnam. Both scholars conceptualized social capital as the networks of social relations that enable the effective functioning of society. Social capital refers to the structure and quality of social relationships, from which individuals, social groups and the society may benefit. However, most scholars agree that social capital is a multidimensional resource that is generated through interpersonal interactions, and it includes both network ties and shared values, such as trust and reciprocity, that may facilitate cooperation and collective action (Tsounis & Xanthopoulou, 2025). The authors (Van Bakel & Horak, 2024) emphasize that social capital can be defined as the sum of resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual. It includes **three core components** social networks (or the ties between individuals), norms of reciprocity, and social trust, particularly toward individuals, the community, and institutions. Pierre Bourdieu believes that social capital is a partially durable network including institutionalized relations, with any recognition and commitments including mutual trust facilitating both individual and collective actions (Pourrastegar & Hadaegh, 2017). On the other hand, Robert Putnam separates social capital from all other kinds of capitals and considers it as a social organization including networks of relations, awareness-based interactions and social trust. In contrast to Bourdieu, Putnam believes that social capital is not a source whose accessibility to a group limits other group's accessibility to it. However, he points out that social capital is a resource enforcing

individuals' action (Pourrastegar & Hadaegh, 2017) other words, social capital depends on the size of the social networks as well as the amount and quality of resources (prestige, power and wealth) that are contained in the networks, resources that are directly usable in the short or longer run (Li, 2015). The relevance of this theory to the film "Kukumi" lies in its illustration of the destruction of social capital in Kosovar society. All three components of social capital are clearly depicted in the film. **First, the breakdown of networks** the main characters lack friends or social ties that could support them, wandering as strangers within their own society. **Second, the absence of reciprocity** in the aftermath of conflict, society feels no obligation, even moral, to help the protagonists themselves, who do not know how to ask for or offer help. Finally, there is the crisis of trust. As Giddens has argued, one of the greatest challenges of modernity is the erosion of trust. This crisis is particularly evident in the film, where the protagonists distrust the social order outside the mental health institution. In general, these theories are significant for a constructive analysis of the film "Kukumi", as they address the social realities and segments of a society that has undergone the turbulence of transition. Admittedly, the theories also have their limitations, and a film of this complexity cannot be fully analyzed in just a few lines, given the wide range of other relevant theoretical approaches. Therefore, we may conclude that the analytical and theoretical examination of "Kukumi" demonstrates that the film is not merely an artistic work but rather a social diagnosis that integrates multiple perspectives on the challenges faced by emerging or transitional societies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study collects data through qualitative research, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with carefully selected target groups.

#### 3.1. Research Design

Research is a crucial tool for reaching objectives and for assessing the opinions, evaluations, or attitudes of others in relation to a given topic. Based on its definition, qualitative research is the study of the nature of phenomena, which includes their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived, but excludes their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect (Ugwu, Chinyere and Eze, Val, 2023). The design of this research proceeded through several stages. First, a review of contemporary literature on

the topic was carried out, integrating sociological theories on film analysis and its impact on audiences. Second, the research design aimed to explore both the artistic and social messages conveyed by the film to the wider public. For this purpose, the research process was carefully structured, leading to the development of the research format and methods applied in this article.

#### 3.2. Research Population

Empirical research plays an important role in presenting new insights to the public, which is why this qualitative study was conducted with targeted groups. The study sought to examine the multidimensional approach of the film "Kukumi", including the perspectives of individuals directly involved in its production. Five-in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were planned, focusing on the experiences and insights of participants. Interviews were conducted with one of the film's main characters (Mara), as well as with a film critic, a director and producer, a sociologist, and psychotherapist. Participants were selected carefully, given their specific roles and relevance to the film. In addition to biographical information, the interviews included more than six open-ended and filter questions. For the interviews with the sociologist, psychologist, and psychotherapist, over twelve questions were posed, tailored to their expertise and significance. Their responses were cited and elaborated upon in the course of the article.

#### 3.3. Instrument, Techniques, and Data Collection

The primary research instrument used in this study was the semi-structured, in-depth interview with the targeted groups. These qualitative interviews were conducted virtually, with conversations recorded for accuracy. Data were then processed, analyzed, and integrated into the study. The research was carried out between August and September 2025. After data collection, the material was carefully reviewed, refined, and, based on its relevance, cited in the article.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Analysis of the Film KUKUMI

"Kukumi" is one of the most representative works of Kosovar cinematography after the 1999 war. The screenplay was based on Mehmet Kraja's novel "Edhe të çmendurit fluturojnë" (Even the Mad Fly) (Kraja, 2004) with Kraja himself also serving as co-screenwriter. The film explores the problems arising from a misunderstood sense of freedom among the

citizens of Kosovo. The plot unfolds immediately after NATO troops enter Kosovo and Serbian forces withdraw. From a psychiatric institution, three characters—Mara, Hasani, and Kukumi—escape. At once free and fearful, they begin wandering through a land marked by destruction and devastation (Mehmetaj, 2010). Through these characters, the film portrays both euphoria and the absence of law and order. The entire narrative is filtered through the perspective of the mentally ill, presenting the outside world as even more unstable and insecure than life inside their old institution (Gonzales, et al, 2024). The theme and central idea of the film are highly challenging, encompassing multiple layers of meaning embedded within the dramaturgical line of the work. Regarding the concept of idea in cinematic works, art scholar Petrit Imami notes that unlike the theme, which is an objective aesthetic category, **the idea is a subjective one** it is discovered by the reader or viewer through their own aesthetic experience. Sergei Eisenstein similarly argued that the image leads us to feelings, and feelings lead us to ideas (Imami, 2023). “Kukumi” has generated interest within the artistic community precisely because of its ability to combine narrative with a striking aesthetic dimension. The director employs color and setting as aesthetic representations, particularly in the characters’ wanderings through post-war landscapes and ruins. Through the symbolic language embodied in the character of Kukumi, the film speaks metaphorically of the journey. His wanderings through various paths tell us much... To be on the road means to seek. To want to find and to be found. To consciously explore the states of the road—its richness and difficulties, its surprises, traps, and gifts (Kalin, 2022). The character of Kukumi illustrates how freedom—both his own and that of those around him after Kosovo’s liberation—transforms into trauma and becomes an obstacle to their existence (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Scene from Film 'Kukumi', Source: (Qosja, 2005).*

The characters, walking the roads of post-war Kosovo, seem to involuntarily become depressive subjects, resonating with the idea that the depressive individual is one exhausted by their own sovereignty, and therefore no longer capable of being master of themselves (Han, 2022). It is worth noting that “Kukumi” **received several international awards, among them** the Special Jury Prize at the Sarajevo Film Festival in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2005) and Best Feature Drama at the Albanian Film Festival in Tirana (2006) (KOST, 2010). The film “Kukumi” was also part of the Balkan Films Showcase in the 10th edition of Sofia IFF in 2006. At the Award Ceremony, “Kukumi” was awarded by the International Youth jury from Nisi Masa—the European Network of Young Cinema., etc (Dzhogleva, 2025). Drawing on the insights of the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman, Qosja interprets film not as a visual document but as an artistic dream, born of inner experience rather than logical reflection. When asked about the inspiration for alternating elegy with protest, **he replied** “Film, when it is not a document, is a dream, says Bergman. ‘Kukumi’ is my dream. If I made ‘Rojet e mjegullës’ (Keepers of Fog) with my head, I made ‘Kukumi’ with my heart (Apolloni, 2019) (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Scene from Film 'Kukumi', Source: (Qosja, 2005).*

Following its participation in several international festivals, the film was also screened at Kino ABC in Prishtina. Data provided by the cinema’s manager, Avni Dobraj (Dobraj, 2025), show that “Kukumi” was screened in September 2005 for a total of 27 days, with 106 screenings and 5,221 viewers. Additional data obtained from the Sofia Film Festival indicate that in the 10th edition of Sofia IFF in 2006, there were two screenings with a total number of 149 viewers (Dzhogleva, 2025).

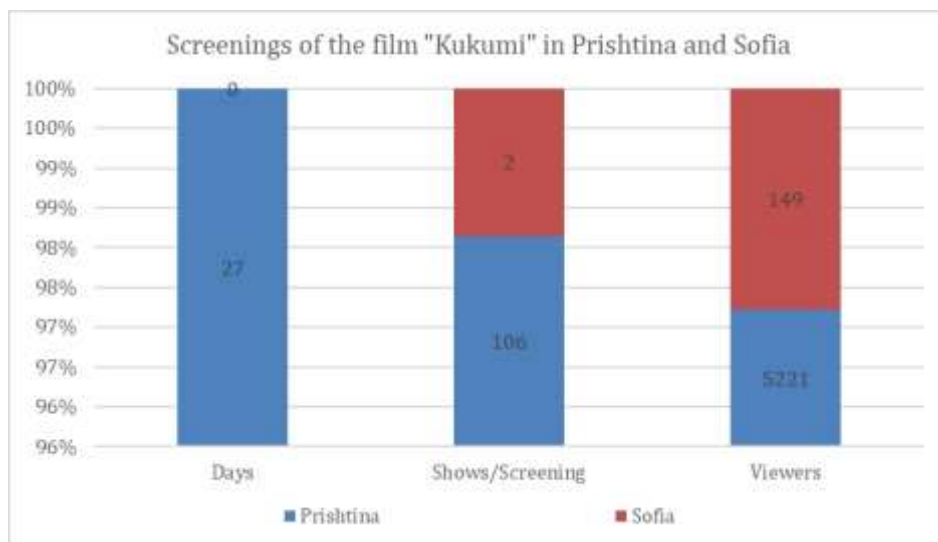


Figure 3: Screening of the Film "Kukumi" in Prishtina and Sofia. Source: (Dobraj, 2025) & (Dzhogleva, 2025).

Overall, "Kukumi" was regarded as a film of significant artistic, cultural, and social value, but also as a provocative work that did not receive a uniform reception. Internationally, it was admired for its courage and message, while within Kosovo and abroad it sparked debate over how it portrayed the social realities of the time. The British critic Neil Young observed that "'Western' audiences may not be entirely comfortable at what they may see as an out-dated, R D Laingian presentation of what in the UK are now referred to as 'learning difficulties': Kukumi, Hasan and Mara are alternately sources of childlike wonder, holy-goof oddity and even slapstick comedy, and it's perhaps regrettable that there is more in the way of narration (by Kukumi) than actual spoken dialogue by the three" (Neil, 2005). Reflecting on the originality of the film's narrative, the writer and art scholar Stefan Çapaliku argues that the strength and originality of Isa Qosja's "Kukumi" lie above all in how the protagonist's narrative unfolds, surrounded by a world more insane than he himself. He manages to orient himself within the "chaos" regarded as "normality" and to captivate the spectator without ever becoming mute or clumsy (Apolloni). In a similar vein, Kosovar film critic Driton Dragusha emphasized in our interview: "This film is the mirror image of the spiritual turmoil of a society emerging from war. The characters of the asylum reflect a society driven mad by the effects of war and the delirium of freedom. Kukumi's lament seems less a mourning of the past than a cry for the future. The film addresses the bewilderment of man in freedom, his inability to grasp that a free world and freedom itself are not without limits" (Dragusha, 2025). In post-conflict or transitional societies, film has been used by directors not only as a mirror of

social flaws and struggles but also as a medium of reflection. This reflection often functions less as a direct revolt and more as a provocation that raises new questions. As director and producer Gazmend Nela points out, "film is fiction and need not necessarily be realist. In the words of Agnès Varda: 'What interests me is not verisimilitude in film, but truth.' In 'Kukumi', that truth becomes most visible to those who directly experienced the postwar period (Nela, 2025). Similarly, Anisa Ismaili (Mara), one of the film's main protagonists, emphasized in our interview "The film addresses a kind of freedom that people exploit, misuse, or perhaps do not fully understand-yet they still seek to benefit from it. Meanwhile, this trio (Kukumi, Mara, and Hasan) only wants to enjoy freedom, fully aware that it is sacred" (Ismaili, 2025). Through the film, a message of protest is conveyed against social injustices and against the various international institutions that, at the time, were part of decision-making in Kosovo.

Although the protagonists are often dismissed as "mad" by the other characters, throughout the narrative they prove to be more honest, compassionate, and humane than postwar society itself. The escape of the three characters from the mental health institution symbolizes Kosovo's emergence from a long historical "prison" into a new, though uncertain, reality. Much of the film underscores the idea that Kosovar society must find new ways of living together and of building equality and social justice. Psychologist and psychotherapist Yll Avdijaj emphasizes that: "the film's central message is that mental health is not merely an individual issue but the consequence of collective trauma. The rest of the cast and extras, representing 'normal' society, are often portrayed as cold,

indifferent, or even hostile toward the protagonists, highlighting both the stigma surrounding mental illness and the absence of empathy. This dynamic illustrates a deep rift between the individual and the collective, where the 'healthy' fail to understand the wounded, thereby reinforcing exclusions (Avdijaj, 2025). At the same time, the film encourages audiences to reflect on the wounds of war and to resist forgetting, while also calling for collective memory and responsibility toward the new reality the country has entered. According to Dragusha, "one of the film's most evident messages is that the misunderstanding of freedom leads to suicide—both individual and collective" (Dragusha, 2025). Similarly, director Mahir Musliu argues that "'Kukumi' carries the spirit of Dostoevsky, in which crime and punishment lie perilously close, and wisdom and madness often arrive as part of the same package or merge at their limits. Director Qosja, through this work, sought to highlight a form of magical realism, not that of Abbas Kiarostami or Majid Majidi, but another kind of realism, grounded in a different reality. It is a realism in which people are horrified by daily life, and the lines outside the asylum grow longer every day with new candidates" (Musliu, 2025). In this film, Qosja seeks to assert an authorial voice in the message he conveys, aiming to reach deeply into the collective consciousness. As Croce, (2021) observes, "great artists reveal in us our own selves", through art and, in particular, through the language of cinema.

#### **4.2. Film as Social Protest and Social Dimension**

Countries that have experienced wars and conflicts inevitably face a range of social phenomena, particularly during transitional periods. Although film is primarily considered an art form, in many cases it has also served as a mode of peaceful social protest, conveying messages that aim to influence social functions. As Dilthey argues, art reflects life in typical forms, connecting it to broader historical and spiritual dimensions (Franzini & Mazzocut-Miss, 2018). Jung, on the other hand, once emphasized that unfortunately, it often seems as if no one knows what to do; perhaps, he suggested, each of us should ask whether our unconscious might hold knowledge of value for all (Jung, 2005). Modern man fails to realize the extent to which "rationalism" has put him under the dominion of a psychic "underworld." Freed from "superstition," he has also lost touch with its own spiritual values (Jung, 2004). In this light, "Kukumi" represents both a historical and a social moment for Kosovar society, reflecting through its narrative the chaos that characterized the post-war Kosovo. First,

it highlights the absence of the state as an institutional mechanism. Second, it exposes the lack of functioning public institutions for social services. Third, it portrays the social and cultural confusion of a society struggling to accept "the others" in an environment that had only just emerged from war. In this sense, the film can be seen as a form of revolt against injustice in post-conflict society. Film critic and philosopher Driton Dragusha concurs with this perspective, emphasizing that the film "should also be seen and understood as an individual drama that happens to a person. Indeed, Kukumi's drama, as portrayed in the film, should make us conscious that the events of a conflict or war ought not to be generalized and treated merely as a grand social drama, but rather as phenomena in which each individual carries their own drama, each bears their own form of pain..." (Dragusha, 2025). Similarly, psychologist and psychotherapist Yll Avdijaj, who has examined the context of "Kukumi", stresses that "the film explores the difficult realities of post-war Kosovar society. It is distinguished by its powerful symbolism, its poetic treatment of trauma, and its construction of characters that challenge the traditional logic of 'normality.' Today, 'Kukumi' is more than an artistic film—it is a symbolic mirror of post-war reality in Kosovo, presented through characters who have passed through mental health institutions. In this sense, the film retains a contemporary relevance, as the themes it addresses, trauma, identity, exclusion, the desire to understand the world, remain very much present" (Avdijaj, 2025). Thus, both Dragusha and Avdijaj share similar views regarding the film's presentation and the social dimensions depicted within it. In fact, through its symbolism, the film reflects the social, political, economic, and cultural realities of post-war Kosovar society. "The symbol makes one think," observes Paul Ricoeur. He continues this line of reasoning by emphasizing that the symbol confers meaning upon what is to be thought and what must be reflected upon, since from the inclination one can discern the position (Dema, 2015). In this sense, there are certain products whose symbolic character does not depend on the attitude of the observing consciousness, but rather asserts itself as an inherent quality, revealed through the effect it manages to create, as noted by the renowned psychologist Jung (2014). From this perspective, the film also embodies a powerful and symbolic representation of a silent revolt against injustices in post-conflict Kosovar society. This is affirmed by Avdijaj, who argues that "'Kukumi' symbolically represents a revolt against the injustices of post-conflict Kosovo. Through the three characters

released from the psychiatric hospital, the film depicts marginalized individuals who cannot adapt to the newly established 'normality' after the war. Their absurdity, silence, and unconventional behavior function as a form of protest against a disoriented reality, one marked by the absence of justice, order, and a true understanding of freedom. The revolt is silent, yet profound—a critique of a society that has yet to find itself" (Avdijaj, 2025). At the social level, the film, through its characters, reveals a holistic dimension, reflecting the complex reality of society.

- First, the film portrays social isolation and marginalization, where the main characters embody the marginalized strata of society.
- Second, it highlights the absence of functioning social institutions, particularly those dealing with mental health in a post-conflict society.
- Third, the film addresses the need for identity, space, and social belonging. Through their escape from the psychiatric hospital, the characters metaphorically wander into a space they do not recognize. Perhaps Çapriqi is right when, citing Max Black, he emphasizes that the essence of metaphor lies in the deviation of linguistic structure from literal meaning toward a fictional construct, in the style of saying one thing while meaning another. It is precisely this "falsehood" and "nonsense" that is essential; without it, we would have mere literal statement rather than metaphor (Çapriqi, 2005).
- Fourth, the film brings to the surface not only individual traumas but also the collective traumas endured by the citizens of Kosovo. Thus, the wounds of war affect not just individuals but society as a whole. In this regard, Foucault reminds us that what we consider "madness" is not natural but made by social histories. Foucault thought that psychiatry controls people by defining normality (Zović, 2024).
- Fifth, the film also explores solidarity, community, and social reintegration. It begins with a critique of the provisional institutions and the international community for neglecting vulnerable groups, but it also depicts moments of solidarity among the characters themselves and with members of society who accept them. This suggests the potential for reaffirming communal values.

Thus, the film "Kukumi" may be understood as a form of protest against the social phenomena present in post-war Kosovo, implicitly advocating for change

and development within society. It reflects a kind of social diagnosis, offering a profound reflection on the psychosocial condition of a society in transition and underscoring the need for a more humane approach toward its most vulnerable members. In this sense, "Kukumi" is not merely a film but also "a mirror, an alarm, and a dark poetry about the modern man in crisis. It remains relevant today, as Kosovar society (and beyond) continues to grapple with unaddressed trauma, social exclusion, and a lack of deeper understanding of mental health" (Avdijaj, 2025). The film succeeds in weaving together a **multidimensional approach** it stands as a peaceful social protest advocating for social justice, possesses artistic merit, has gained cultural and international recognition, and, above all, delivers a clear message to contemporary society. This message concerns the critical periods inscribed in the historical backdrop, where gradually, through cooperation, empathy, work, creativity, peace, solidarity, and social reconstruction, the re-affirmation of identity in post-conflict societies can be achieved.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Isa Qosja's cinematic work "Kukumi" functions as a sharp social analysis of post-war Kosovo, revealing structural problems within the social care system and underscoring the pressing need for a more inclusive infrastructure of social support. Through the portrayal of three figures coming out of a mental health institution, wandering unprotected through a damaged social environment, the film poignantly exposes the institutional shortcomings in providing adequate care. By means of cinematic language, the director presents the patients' liberation from the medical institution, while simultaneously highlighting the absence of any reintegration strategy: an absence that reflects the broader lack of a stable apparatus for social services. This situation illustrates a common challenge in newly established states or those emerging from armed conflict, where immediate priorities of security and reconstruction often overshadow the needs of the most vulnerable social groups. Furthermore, in our in-depth interviews, participants also emphasized the film's analytical and critical approach. As critic Driton Dragusha points out, this cinematic work represents the mirror of the spiritual turmoil of a community emerging from violent confrontation, turning the three mental hospital patients into powerful emblems of all those abandoned by the system.

As actress Anisa Ismaili observes, the film's characters simply wish to experience freedom, fully

aware of its sanctity. Psychologist and psychotherapist Yll Avdijaj underscores that the message conveyed by the film is that psychological health is not merely a personal matter but the result of collective trauma. The relationship between the three protagonists and the wider society reveals the persistence of prejudice toward psychological disorders and the lack of compassion. The work represents a quiet rebellion against injustices in post-conflict society, where paradox, silence, and extraordinary behavior serve as forms of resistance to a newly emerging reality. The film should also be seen as a call to hope for change: while it portrays a harsh reality, it simultaneously offers optimism. In this sense, "Kukumi" does not impose a moral or political narrative but instead provokes an open-ended and profound dilemma: What kind of society should we build for the future? This interrogative dimension transforms the film into an instrument not only artistic but also social and philosophical, inviting audiences to reconsider reality beyond the screen, as director and producer Gazmend Nela emphasizes. Thus, two decades after its release,

"Kukumi" remains relevant not only for Kosovo but for any society grappling with the aftermath of conflict, political transitions, or social crises.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

Film "Kukumi" provides an exemplary case study for this interdisciplinary integration, demonstrating how artistic works can function as powerful tools for analyzing and understanding social phenomena. "Kukumi" serves as an ideal bridge between humanities and social sciences, offering: Case Study Material: Real-world application of theoretical concepts, Cultural Context: Understanding of post-conflict society dynamics, Methodological Innovation: Integration of artistic interpretation with scientific analysis, Student Engagement: Accessible entry point into complex social theories. This interdisciplinary approach prepares students for modern professional environments that increasingly require cross-disciplinary thinking and cultural competency.

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