

Transnational Anatomies of Exile and Abjection in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (1994)

by Katarzyna Marciniak

Abstract: This essay considers the discourses of liminality and "national purity" in Milcho Manchevski's Before the Rain (1994) in the context of contemporary transnational exilic cinema. Through its innovative narrative structure, the film self-consciously seeks to resist aesthetization and sublimation of abjection and mobilizes a critique of "authentic" citizenry.

In 1992, Stuart Hall reflected on the political reconfigurations of Europe at the time of its critical changes as marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1991:

There is nothing to be said, in this day and age, for being nostalgic about the cold war, but the cold war did at least give Europe a kind of arbitrary stop. The Berlin Wall, monstrosity that it was, did set up a kind of barrier, real and symbolic. Its awesome brick visage carried a message: "Beyond this frontier is another kind of Europe, another system, another world." In a way this reinforced certain old European preconceptions, for the "real" Europe has always imagined over there as elsewhere, other, the beyond: the frozen wastes, wolves roaming the icy slopes, the mysterious east, barbarians clamoring at the gate of civilisation.¹

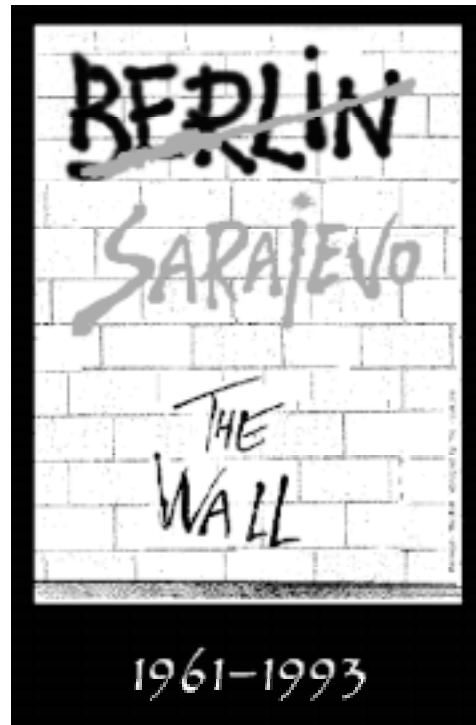
Scholars such as Dina Iordanova, Maria Todorova, and Slavoj Žižek have argued that the Balkan conflict has frequently been understood and represented in the West in these terms: as the less "civilized" part of Europe erupting beyond control, where "barbarians" mercilessly and impulsively act out an "eye-for-an-eye" philosophy, or, alternatively, as "the mysterious east" consumed by old, deep-seated ethnic conflicts that set the peoples of the Balkans apart from the "true" European community. Todorova argues that "Balkanism" is a discursive strategy that has worked to produce the idea of the Balkans as a "repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'the West' has been constructed."² Iordanova pushes this critique further by suggesting that many Balkan intellectuals participate in what she terms "consenting self-exoticism." She writes that

the "orientalisation" of the Balkans cannot be declared a purely Western project, as it is a process which has been embraced, internalised and partially carried out by many

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Figure 1. *The Wall-Sarajevo*, Postcards from the War series, 1993. This image, designed during the war in the former Yugoslavia by the TRIO Sarajevo group, functioned as a comment on the new symbolic wall separating Europe from the war-torn communities in the Balkans. Courtesy Goran Sipek.



consenting Balkan intellectuals. It is not just “the West” which constructs the Balkans as compliant to Western stereotypes, to a large extent this construction is taken up and carried further by “the Rest,” and in our case by Balkan writers and film-makers themselves. The result is a specific voluntary “self-exoticism,” which becomes the preferred mode of self-representation for many Balkan film-makers.³

Considering this foreclosure of representation, I am specifically interested in the formal challenges that cinema faces in order to “perform” the Balkan conflict without reproducing the familiar impulse to binarize Europe (the civilized West versus the barbaric East). How can a critical tribute be paid to the region without falling into the predictable pattern of portraying the Balkans as “the Other of the West” and “the madhouse of thriving nationalisms”?⁴ What textual strategies are effective in subverting either a xenophobic or a xenophilic illustration of the Balkan struggle or in representing violence against the usual scheme of sexualized entertainment or sublimated, sentimentalized brutality? How can one enunciate the logic of ethnic violence without either demonizing or exoticizing the inhabitants of the Balkans? These are important questions because they involve opening up representational practices that allow for more complex registers of cinematic signification. In this context, these registers might give voice to the critique of the logic of ethnic cleansing, propelled by the idea of privileged and “authentic” citizenry.

With these concerns in mind, I analyze the discourse of “national purity” in Milcho Manchevski’s 1994 directorial debut, *Before the Rain*, which focuses on the dynamics of ethnic anguish among Macedonian Christians and Albanian Muslims in Macedonia in the early 1990s. The film constructs a compelling interrogation of the cultural mechanisms fostering the growth of oppressive nationalism: the policing of ethnic boundaries and the pursuit of an ideology of purity in the service of national homogeneity.

Part of the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia, with its difficult and conflicted history of nationhood, is certainly a compelling ground for an inquiry into the mechanisms that instigate religious and racial violence. The country declared its independence in November 1991 after the collapse of Yugoslavia, and in April 1993 it was finally admitted to the United Nations as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).⁵ The country’s multiethnic population, according to the last census, in 1994, consists of about 70 percent Orthodox Slavs, who, being the largest majority, consider themselves Macedonians, and about 30 percent Muslim Albanians, who want a separate state of their own. The remaining 10 to 20 percent of the population are Serbs, Turks, Vlachs, and Gypsies.⁶

Unlike the other well-known Western film about the Balkan conflict, Michael Winterbottom’s *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), which focuses mainly on the experiences of Western characters, Manchevski’s film, like the recent Oscar-winning *No Man’s Land* (Danis Tanovic, 2001) and to some degree *Beautiful People* (Jasmin Dizdar, 1999), gives space to the Balkans’ point of view. *Before the Rain* dissects the sociocultural mechanisms that produce phobic nationalisms in a way that self-consciously seeks to resist the aesthetization and sublimation of abjection. Additionally, the narrative refuses to present the Balkan conflict in terms of predictable binaristic hierarchies such as victim/victimizer, hero/villain, or interpreter/interpreted and thereby opens up a space for a more dialectical representation of ethnic cleansing. It is the film’s focus on the exilic status of the protagonist, Aleksandar Kirkov (Rade Serbedzija), that mobilizes the need to question these traditional dichotomies.

Aleksandar’s quivering subjectivity, his status as a liminar who does and does not belong to “his” nation, enables us to examine the normative idea of the “I,” the self historically conceived within the parameters of ethnic sameness and stable national territory. The film uses Aleksandar’s liminality to critique the logic of national purity. What is unconventional about Manchevski’s film is that, unlike many well-known films of exile that focus on the struggle of a foreigner/stranger within the space of his or her nonnative culture, *Before the Rain* foregrounds the challenge Aleksandar faces in being “reincorporated” into his native place, in being reaccepted by his “own” people upon his return.

Furthermore, the film invites us to reflect on the urgency to reconfigure the *privileged* notion of the nation-state based on a claustrophobic paradigm of “pure,” homogeneous community that has historically repudiated otherness in all its forms. On this level, *Before the Rain* speaks not only to spectators from the former Yugoslavia but to Westerners as well, including, of course, Americans, whose national history is by no means exempt from ethnic violence.⁷ Thus, what *Before the Rain* asks of us is quite difficult: to recognize the problematic “doubleness” embedded

in the concept of national identity. What I mean here is that glorification of one's origins or their denial can be equally dangerous, for, fueled by the logic of ethnic purity, either may instigate xenophobic nationalism.

Transnational Exilic Context. *Before the Rain* won numerous international awards but received little critical attention in the West until *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* devoted its entire 2000 edition to the film.⁸ Andrew Horton, who interviewed Manchevski, argues that *Before the Rain* “is by far the most important movie to appear from the war-torn Balkan republics that once constituted Yugoslavia since the current war began in 1991.”⁹ To call this film a “border crossing text,” as Horton does, is indeed pertinent because *Before the Rain* resists the “purity” of traditional categories as defined by national “origins.”

Manchevski, born in Macedonia and educated in the United States, does not consider himself a Balkan filmmaker. Asked about this, he replied, “I have had the luck of living in New York.” Manchevski noted: “I don’t see myself as an American, but I also don’t see myself as a Balkan. I think I am a filmmaker across the oceans.”¹⁰ Manchevski’s refusal to situate himself and his work within one national category and the fact that *Before the Rain* foregrounds exile as a narrative concern enable us to conceptualize the film as an example of transnational exilic cinema. As such, the film enacts its transnationality thematically and formally: national and ethnic border crossings lie at the heart of its three-episode drama. The triptych structure is bound by Aleksandar’s diegetic movement as a Macedonian exile from Macedonia to London and back to Macedonia. His crossings—reminiscent of Manchevski’s own transnational and transcultural condition—punctuate the film’s overlapping three parts: “Words,” “Faces,” and “Pictures.”¹¹

Contextualizing *Before the Rain* within the category of transnational exilic cinema is especially important when discussing the diasporic filmmaking of the late-twentieth-century liminars, transnationals, and exiles. As Hamid Naficy writes, this genre “cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic, and metacinematic boundaries.”¹² Naficy’s work on “accented cinema” has drawn attention to the sustained theorizing of “a cinema of exile and a cinema in exile,” specifically as it pertains to the work of filmmakers in the postmodern era.¹³ Since 1945, massive displacements of peoples, in part due to the complex processes of global decolonization, have resulted in the movement of economic and political refugees, exiles, and immigrants, mainly from non-Western spaces coded as “second” or “third world” to industrially advanced Western nation-states.¹⁴ Naficy’s notion of “accented cinema,” as he argues, “emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production codes.”¹⁵

Within this context, it is important to add that the term “transnational” emerged most prominently on the wave of what Christian Moraru calls “the logic of the global” and often refers to contemporary changes in advanced capitalist societies that mark the “shifts that challenge the older, conventional boundaries of national economies, identities, and cultures.”¹⁶ However, the category of transnational exilic filmmaking is not simply a new, fashionable terminology. Rather, it is an

attempt to open up the often stifling, reductive, and patronizing filmic markers of “immigrant,” “minority,” and “ethnic,” which, although historically valid, tend to lump diasporic work into what Naficy calls “discursive ghettos.”¹⁷ These traditional labels often work to code specific cinematic texts as “of ethnic interest,” as if “ethnicity” inherently belonged to the so-called minority discourse.¹⁸

When addressing transnational exilic cinematic texts and their frequent emphasis on the multiplicity of national “belongings,” it is important not to homogenize transnational locations, as each needs to be analyzed in its specificity, with attention to the heterogeneity of gendered, racial, and ethnic modalities. Clearly, *Before the Rain* is a product of Manchevski’s authorial vision, his political and ethnic affinities, his own exilic longings and nostalgia, and his position as an artist “across the oceans”—that is, neither “fully” Macedonian nor “fully” American as defined by the traditional logic of national identity.¹⁹

Manchevski has commented that the script for *Before the Rain* came into being in 1991 when he went back to Macedonia after a six-year absence. He writes that the emotionality of this visit was intense, as he experienced “a sense of heartfelt homecoming and a sense of impending doom.” The historical moment of his visit was marked by a sense of endings and beginnings: while Yugoslavia, the country in which the director was raised, was disintegrating, Macedonia was emerging out of the war. Manchevski describes the sensation of impending changes and the aura of uncertainty as a “before-the-rain-feeling”: “It felt sort of like the pressure you feel on the inside of your mouth before it rains.”²⁰ While *Before the Rain* is set largely in Macedonia and was inspired by the political events in the Balkan region, Manchevski insists that the film “is not about a particular country. It is about people caught on the verge of wider violence that is about to erupt around them.”²¹

Before the Rain’s attempts to grapple with the aesthetic and political concerns I have sketched out in the opening of this article produce significant tension. On one hand, as others have already argued, the film may be read as performing “Balkanism”—that is, as recycling familiar stereotypes about the “otherness” of the Balkans.²² On the other hand, as a result of the “carefully designed quirk in the [narrative] chronology,” to use Manchevski’s words, the film appears to be mindful of normative representations of the Balkan conflict, specifically the popular Western notion of the circularity and timelessness of the ethnic violence in the region.²³

Using art-cinema narration, the film’s formal arrangement is indeed complex. Self-consciously dislodging chronological time, the film tells the story as if out of sequence. The nonlinear, fragmented, intricately tangled narrative appears to mimic the linearity of a circle except that, as the old monk in the film says, “the circle is not round” because its seemingly cyclical nature is thwarted and filled with temporal and logical paradoxes.

As Robert Rosenstone succinctly puts it, *Before the Rain*’s narrative “incorporates a temporal sense that is, literally, disjunctive and impossible.”²⁴ The film’s formal experiment with the “illogic” of its narrative becomes a means of performatively critiquing the stereotypical portrayal of the violence in the Balkans as a permanent historical construct in the region. This critique is crucial for two



Figure 2. Kiril (Grégoire Colin), a monk in the “Words” section of *Before the Rain*, is committed to maintaining his vow of silence. Courtesy Milcho Manchevski.

reasons: it does not locate ethnic violence as occurring solely in the Balkans, and it does not allow for the representation of Western Europe as a superior “civilized” space that has overcome its ethnic dilemmas.

The remainder of this essay focuses on the representation of the workings of the logic of ethnic purity in the context of *Before the Rain*’s “interlocked” diegesis and the transnational crossings that take place between London and Macedonia. I discuss Aleksandar’s “quivering ontology,” which ruptures a privileged vision of a nation; I examine the haunting positioning of female characters; and I conclude with an explication of the “violence of vomit.” The narrative performance of such violence invites reflection on the complexities of transnational location, which, as evoked by Manchevski’s film, contest celebratory conceptions of transcultural identity.

Narrative Illogic/the Logic of Purity. The first episode of *Before the Rain*, “Words,” opens with an image of a stunning ancient monastery and the surrounding Macedonian countryside and introduces us to Kiril (Grégoire Colin), a young Orthodox monk committed to a vow of silence. The clash between the title of this segment and Kiril’s muteness becomes apparent when he finds Zamira (Labina Mitevska), a young Albanian Muslim, in his cell, hiding from armed Christian villagers who are hunting her down. (Kiril has no words to give her because of his vow; besides, they have no language in common.) Believing that Zamira killed their local shepherd, the villagers seek retaliation, but, thanks to Kiril’s collusion in concealing Zamira, they are unable to find her. Kiril’s interest in helping Zamira leads him to a crisis: he abandons the monastery, breaks his vow of silence, and tries to escape with her. “Words” concludes with an image of gory, heart-wrenching violence. Both Kiril and Zamira are caught, not by the vengeful villagers but by Zamira’s Muslim relatives, including her grandfather and brother. Before Zamira is killed in a most brutal way—shot many times by her own brother—and Kiril is told to run away, we witness shocking abuse as Zamira’s grandfather, who holds the highest position of authority in the family, assaults Zamira.

The conflict in “Words” revolves around not only the suspicion that Zamira may have killed the shepherd (“Blood calls for blood. You’ll start a war now. You slut.”) but also the fact that as a Muslim she has been rescued by a Christian, a man from an antagonistic culture. As Zamira is kicked and punched before she dies, her grandfather’s words reveal a history of her treatment in the family: “I never hit you. I locked you up in the house. I cut your hair. Should I shave it off?” The painfully ironic twist in this closing is that the audience has been led to believe that Zamira is in danger of being hurt by the Christian villagers, not by her own Muslim family. But hatred of people from another culture is evidently stronger than affinity for one’s brothers and sisters. Her brother believes that because Zamira ran after Kiril, she has betrayed her family, her heritage, and her culture. She has betrayed her “blood.”

The most significant point “Words” makes is that ethnic groups in Macedonia are committed to the destructive logic of ethnic purity. On the surface, the film appears to be neither pro-Albanian/Muslim nor pro-Slavic/Christian, as both communities are depicted as caught up in the destructive paradigm of ethnic superiority. We

hear the rhetoric of hate articulated strongly by characters in both ethnic groups. Zamira is called an “Albanian whore” by angry Christian villagers, while Kiril is labeled “Christian scum” by Zamira’s Muslim grandfather. Both the Albanians and the Christians display cruelty and ruthlessness; both believe they are entitled to the land they share. The film thus seems to be critical of both cultures and of each group’s dogmatic claim that its blood is “better” than its neighbor’s. Neither culture is excused from perpetuating ethnic hatred. One of the Christian villagers addresses the monks trying to prevent the monastery from being searched. The villager asks emphatically: “Remember five centuries of Muslim rule? An eye for an eye.” The statement is supposed to serve as a reminder of hatred grounded in specific historical circumstances. We witness a similarly vehement attitude in Zamira’s grandfather and brother, both of whom are ready to punish Zamira for having crossed an imaginary ethnic border and for “betraying” her Muslim “roots” by associating with a Macedonian Christian.

Manchevski has acknowledged that *Before the Rain* was conceived as a “very emotional story” and that its structure is deliberately complex. The reason for this complex structure, he has said, is to critique war and ethnic cleansing without “taking sides” in the conflict.²⁵ Despite these intentions and the attempt to present a balanced critique, *Before the Rain*, through its emotional pull and point-of-view style, seems to imply that the land that is being ravaged by violence putatively belongs to the Christian majority.²⁶ “Words” clearly presents Orthodox Christianity as historically rooted—and hence privileged—in the Macedonian land. The aesthetics of the *mise-en-scène* does not evoke emotional proximity to the Albanian Muslims in the same way that it garners spectatorial attention to the representation of the Christian nation. Also, the narrative offers a compassionate look at various Christian rituals: visiting family graves, paying respect to the dead, performing burials and liturgies, celebrating weddings and family gatherings, raising sheep, and farming. Through these diegetic moorings, the audience is invited to believe in the ethnic “authenticity” of the Christian majority.

The monastery plays an important role in this process of authorizing the Christians and creating the impression that they “rightfully” belong to the land. The monastery is portrayed as the site of an ancient sanctuary, a place of spiritual “purity” and metaphysical reverence. Shots of the monks walking under starry skies, the monks’ chants, the solemnity of their prayers, and shots of the monastery against the remarkable blueness of Lake Ohrid create a nostalgic aura and underscore the emotional and historical significance of Christian Orthodox aesthetics.

When we are shown a sequence of violence and destruction—a protracted “game” in which turtles are tortured—the dramatic impact metaphorically “argues” that the looming conflict on the larger scene threatens to erase the historic beauty and the uniqueness of the Christian nation. While the monks say their prayers amid ancient paintings of their sanctuary, we see a group of village boys playing outside with the turtles. The first shot of the children is of two boys fighting with turtles-turned-tanks: “Go, Ninja Turtle! Kill him!” Through parallel editing, we witness the monks praying and the children building a circle around the turtles with wooden sticks and setting it on fire. The editing increases the sense of

impending violence, juxtaposing the sacred litany with the cruelty of destruction. In an eerie way, the chanting of the monks intensifies the strangely defamiliarized image of violence. The narrative movement back and forth between the monastery and the children aurally accentuates the monks' prayers as the sound bridge carries their voices and estranges the children's cruelty.

At the end of the sequence, the shots cut rapidly between the prayers, Kiril's awed perception of the grandeur of the frescoes, and the cruelty as the turtles explode in the fire. The last shot is a close-up of a turtle lying on its shell, dying. This closing moment mobilizes the metaphorical connection between the dying turtle and the monks, who, we may conclude, are also threatened with violence and extinction. This idea is further emphasized when Kiril, the only young novice, leaves the monastery, crushing the community's hope in the survival of the spiritual tradition.

While "Words" pulls the audience gradually into the dynamic of violence in Macedonia—the explosion of the turtles and then the shooting of a cat that foreshadow Zamira's violent death—it is clear by the end of the middle section, "Faces," that both "Words" and "Faces" are symbolically interlocked. In "Faces," we seem at first to be moving away from the events in Macedonia. This part opens with an image of a woman, Anne (Katrin Cartlidge), sobbing in a shower. (Anne has already briefly appeared in "Words.") A photo editor in London whose personal dilemma is sketched quickly for the audience, Anne must choose between her estranged husband, Nick (Jay Villiers), and an impulsive lover—a Macedonian photojournalist, Aleksandar. Nick comes across as a stable British husband, while Aleksandar, an exile, is a tempestuous, world-traveling artist whose prize-winning photographs document the war in Bosnia. We are led to believe that "Faces" will narrate Anne's personal conflict, and although "Faces" does so to some extent, it also shows that a London photo editor who studies pictures of war from a seemingly safe distance is not that far from the conflict in former Yugoslavia, after all. Within minutes after she meets Nick at a restaurant to resolve their relationship, a shootout occurs that leaves Nick dead. A stranger, presumably from the Balkans, the shooter has come to settle a score with one of the waiters. The scene implies that no one is free from the erupting violence, even in an elegant London restaurant.²⁷

The connections that emerge between "Words" and "Faces" foreground the notion that although distant from one another and in seemingly different cultural locations, Macedonia and London are interconnected through violence. The purpose of creating this accentuated bonding is to question the binary understanding that stereotypically privileges the "normal" West over the "barbaric" non-West. Several overlapping images of "transnational crossings" underscore the metaphorical connections between the first two parts of the narrative. The words "Time never dies. The circle is not round," spoken by a monk in the first part, appear in "Faces" as graffiti on a London street, as if written into the *mise-en-scène* of the city; in the restaurant where Nick dies, there are turtles, as in the first part, this time swimming in an aquarium, constrained and trapped as in "Words"; finally, in her photo studio in London, Anne examines war photographs that, in fact, document Zamira's killing.

These photographs, especially in the hands of the Western photo editor, hold crucial significance: we are shown how the tragedies materially experienced in the

ethnic war in the Balkans are “transported” to the West via visual representations to be studied, examined, and published. Although it is not clear how Anne obtained these photographs or who took them (although we may deduce that she got them from Aleksandar), the friction between Anne’s position as a scrutinizer and the horror the pictures represent is striking. Anne analyzes the photographs with a magnifying glass, dissecting the visual records of the tragic events. In her white darkroom gloves, she looks like a scientist as she examines the people’s faces; she carefully observes the photographic sequence featuring Zamira’s death and a collection of random photographs depicting the Bosnian war and its victims. The slickness of her studio and Anne’s white gloves suggest that she is engaged in a “safe” analysis; she is privy to the tragedies going on in the Balkans only through photographic illustrations. The underlying assumption here, foiled by the end of “Faces,” is that ethnic violence takes place in faraway places.

The eerie visual clash between Anne’s sterile high-tech studio and the “dirty” horror shown in the pictures is additionally underscored when we see a series of glossy color pictures of Western models and pop stars next to the pictures of Bosnia. The unnerving, rhythmically pounding soundtrack further heightens the tension and the contrast between the images. The photographs Anne reviews are shown in close-up so that the spectator’s gaze is implicated in the scene. The austere black-and-white pictures give us an uncanny “collage” of terror: a man without a shirt, exposing his starved, bony torso, his gaze empty and barren, as though he is deprived of sight; a child whose forehead is tattooed with a number; a person wearing a gas mask; an old woman crying over a grave; corpses of children lying against a wall. Another picture, of a young man wearing a swastika band on his arm, constructs a link between the war in the former Yugoslavia and the Holocaust.²⁸ When the second episode ends with Anne’s broken voice whispering in disbelief—“Your face, Nick. Your face. Your face”—the audience is invited to associate Nick’s violent death in the London restaurant with the haunting faces of the Bosnian people in the photographs.

Quivering Ontology: Paradoxical Estrangement/The Exilic Return. “Pictures,” the last section of the triptych, focuses on Aleksandar’s “homecoming” and thematizes the dialectics of exile, calling into question a traditionally stable understanding of the idea of self, home, nation, and cultural belonging. The film creates an unsettling incongruity regarding Aleksandar’s status insofar as the condition of being an exile implies continual quivering between the “worlds” of the native and adopted cultures. The emphasis on Aleksandar’s difficulty in anchoring his identity to a single place is not simply an invitation to deplore the perceived compromise of his native roots. But neither are we encouraged to sentimentalize the exile’s often painful antinomies or to celebrate his hybridity as cosmopolitan. Rather, we are shown that his “homelessness” opens up a space for questioning the logic of privileging one’s origins. Zygmunt Bauman’s theorizing of what it means to “be” a stranger helps explain Aleksandar’s place in his native community:

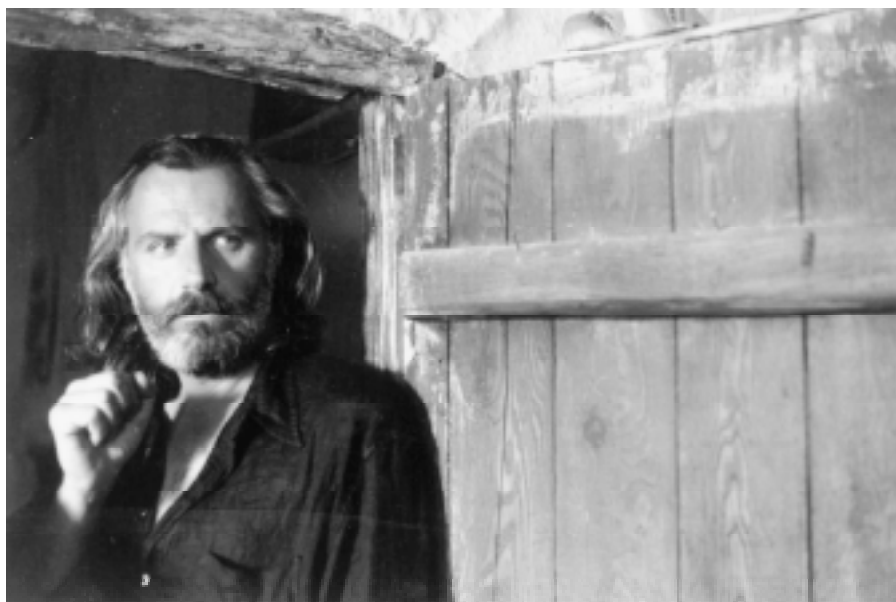


Figure 3. Though a native Macedonian, Aleksandar (Rade Serbedzija) is a stranger in his native village in “Pictures,” the third section of *Before the Rain*. Courtesy Milcho Manchevski.

The strangers are not, however, the “as-yet-undecided”: they are, in principle, undecidables. They are that “third element” that should not be. The true hybrids, the monsters; not just unclassified but unclassifiable. They therefore do not question this one opposition here and now; they question oppositions as such, the very principle of opposition, the plausibility of dichotomy it suggests. They unmask the brittle artificiality of division—they destroy the world.²⁹

In fact, Aleksandar’s in-betweenness turns him into a stranger, and his return to his native Macedonia exposes his “unclassifiable” status—it is as if he is and at the same time no longer is Macedonian. It is precisely this uncertain location of what I call quivering ontology that underlines the condition of liminality that the protagonist experiences.

“Pictures” shows Aleksandar’s return from London to his childhood village in Macedonia, a place we already know from “Words.” His arrival is riddled with contradictions: he hopes to reconnect with “his” people but seems unaware that the very idea of who “our” people are has become contested in the village. He confronts a foreboding tension between the Albanian Muslims and the Macedonian Christians, who no longer treat each other as neighbors of one community but as enemies. The disharmony, intolerance, and sectarian violence he encounters painfully remind him of the past, which he nostalgically recalls as the time of harmonious Muslim/Christian coexistence before the latest ethnic cleansing. Aleksandar’s problematic desire to reclaim the home in which he grew up underlines his exilic

longing: his impulse to recover the past, to restore a prelapsarian moment, to go back to the “original” communal unity. Ironically, although he escaped death as a photographer on the front, he is caught in deadly crossfire in his native village. By the end of “Pictures,” Aleksandar, like Zamira, who was killed by her brother, is shot dead by one of his people, his cousin Zdrave.

As Aleksandar returns to his homeland, his liminality invites a critique of nationalist rhetoric. The film unveils his loss of affinity with his people, suggesting that once the “I” becomes an exile and steps beyond the realm of “one’s own,” this “I” becomes curiously “foreign” to kin. Even though his relatives and old friends are touched by his return, they do not quite know how to relate to him since he eludes the usual categories along the axis of native/foreigner. Through his experience of exile, Aleksandar has lost his status as a person who unequivocally “belongs” to his native place and its people; he has become estranged from them and has turned into a paradoxical “mixture,” a hybrid, both a foreigner and a native at once, both an insider and an outsider, or, in Salman Rushdie’s words, “at once plural and partial.”³⁰ Thus, Aleksandar’s presence creates a sense of discomfort in the village because his cultural loyalty is perceived as ambiguous. The seemingly contradictory notion that Aleksandar is no longer a “native,” even though he was born in Macedonia, is emphasized by a relative who tries to warn Aleksandar not to get involved in the conflict: “Keep out of this. You are not from here.” Aleksandar is indeed a phantom: a provisional, tenuous “I” who has returned to reclaim a self that no longer is.³¹

This idea that Aleksandar is a foreigner among “his” people is further dramatized when he visits Hana, a romantic interest from the past, whose home is on the Albanian “side” of the village. (This episode also underscores how both communities vehemently police their ethnic boundaries.) While Hana’s father greets Aleksandar somewhat affectionately, her son (Zamira’s brother and killer) is openly hostile: “Why is he here? He doesn’t belong here. I’ll slit his throat.” This comment about “belonging” is ironically reminiscent of an earlier scene in which Aleksandar first approaches the village. He is immediately accosted by a young Macedonian whose job is to guard the village borders (and whom we have already seen in the first episode among angry villagers searching for Zamira). When Aleksandar addresses the young man in his language, the man relaxes slightly: “Ah, you are one of us.” The contradictions Aleksandar exposes in “belonging,” or not “belonging,” in being, or not being “one of us,” are at the heart of the philosophy the film wants to critique. But, of course, the difficulty of Aleksandar’s position is that he both is and is not “one of them.”

Aleksandar’s encounter with Hana’s family also foregrounds the issue of the social position and oppression of the Albanian women in the village and provokes the reading of their patriarchal entrapment in both communities. The ethnic “war” within the diegesis concerns only male characters; they are always the agents performing the violence. Besides, all positions of authority in the village—doctors, monks, group leaders—belong to men. Men also patrol and “protect” the borders. The women, both Macedonian and Albanian, are relegated to serving food, taking care of children, providing sexual services to men, tending the wounded,

and lamenting the killings. And although the women, especially the Albanians, are not portrayed as agents performing violence, they are the ones whose bodies endure male violence. Even before her death, Zamira is assaulted by her grandfather—called a “slut” and a “whore” and beaten; Hana is locked up in her multigenerational family home.³²

Not surprisingly given this context, Hana must first receive her father’s permission to enter the room and greet Aleksandar. She appears cloaked in dark clothing; her head is tightly wrapped; she casts her eyes down, confirming her submissive position in the house. She walks into the room only to serve food and drinks, and before she finally looks up at Aleksandar, she looks to her father for permission to make eye contact. She hardly speaks; she has no power to gaze and therefore no power to assert her subjectivity.

As Aleksandar walks away, we see Hana’s solemn face in the window, watching him. The window is barred, her face behind the grates, underscoring her entrapment by the familial dynamics of patriarchy. Aleksandar’s and Hana’s eyes convey their affection for each other, and their looks manifest that they both are, in different ways, outcasts of the village. The difference between their positions, however, is crucial: he is entitled to mobility; she is not.

Female Hauntings. If women like Hana and Zamira are shown as controlled and tyrannized by their families, they are, at the same time, sites of critical possibilities. Given the violence they experience, they obviously do not occupy liberatory positions. Nor does their resistance readily project a new model of “nation” that would contest phallogocentric social structures. Still, except for Aleksandar, the two women are the only ones who risk crossing ethnic boundaries: Zamira because of her connection with Kiril; Hana when she visits Aleksandar’s house, as she searches in desperation for her missing daughter. Even though they are narratively “punished” for their transgressive acts, through their actions both women point to the urgency of critiquing the intersection of patriarchal hegemony and the logic of ethnic violence. Their affiliations with men outside their “blood” signal cross-cultural, cross-ethnic openings—cracks in a circle.

The women—like Aleksandar, who is marked by a sense of unsettling instability—also set the temporal paradoxes in motion, as they appear in the narrative at moments when, logically, their appearances should not be possible or are unlikely to occur. For example, during Aleksandar’s visit to Hana’s house, we briefly see Zamira, even though she has been killed by her brother in part one, “Words.” Also, at the opening of the film, we see Anne as a peripheral participant at a funeral in Macedonia. We cannot understand her presence here until we find out who she is in “Faces” and learn of Aleksandar’s death at the end of “Pictures.” Only at the closing of the narrative does the spectator realize that Anne has come to Macedonia because Aleksandar is dead and that the funeral that opens the film is his.

These narrative complications continually emphasize the tension between aesthetic expression and the way such expression comments on politics. They also lead us to consider the larger argument the film interrogates: the correlation between art and violence. Even before Aleksandar comes back to Macedonia, we hear his



Figure 4. Zamira (Labina Mitevska) before the fatal confrontation with her Muslim relatives in “Words.” Courtesy Milcho Manchevski.

“confession”; he is experiencing an ethical crisis. “I killed. I killed,” he tells Anne. This comment refers to Aleksandar’s last trip to the front as a photojournalist, during which he “complained” that there was nothing for him to photograph. He writes Anne a letter from Macedonia that reads in part:

Dear Anne . . . It’s gonna rain. . . . This place is the same as before, but my eyes have changed like a new fit on the lens. Last week I told you I killed. I was friendly with this militia man and I complained to him I wasn’t getting anything exciting. He said, “No problem,” pulled the prisoner out of the line and shot him on the spot. “Did you get that?”—he asked me. “I did.” I took sides. My camera killed a man.³³

As Aleksandar’s voice-over narrates the letter, we see shot by shot, detail by detail, the photographic sequence he is describing. From the moment the militia man points a gun at the back of the Bosnian victim’s head through the slow motion of his falling down, Aleksandar’s camera “captures” the killing.³⁴

While *Before the Rain* problematizes Aleksandar’s position as a photojournalist and an artist, the film’s point, even when depicting the involuntary killing, is not simply to critique Aleksandar. Instead, Aleksandar’s ethical crisis regarding what he believes is his aesthetic exploitation of death points to the way the West (specifically, in this context, photo editors in London) transforms images of abjection, isolation, and destruction in the former Yugoslavia into sensationalized expressions that become, as Žižek writes, “good fodder for hungry Western eyes.”³⁵ Aleksandar’s statement about killing with his camera invites us to consider whether,

indeed, photography, and art more generally, can “kill.” The answer the film gives is complex, one that forces spectators to contemplate the very politics of representational practices. If art can be used to critique war and violence (the position *Before the Rain* appears to take), the film seems to suggest that there is a difference, however fragile, between art done for the sake of capturing and exploiting the morbid “beauty” of abjection and self-conscious art that foregrounds a desublimatory examination of abjection and the complexities of representing, in this context, interethnic destruction.

The most compelling example, I think, of how *Before the Rain* desublimates abjection is figured through a series of black-and-white photographs representing Zamira’s killing. As I have already mentioned, in “Faces” Anne studies photographs showing Zamira’s final moments and death. The film implies that Anne receives the photographs from Aleksandar, yet, if he took the photographs and gave them to Anne in London, this would mean that he was alive after Zamira was killed. However, by the end of the narrative, we know that Aleksandar dies *before* Zamira is shot. In fact, he dies because he tried to save her.

As some critics have argued, the end of the film suggests that the narrative has created a “full circle.”³⁶ While, on the level of imagery, spectators might have the impression that the ending is a return to the opening scene (we see Kiril again in the tomato garden and Zamira running), the narrative chronology has been foiled, especially by the use of photographs of Zamira. It is the haunting appearance and reappearance of these stills that prompts a series of questions: Who took these photographs? How is it logically possible for them to materialize at different diegetic moments? Where is their stable place in the narrative? Why do they weigh on the film with their insistent reoccurrence? Clearly, the photographs are the site of ambiguity, the ontological “puzzle,” of the film. Their frequent insertion into the narrative alters the film’s temporality, impedes its narrative rhythm. The photographs create yet another temporal space that is interjected into the film’s larger space—a frame within a frame, or time within time, of fragments of transitory and shifting moments. These moments ask us to think about the way we experience narrative time, so-called screen time, and to contemplate how such time differs in its dynamic from the way we “feel” time as created by the stills.

These formal complications are important not because they underline an aesthetic experiment and sophisticated formal “play” but rather because they emphasize the need to foreground the difficulty embedded in representing violence. Specifically, what is at stake here is the aestheticization of death and the erasure of the violence done to Zamira. Because the presence of the photographs in the narrative design is disjunctive, they create a sense of discomfort and confusion, suggesting that there is indeed no fixed place for them within the diegesis. It is as if the photographs symbolically refuse to be contained by the narrative and instead, like Zamira, who also appears and reappears, disrupt the narrative movement and haunt the spectatorial vision.

Bodily Expulsions: The Violence of Vomit. Although Manchevski’s film depicts a crisis of national identity engendered by the discourse of authenticity—that is, a

claim to legitimate “ownership” of a place—the reconceived idea of a nation as a multicultural community that can recognize and respect a multitude of otherness *within* itself becomes the film’s haunting. This effect results from the “cracks,” the small splinters that, as the formal arrangement of the narrative demonstrates, interrogate the circularity of ethnic violence. As I have suggested, these narrative cracks are performed by Aleksandar’s transnational status and by the liminality of the main female characters, whose actions, while restrained by the patriarchal logic of their communities, point to the need to challenge the phallogocentric dynamic of violence that implicates men as fighters/killers and women as their submissive, quiet servants. Thus, the temporal disjunctions in the film, which make our comprehension of the narrative at times frustrating, might be interpreted as performative sites calling into question the violently revolving hatred of otherness. It is in this sense that the film calls for the need to “loosen” the violent and unyielding conceptual rigidity of the idea of national identity, to conceive of the “I” dialectically, “against origins and starting from them.”³⁷

To show how the issue of national identity, nationalist logic, and what Robert Burgoyne terms “the emotional pull of ethnic modes of belonging” always necessarily involves one’s body, *Before the Rain* continually assaults its audience with repeated images of blood and sounds of vomiting—visual-aural motifs that underline the narrative theme of violence and bodily reactions to it.³⁸ Importantly, these acts of vomiting signify more than the bodily need to “cleanse” one’s self at the sight of horrible brutality. Rather, these moments are acts of awakening, of solidarity with the ones who die, who are, in fact, brutally expelled out of being. The vomiting—sounds of bodily excess—parallels the ejection of the unwanted people, those who need to be removed beyond the validated realm of cultural intelligibility. In other words, the very performance of vomiting is a gesture toward identification with the abject zone, a space without which the subject cannot call itself a subject and, simultaneously, a space historically repudiated because it points to the very materiality and negation of the self.³⁹

Arrested by the hollow gazes of the war victims in the photographs, Anne vomits. Her response parallels Kiril’s earlier reaction to a brutal killing of a cat by one of the Christian villagers, whose gunfire shreds the cat to pieces. Unlike Kiril and Anne, who shiver in pain at the sight of violence done *to* others, Aleksandar’s act of “bodily expulsion” is more about himself as he recognizes that he has performed an act of violence with his camera. The moment of destroying the highly troublesome photographs documenting the death of the Bosnian man signals an awakening mobilized through the painful experience of an encounter with horror. All three characters, in different ways, respond to violence bodily. Thus, vomit—the expulsion of the unthinkable, the horrible—is presented as a “defense” of the flesh against death and abjection. This response suggests that the film wants to make a visceral appeal by binding the spectator’s gaze to the expelled bodies of those who have fallen victim to the logic of racial hatred.

Within this conceptual framework, *Before the Rain* shows a self-conscious awareness of the difficulties embedded in representing violence with the purpose of critiquing it without glamorizing it as a staged spectacle. The film is conscious of

the need to analyze violence without succumbing to the dangers of reinscribing it as it tries to refrain from exploiting images of gratuitous brutality. At the same time, the film appears to function on two clashing levels. On one hand, spectators are lured with appealing images of the Macedonian landscape, the aesthetics of the Orthodox liturgy, poignant music, and the “tragic” beauty of Zamira and Kiril. On the other hand, the film hopes to elude spectatorial comfort zones through its metaphorical attention to blood and vomit, preventing us from feeling that the war the narrative represents is a conflict that does not involve “us.” This implication of the audience is certainly hard to achieve, given that most of the narrative is located in a distant Macedonian village, seemingly far away from the Western culture that, as Page duBois writes in *Torture and Truth*, often likes to believe that “barbarism resides elsewhere, in the other, that other world, unenlightened, steeped in medievalism and bloody cruelty.”⁴⁰ Critiquing “first world” cultures for displacing torture onto the non-Western world, duBois comments:

Torture has become a global spectacle, a comfort to the so-called civilized nations, persuading them of their commitment to humanitarian values, revealing to them the continued barbarism of the other world, a world that continues to need the guidance of Europe and North America, a guidance that is offered in the form of a transnational global economy controlling torture as one of the instruments of world domination.⁴¹

DuBois’s critique of the way the first world likes to project its superiority reveals a Eurocentric ideological positioning: Western nations like to maintain that they are protected from “the continued barbarism,” that horrors transpire beyond their limits, in “the other world,” but also wish to sustain their role as rescuers and leaders in maintaining the world’s “order” under the slogans of “humanitarian” concerns.

Manchevski’s film exposes the logic of such “discursive colonization,” to use Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s words, by refusing to create a space where the audience can feel safely positioned outside the discourse of ethnic cleansing.⁴² The frequent use of close-ups after Aleksandar enters Macedonia does not permit the spectator to feel emotional distance or to perceive the characters of the village as depersonalized masses. The camera’s attention to details exposes the pain written into the *mise-en-scène* of the region. Old women’s tired, wrinkled faces; their bent backs; bony donkeys; malnourished, exhausted dogs hardly able to walk—all these images enunciate the specificity of pain. And as the narrative movement of each episode binds our gaze, the audience experiences a “history of what has not yet happened”—the foreboding sense of the impending destruction, the “heaviness” of the *mise-en-scène*, the moments “before the rain.”⁴³

Sounds of thunder and remarks by various characters about rain frame the narrative. In the beginning of “Words,” the monk’s comment establishes the narrative space: “It will rain. It smells of rain.” Later, Hana’s father tells Aleksandar, “Blood is in the air. It should rain.” And finally, Aleksandar’s last words—“It’s going to rain”—cue us to the impending eruption of conflict. Indeed, the concluding scene, which leads us back to the beginning of the narrative, takes place amid heavy drops of rain and lingers on an image of the exile’s corpse, drenched in

blood and abandoned. And so we are left to ponder the cruelty of bodily expulsions and the moment of dreaded identification with the site of abjection.

Notes

My gratitude for conceptual help with this essay goes to Linda Kintz, Robert Miklitsch, Áine O’Healy, and Alden Waitt and to the College of Arts and Sciences at Ohio University for providing me with a summer fellowship to develop this essay. I also appreciate the insightful suggestions of the anonymous readers for *Cinema Journal*.

1. Stuart Hall, “European Cinema on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown,” in Duncan Petrie, ed., *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 46.
2. Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention,” *Slavic Review* 53 (summer 1994): 453.
3. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture, and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 61, 56.
4. Slavoj Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 212–13.
5. Greece refused to acknowledge the republic until it changed its name, claiming that “Macedonia” was historically a Greek term and that its use implied a territorial claim to the Greek region of Macedonia. Greece also objected to the imagery of Alexander the Great’s Sixteen Star of Vergina on the Macedonian flag, further intensifying the tension between the countries. In February 1994, Greece imposed an economic blockade that was in effect until September 1995, when the two countries agreed to establish diplomatic relations. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) agreed to remove the controversial Star of Vergina from its flag; Greece consented to lift its embargo.

The most intense internal ethnic tensions between Macedonian Slavs and the country’s large Albanian minority developed before the FYROM was admitted to the United Nations, after an extensive period of not being recognized by the international community. In 1993, the United Nations delegated peacekeeping troops to the FYROM to prevent the war in Bosnia from spreading there. In 1998, however, three years after fighting ended in the rest of the old Yugoslav federation, the battles in Kosovo began.

Ninety percent of the FYROM’s Albanians reside on the borders with Albania and the Serbian province of Kosovo, which has long been regarded as the most volatile region in the former Yugoslavia. (Two wars in the Balkan Peninsula, in 1912 and in 1913, were fought over Kosovo.) In March 1999, NATO began air attacks against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after it refused to accept an international peace plan for Kosovo. After Serbian police and the Yugoslav army intensified assaults on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, many were forced to flee to Montenegro, Albania, and the FYROM. See Paul Mojzes, “Travels in the Balkans: Tensions and Aspirations in Macedonia,” *Christian Century*, May 11, 1994, 499; Dragoljub Zarkovic, “A Serbian Journalist Answers Critics,” *Nieman Reports* 54, no. 2 (summer 2000): 79+; and Jonathan Schwartz, “Macedonia: A Country in Quotation Marks,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11, nos. 1–2 (autumn 1993), available at <http://condor.depaul.edu/~rrotenbe/aer/aerr11_1/schwartz.html>.

6. See, for example, Ian Fisher, “Albanians’ Many Children Unnerve Macedonia’s Slavs,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2001, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/11/>>

international/europe/11MACE.html>. This interesting article is on how the birthrate in Macedonia is hotly debated: "On both sides of the ethnic line, birthrates are acknowledged as perhaps the fundamental fact of politics here." The issue, as Fisher describes it, is that the Albanians are supposedly having more babies than the Slavs; some believe that this situation is dictated by the fact that the ethnic Albanians have a more conservative culture in which women rarely work outside the home and are encouraged to have large families. The rapidly changing demographics, in turn, causes an anxiety that the Slavic majority could eventually become a minority in the FYROM and that the structures of power could change in favor of the Albanians. The article argues that the issue of birthrates lingered in the background of peace negotiations, ending a six-month rebellion by ethnic Albanian guerrillas demanding greater political rights: "Demographics may also, ultimately, lay down the logic for the biggest nightmare for many Macedonian Slavs: territorial division along ethnic lines, as has happened in Bosnia and Kosovo. That, they argue, is exactly what Albanian leaders are planning for the long run."

7. Critics and reviewers did not always appreciate this point. See, for example, Teresa Esser, "Surreal Images and Situations Carry *Before the Rain*," *The Tech*, March 10, 1995, 6. Esser calls the film confusing, difficult, and bungled; perceives Macedonia as "technologically backward"; and suggests that the film will "make you appreciate the relative peace and tranquility of life in the United States." Esser's position is precisely the attitude the film critiques: envisioning violence as happening "somewhere else" and perpetuating the oppressive dichotomy between the "tranquil" West and barbaric, violent non-Western places. Similarly, Dina Iordanova reproduces the binaristic logic of the rational West/irrational Balkan community when she writes about Aleksandar that, "having come from the civilized and rational west, he encounters a world consumed by ugly and violent intolerance." Iordanova, "Conceptualizing the Balkans in Film," *Slavic Review* 55 (winter 1996): 886.
8. *Before the Rain* was a coproduction (England, France, and Macedonia). It won international awards, at the 1994 Venice International Film Festival and the 1994 São Paulo International Film Festival, as well as at other festivals and was nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign-language film in 1995.
9. Andrew Horton, review of *Before the Rain*, *Cineaste* 21, no. 3 (1995): 44.
10. Andrew Horton, "Cinema across the Oceans: An Interview with Milcho Manchevski," *Cineaste* 21, no. 3 (1995): 45.
11. In his interview with Horton, Manchevski acknowledges that Aleksandar Petrovic is the spiritual father of his film. Indeed, *Before the Rain* draws structurally and conceptually on Petrovic's 1965 Yugoslav war film, *Three*, which, told as a triptych, frames the protagonist's three different perspectives on World War II. Ibid.
12. Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre," in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 119.
13. Hamid Naficy's latest book features analyses of exilic filmmaking globally and covers a wide variety of contemporary diasporic cinema created by directors from different geopolitical locations: Ghasem Ebrahimian, Ann Hui, Emir Kusturica, Mira Nair, Gregory Nava, and Trinh Minh-ha. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8.
14. As Naficy argues, what differentiates recent transnational filmmakers from European directors who moved to the United States in the 1920s and 1940s is that most of the

earlier immigrants were absorbed by the Hollywood studio system while the transnationals of the last two decades frequently produced their work via independent filmmaking channels. See Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics," 121–22.

15. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 4.
16. Christian Moraru, "Refiguring the Postcolonial: The Transnational Challenges," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 28, no. 4 (October 1997): 173, and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity," in Grewal and Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 9.
17. Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics," 120.
18. Ella Shohat's discussion of ethnicity is of special importance here. In the context of American cinema, she argues that

the disciplinary assumption that some films are "ethnic" whereas others are not is ultimately based upon the view that certain groups are ethnic whereas others are not. The marginalization of "ethnicity" reflects the imaginary of the dominant group which envisions itself as the "universal" or the "essential" American nation, and thus somehow "beyond" or "above" ethnicity. Shohat, "Ethnicities-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema," in Lester D. Friedman, ed., *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 215.

See also Lucy R. Lippard's discussion on the social and historical awkwardness that underlies the terminology used to refer to intercultural art and artists who frequently live between cultures. The notion of ethnicity is one of the terms Lippard scrutinizes, noting that the word "ethnic" is "ambiguous in its application to any group of people anywhere (though it is, significantly, rarely applied to WASPs) who maintain a certain habitual, religious, or intellectual bond to their originary cultures." Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 17.

19. Iordanova makes a useful point about the "transnationality" of *Before the Rain*, arguing that it is precisely its "cosmopolitan" status that enabled the production and then the wide distribution of the film:

Had the director depended solely on domestic finance and subsidies, I doubt that such film would be made in Macedonia, or in any other of the Balkan countries. . . . Unlike other Balkan films that rarely make it beyond the festival circuit, the film was widely distributed in the West in 35mm and on video. Iordanova, "Before the Rain in a Balkan Context," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 147.

20. Milcho Manchevski, "Rainmaking and Personal Truth," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 129.
21. *Ibid.*, 130. See also Andrew Horton, "Oscar-Nominated 'Rain' to Screen at Tulane," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1995, E5. In this interview, Manchevski explains further his resistance to creating a film that could be perceived as a "realistic" documentary:

I didn't want the film to comment on any event or events happening right now. You see, I don't know enough about the war. I haven't lived there for years. I wanted rather for my story to be pulled out of those events in its style, music, and in its content, too. . . . What is important is that I do not mean my film to be taken as a documentary of actual events.

22. For example, Slavoj Žižek sees *Before the Rain* as portraying “the Balkans as the timeless space on which the West projects its phantasmatic content,” while Iordanova believes that, at least on some level, the film reiterates that “the Balkans are different; that it is all about the ‘Other’; that nothing can be done; that there is no way to solve the problems that are destroying this ‘Other’ from within.” Žižek, “Underground, or Ethnic Cleansing as a Continuation of Poetry by Other Means,” *InterCommunication* 18, available at <http://www.ntticc.or.jp/pub/ic_mag/ic018/intercity/zizek_E.html> (November 14, 2000), and Iordanova, “Conceptualizing the Balkans in Film,” 887.
23. Manchevski, “Rainmaking and Personal Truth,” 129.
24. Robert Rosenstone, “Editorial,” *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 124.
25. Horton, “Cinema across the Oceans,” 45.
26. I thank Áine O’Healy for pointing out that, perhaps despite its “multicultural” intentions, the film largely privileges the Macedonian Christian community, and the visual and aural qualities of the setting in the first part of the narrative serve to romanticize the “timeless” qualities of the Christian nation.
27. The identity of the stranger/killer is quite troublesome. Manchevski mentions that the nationality of the anonymous man is of no importance because the point is to show the universality of violence:

It doesn’t matter what nationality the killer is. It’s not explained on purpose. We don’t subtitle his dialogue because I was trying to say that we are not immune to what is going on elsewhere in the world. You cannot switch channels. It doesn’t work that way. By not doing anything or not doing enough, you’re an accomplice.

But, of course, the nationality of the killer matters in this context. Even though the man’s words are not subtitled, it is obvious that he speaks Serbian. See Judy Stone, *Eye on the World: Conversations with International Filmmakers* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1997), 823.

28. It is significant that, although fictional drama, the film shows us photographs of the faces and bodies of real victims of the ethnic war. The credits reveal the various photographers of each of the pictures: Ranko Cukovic’s “Emaciated Man—Bosnian Refugee”; Luc Delahave’s “Child with 1 on Forehead”; Jon Jones’s “Man with Gas Masks”; Patrick Chauvel’s “Woman in Graveyard”; Marco Armenta’s “Two Children Dead in the Morgue”; and W. Betsch’s “Punk Soldier with Swastika Armband.” Like the documentary footage in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, which blurs the line between fiction and documentary, these photographs, too, erase the clear line between narrative fiction and “reality.”
29. Zygmunt Bauman, “Modernity and Ambivalence,” in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1990), 148–49.
30. Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” in Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 19.
31. Another compelling film about the exile’s “return” is Theo Angelopoulos’s *Ulysses’ Gaze* (1995), a poetically moody narrative about an American man’s journey through “his” Balkans. Through its visual motifs of fog, clouds, and misty mise-en-scène, which underline the exile’s hallucinatory return, the film draws on the legacy of Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Nostalghia* (1983) and reminds us that the native-turned-foreigner occupies an unstable, “murky” position with one’s kin.
32. The difficult social position of women from the former Yugoslavia and their “double” oppression is also foregrounded in Gregor Nicholas’s *Broken English* (1996). It is about refugees/immigrants from Bosnia who settle in New Zealand.

33. The issue of “taking sides,” as Iordanova points out, holds special significance in the post-Yugoslav moment, as imposed ethnic identification (expected to be performed along the lines of fixed-identity politics) propelled nationalist phobias:
- With the break-up of Yugoslavia, the compulsory taking of sides was one of the most difficult experiences for its former citizens. No matter how unwillingly, everybody in Yugoslavia had to undergo an imposed re-identification—from the inclusive concept of “Yugoslav,” cultivated for decades but now abandoned overnight, people had to switch to a restrictive concept of belonging and confine themselves to a clear-cut ethnic identity. Dina Iordanova, “*Before the Rain* in a Balkan Context,” 148.
34. Erik Tängerstad makes an interesting point about this moment, drawing upon Manchevski’s admission that he played the role of a prisoner:
- Writing himself into the script in this manner, Manchevski has more than made an ironic remark on “the death of the author.” Depicting himself as the executed and not the executioner, Manchevski suggests that he, like his imagined character Aleks, cannot find a neutral position from which to objectively describe “reality.” Tängerstad, “*Before the Rain—After the War?*” *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 178–79.
35. Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment*, 2. The ethical issue of the “ownership” of the war images from Bosnia is also compellingly represented in *Beautiful People*.
36. See, for example, Mary Dickson, “The Faces of Violence,” *Private Eye Weekly*, July 29, 1997, available at <http://www.slweekly.com/ae/cinema/cinema_rain.html> (April 20, 1998), and Roger Ebert, review of *Before the Rain*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 10, 1995, available at <http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1995/03/969362.html>.
37. Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 16.
38. Robert Burgoyne, “Ethnic Nationalism and Globalization,” *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 161.
39. My thinking about the “violence of vomit” is indebted to Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection. Discussing the “shattering violence of a convulsion,” Kristeva suggests a seeming paradox: “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*. . . . During that course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.” The “I” establishes its selfhood through self-abjection; the act of vomiting is simultaneously an act of “becoming” and “I.” Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.
40. Page duBois, *Torture and Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 155.
41. *Ibid.*, 157.
42. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” in Bill Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 259–63.
43. Robert A. Rosenstone, “A History of What Has Not Yet Happened,” *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 191.