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**FEELING THE PARANOIAC, THE SCHIZO AND THE  
DEPRESSIVE –A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF MACEDONIA’S  
EMOTIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN **BEFORE THE RAIN****

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## **Opening scene**

A lonely bird's screech pierces the dark burgundy sunrise sky which segues into a close-up of tomato plants nestled in a luscious little vegetable garden adjacent to an ancient Orthodox Christian monastery. The land surrounding the monastery is criss-crossed with innumerable rhizome-like cracks that are covered with a thick layer of dust. Against the annihilating goldness of the sun, and the faded blue of the summer sky marked with gaseous milky traces of supersonic military planes, Kiril,<sup>1</sup> a baby-faced monk, admiringly looks and touches the voluptuous crimson tomatoes as if paying homage to these divine fruits of the monks' loving labour on this not so fertile piece of God's land.

Male children dressed in rags play with fire in which they toss a few unused bullets and a turtle. An elderly Orthodox Christian monk with an old sweet wrinkly face arrives to escort the young monk out of the garden.<sup>2</sup> On the distant horizon dark clouds start congregating and one can hear the bolting of a thunder. For a moment, shivers of fear and uneasy foreboding permeate the face of the old monk. "Every time it thunders it jolts me. I think here we go the shooting has started here too"- he says to the silent young monk. As they walk away from the ancient monastery, they ingest the breathtaking beauty of an

old stone church and a tall cypress tree that stand alone on a cliff cutting a bubbling emerald green lake.

The stunning view does not provide sufficient comfort for the weary body of the old monk. The space between the barren mountains is filled with a repetitive and unbearably irritating noise of millions of crickets – heralds of an ominous event just about to unfold in a most violent way. Hypercharged heat threatens to dissipate into a violent storm. Signs of human tension fill the space under the stage of this celestial drama. Eyes almost pulsate their way out of their sockets with force that follows the relentless rhythm of the crickets. The muscles and skin around the eyes contract trying to pull the eyes back in their sockets. The tensed up body and face of the old monk signify a premonition of something unthinkable and dreadful just about to hit the innocent and unsuspecting like a sudden summer storm.

As the monks' gazes lovingly touch the rugged mountains and landscapes, skies ready to explode in gold and blue, monasteries and churches carved out in stone, barren lands scorched by the sun, elegant cypresses and wavy lakes, a deeply sensual and suggestive music impregnates the ascetic beauty of their surroundings with divine lushness. A warm, velvety melody in adagio tempo springs out of a lyrical guitar punctuated occasionally by the thundering of drums and the melancholy of a flute. The music heralds tempestuous emotional landscapes that are just about to unfold in a volatile land, fraught with simmering tensions, resentments, historical misunderstandings, tabooed passions, violent hatreds, dashed hopes, and quashed ambitions.

The music develops in a theme that suggests *catharsis*, a deep soul cleansing that will come after the tempest. Yet, at the same time, there is a nagging flickering of fear of being caught in the brutally indiscriminate whirlwind of the tempest without any recourse to the doors of the promised purgatory. Instead of a welcome possibility for sweeping away the evil spirits, the storm could turn out to be nothing but a futile exercise of power. By this stage the choreography of faces, bodies, words, voices, built spaces, natural landscapes and music on the screen sets off an avalanche of associations, identifications and emotions. I am utterly seduced by this opening scene that urges me to keep watching.

### **The Macedonian imaginary – synopsis of basic historical and socio-cultural references in *Before the Rain***

Thus begins ***Before the Rain*** (Manchevski 1994), beautifully told (filmic) story about the tragedy of certain kinds of molecular desires and affectionate contaminations that are pulled apart by the molar gravity of social forces that push in the direction of social separation and purity between ethnic groups, nations, classes and genders (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Manchevski, screenwriter for and director of the film, is particularly interested in examining some of the capillary effects of the ‘paranoiac fascizing’ pole of the Macedonian (national) imaginary - a group fantasy (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 277), a sociocultural script massively reinforced by so many cogs in the Macedonian social machine, a carefully calibrated set of representations and moral imperatives obsessed with the purity of the ‘superior’ class and ethnicity (Lambevski 1999).

This is an imaginary that furnishes the motives behind the affects, the ‘immediately rewarding or punishing experiences’ (Tomkins 1995: 54), that criss-cross the flesh of Macedonia’s people. This group fantasy also assigns values, which happen to be socially valorised emotions, to cultural artefacts, practices and human bodies (Tomkins 1995: 54). Thus some of these artefacts, practices and bodies become good, interesting, exciting, desirable, joyous, pleasant, or divine, while other objects attain the status of bad, vulgar, unpleasant, disgusting, contemptible, sad, evil and unbearably shameful things.

The Macedonian imaginary is a deeply fractured set of authoritative representations that is marked by inherent social antagonisms between classes, ethnicities, genders and sexualities in Macedonia. As such it is regularly contested by those who desire an escape from its affective grip. The ethnic antagonism between Macedonians and Albanians overwhelms the split Macedonian nation to such a degree that it totally absorbs all other forms of social antagonism in Macedonia. Occupying completely opposing cultural positions within the Macedonian national imaginary, where one’s ethnic identity is only established in opposition to the negatively defined supplementary figure of the other (Smith 1994: 24; Derrida 1974), Macedonians and Albanians keep insisting on their ‘purity and superiority’, so they do not have to dread the miasma of miscegenation and loss of identity (Lambevski 1997).

Forced by history to live on such intricately mixed territories, Macedonians and Albanians have developed elaborate ways of cultivating certain types of contacts and

relationships with each other, on one hand, and of violently discouraging other relationships and contacts with each other, on the other (Lambevski 1997). While Albanians and Macedonians can be good neighbours, classmates, business partners and maybe even friends, they must never become each other's lovers or spouses.<sup>3</sup> However, living in such close physical proximity to each other, there is always the ever present possibility of feverishly passionate intermingling between Albanian and Macedonian bodies of the opposite, or the same sex (Lambevski 1999). The thought of flows of bodily fluids, pleasures and passions between Macedonian and Albanian bodies, of their naked flesh, tense with fear from breaking the unwritten laws, and quivering with desire bigger than that fear, constitutes the unthinkable and unspeakable kernel of the Macedonian imaginary.

In other words, the Macedonian imaginary is an intertwined set of ideas about: 1. what a human body marked as either 'Macedonian' or 'Albanian' should do, think, say and feel; and 2. how the body politic of Macedonian society should be organised. Within this group fantasy, the body politic of Macedonian society is invariably imagined as a composite masculinist male 'Albanian' or 'Macedonian' body of an 'impregnable' master that comes complete with all its anxieties, macho fantasies, and defensive armours (Stojanovich 1967; Gjuric 1990; Lambevski 1997; Gatens 1996). The composite feminine female 'Albanian' or 'Macedonian' body plays a supplementary role in imagining Macedonia's body politic by defining the femininity of the private sphere in opposition to the masculinity of the public sphere – the Macedonian nation-state and economy. This composite and very authoritative image of a 'Macedonian' or 'Albanian'

woman usually figures either as a saintly mother, who is a giver and sustainer of (male) life, or as an 'honourable' wife, a domestic worker in charge of the man's house that strives to please and obey her man completely (Lambevski 1997). Contemporary Macedonian political discourse, to a very large extent, still metaphorically configures the physical ground on which the Macedonian state, economy and nation are implanted as a 'mother' or 'honourable wife' (Lambevski 1997 and 1999: 412-3) in service either to her 'beloved son' or in possession of her 'master' (Yuval-Davis 1993).

The nuclear and the extended family, as well as the clan are put in charge of a gigantic sub-state social machine (Massumi 2002: 82), which includes one's neighbours, school peers, work colleagues and the informal morality police – a motley crew of 'concerned' busy bodies. The role of this machine is to completely seal off leakages of desire outside this group fantasy (Tomasic 1948; Lambevski 1997).<sup>4</sup> However, this fantasy leaks on all sides all the time. The more the Macedonian social machine tries to reduce life in Macedonia to a rigid symbol of the purity of the split Macedonian nation, the more it feeds ravenous microscopic desiring-machines, unpredictably assembled from detached segments from heterogeneous signifying chains (Lacan 1977: 33-113) of the Macedonian imaginary and from flying partial objects (Klein 1930) – bodies, artefacts and practices – to which this group fantasy attempts to impose the stasis of the law (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 78-100).

Against the appearance of rigid stability and order in the relations between the molar aggregates of ethnicities, genders, classes and sexualities in Macedonia, there is the

explosive flux of molecular desiring-machines - Macedonian and Albanian eyes exchanging longing gazes, flaming tongues caught in tabooed kisses, febrile bodies rubbing against each other – capable of demolishing entire established sectors of Macedonian society (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 116). Within the *ancien regime* of the Macedonian imaginary, there is the electrifying current of desire, a sign of strength, tempestuous force that gives rise to new imaginations about new syntheses of singularities and signifying chains, intensities, becomings, new alliances, loves, and societies (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 111, 304-7). This constitutes the schizo(revolutionary) pole of the Macedonian imaginary which nourishes a nomadic subject who refuses the territorialisations of its paranoid counterpart: ‘I am neither Macedonian nor Albanian, neither a man nor a woman, neither upper or lower class, neither gay or straight. I am scum of the earth, a proud dweller in the dungeon of my shame. I have a two headed eagle taking off from my vagina, and the sun coming out of my bottom.’<sup>5</sup> You can take my body, but you cannot take my desire. It will migrate in many new bodies as soon as you gun me down with a spray of bullets. Remember that.’

The incessant battle between the paranoid and the schizo, two distinct Macedonian subjects each plugged in their respective register of the Macedonian imaginary, constitutes the main line of dramatic tension in **Before the Rain** (Manchevski 1994). Manchevski uses a series of very effective cinematic devices to represent this titanic struggle between these two subjectivities. In the next few sections I will pay special attention to the diegetic, photographic and auditory structuring of this battle in the film.

## **Zemira and Kiril**

In this stunning directorial debut,<sup>6</sup> Manchevski adopts an elliptical narrative structure to tell three love stories that are connected by people and events. Each part includes scenes from the other two stories, thus creating a feeling of circular temporality where the present and future constantly loop into each other. Each part also returns to the opening scene that I just described above. This scene serves as a narrative puzzle and as an overture to the full range of emotions that the film represents. With each return, Manchevski masterfully adds bits and pieces to this scene, managing to keep the viewer's suspense as to its fuller meaning to the very end of the film.

There is something both paranoid and schizoid about the scene. The old monk with his jumpiness represents the paranoid register of the Macedonian imaginary, while the ecstatically serene baby-faced monk represents the schizoid register of the Macedonian imaginary. The camera constantly shuffles between their respective gazes. While the old monk sees ominous signs of an impending doom everywhere - in the distant thunders, the explosion caused by the children dressed in rags, the milky traces left in the sky by supersonic military jets and the nerve wrecking noise produced by innumerable summer crickets, the young monk detaches himself from the thunderous political climate of his country, metaphorically hinted by the celestial drama played out in the opening scene,

with sensual daydreaming. His perfectly unwrinkled face punctuated by a permanent grin sits in odd contrast to the creased and tensed up face of the old monk. The young monk's face suggests that he is prone to flights of fancy. His gaze constantly evades the solidity of the mountains and the rocky ground, as well as the claustrophobic regulation of flows in the built environment depicted in the film. His gaze is *always already somewhere else*.

The scenes in the first part of the film, which immediately follow after the prologue, will only confirm the young monk as someone who is *ready to escape* the paranoid designations of his Orthodox Christianity and his Macedonian ethnicity. The first part is a study of the insurmountable difficulties faced by Zemira,<sup>7</sup> a Moslem Albanian girl, and Kiril, the already mentioned baby-faced Macedonian Orthodox Christian monk, in living the love they have for each other. Their affections for each other develop under the most extraordinary circumstances.

Zemira is a beautiful, but somewhat 'mischievous' Albanian girl. Curious about the other men (the Macedonians), she approaches them too closely. Against the backdrop of serious ethnic tensions between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians in a remote Macedonian village, Zemira crosses the Macedonian/Albanian paranoiac's boundary. Her desire for the other men threatens to trigger a civil war in the village, since it questions the entire established order between genders, ethnicities and religions in the village. Manchevski does not show us how she actually crosses this boundary. This is an amazingly effective narrative device in showing the tragic absurdity and irrationality of the paranoid-fascisizing register of the Macedonian imaginary. The paranoiacs on both

sides of the ethnic divide do not need evidence. They conjure up a paranoid accusation out of a few disconnected pieces of ‘proof’.

There is a corpse of an ethnic Macedonian shepherd in a hut on a top of a hill. Zemira is seen running, presumably away, from the hut. Given this ‘evidence’, armed Macedonian villagers accuse Zemira of seducing and then murdering this Macedonian shepherd. The armed Macedonian militia men search for Zemira in order to administer their ‘justice’.

Zemira somehow manages to find refuge in Kiril’s monastery cell. Huddled in fear, she pleads to Kiril in Albanian to protect her. Kiril initial impulse is to report her to the deacon of the monastery, since Zemira’s presence as a woman and Moslem defiles the monastery’s male Orthodox Christian ‘sanctity’ and ‘purity’. However, Zemira’s pleading eyes, filled with fear, anxiety, anticipation, and gratitude, trigger an avalanche of emotions in Kiril that question the very core of his identity as a male Macedonian Orthodox Christian monk. He abandons the dogmatic proscriptions of his monastic life for an ethics based on an unexpected love. He feeds her with the juicy crimson tomatoes he collects in the opening scene and vows to protect her against all odds, even if it requires lying to his spiritual brothers and God’s representatives on earth. To this gesture, Zemira responds with her own unexpected emotions. Her fear gives way to a loving surrender to Kiril’s hallucinatory protectiveness.

Bearded and raucous armed Macedonian militia men ransack the monastery in pursuit of Zemira. They fill the dignified air of the monastery with extremely vulgar slurs and

threats addressed to Zemira. The Macedonian militia men do not find Zemira. They decide to camp outside the monastery and guard all its exits just in case Zemira tries to slip outside in the deep darkness of the night. The monastery's deacon orders his own search and finds Zemira in a hidden spot close to Kiril's cell.<sup>8</sup>

The deacon reluctantly plays the role of the upholder of the ecclesiastical law. Kiril is defrocked and his vow of silence is invalidated. The deacon's fury is, however, immediately subsided by a deep understanding of Kiril's motives and the long monastic tradition of providing refuge for persecuted people regardless of their religion and ethnicity (Cornakov 1991).<sup>9</sup> The deacon makes arrangements for Zemira's and Kiril's safe escape from the besieged monastery. The deacon lovingly hugs and kisses Kiril before he leaves. Kiril, knowing well that his and Zemira's life in Macedonia would be a living hell, promises to take Zemira to his uncle in London, a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer working for a famous photo agency. They both manage to slip safely out of the monastery.

However, they get intercepted by Zekir, Zemira's grandfather,<sup>10</sup> her brother and a group of Albanian armed villagers. Her brother asks about what she is doing with that 'dirty Macedonian scumbag'. She responds that she loves him. Apart from Zemira and Kiril, who obviously does not understand a word of the Albanian discourse taking place in front of him, everyone else erupts in cynical laughter.

In an emotionally charged disciplinary move mirroring Kiril's earlier disciplining by the deacon, Zemira's grandfather slaps her face hard, while her brother calls her a whore. Zemira's grandfather's face and voice are torn between two contradictory impulses: the first comes from his somewhat reluctant playing of the role of enforcer of the Albanian way of life, while the second impulse springs from his almost unconditional affection for Zemira. Her brother and his friends have their hands ready on their machineguns' triggers. Her grandfather gives Kiril an ultimatum: he would either stay to face certain death as a sign of his love for Zemira, or would leave Zemira immediately. Everyone's eyes are on Kiril now. Zemira's brother's eyes are filled with triumphant knowledge that Kiril will run away with the tail between his legs. Zemira's grandfather threateningly, and yet pleadingly, gazes at Kiril signalling to him that he should leave. He has not only the burden of upholding the Albanian tradition, but he also, as an Albanian elder, shoulders the responsibility for peace in the village based on the tradition of self-imposed apartheid between its two ethnic communities. Zemira's grandfather knows that Kiril's death would lead to Macedonians' avenging his death by killing someone in Zemira's family or clan.

After a few agonising moments, Kiril drops his shoulders and lowers his head as a sign of utter defeat and humiliation. He slowly and very reluctantly makes his first steps. Zemira runs after him, screaming in Albanian that she loves him. This proves too much for her brother who sprays her with bullets. Zemira falls on the ground, her body convulsing with the last breaths of her life in Kiril's embrace. There is shock on the faces of the Albanian witnesses of this fratricide. Zemira's grandfather's face and body signal his utter exasperation with the trigger happy excessiveness of his grandson's action. Zemira's

brother's face is paralysed by grief. There is the realisation of the heavy price one pays for listening to the shrill voice of the paranoiac within oneself. The remorse for the murderous enforcing of the Albanian way of life gives way very quickly to the understanding of the 'necessity' of this action. The paranoiac is busy at work here flaunting his terrorising imperatives: better fratricide in the name of the purity of one's ethnic group and family, than the dread of miasma, miscegenation and loss of ethnic identity.

Zemira's brother takes her body, but cannot take the desire that temporarily occupies that body. As the film shows in the following scenes, this desire does migrate in other bodies as soon as one body is gunned down with a spray of bullets. It runs in the family.

### **Anne and Aleksandar**

The second part of the film begins with a phone call from Kiril to Anne,<sup>11</sup> an editor in a photo agency in London. Kiril asks in French for his uncle Aleksandar Kirkov,<sup>12</sup> a war photographer in the agency and Anne's lover. Anne answers the phone in her soft, fragile voice, while kneeling down on the floor and writhing with pain caused both by an unexpected pregnancy, and the sickening war images sent to her by her lover. As soon as she manages to say to Kiril that his uncle is not there, the haggard looking Aleksandar enters the agency.

His gait is a mixture of fury, resignation, anger, and hope. He quickly grabs Anne from the agency in order to ask her whether she would join him on his trip to an ethical 'purgatory' which Kirkov localises as 'Macedonia'. He tries to explain to Anne why he urgently needs to undergo through some sort purification. Documenting the Bosnian war in the early nineties, Aleksandar finds himself traumatised by his complicity with the Western media's perverse search for a 'good' Bosnian, meaning particularly bloody, story at any cost. He complained to a Bosnian Serb soldier that there was nothing to report today. The soldier pulled his pistol out and killed a male Bosnian Moslem prisoner in front of him, saying to Kirkov: 'Well, here is your story now'. The realisation that he was an accessory to a murder infuses Kirkov with unbearable guilt and self-disgust.

He finds the polite civility of London where monstrous things happen under polite disguises happen all the time unbearable. It is in his construction of Macedonia as a purgatory, where Aleksandar stumbles over his fantasy of Macedonia as a place of decent, peaceful and hard-working men and women unsoiled by the malaise of the Western civilisation, or the 'irrational' violence of the other (non-Macedonian) Balkan 'tribes'. 'Macedonia' as a symbol here sets off a particular desiring machine within Aleksandar which is plugged into a network of heterogeneous signifying chains (Deleuze and Guattari 1983), which stretch from his uncritical reading of ancient Macedonian history, and glamourising the backbreaking harshness and banality of the 'scraps, rags and patches' of Macedonian daily life (Bhabha 1993: 297), to his smoothing over the inherent ethnic, class, gender and other social antagonisms in contemporary Macedonia. Aleksandar's desire for return to an (impossible) state of purity, or ethical integrity, is

predicated upon the existence and the productive force of the fantasy he manages to conjure up about Macedonia.

Anne for a moment is tempted by the seductive power of this desire of Aleksandar's. Her voice and speech signals she would love to escape the territorialisations of her Englishness, middle-classness, conjugal femininity and career ambitions (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). However, Anne rejects this offer of creating a new life out of flying bits and pieces from their respective personal biographies and social milieux. She proves to be a fatalistic, and a depressing, realist.

Aleksandar gives Anne a one way air ticket to Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, just in case she changes her mind. Anne says she needs to take care of urgent business in London, without telling Aleksandar that she is actually pregnant. Manchevski does not conclusively tell us whether the father is Aleksandar or Anne's estranged English husband, Nick.<sup>13</sup> Anne arranges to see Nick in a posh London restaurant in order to tell him about her pregnancy. One gets a sense here that Anne wants to see Nick's reaction to the news of her pregnancy before she decides whether she wants to keep the baby. There is a very awkward attempt at rapprochement between Anne and Nick, particularly on Anne's side. While Anne and Nick are trying to re-establish some sense of normal communication, there is a loud altercation between a Croatian waiter and a Serbian customer, who argue in Serbo-Croatian.

The posh restaurant, supposedly removed from the violence of the world, a place where little nice, plain chats occur, suddenly becomes a stage for a brutal explosion of paranoid miscommunication on many levels. The Serbian customer with his long unkempt beard, cocky gait, vulgar speech and gauche suit demands 'respect' for his 'equal' status not only from the 'lowly' waiter, but also from the restaurant's upper middle-class guests. The paranoid feeling that he is looked down on, although in reality no one pays attention to him, pushes this gauche customer into making a huge scene, thus demanding everyone's attention. He showers the waiter with hundreds of large denomination pound notes signalling to everyone that he is so rich he can buy every one of them. The waiter politely asks this customer to leave the restaurant, which the customer refuses.

The stiff English restaurant owner attempts to get rid of the nuisance, by sacking the waiter, who bears no responsibility for the scene at all, and by suggesting with contempt that the 'two of them' should continue their 'Balkan' fights outside the restaurant. This only further infuriates the raucous customer. The gauche attention seeker leaves for a moment, just to return with a machinegun in his hands. In a fit of rage he starts shooting indiscriminately around the restaurant. Many of the guests and staff are killed or maimed. There are rivers of blood, punctured bodies and detached body parts everywhere. In the chaos of the moment, the camera finally focuses on Anne and Nick huddled together under their table. Anne lifts Nick's head to find a bloody stream coming out of one of Nick's gouged eyes. His handsome face is completely disfigured in the same way as her hope for a return to a 'normal' English middle-class life is shattered.

## **The narcissistic wounds of the democratic paranoiac**

In the microcosm of this stylish London restaurant, Manchevski metaphorically condenses the paranoid misperceptions between the affluent, civilised, and democratic West and its ‘nemesis’, the Balkans, and the narcissistic wounds they keep inflicting on each other. Manchevski subtly mocks the Western liberal for his/her narcissistic construction of ethnic or racial violence as a remnant of some primitive and distant past untouched by the civilising mission of the project of liberal democracy, modernity, and rationality. When the owner apologises to the guests for the scene, before the armed paranoid customer returns, Nick cheerfully dismisses the incident by saying that ‘these things’, as far as the British are concerned, happen only in Ulster. The owner, ironically, is incensed by this comment and replies that he is from Northern Ireland too. Nick immediately understands the stupidity and offensiveness of his comment. For Manchevski, ‘the Balkans’ is not the Western European past. It is rather the European present in its Northern Irish otherness.

The uncivilised, violent Other is a limit inherent to Western democracy (Žižek 1993: 200).<sup>14</sup> It is an Other produced and generated by it. There is a paradox at the heart of Western democracy, when it is constructed as expressing someone’s ‘superior’ composite (national, ethnic or regional) political being. The belief that all people are created equal is fundamental to a democratically organised society. When one person expresses contempt for another person because of the latter’s ethnic, class, religious, gender, sexual or any other identity, the latter is ‘more likely to experience shame than self-contempt insofar as

the democratic ideal has been internalised' by the shamed person (Tomkins 1995: 139). Shame is an intensely toxic affect that the latter will try to minimise according to any strategy of negative affect minimisation at her disposal (Tomkins 1993: 67).

She will either try to recast the person who shamed her into a shameful position, or seek some sort of reparation or retribution from the person who inflicted the shame damage on her. Both strategies contain the possibility of resorting to anger, as an emotional response to being shamed. Anger is the most antisocial, most toxic, most contagious and least controllable affect (Tomkins 1995: 197-201).<sup>15</sup> Anger, whether it underpins a recasting or reparative strategy of negative affect minimisation, almost invariably involves some form of violence. Sometimes this violence is directed towards the person or situation that triggered the shame-anger response, but many times it escalates into an indiscriminate aggression towards everything around the angry person. The name for this aggression is rage.

The stylish London restaurant in Manchevski's film lends itself to being read as a metaphor for the exclusive club of affluent Western (European) democracies. A motley crew of ratbag Eastern European democracies, as represented by the gauche attention seeker, are desperately vying for membership of this club. The membership rules and entry into the club are arbitrarily and capriciously policed by a stodgy and arrogant political bureaucracy of the 'old Europe', which is represented in the film as the stiff English owner of the restaurant. The pleading and servile new Eastern European governments in the film are represented in the character of the spineless Croatian

speaking waiter. The gauche attention seeker metaphorically condenses both Western prejudices about Eastern Europe and the Eastern European internalisation of the democratic ideal of the West. He enters the restaurant demanding that he is afforded the respect of an equal, however he is shown to the door mainly because of his apparent lack of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1984). Manchevski clearly alludes to the possible political and social dangers of such a Western European approach towards postcommunist Eastern Europe, and particularly towards his native Macedonia.

### **Homecoming**

From the carnage in the restaurant, Manchevski immediately transports us into Aleksandar's Macedonia screened through the lenses of his earlier mentioned fantasy about his homeland. There is a two and a half minute homecoming sequence that signifies Aleksandar's long overdue and anxiously anticipated trip from London to his native village. This sequence also marks the beginning of the third story of the film.

Manchevski, an award winning director of music video clips for MTV (Andonovski 1995), treats us to a beautifully edited succession of smooth aerial shots of rugged Macedonian landscapes that immediately segue into aerial and ground shots of Aleksandar's gazing at objects and residents of the Macedonian capital from his bus. Everything in this sequence has been edited in way to reinforce the fantasy Kirkov has about Macedonia as a harmonious society, as a *refuge* from the metastases of Western Life, as a peace oasis untouched by interethnic wars, as a *home* where simple, decent,

hard-working, honest and innocent people live. There is a certain warm glow to the light that illuminates everything that appears on the screen, while the film music tickles the viewer with a whiff of joy. The camera beautifully descends from a *Skopje from air* plan to a *Skopje from a UN* tank plan.

Almost every shot in this sequence prominently features a woman going on about her daily business. There is a quick procession of peasant women doing their backbreaking labour, elegant middle-aged urban women busily walking the streets of Skopje with their shopping bags, funky young women arguing with their not so funky boyfriends. They all walk on the ground of the land called *Macedonia*, thus metonymically signifying Macedonia as a *home* where women do most of the emotional and other work in order to create a refuge for their men – husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, partners - from the harsh demands of the male dominated public sphere. One gets a sense that Aleksandar's perception of Macedonia as a (feminine) oasis in an ocean of alpha-male dogs is plugged deeply into the traditional Macedonian imaginary as I described it earlier.

The juxtaposition of these female images with other potent Macedonian images and sounds in this sequence only further confirm Aleksandar's fantasy about Macedonia as an ideal, harmonious, immaterial, and ancient order that shines with divine beauty. There is an abstract and deeply potentializing quality of the images and sounds deployed here (Massumi 2002). Behind the triviality and banality of the scraps and patches of Macedonian daily life that Aleksandar encounters on his trip from Skopje Airport to his native village there is a *Thing* that has the potential to turns these objects, people and

practices into sublime objects of desire. Suddenly, a virtual Macedonia springs from the wells of desire which *transcends everything*: small or great empires, communist or democratic republics, thugs killing and pillaging in the name of their ethnic groups, and UN soldiers observing a volatile people.

This Thing is not a substitute for anything anterior and should not be confused with Aleksandar's empirical objects of desire (Lacan 1992: 52) The Thing does not form part of the desired object, but constitutes, causes, the desire for that object (Grigg 1991: 34). The constant metonymic evasions through which *Macedonia* slips from one object/practice to another in the film, just demonstrates Aleksandar's inability as a Macedonian to pin his desire for *Macedonia* to any particular *thing*. Macedonia here appears, to put it in Derridean terms, both as a *spirit* and a *spectre* (Montag 1999). It is a spirit, since *Macedonia* is extrafilmically embodied in multiple material objects, practices and bodies. The spirit pierces these objects, practices and bodies with an identity that escapes definition. Manchevski reproduces this spirit as an apparition, a *spectre*, a recording of a longing without a name.

### **The Macedonian sonic imaginary**

The music of the ethno-rock band Anastasia brings the elusive quality of the Macedonian Thing to the forefront where symbolisation fails, and one finds oneself immersed in an unbearable joy/pain. Their music is interwoven with all of the features of the Macedonian

way of life shown in the film, illuminating what is present in them, what appears through them, what is *more than* just rituals, objects, landscapes, etc.

Anastasia cultivates a particular music style that belongs to the tradition of the second wave of Macedonian ethno rock which in the eighties moved away from the forms of classic electro rock in order to develop a new, hardly rock, music form based on Eastern Orthodox Church singing (Lambevski 1992: 55). Ideologically they belong to a group of music and art bands loosely connected in a Macedonian *retro* movement interested in reconstructing the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Macedonia (Lambevski 1997: 139-170). As such, Anastasia draws from highly coded music representations that have already proven their capacity to produce certain effects in its listeners.<sup>16</sup>

By using traditional Macedonian folk and sacral music forms Anastasia is able to immediately evoke a familiar sonic imaginary, a landscape of sounds, expressing emotions and images with which Macedonians identify. Most Macedonian traditional folk songs and dances were created by Macedonian peasants during the Ottoman rule of Macedonia. These songs and dances served as a particularly useful creative outlet for dealing with the extremely harsh conditions under which they found themselves in Ottoman Turkey (Lambevski 1997: 15-19). In song and dance, Macedonian peasants were able to symbolise their tragedy caused by their tyrannical rulers, to vent out an enormous range of negative affects (anger, powerlessness, envy, frustration, sadness, deep depression, rage, hopelessness, fear, worry) in the face of this tragedy, and to imagine sweet revenges against their rulers.

In other words, Macedonian peasants were able to emotionally cathect the songs and dances they were collectively creating with affects that were produced in relation to the peasants' social/material reality in pre-modern Macedonia. While the modern Macedonian nation-state wove and still weaves a Macedonian nation out of these scraps and patches of folklore (Lambevski 1997), the affective cathexis that contemporary Macedonians develop in relation to these songs and dances is quite different to that of their pre-modern ancestors. Feelings are very 'much linked to people's material and psychosocial conditions of existence throughout their embodied experience' (Collins quoted in Williams 1998: 62). The feelings that contemporary Macedonians invest in traditional Macedonian folk songs and dances have a very different material and psychosocial basis to that of pre-modern Macedonians (Lambevski 1997). The socio-economic and political reality of contemporary Macedonia is very different to that of eighteenth and nineteenth century Macedonia. However, the reproduction/remake of these traditional folk songs and dances constitutes a convenient vehicle through which a direct link between the Macedonian past and present can be imagined, thus establishing a connection between the affective landscape of contemporary Macedonians and that of their pre-modern ancestors.

### **The music of the Macedonian depressive**

Macedonian peasants developed a particularly bleak outlook on life, prominently placing the theme of death and dying as a final refuge from the enormous pain in their lives in

most of their songs and dances. In this way they codified a particular representation of Macedonicity as a journey through poverty, misery, injustice in the face of arbitrary power, disease, rape, heavy taxes, constant warfare, loveless marriages and backbreaking manual labour. Macedonian peasants cultivated a set of images of the Macedonian as a tragically heroic depressive. This set of images constitutes, after the paranoiac and the schizo(revolutionary), the third register of the Macedonian imaginary. This depressive was on a journey that needed to be hurried, since life was joyless and meaningless, so she could meet her final refuge – death. What gives particular power to these images and narratives of death are the music rhythms and tones with which they are reproduced.

The extremely fast paced (7/8 and 13/16) rhythms of Macedonian folk dances (ora) and songs are nothing but affective signs of this rush towards the final destination. Thus, Macedonian folk music abounds with representatives of (manic) depression which constantly vacillates between hyper liveliness and a depressive monotone. Many Macedonian folk dances and songs are rhythmically organised in a tripartite movement: *slow fast slow*. Here, the music theme develops slowly with a grieving singing voice that cries over a Macedonian boy's or girl's tragedy until it is suddenly broken in the middle into an unbelievably fast theme full of life and determination to break from the self-pity, and returns in the end to a much slower journey towards silence. Anastasia brilliantly taps into this triple-themed song of traditional Macedonian folk music in their sound track for **Before the Rain**, thus immediately transporting the Macedonian listener to the sound landscape that I just described above.

Most of Anastasia's scores for the film follow this formula. The main music theme or phrase slowly develops through a repetitive slow playing of the theme by a guitar accompanied by a *tapan* (a type of drum). The lyrical guitar is juxtaposed to the dramatic epic beat of the drum, and the voice of the singer (Goran Trajkovski). Together they produce an unusual sonic effect of rounded sharpness, or of unsettling warmness. The intermediary part is usually purely instrumental and rhythmically represents a typical Macedonian *oro* (dance).

The encounter between the Macedonian language and the voice of Anastasia's lead singer (Goran Trajkovski) is marked here by a displacement from the symbolic-imaginary field (signification) to the field of the real where signification fails (Barthes 1977: 181). This displacement is a signifier of *jouissance*, which Barthes names it *the grain of the voice* (Barthes 1977: 181). This signifier is in a position of 'dual production - of language and music' (1977a: 181). There is something particularly unsettling about the voice of Anastasia's lead singer.

His voice penetrates every word of the song, impregnating every word with *jouissance*. There is something here that goes beyond any meaning that could be conveyed by the words of the song he sings, the style of the song and the way he sings it. There is something about the materiality of the cantor's body that disturbs. There is a vibration that penetrates the body and which seems to come from 'deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic [Macedonian] language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and

the music he sings' (Barthes 1977: 182). There is nothing personal or original about the cantor's voice, since all lead singers in the second wave of Macedonian ethno rock have very similar voices. However, this particular voice touches in a particularly intense way. This voice has a separate body that refuses to make itself intelligible or expressive. What one stumbles across here is the *grain of the voice*, 'the materiality of the body [singing] its mother tongue, perhaps the letter, almost certainly *signifiance*' (Barthes 1977: 182).

But *jouissance/signifiance* cannot be reduced to the voice only. There is something also in the way the players play their instruments, in the materiality of the instruments they play, in the way they manage to develop the transition from *slow* to *fast* from unsettling pain to unbearable enjoyment. In the fast movement of this particular track, Anastasia speeds up the melody into a *crescendo* where it has to explode in a 'shhhh' sound because the stimuli of the unbelievably fast *oro* are unbearable. It is a flash of the Thing where meaning dissolves into a pathetic sound that signifies nothing and everything at the same time.

### **Hana and Aleksandar in the tragic house of Macedonian desire**

A 'shhh' sound is delivered at the moment when Kirkov finally gets to his old family house in his native village. His fantasy about Macedonia as a pure, peaceful oasis wrapped in unconditional feminine love is cracking on all sides. Not only he has to fight his armed Macedonian teenage cousin, who obviously does not remember him, to get access to his village, but he also finds his whole village on the verge of a nervous

breakdown. As he walks the dusty streets of the village with the machinegun he seizes from his teenage cousin, an elderly Macedonian mother figure refuses to return his greeting, staring at him with contempt and fear.

The way Aleksandar's family house is filmically and diegetically framed touches on some fundamental impasses in Aleksandar's desire for redemption which is fuelled by his fantasy about Macedonia. While his house looks like a typical rural Macedonian house from the end of the nineteenth century, its cracks serve a metaphoric reminder of the cracking of his fantasy about Macedonia. He comes to the realisation that his native village and country are as sickeningly banal and perversely crazy as the malaised London he just left. Sleazy slob of Macedonian men cheat on their wives, who are cloistered in the claustrophobic world of domestic, sexual and emotional servitude. The speech of these men is filled with paranoid fantasies about final solutions to the problems of 'dirt' and 'thievery' that the men of the other ethnic group pose, while at the same time they could hardly stop salivating while imagining forbidden pleasures they can have with the women from the other ethnic group.

Against this background of intense hatred and intolerance between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians in the village, Aleksandar attempts to recreate the lost 'innocence' of the village by visiting the family home of his beloved Hana,<sup>17</sup> an Albanian woman who he has not stopped loving since his school days in the village. Hana is a mother of Zemira. Hana's house is guarded by the same armed Albanian militia men we see in the first part of the film. They reluctantly let Aleksandar in after he mentions that his bringing gifts for

Zekir, Hana's father and Zemira's grandfather. Aleksandar is welcomed by the affable Albanian elder, who is certainly aware of the emotions his daughter and Aleksandar have for each other. Zekir shares Aleksandar's disbelief at how bad the relations between the two communities in the village are. Hana, who patiently waits behind the curtained door leading to the guest room, is finally allowed by her father to serve coffee and sweets to Aleksandar. Having caught a glimpse of a prohibited love for him in Hana, Aleksandar's body signals that he is now ready to drift away into deadly melancholy, since his return to his village did not materialise his hopes for redemption.

However, a possibility for redemption comes knocking on his door in the most dramatic way. In a particularly intense scene, Hana, who *is not supposed to* talk to and be seen by any other men without the permission of her father, visits the half-naked Kirkov in his house on her own. Having covered her body in accordance with Albanian custom, she is reduced to her sublimely beautiful face, filled with pleading sadness, and to her piercing gaze signifying so many things. With the resigned dignity of a woman who has nothing but her maternal duty, she asks him to save her daughter from the wrath of the Macedonian male villagers who accuse her with a seduction and then a murder of one of them. Against the background of Anastasia's music which hauntingly captures the tragic nature of the impossible and prohibited love between Hana and Kirkov, she appeals to him in a hushed voice saying: 'Do it as if she was yours'. He unflinchingly rises for the opportunity not to only redeem himself for what he has done in Bosnia, but to commit an act of sublime love for Hana (**New Formations** 1994). Both understand that this is a life and death issue for everyone involved in this tragedy.

Aleksandar refuses to accept the authority of the armed Macedonian male villagers as enforcers of the paranoid unwritten laws governing the village, who tell him to stay away from this since 'he is not from here'. He finds Zemira being held hostage in a shepherd's hut full of snoozing armed Macedonians. He pulls Zemira out of the hut and protects her with his own body. They both are within the angry Macedonians' machinegun range. Aleksandar signals to Zemira to run away. Zemira finally runs and Aleksandar is sprayed with bullets by one of his own cousins.

While Kirkov is lying dead on the scorched Macedonian soil, being mourned by the cousin who kills him, Anastasia's music floods the Macedonian viewer with a tidal wave of emotions, images and associations. At this point, the viewer hears a deeply unsettling female voice (that of Vanja Lazarova-Dimitrovska), vibrating with unspeakable grief. She sings a funeral song dedicated to the heroic death of a Macedonian fighter against the Ottoman Turks, thus already diachronically weaving the profilmic image of Aleksandar's death into the fabric of the already mentioned extrafilmic Macedonian imaginary of the (manic) depressive.

While the Macedonian male villager recoils in horror from the murder he has just committed against his own cousin, the female voice brings the final pulsations of depression both in the lyrics she sings and in the maternal grieving sonority of her voice. The finality of death is punctuated by the marching solemnity of the drum, briefly allowing the maternal voice to catch her breath between strophes in the song. As the

camera catches the imprints of bewilderment on Kirkov's murderer's face caused by his obedience to the paranoid and mercilessly violent imperatives of the law of the Macedonian nation, in which name he kills his own cousin, the maternal voice drives the final nail in the coffin about the futility of Macedonian life: 'With pain I was born and with sadness I'll die...' (Anastasia 1994, 'Death of Alexander' track). We see a repeat of the opening scene, now with Zemira running near where the two monks gaze at the lonely church and the emerald lake. A heavy summer rain starts pouring.

As the scene is brought to a full closure, I am swept by an emotional tidal way. Cries and shakes of unbearably painful distress colonise my body. In the semi-deserted theatre hall in Sydney's Pitt St I am painfully reminded of the Macedonia I thought I had escaped.

### **The paranoiac, the schizo and the depressive – three main modes of Macedonian subjectivity**

The battleground on which the Macedonian/Albanian paranoiac and schizo face each other, both plugged into their respective registers of the Macedonian imaginary, represents the foundation of the drama depicted in **Before the Rain** (Manchevski 1994). The Macedonian depressive, a subject deeply immersed in a culture that celebrates death, is a compromise formation in this titanic struggle between the paranoiac and the schizo. Manchevski offers a powerful analysis of the paranoiac, the schizo and the depressive as three basic, and deeply intertwined, modes of Macedonian subjectivity. The battlefield where these modes of existence face each other is littered with emotions: crushing

humiliation, shame, disgust, disdain, fear, startle, misplaced pride, self-righteous indignation, anxiety, lustful interest, envy, sublime love, raging hatred and resigned melancholy. Manchevski's filmic representation of the relentless struggle between the paranoid codings, the schizoid escapes of desire, and the depressive compromise formations, of the constant push and pull traction between the molar and molecular social forces, is in itself an exercise of cinematic relentlessness. He forces the viewer to make her choices of reading the film: according to the paranoiac, the schizo or the depressive in her. While I am certainly cheering for the schizo and her brave flights of fanciful desire, the film indicates a claustrophobic and lonely shuffling between the paranoiac and the depressive as the only realistic, and very distressing, outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> The character is played by Coline Gregoire.

<sup>2</sup> The old monk is played by Josif Josifovski.

<sup>3</sup> Proof of this taboo can be found in a poll conducted in the mid-nineties showing that less than two percent of the surveyed Macedonians and Albanians would marry a person from the other ethnic group. Arben Xhaferi, the leader of the Party for Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians in Macedonia, used this poll as 'evidence' for the need for complete institutional separation or apartheid between Macedonians and Albanians. He argued that Macedonians and Albanians lived in 'cultivated antagonism', meaning that they could live next to each other, but not together (Australian Macedonian Weekly, 12 March 1996, Josifovski 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Clan structures and loyalties are only significant in certain rural and semi-rural Albanian communities in Macedonia.

<sup>5</sup> A stylised two headed eagle represents the Albanian national symbol, while a stylised sun with eight or sixteen rays represents the Macedonian national symbol.

<sup>6</sup> The film received wide international critical acclaim, winning 27 international film festival awards, including the coveted Golden Lion for Best Film at the 1994 Venice Film Festival and an American Film Academy nomination for Best Foreign Language Film in 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Zemira is by Labina Mitevska.

<sup>8</sup> The deacon is played by Kiril Ristoski.

<sup>9</sup> The historical records are not very clear whether a persecuted sole Albanian Moslem woman would be given a refuge in an exclusively male Macedonian Orthodox Christian monastery (Cornakov 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Zekir is played by Abdurahman Shalla.

<sup>11</sup> Anne is played by Katrin Cartlidge.

<sup>12</sup> Aleksandar is played by Rade Sherbedzija.

<sup>13</sup> Nick is played by Jay Villiers.

<sup>14</sup> Zizek here notes: 'The more the logic of Capital becomes universal, the more its opposite will assume features of "irrational fundamentalism"...the Western gaze upon the East encounters its own uncanny reverse usually qualified (and by the same token disqualified) as "fundamentalism": the end of cosmopolitanism, liberal democracy's impotence in the face of this return to tribalism...The traditional liberal opposition between "open" pluralist societies and "closed" nationalist-corporatist societies founded on the exclusion of the Other has thus to be brought to its point of self-reference: the liberal gaze itself functions to the same logic, insofar as it is founded upon the exclusion of the Other to whom one attributes the fundamentalist nationalism, etc' (1993: 220-222).

<sup>15</sup> 'Of all the negative affects it is the least likely to remain under the skin of the one who feels it' (Tomkins 1995: 198).

<sup>16</sup> The music codes refer both to the coding of music styles and performances, as well as to the meanings/effects produced in the listener when listening to these styles and coded performances. In the case of Anastasia's music, we can speak about the use of different performing styles (solo, a group of three voices, or a group of two voices that sing in parallel *terzas*, and so on) that Macedonians were taught to recognise as *their own* styles (Ristovski et al. 1974:19, 25-26), through the ideological apparatuses of the Macedonian state (the family, the Orthodox church, the educational system, and the media) We can speak about the 7/8 and 13/16 rhythms of the Macedonian *ora* (folk dances). On this level we can also speak about the *ambitus* (the use of intervals) in Macedonian folk melodies in which the big and small sixth and pure fifth prevail (although many Macedonian melodies use ninth, tenth and eleventh), or the structure of the tonal series in its melodies.

<sup>17</sup> Hana is played by Silvija Jovanovska.

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