

Historical Narrative and the East-West Leitmotif in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* and *Dust*

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For the decade and a half since the fall of the Berlin wall, Balkan films¹ have presented to international audiences images of life and death—in cities under siege, in burned-down villages, in underground tunnels and cellars—amidst war and devastation, in what Dina Iordanova has termed a “cinema of flames.” Given the conditions of the civil war, the depth of physical and spiritual wounds, and the fiscal strains if not outright deprivation in which recent films were made, the successes of the past decade have been remarkable. They include, most notably, the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film for Danis Tanović's *No Man's Land* (2002), the Cannes Film Festival Palm d'Or for Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995), and the Venice Festival's Golden Lion for Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (1994). But as the filmed inferno of the Yugoslav wars has brought cinematographies into prominence and won their authors international awards, it often confined them to a predictable range of anticipated representations. The Western recognition came at the price of misrepresenting or manipulating Balkan history (compounded in part by select Balkan artists' deliberate self-colonialization or self-

marginalization), although not always in ideologically clear-cut ways.

The Western embrace of the Balkan cinema, especially of Emir Kusturica's films,² occurred during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, the Western political and media construction of a "frozen image" of Balkan nationalism solidified (Todorova; Goldsworthy). A place of seemingly "un-European" brutality and destruction, the Balkans became a definitive pejorative term and "a powerful symbol conveniently located outside of historical time" (Todorova 7). Numerous authors of Balkan origin, but most prominently Maria Todorova, have provided in response detailed challenging accounts of the entangled multi-national histories of the region's "imagined communities" and their embeddedness in Europe (3-37).

The value of Milcho Manchevski's cinematic "imaging" and "imagining" of the Balkans in *Before the Rain* (1994) and *Dust* (2001) can be found precisely in the innovative and critical interpretation of these two leitmotifs—the complex simultaneous connectedness and disconnectedness of the region to Europe, and the deceptively endless, seemingly self-perpetuating ethnic warfare. I argue that Manchevski constructs a novel East-West "encounter" and uncovers new meanings of "in-betweenness" in the Balkan cinema through advanced visual grammar and powerful iconography of interlinked reverse exiles and crossings (in both *Dust* and *Before the Rain*), and through a hybrid-genre, cinematic critique of Balkan historical narratives (albeit with several plot shortcomings, especially in *Dust*).

The East, the West, and the In-Between of the Balkan Cinema

One of the keys to understanding the cinemas of the former Yugoslavia, or more broadly its art, is the particular set of varied relationships between Eastern and Western influences, between Oriental and Occidental impulses. This dynamic is accompanied by, although not directly translated into, the tensions between the modern and the traditional (emphasizing, of course, the typically modern uses of the traditional, to paraphrase Anthony Giddens), the cosmopolitan and the provincial, the urban and the "epic-rural." Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, as Maria Todorova, Milica Bakić-Hayden, and Dušan Bjelić explain, cannot be easily translated to the Balkan context, where each ethnic group selectively "orientalizes" or "occidentalizes" others and, when suited, self-exoticizes its own heritage (Bjelić, 1-19). It is important to emphasize the fluidity rather than the sharpness of the

“oriental” or “occidental” distinctions in the context of former Yugoslavian art. The East-West dualities never fully applied in the case of the Balkans and should not be seen as binary divisions, but rather as syncretic visions and meandering voyages that authors undertake deliberately or manipulate creatively.

I propose that the reinterpretations of the East-West dynamic in the Balkan cinema are embodied, first, in the visions of “in-betweenness” and, second, in the tension between the turmoil of the modern-present and the reinvented past. While “inbetween-ness” can be seen as a broader characteristic of the region,³ it seems to be particularly suited to the Balkan film art. Situated in a non-aligned mode amidst the Cold War conflict, a special, at times surreal, cultural space of in-betweenness, an Eastern-Western *mélange*, thrived in the post World War Two former Yugoslavia, as Andrew Horton’s perceptive and witty critique reveals (413-430). The assertion of in-betweenness over the artificially inscribed forms of communist cultural expressions in Tito’s Yugoslavia made great cinematic gains. Dušan Makavejev’s provocative films *Man Is Not A Bird* (1965) and *Love Affair or the Tragedy of a Switchboard Operator* (1967) are among the more creative examples of a liberated, politically-conscious cinema. And in different, socially-engaged films, filmmakers presented an intricate montage of interlinked lives, revealing the conjoining or *jouissance* of eros and pathos of a distinct yet not “Balkanizing” sort. One of the most powerful works of art about the social margins of the former Yugoslavia remains Aleksandar Petrović’s *I Even Met Some Happy Gypsies* (or in literal translation from Serbo-Croatian, *The Collectors of Feathers*, 1967), a film about the life of Roma, set amidst the visual and linguistic cacophony of various ethnic groups in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. In such films,⁴ directors interpret in-betweenness through characters’ struggles to embrace urban or modern identifications and show sympathies with individuals at the margins of society without allegorizing their identities or trivializing their stories.

The second collection of visions, following the themes of the turmoil of the present and the reinterpretation the historical pasts, is linked to the twentieth century’s history of conflict and warfare in the Balkan territories. This tension can appear in a World War Two film or in a depiction of twentieth-century modern, urban life. A certain schizoid, creative urban electricity, always struggling to assert itself over rural, provincial or nationalist impulses, can be detected as well

in films about Sarajevo or Zagreb or even the Montenegrin coast, even if with slightly different local cultural reinterpretations. But here too, we can perceive a tension between the traditional and the modern, the socialist and the emergent capitalist, and also the repressed and the sexualized. In the films by Žika Pavlović (*When I am Dead and White*), Dušan Makavejev (*Man Is Not A Bird*), and Rajko Grlić (*In the Jaws of Life*), for example, these dynamics come to symbolize strivings to become a part of the modern Western urban world without giving up originality and soulfulness. A different, less playful and more devastating sense of tension is represented in films that critically reexamine the history of World War Two in the former Yugoslavia, such as Slobodan Šijan's *Who's That Singing Over There?* (1980) and Lordan Zafranović's *Occupation in 26 Pictures* (1978), one comedic and theatrical, the other dramatic and cinematic. Here, a key visual and narrative motif in the Balkan cinema appears—that of a loss of the imagined, nascent, incomplete national identities prior to the war(s), of the never-attained moment of tranquility, of forever altered lives.

The complexities of the East-West-in-between worlds of the Balkan cinemas post World War Two cannot be described in full here beyond these two common leitmotifs: an artistic embrace of in-betweenness that often carries in it an element of appreciation for socially marginalized groups, and the dramatization of the historical narrative, especially in reinterpretations of the memories of warfare. Behind both visions, the most original films of the post World War Two period presented the inner and outer turmoil of the unstable “Yugoslavian” identities, striving for authenticity, reaching out to both East and West, unable to quite join them.

The Balkan cinema of the past decade and a half has included interpretations of Balkan history freed from the prescribed narratives of the communist era, yet marred by essentialist visions. Renewed ambivalences towards both the West and the East have also accentuated the replacement of “in-betweenness” with forms of “Balkanism.” This may be unsurprising given that during the rise of nationalism in the 1990s, Balkan film directors and screen writers were perhaps not left with much of a choice but to turn inward, artfully digging through the mines of the past, turning up more stones than gold. Yet many of the cinematic searches of this period have also been more ingenious, more intriguing than those of the former Eastern bloc's, whose film art suffered creative blockage subsequent to the region's opening to the

West (Krzysztof Kieslowski, quoted in Insdorf 183).

I cite only three directors here whose treatment of Balkan history and the East-West leitmotif provides an important cultural context for the analysis of these themes in Milcho Manchevski's films that follows. First, Emir Kusturica's international success *Underground* represents the culmination of the author's opus and the full visual evolution of his cinematography into a Balkan genre of magic realism. It stands apart for the dynamism, complexity, and imaginativeness of the author's "underground" imagery, most notably in the magical, despairing scene of a wedding in the cellar. The film's vision of 50-year long imagined war, however, presents a polemical political allegory of the former Yugoslavia, both vexing and disturbing, and at times uncritical (Gocić; Iordanova 2002). Selectively breaking with the realist traditions, Kusturica's art establishes one paradigm of Balkan "authenticity" (largely for Western consumption) and presents a cinematic allegory of Balkan separatedness.

Secondly, Srdjan Dragojević's *Pretty Villages, Pretty Flames* (1996) and *Wounds* (1998) are especially notable for the director's attempt to challenge conventional narratives of warfare⁵ and to engage creatively, at times mockingly, with the heritage of war imagery that haunts Balkan cinema. In these two films, manipulations and deceptions in the narrating of historical events play a key role, as they also do in Manchevski's films. In contrast to Kusturica's films, Dragojević's ironic treatment of the sinister aspects of war speaks to the audiences of the former Yugoslavia but does not translate well for the Western public.⁶ Both Dragojević's and Kusturica's films strive to uncover the ravaged souls of warlords but falter in their redemptive aim.

Finally, a poetic treatment of the hauntedness of the cinematic and collective-historical memory is offered by Greek film director Theo Angelopoulos in his visualization of a cinematographer's voyage through the Balkans of the past and present in *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995). Here, the history of the region and its cinema are revealed through a travelogue: the main character ("A"), played by Harvey Keitel, returns to Greece after years of exile to search across the war-torn Balkans for the original reels of the early twentieth-century Balkan cinema pioneers, the Manaki brothers. In this quest through the wreckage of Balkan history, and in Angelopoulos' art more broadly, Balkan myths are at times universalized, in other instances selectively "balkanized," an approach perhaps most similar to Manchevski's *Before the Rain*.

The three examples sketched reveal new relationships of ambivalence towards Balkan historical narrative, of strivings to overcome marginality and self-marginalization, of strides towards authenticity, with common stumblings over nationalist or balkanizing traps. These visions depart in significant ways from the leitmotif of “in-betweenness” of the post World War Two former Yugoslavian cinema. In the case of Kusturica’s films, it is as if the acceptance of self-marginalization in the 1990s replaced the originality of the former Yugoslavian cinematic in-betweenness and inter-connectedness with European history present in the earlier films of Petrović, Zafranović, or Makavejev. Angelopoulos’ poetics of loss, Kusturica’s visions of despair, and Dragojević’s ironic treatment of the heritage of World War Two films present glimpses of the new Balkan narratives. Manchevski’s films, the closest in aspirations perhaps to Angelopoulos’, offer a further innovative challenge to the project of re-envisioning the Balkans. In their engagement with the Balkan context through a different sort of in-betweenness (that of exile) and through critical visions of historical narratives, Manchevski’s films both drift away from and resume the course of Balkan cinema.

Milcho Manchevski’s Eastern-Western Narratives in *Before the Rain* and *Dust*

Even in a cinema of crossings and in-betweenness, Milcho Manchevski’s two films *Before the Rain* and *Dust* stand apart in significant ways. Iordanova has suggested that *Before the Rain* cannot even be seen as a product of Balkan cinematography, given the foreign financing of the film, the international cast, and the cosmopolitan background of the film’s writer-director (“Before the Rain in a Balkan Context” 147)—an argument that can be extended to *Dust* as well. Indeed, Manchevski, educated in both the U.S. and Macedonia and residing in Skopje and New York, prides himself on being a cultural hybrid.⁷ This hybridity is reflected not only in his Balkan and Western cultural references, in an original blend of American and European art influences, but also in the films’ narratives. Both *Before the Rain* and *Dust* are set in the Balkan (Macedonia), and Western (London and New York, respectively) contexts that are not merely the milieux for characters but assume critical roles in the narrative. Manchevski, who also wrote the films’ scripts, casts both Balkan and international actors as displaced or rootless characters who traverse continents, cross

borders, and, at least in the context of the Balkan cinema, redefine Eastern-Westernness. This article offers a unique comparative focus on the author's treatment of Balkan historical narratives and his representations of East-West interconnectedness in both films. Although *Before the Rain* is arguably a more accomplished film, *Dust* shows glimpses of the director's growing capacity to engage with the historical narrative in creative and critical ways.

Before the Rain, Manchevski's first major film, is told out of chronological order. The visual/temporal play and a particularly skillful, measured montage in which several events occur at the same time or before they could have happened represent one of the most innovative aspects of *Before the Rain*'s cinematic technique, as discussed in numerous articles.⁸ Although one of its key features is its tangled narrative and disrupted chronology, to facilitate the reading of the film, I present the plot in order. The first section in time, entitled "Faces," which actually occurs in the middle of the movie, begins with Anne (Katrin Cartlidge), an editor at an agency in London that dispatches photojournalists to the foreign conflicts being covered by Western media. Aleksandar (Rade Šerbedžija), her Macedonian lover, has just returned from a shoot in Bosnia and from receiving the Pulitzer Prize for his book of war photography. He tells Anne without giving his full reasons that he has resigned and is returning to his home, saying before stalking off that she can either join him or lose him permanently. The London portion of the film concludes with a scene in a restaurant that moves from Anne failing to persuade her husband to grant her a divorce to her husband actually being killed by random bullets from an enraged Serbian patron. Thematically, Manchevski's narrative in "Faces" plays up the leitmotif of in-betweenness in the context of Anne's and Aleksandar's impossible East-West romance and their uneasy belonging to both the Balkans and the West. This is further heightened by the incident of violence and the placement of the scene of shattering in the Western context.

Shifting to Macedonia, in the section called "Pictures," Aleksandar finds the country and his village polarized into mutually suspicious and highly hostile populations of Macedonians and Albanians. Aleksandar fails to comprehend or overcome these divisions and connect with his Albanian childhood love Hana; he fails as well to integrate into the village that he left behind. Indeed, he eventually intervenes to save Hana's daughter, Zamira (Labina Mitevska), from

the villagers, one of whom (Aleksandar's cousin) has assaulted the girl and been killed by her in return. For this they kill Aleksandar, and he surrenders himself up to death having given up hope for reconciliation. In these sequences the film stumbles uneasily along the depiction of the brewing nationalist tensions and offers critics the strongest grounds to take the director to task for sketching endless, untamable Balkan warfare.

In the last section of the film chronologically, though that with which the film opens, called "Words," Zamira takes refuge in a nearby monastery in the cell of Kiril (Grégoire Colin), a young monk who is Aleksandar's nephew and has taken a vow of silence. Neither can communicate, by language or intention. Kiril, apparently taken by Zamira, is moved to conceal her there from his fellow monks and from the paramilitaries from the village who soon arrive in pursuit of her. The monks quickly discover Kiril's deception and send the two away, though, since they note a love growing between them, not to the armed villagers. Before the two can get far, however, Zamira's Albanian relatives find them. Her grandfather rebukes her for disobeying his authority and for her wantonness, and Zamira's own brother, when he sees her love for Kiril crossing forbidden ethnic boundaries, shoots her. Kiril is left sitting on a suitcase by the side of his dead love; Anne arrives shortly thereafter from London for the funeral of Aleksandar. In this portion of the film, a fairy-tale like narrative offers symbolic understandings of the interconnected East-West faiths in the actual and implied reversed exiles and in their joined devastating losses.

Visually and stylistically Manchevski's *Dust* goes further than *Before the Rain* with the "orchestration of montage" (Dimitrijević) and an expanding range of references and leitmotifs, although at the same time the narrative implodes (Tängerstad; Kobow). Initially conceived as an "Eastern" that would bring the world of Pancho Villa and Zapata into the Balkans, *Dust* has emerged instead as a narrative that attempts to shatter Eastern and Western myths the better to recreate them. The film consists of numerous flashbacks between the U.S. and Macedonia: in New York, Angela (Rosemary Murphy), a Macedonian-born 80 year-old wreck, forces young, African-American Edge (Adrian Lester) at gunpoint (he had been burglarizing her apartment) to listen to her story of two brothers, Luke (David Wenham) and Elijah (Joseph Fiennes), who voyaged a century earlier from the Wild West to the Balkans. Elijah had fallen for a prostitute named Lilith (Anne Brochet) and married

her; she had an affair with Luke, who then set out for the Balkans, running away from forbidden love. In Macedonia of the early 20th century ravaged by warlords, Luke found another frontier and a moment of solace when a Macedonian family sheltered him and healed his wounds.

In *Dust*, in-betweenness is represented by characters who are marginalized and displaced in a Western city, living at its violent or abandoned edge and whose life paths will connect Balkans and the West. Edge is a thief and Angela a person with a stolen past and little future left—they are, according to Stillan Yotov, “two persons for whom it seems that there is no place of their own in the whole world” (1). Angela and Edge are connected by losses that will multiply as their narratives unfold, eventually offering them both redemption. The platonic Harold and Maude coupling, crossing age, race, and even class boundaries, makes the East-West connection difficult, but also impossible to sentimentalize. Angela’s storytelling, moreover, recreates a Balkan historical narrative through the imaginary voyage of Luke’s self-exiled American outlaw, which Edge then remakes into his own “Western.” Notwithstanding the plot and the flash-back difficulties, Manchevski’s film presents in key sequences of Angela’s storytelling one of the most critical reconstructions of a Balkan historical narrative in film.

Unlike the temporal play of *Before the Rain*, the narrative construct of *Dust* is based on Western genre fusion and its transplantation into the Eastern context. *Dust* is, however, more than the work of a Macedonian Sergio Leone. The structure of *Dust* seems to be one of East-West cultural and philosophical dualities challenged, yet narratively reinforced. Manchevski’s reinterpretation of the Western genre in the Eastern context subverts the genre through the confrontation of Eastern and Western histories: the Wild West (a mythical place to Manchevski) collides with the “Wild East” of the early 20th century Balkan warfare (a mythical place to Western audiences). This innovative technique strives to engage critically with the dual heritage of East-West heroism, patriotism, and “mythmaking” in genre film.

The Construction of Macedonia in *Before the Rain* and *Dust*: Ambiguous Authenticities and In-betweenness

Although the narratives of *Before the Rain* and *Dust* take place in both the West and the Balkans, the Macedonian milieu is central to the films’ representation of history. Macedonia, which has been largely

spared ethnic violence but where unease and tension persisted during the 1990s (and continue today), provides a complex setting for both narratives and for the reception of Manchevski's films in the West. In this territory of multiple border-crossings, Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian neighbors have historically made irredentist claims, the state's international name recognition was fought by the Greek government, and the very existence of Macedonians as an ethnic group was brought into question (Ramet 229). A discussion of the political context and conditions in Macedonia needs to be distinguished from the Western perceptions of the country, although the two are also related. As Jordanova points out, the uncritical understanding of Macedonia in the West helped to perpetuate the vision of an endless potential conflict in Macedonia, a place where a civil war was expected by many Western observers ("Before the Rain in a Balkan Context" 149-152). The particular liminal position of Macedonia, the context of the civil war and the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the fear of conflict between Macedonians and Albanians, and the presence of the UN peacekeepers in the early 1990s provided a backdrop to *Before the Rain*, just as the increased tensions following the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 did so for *Dust*.

Cinematic engagement with the recent Balkan political context carries a significant risk for directors' capacity both to relate film to and separate it from predominant national narratives. Always careful to emphasize that he was not portraying actual events in Macedonia, Manchevski has claimed that *Before the Rain* was intended as a warning that ethnic warfare might happen in this former Yugoslav republic too ("Rainmaking and Personal Truth" 130).⁹ Yet in spite of the director's intentions, *Before the Rain*'s plunge into the Balkan context, its emphasis on the historical narrative, and the Western perception of it as a film "about the Balkans" root the film deeply in the context of the cinemas of the former Yugoslavia.

In *Dust* as well, an even more intricate work of art of multiple genre- and boundary-crossings, Manchevski found himself in the odd position of having to defend the film from ideologically focused critics who took the author to task on his political views.¹⁰ In an editorial article published before the premiere of *Dust* at the Venice Film Festival in 2001 (although edited without his full consent, apparently), Manchevski accused Albanian KLA extremists of heightening hostilities in Macedonia and called for Western intervention to prevent possible

conflict there (“NATO gave us this ethnic cleansing” 12). Thus *Dust*, one of the least “Balkan” of Balkan films, found itself unable to transcend the Balkan context, just as *Before the Rain*, international success notwithstanding, became of importance for the national Macedonian narrative of state-making. My focus here is on the content analysis of the films, although it is precisely in the interplay between the films’ narratives and the Western (and local) reception, that we can see how Balkan films emerge as “the loci of debates about a nation’s governing principles, goals, heritage and history” (Hjort and MacKenzie, 4). In this manner, cinema plays an active role in shaping the nation’s imagined community (Hayward 88-91; Goulding 1-31).

Manchevski “imagines” Macedonia as a setting for tangled, ambiguous historical events and uneasy identity affiliations. The director’s treatment of the landscapes in *Before the Rain* and *Dust* seems similar to Angelopoulos’ vision in which landscape is not merely a backdrop or a stage set but assumes an active, historically signifying role (Christie 1). “A” of *Ulysses’ Gaze* and Aleksandar of *Before the Rain* are exiled photographer-filmmakers whose gaze upon the Balkan landscape reconstructs it through visual connections between individual and collective histories, and between actual and imagined places. In *Before the Rain*’s sequences entitled “Words” and “Pictures,” images claiming authenticity (sheep birthing, a traditional wedding, musical orchestration by the band Anastasia) are in an ambivalent, complex relationship with what is supposed to be an imagined Macedonian-Albanian village. Macedonian audiences’ main critique of the film was that it focused too much on the rural landscape of underdevelopment and did not show enough of the modern, urban world of Skoplje, the capital of Macedonia (Manchevski, “Rainmaking and Personal Truth” 132). Perhaps the establishment of the Macedonian milieu works best when it is supposed to be linked to Aleksandar’s memories of the Macedonia he left behind. In part, this is also the director’s vision; in scenes of Aleksandar’s arrival in Macedonia, we can detect the ambivalence of someone reconstructing his roots with anthropological detachment, yet claiming authenticity. This is, after all, an exile’s story of exile.¹¹ Scenes of Aleksandar’s return to Skoplje are overlaid with a tender patina of 1980s Yugoslavian TV productions, infomercials, and intermezzos, which Manchevski perhaps could not have seen (but has imagined) given his absence from the country. As Keith Brown has suggested, these images, associated with nostalgic memories of the

former Yugoslavia present “a multi-layered evocation of the past” (8). They achieve a collage of Skoplje from Aleksandar’s memory and conjure up its new reality in ways that images from the village do not — Aleksandar is simply so urban, so foreign that we cannot see how he could have ever lived there.

Aleksandar’s character, an obvious alter ego to Manchevski, personifies at once a Western media professional and a Balkan male unable to reconcile his sense of guilt and responsibility, his anti-war consciousness, with the Western journalist’s impulse to detach. Iordanova suggests that, upon his return to Macedonia, Aleksandar’s character becomes the embodiment of the West, and that his rejection by the villagers and ultimately his death signify rejection of Western values (*Cinema of Flames* 82). This could perhaps be seen as one arch of interpretations given Aleksandar’s sophisticated hybrid-character. But several other arches need to be added. Aleksandar makes his indictment of the Western media for profiting from the violence in the Balkans; most of his remarks about life in the West are critical. Aleksandar finds himself occupying precisely that in-between space that is gradually rendered nonexistent. He is the only Macedonian allowed to go into the Albanian side of the village where he journeys to visit his high school sweetheart Hana. He is told by the paramilitary gang leader and by his neighbors that he has lived abroad for so long that he cannot understand the need for division or separation. Aleksandar becomes the sole defender of the “in-between,” of communication across ethnicity and of love across boundaries.

Perhaps the stylistic approach Manchevski takes in the monastery scenes is the most visually accomplished. These scenes (filmed at three different locations) transcend the context of the Eastern Orthodox religion to tell a narrative about the clash of spiritual and aesthetic exaltation with sinister, material destructiveness—this deceptive schism constitutes one myth about the supposed impossibility of transcending history in the Balkans. Western audiences have translated this element in more simplistic ways as a clash between the beautiful landscape and the ugly people set to destroy it, as Brown and Friedman point out (4-5; 1,8-9), and Manchevski’s visions and narrative at times allow for this interpretation. In other instances, however, the meaning of the landscape is more complex. The older monk tells Kiril that the beauty of the landscape merits words, and as we learn, Kiril finds beauty in Zamira and hence breaks the vow of silence—words

triumph over silence, even if they are then trumped by violence and death.

The meanings of interior spaces are even more layered and point to the interesting gender intersections and reversals as well. Kiril's quarters represent a "chardak" of sorts, a Turcism for an enclosed porch on the second floor of a Turkish house. In a well-known Balkan fairy tale, "chardak" is located "neither upon the sky nor on the land"¹²—this place can be understood as an undefined, unreachable space, and for international audiences, a world apart. In *Before the Rain*, Kiril's chardak becomes a place of spiritual refuge and also of in-betweenness. Kiril himself occupies the in-between space: first, as the only young monk, second, with his vow of silence, and third with his inability to give away Zamira, with his impulse to share the sanctuary with her. The paramilitaries, in search of Zamira, trash his quarters, thus also destroying symbolically this place of refuge or the possibility of not "taking sides." One of the leitmotifs in the Yugoslavian cinema of the 1990s is the destruction and devastation of civil places, of middle-class homes, of villages, where killing begins with those challengers within the group who would be most likely to undermine the "oneness" of the community. On the other hand, mines, tunnels, and underground cellars, as in Kusturica's *Underground* or Dragojević's *Pretty Villages*, *Pretty Flames*, become key interiors, often associated with subterranean, dark aspects of male aggression. The destruction of the chardak space signifies a spatial metaphor for the loss of shelter, and, indirectly perhaps, of the feminine qualities of the environment. Kiril in his chardak, much like the youngest son in a fairy tale, remains a rare character of innocent bravery, an oddity in a cinema whose narratives of courageousness are often linked with displays of belligerent masculinity. (Of course, Kiril's bravery is at once his evolution into masculinity and his loss of innocence.)¹³ Chardak as an in-between space is more broadly a metaphor for the former Yugoslavia, or for Macedonia.

In *Dust*, the Macedonian landscape is constructed in a dual manner through the exiled Angela's fading memories and Luke's own detached gaze. Manchevski tries hard to strike a balance here between the redeeming and the self-exotic modes in *Dust*,¹⁴ as his visual technique and the creative use of the linguistic cacophony are diminished by the less sophisticated type casting.¹⁵ In the scenes of a village in which Luke recovers from wounds, this period of waiting is the time for remorse, mercy, for the ceasing of hostilities, a moment "in between" the rain storms when the course of history can be altered. In these

sequences, Neda's Macedonian family shelters him and represents in particular the paradigm of virtue, offering perhaps the strongest support to critics' argument that the film endorses Macedonian nationalism.¹⁶

Neda (Nikolina Kujača) is a good mother with a cross drawn between her eyebrows: a woman whom the camera approaches delicately. Hana's character in *Before the Rain* is similarly positioned in an extreme patriarchal context, where she is the ideal object of Aleksandar's love. Here, Manchevski lets the camera and Aleksandar character's rakishness orientalize freely. Manchevski makes it clear that his films are not liberating Neda or Hana as they try to persevere in a patriarchal society. In *Dust*, similarly to the "frames of belief" presented in *Before the Rain*'s rural scenes, the director's construction of an imagined Macedonian community remains ambiguous given his dual identification with the characters of both Luke and Neda, that is, with both the Western gaze and the South-Eastern Slavic embodiment of virtue.

The identification of Neda with the national landscape comes close in particular to the problematic nationalist vision in this otherwise cosmopolitan-aiming film. As Susan Hayward has argued, "the woman's body is closely aligned and identified with nationalist discourses. We fight and die for our mother-nation; the colonised referred to the colonising country as mother country. When 'she' is invaded by the enemy, she is 'raped'" (97). The prominence of this theme in the Balkan cinema of the 1990s, especially given the brutality associated with it in the Bosnian war, has rarely been critically treated.

Women in *Dust* exist mostly to witness this tragedy, to remember it, to be the tellers of stories. Aside from Murphy's Angela and Kujača's Neda, only Anne Brochet's Lilith claims screen space. As is too common in the Balkan cinema (or certain Westerns, as Manchevski might say), these women represent the mother-saint and whore-who-stays-a-whore duality. For Angelopoulos in *Ulysses' Gaze*, they are the same woman, a projection of male desire in a male dominated world. The "whore"—always a lively sort, who in *Dust* is overdetermined as French—is often used in the Balkan narrative to motivate male violence or fratricide.¹⁷ Svetlana Slapšak has pointed out in an excellent article on *Dust*, however, that women in this sort of Balkan narrative preside over rituals of birth and death, negotiating in this manner some power from the patriarchy. At best, it can be added, Manchevski's female characters do so by enveloping or containing the patriarchy, but they never challenge it. (Zamira's character in *Before*

the Rain, who does just that, ends up killed by her brother.) In both *Before the Rain and Dust*, the impossibility of female rebirth is underscored by miscarriages (in a possible interpretation, that of Anne, horrifically after the restaurant scene, and certainly that of Lilith), where the theme of female tragedy borders on replications of female punishment. These stronger female characters in both films are framed by the idealized feminine submissiveness, which diminishes their libratory potential and reduces them to fixtures within the landscape in both Manchevski's film and Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze*.

Representations of Macedonia in both *Before the Rain* and *Dust* depict landscapes of ambiguous authenticities torn between the rural, ethnic-nationalist settings and their reconstruction through the uncertain, reflexive gaze of exiles. In the latter case, layered evocations of the author's awareness of the multiplicities of the gaze of exiles, outsiders, or challengers to the group establish new meanings of "in-betweenness" in Balkan cinema.

Narrating History, Reinventing the Past in *Before the Rain* and *Dust*

Manchevski further uncovers the character-landscape linkages and constructs the "imagined" Macedonian community through historical narratives in both films. The metonymic motto repeated three times in *Before the Rain*, "Time never dies; the circle is not round," suggests the cycles of history and limited possibilities for escaping them. The film's narrative proposes that the wheels of Balkan history are also turned by the persistent rhetoric of the past. In one sequence, the gang of paramilitaries searching the monastery for Zamira reminds, the Orthodox priests there of "five centuries of Turkish rule"; in another, Aleksandar speaks to Anne of how the "Byzantines poked 28,000 Macedonian eyes." In the first example, the paramilitaries are attempting to invoke the common history of suffering of Macedonians in hopes of persuading the monks not to shelter the escaped Albanian girl; in the second, Aleksandar emphasizes how much greater is the scale of loss and the depth of suffering in the Balkans than in the West, thus selectively "Balkanizing" the narrative and distancing himself from Anne. The rhetoric of the past in both cases comes too close to rooting the film in it as well, thus perpetuating the discourse on the backwardness of the Balkans, as Stuart Klawans has observed (397). Other authors have argued that the film presents a fatalistic vision of

both the region's future and its past. In her review of *Before the Rain*, Iordanova argued that the film, narratively and metaphorically, asserts a vision that "nothing can be done to change the Balkan cycle of self-destruction" ("*Before the Rain* in a Balkan Context" 153).¹⁸



Mourning the dead as an occasion for Macedonian nationalism in
Before the Rain

Taking into account these important critiques, I nevertheless propose that the narrative of dual exile and the multiple London-Macedonia or West-Balkans connections, transforms this shortcoming offering instead visions of loss but also of resilient boundary crossings. "Time never dies" roots the film partly in the "expected" vision of the Balkans' deceptively "frozen" history, but "circle is not round" indicates a possibility of transcending it. As Ann Kibbey suggests, "Time and the circle provide the metaphoric template that sustains both form and context of the film. Furthermore, they symbolize aspects of human and temporal interdependence. What happens in Macedonia has implications for London, and vice versa" (3).

Manchevski's film at once self-exoticizes, implicates the West in this process, and propels the characters to escape the course seemingly set for them. In this narrative construct, *Before the Rain* and especially *Dust* challenge the self-colonialism prominent in Kusturica's films.

More broadly, in my interpretation, the director's focus on "words" and "pictures," that is, the historical narrative and the historical vision, perhaps suggests both Western and Eastern inability to fully come to terms with historical truths.

The theme of an ever-present yet untenable past is treated differently in *Dust* than in *Before the Rain*. Manchevski attempts as well a dual East-West challenge to the relationship between history and myth in *Dust*. Manchevski's proficient use of a montage of images, music (composed by Kiril Dajkovski), and sound is further enhanced by languages that at times split the film in two. An utterance that is untranslated nonsense for Western audiences is a whole other story for Balkan viewers, just as Luke and Elijah's imaginary 19th century frontier English becomes simply one of many heavy-accented vernaculars in Macedonia. When Luke, in search of a 12,000 ducat reward, finds the "rebel czar" or "Teacher," he holds him at gunpoint and growls, "You move, I kill you." Here, Luke embodies the Western at its most powerful (both the genre and the West itself). On his knees but not down yet, "Teacher" replies to Luke in curses that go untranslated and are perhaps untranslatable into English. For the Balkan audiences that can understand him, "Teacher" is saying, "You may have the gun but we have myths that are stronger." Manchevski, working within the Eastern-Western genre, presents an ironic collision of heroic modes in which both East and West tell narratives of their presumed dominance and their national virtues forged with arms. The uncertain narrator in *Dust* has in fact told us a story of a dual myth-making or mythomania.

Manchevski's accomplished genre collage in *Dust* creates a unique form of hybrid film art (at least in the context of Balkan cinema), yet the visual seems to overpower the narrative structure in these scenes of Eastern-Western "myth-making" that lack the power of Angela's story telling sequences. Here, Manchevski effectively exposes the manipulations, the mimicry, and misuse of the Ottoman history through Angela's unreliable narrator. At one point, Angela relates, Luke was surrounded by 20 Turkish soldiers; later, she changes the number to 200. Irritated, Edge demands that she clear up the discrepancy, and Angela arbitrarily fixes on 20. Balkan viewers and reviewers know very well that in the former Yugoslavia, 200 or 20 or even 2,000 depends on who is telling the story and to whom. Manchevski's subtext suggests that a similar, if less blatant variability might be practiced in Western narrative as well, and here again we have an explicit condemnation of

both Eastern and Western manipulations of the historical present. As Angela settles on a number, Manchevski intervenes in her story, freezing frames, making soldiers disappear, and even turning one of them into a sheep. This visual and narrative device also comments with irony on the magic realism (and its political manipulation) that has been adopted in the Balkan cinema, most notably by Kusturica. Rather than spinning the wheels of history as in *Before the Rain*, Manchevski suggests here again that "time never dies," but that so many of its moments, peripheral and crucial, illuminate and extinguish with our lapsing memories.

Manchevski's vision of history in *Dust* does not seem to embrace complete relativism but rather, in the context of Balkan cinema, to include elements of irony in this East-West and exilic narrative. History does not disappear in this manner, it does not become a set of arbitrary numbers of victims or conquerors; rather, in Balkan film art it lives on through creative visual narrative reinterpretations—it becomes the obsession, the muse, the plague, not always the nightmare—of the storyteller and the Balkan filmmaker.

Symmetries of Violence: Shattering East and West

The nightmares of Balkan history are, however, explicitly revealed in both films, but Manchevski places them in Western as well as in Balkan contexts. In "Faces," before we have seen the sequences of ethnic contention in Macedonia in "Pictures," Manchevski situates a scene of carnage in an urban Western milieu. There, in an elegant London restaurant, an enraged "Balkan" man, after an altercation with a "Balkan" waiter, returns to shoot the waiter and a random collection of restaurant guests. In this seemingly unmotivated sequence the dispute between the two men is left untranslated for Western audiences, rendering it an inexplicable ethnic affair. In fact, the brawl involves dissatisfaction with Western values and a challenge to assimilation. The two men are cast as different types of masculinity, one bearded, of the heroic or "epic-rural" type, another urbane, civil; one refusing to integrate, another struggling to earn a living and become a Londoner. The untranslated conversation in Serbo-Croatian consists of half-heard sentences from which we can deduce that the older "epic" man is trying to humiliate the younger "civil" one, ridiculing his job as a waiter and his wish to earn money honestly; he even contemptuously tosses bills at him, demeaning him further. The two "Balkan" men, who speak Serbo-Croatian, are not clearly ethnically defined; they could be from Serbia, Bosnia, or the Knin region of Croatia, although it seems implied

that they are Serbian. The bearded man speaks with a Serbian accent; the scene of carnage that he perpetrates ends with a song, "Igrale se delije," which reflects Serbian nationalism. Among the casualties in the restaurant is Anne's husband Nick (Jay Villiers), cast as a Brit. "At least they are not from Ulster," he says to the restaurant owner before the shooting occurs. "No, sir," the owner remarks, "I am from Ulster." When Nick, raising a toast, tells Anne, "Here's to civil wars getting more civil once they reach here," Anne, who was collecting courage to ask for divorce, now finally knows that she could not live with his ignorance. She will cross over to the Balkans in search of Aleksandar. The scene of shattering that results in Nick's death is horrifically, absurdly, the scene of Anne's liberation. More broadly, connecting nationalisms and violence in the Western context, with subtle uses of the word "civil" (civilization, civil war), Manchevski shows the non-exceptionalism of the Balkans and global interconnectedness.

In *Dust*, again placing destructive impulses in the Western context, Manchevski creates a striking scene when Edge, in destroying Angela's apartment, finds a world already broken into pieces; the more he ransacks it, the more fascinating shards he uncovers. Although editing and the visuals (particularly the photographs that Edge discovers) are excellent, Manchevski lets the audience assume that a pot of gold is there for Edge, that in the very destruction he will find his salvation. But when Edge does happen on Angela's literal gold treasure, the director steps back again, the camera exits, seductive Middle Eastern music blasts, and we see Edge or his dark shadow in a window of a Manhattan walkup, just the way he started, with no one to share his fortune with, as lonely as Luke is in a mountainous Macedonian landscape with his own gold, the only thing they both thought they ever wanted. This isolation within his urban ghetto will propel Edge's exile, making it more meaningful than Luke's as Edge has already crossed over to the Balkans through his redemptive connection to Angela. The cultural divide does not stand, and the director wishes to shatter it, albeit with a difficult but perhaps not impossible connection between an elderly Macedonian-American woman and a young black New York thief. Their connection is at the same time ironic and real, applying a Western genre knowledge to the prominent cinematic tradition of appreciation for the margins of society in Balkan film. In these crisscrossed exiles, Manchevski strives for and at moments creates new forms of hybridity and in-betweenness.

In contrast to *Before the Rain*, Manchevski's *Dust* carries the

ironic language further into a post-mythological arena. When, in a set of Macedonian sequences, he introduces the refined Turkish commander (Salaetin Bilal), he has him speak German and French but, as the leader underscores, “none of the barbaric languages.” Bilal’s commander speaks with the awareness of a man who is making history at the very moment of its unmaking, about *die neue Zeitung* and the coming of the airplane that will be the mark of both his and Luke’s end. This character requires a theatrical setting, and Manchevski, with a nod to Sergei Paradjanov and Emir Kusturica, comes through with birdcages, tents, kilims, and a multinational cast. Manchevski’s color-coding is striking here: blue and red for the Ottomans, white-brown-red for Macedonians. In these sequences the director attempts to overcome the visions of supposed “Macedonian virtuousness” and “Ottoman ignorance”—the Turkish commander’s character remains the most cosmopolitan, the Macedonians are as brutal as all the other groups, and the headhunters come in all faiths.¹⁹ In the final battle scene that soon follows, he contrasts the “civilized” languages of German and French with the language of Macedonians, who, fighting for independence from the Ottomans, mark every shot with a colorful word of damnation. These scenes of warfare, shot in close ups and jump cuts²⁰ and filled with body parts, wounds, intestines, blood, and watermelons swarming with bees, have, even in the Balkans, been declared too violent — precisely Manchevski’s intent. In the final battle, in death and devastation, the Turks’, Macedonians’, Albanians’, Serbians’, Romas’, and Bulgarians’ faces appear strikingly similar, their features indistinguishable; they become the faces of innocent civilians in the Balkans.

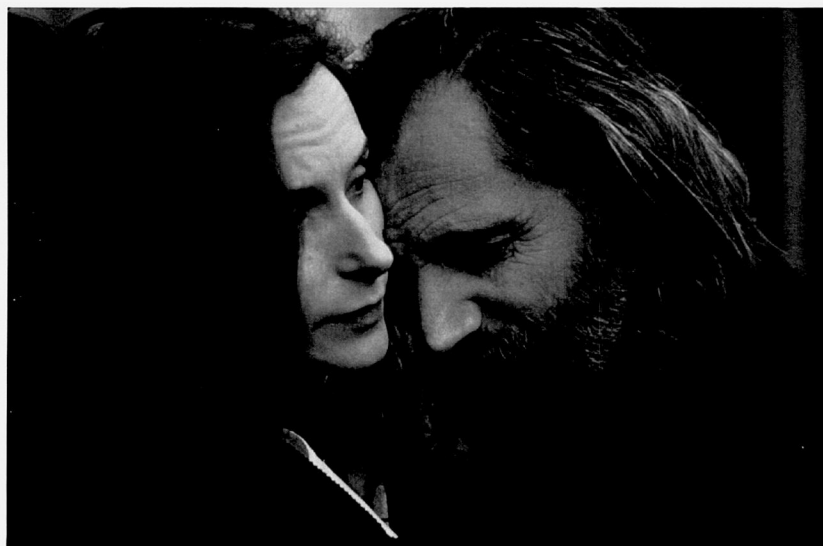
East and West’s “Second Chances”: Exiles in *Before the Rain* and the Exile of Genre in *Dust*

Dust leaves us with powerful images that at times stand apart, as if loosely stitched to the cinematic whole. *Before the Rain*, to the contrary, accomplishes a tangled, yet more effective, narrative and image composite.

If the presumption of the circularity of history in part affirms the persistence of violence in the Balkans and if it undermines the author’s anti-war stance in *Before the Rain*, the film’s narrative, on the contrary, complicates and challenges this assumption. In *Before the Rain*, the possibility of regeneration, while denied by Aleksandar’s and Zamira’s deaths, is yet opened by Anne’s arrival in Macedonia and by

Kiril's implied exile. In the first case, both Aleksandar and Zamira die at the hands of their own (Aleksandar is killed by his Macedonian cousin; Zamira by her Albanian brother), as both made the strongest challenges to their ethnic groups, Aleksandar by his cosmopolitanism, Zamira by her opposition to patriarchy. In the second case, Anne's inner rupture after her husband's insensitive remarks regarding the "uncivilized" Europe, followed then by his senseless, accidental death in a London restaurant and Kiril's horror, his silence, his heartbreak after Zamira's death, are losses that cause displacement but that also connect their paths.

The Zamira-Kiril relationship is supposed to symbolize the impossibility of connection across ethnicity, in this case Albanian-Macedonian. Aleksandar's and Anne's East-West relationship has the possibility to become more profound and complementary, but it is based on will or in Anne's case, on choice—they are not "destined" for each other. Manchevski edges towards East-West stereotypes in these sequences.²¹ Aleksandar, played by Rade Šerbedžija²² in his typical confident ruggedness, demands all or nothing, underscoring his consuming passion and audacity. Their relationship becomes one of loss, as in the poster for the film: two faces in semi-profile overlapping yet not connecting.



Anne's and Aleksandar's unfulfilled West-East romance in *Before the Rain*

The East and the West in Manchevski's films do not reconnect through internal exile or through a common poetic or classical heritage (as in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* [1983] or Theo Angelopoulos's *Eternity and A Day* [1998]). Rather, the link is manifested in the East-West reversals of exile to which a Westerner and an Easterner are led after they have both lost love and faith in the face of war or destruction. In a striking scene, Manchevski films Anne witnessing Aleksandar's funeral in a long tracking shot that also prepares us for this flash forward in time. She is wearing a long dress in red and dark crimson, colors of the Balkans in Manchevski's iconography.²³ Kiril, already having witnessed Zamira's death, is sitting on a dark yellow suitcase, similar to the suitcase in which Aleksandar rediscovers memories of the former Yugoslavia. In Anne's character too, as will be the case with Edge in *Dust*, a Westerner is not sent to discover himself/herself in a war-torn country as a typical film narrative of this type would have it (as in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, 1982); rather, a Westerner arrives transformed.

The philosophical depth of Tarkovsky or Angelopoulos is perhaps missing here, but the visual sensibilities, the poetics of loss, and the cry for the interconnectedness of Europe are similar to Krzysztof Kieslowski's films. Like Irene Jacob in *Double Life of Veronique* (1991), Katrin Cartlidge,²⁴ who plays Anne's character, resembles an Eastern European woman: she is a Western woman "Easternized" who symbolizes the connections of the two worlds. So too does Kiril, in whose role Manchevski casts a French actor, Grégoire Colin, as the most urbane male character in a Macedonian village who breaks the vow of silence and the ethnic divide at the cost of exile. In the cases of all four of these characters—Anne, Aleksandar, Zamira, and Kiril—the death of a loved one or a sense of loss connect them in forceful, tragic ways, as the author reaches to tell a common European history of destinies actually interlinked by war and destruction.

In *Dust* similarly the exiles both reinforce and transcend the myths, only here the voyage offers them redemption. Angela's aged and unreliable narrator (a Westernized Easterner) then tells Edge (a Westerner about to cross over to the East) a story of Luke's cowboy exile to the "Wild East." Manchevski's montage follows Luke's turn-of-the-century journey from the U.S. to the Balkans. On the boat to Europe, Luke is seen next to a seasick Sigmund Freud, who is vomiting over a notepage marked "id-ego-superego." In Paris, Luke glares

through a gallery window at a Cubist exhibit. In a cafe-cinema, an enthralled Luke stands in front of a film screen, in a scene in which Manchevski inserts the American frontier into the cultural memory of both East and West. Luke's delirium (as he watches the Balkan "bandits" on the cinema screen, yearning to join them on this other frontier) in this scene foreshadows his latter downfall caused by greed. He watches early silent films of "primitive worlds" and "savage peoples" in Africa that are then succeeded by those of a "savage" world more nearby. "WAR," reads the silent film intertitle: "rebellion in the Ottoman Empire — 12,000 ducats for a rebel czar." This is the "Wild East," Angela's voiceover tells us, and Manchevski, with some pleasure, even has the "rebel czar" shoot into the camera, knocking the guests in the Paris cafe-cinema off their chairs.



David Wenham's outlaw Luke becomes a part of the Wild West myth captured on a cinema screen

Here, Manchevski does a subtle, sophisticated critique of myth-making and self-ethnicism, using cinematic history as a metaphor for modern understandings and reinterpretations of the traditional or the primitive, of the self and the other. On another level, the scene speaks too of the power of the pictures in motion and the disempowerment (real or imagined) of the audiences. The sequence itself is a double

homage: to the European origins of the cinema, to Auguste and Louis Lumière's *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895), by placing the scene in a Parisian cafe-cinema, and to the powers of spectacle and genre traditions of the American cinema—Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Yet Manchevski endorses not only the European and American traditions of cinema, but also the ways they are redefined by directors creating both within and outside of the Western traditions.

The author, himself a hybrid artist working in both New York and Macedonia, then attempts a difficult merger of the Balkan historical narrative with the Western genre conventions. He transplants Luke into the narrative of the 1902-1905 Balkan uprisings,²⁵ where armies and bandits/local heroes ravage the landscape and the people, and where his brother Elijah will come looking for him. As these scenes play out, Manchevski again pays homage to directors of Westerns, George Stevens, Sam Peckinpah, and Sergio Leone, transferring both Luke and the film itself from the mythic to the ironic mode with visual skill and narrative desentimentalization rarely seen in Balkan films. The Eastern-Western connection here involves genre crossing from the American frontier, filmed in grainy black and white, to a rugged Macedonian terrain. But the change is not simply that of landscape: rather, it is meant to show the globalization of Western cinematic and cultural myths. This "exile of the genre," as one might ironically call it, indicates perhaps as well a counter-hegemonic potential of creative reinterpretations and reconstructions of both Eastern and Western film traditions in a post-global cinema yet to come.

Conclusions

Victor Friedman wrote of *Before the Rain* that, "A Macedonian audience would immediately recognize that the Macedonia of *Before the Rain* is a composite and the events symbolic... Mistrust and hopelessness beget the violence in a cycle that is nonetheless not literally endless and therefore not unstoppable. That many Western viewers did not see this is not the failure of the film but of the gaze" (6). I would like to end with an image of that failure of the gaze: The West first projects images of timeless cycles of violence on others, then, having lost the legitimacy to intervene, gazes at its own self, embedding landscapes of devastation or disequilibrium into its guilty consciousness where once stood its soul, now lost. The East, pulling apart, allegorizes its own marginality yet dreams of an embrace. Neither transcends nor

communicates, and the gulf grows, borders are no longer firmly set, and images of separation and devastation overwhelm. Manchevski's films, in a modest way, call for these mimics to be challenged and reconsidered, and for a more critical inquiry into East-West relationships in the Balkan cinema. His cinema is compelling in its linkages, transpositions, and translations, in its critique of the West, and in its desentimentalization of the East.

Manchevski's work represents a struggle for artistic authenticity that goes beyond the celebrations of marginality in many 1990s Balkan films. He avoids the themes of moral decay that Kusturica, Paskaljević, and Dragojević play up, and in so doing humanizes the vision of the Balkans. Second chances for East and West are still possible, in both *Before the Rain* and *Dust*: opportunities can be discovered in reversed exiles and in a broader connectedness of the Balkans to the world. In *Before the Rain*, even as he shows the untenable existence of in-between spaces in Macedonia, Manchevski extends the turmoil and violence into the West, and so points to the non-exceptionalism of the Balkans. In *Dust*, he makes the further contribution of a visually inventive, critical questioning of manipulations of history, and of an appreciation of the margins without narrative sentimentalization. In both these films, the landscape is torn but not annihilated by violence. The films' characters find the resilience to cross the borders of Manchevski's terrain--and they do so without the wild macabre dance, accompanied by Roma music, that is so familiar from other Balkan films.

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Notes

¹I am somewhat uneasy with the term "Balkan" given its complex history of pejorative connotations (see Maria Torodova, *Imagining the Balkan*). As a graduate of the Belgrade Faculty of Dramatic Arts, I have indeed studied various South-Eastern European "national" cinemas (including the former Yugoslavian, Greek, Bulgarian, and so forth) yet to speak of "Balkan cinema" would have been unthinkable to me or my colleagues in the late 1980s (other than, for example, to refer ironically to Dušan Kovačević's film *Balkan Spy* 1981). Given that the "Balkanization" of everything South-Eastern European, including its cinema, is one of the central intriguing themes of the article, references to the "Balkan" cinema are unavoidable. In cinema studies terms, my use of the word is similar to Dina Iordanova's emphasis on the region's shared cultural heritage in spite of the numerous ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences (which, as many have argued, are more often deliberately promoted by nationalists rather than deeply embedded); see, *Cinema of Flames* 6-9. In this paper, examples of the Balkan cinema discussed are for the most part constrained, by time and space limitations, to the former Yugoslavia. For a discussion of academic discourses on national

cinemas, see Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, "Introduction", in Hjort and MacKenzie, eds., *Cinema and the Nation*.

² In particular, *Time of the Gypsies*, 1988, *Black Cat, White Cat*, 1998, most recently in *Life Is a Miracle*, 2004, and especially *Underground*.

³ My focus is on the *cinematic representations* of "in-between-ness." See also, Vesna Goldsworthy's discussion on the relationship with the European heritage and the seemingly "not quite European" aspects of the Balkans. Goldsworthy, "Invention and In(ter)vention: The Rhetoric of Balkanization," in Bjelić and Savić, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor*.

⁴ We see this manifested as well in the appreciation for life at the margins in the films of Žika Pavlović, especially in *When I Am Dead and White* (1967) or in Boro Drašković's *Life Is Beautiful* (1985).

⁵ See, Nevena Daković, "Yugoslav Wars: Between Myth and Reality," Media Performance and Practice Across Cultures Conference, March 14-17, 2002.

⁶ The quality of the scripts' hidden, layered meanings, linguistic twists and turns: slang vocabulary and a variety of both colorful and sinister curse words, gives Dragojević's films intelligence and complexity (although losing many of their meanings in translation into English). Unfortunately, the visual quality, perhaps due to production difficulties, does not reach the same heights.

⁷ He studied art history at the University of Skopje before winning a scholarship to the University of Southern Illinois Film School in Carbondale, graduating in 1982. Apart from his two feature films, he has made over 50 short films, music videos, and commercials. In addition to the Golden Lion in Venice, *Before the Rain* won almost thirty awards at international festivals. He is the author of a book of photographs called *Street*, a novel, and numerous essays and articles.

⁸ Aleksandar's funeral is anticipated before it happens, the photograph of the death of Zamira is shown before the event has occurred, Anne responds to Kiril's phone call to Aleksandar in London before it could have been placed, and so forth. See, Joao Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira, "Before the Rain - An Aesthetics of Paradox," and Thomas Woodard, "Living/Reliving: Before the Rain", http://www.manchevski.com.mk/html%20en/m_press_essays_btr.html.

⁹ See also, "Interdependence: Art & Activism: A Conversation with Milcho Manchevski" Transcript from the Watson Institute Event, December 2002.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the initial reception of *Dust*, before the film was actually shown at the Venice Film Festival, see Iris Kronauer, "Dust—On Politics, War and Film," (Re)inventing Collective Identities—An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Film Dust, Leipzig University, January 15-17, 2004. See also, Žarko Kujundžiski, "Zapadniot politiziran interpretativen konsenzus kako obid za toksikacija na umetničkoto delo," http://www.manchevski.com.mk/html%20en/essays_dust.html. I especially thank Milcho Manchevski for email discussion of this point

¹¹ Ibid. Manchevski claimed that the script was supposed to take place in an undefined country but that the need to "root" the narrative was inevitable.

¹² The fairy tale's plot, too complex to be dealt with here, tells a story of bravery and justice served, of the choice of the loved one, and of the punishment of spite and envy.

¹³ Critics Janet Maslin and J. Hoberman also pointed out in their reviews of *Before the Rain* that the film underscores the loss of sanctuaries and impossibility of innocence. See, Janet Maslin "The Worst Can Happen, And Happen It Does," *New York Times*, February 24, 1995, and J. Hoberman, "Deepest, Darkest Europe," *The Village Voice*, February 28, 1995, p. 63.

¹⁴ Erik Tängerstad, "When A Story Hides The Story: On Narrative Aspects of Dust," (Re)inventing Collective Identities—An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Film Dust, Leipzig University, January 15-17, 2004.

¹⁵ The linguistic aspect is superb and reminiscent of Petrović's film *I Even Met Some Happy Gypsies*. There are elements of irony in Bilal's Turkish commander, but the director employs too much of an ethnic stereotyping (typical of the genre).

¹⁶ As Nikos Psarros points out, the Ottomans are generally corrupt and tyrannical, "the desperados are Albanian and Greek partisans... the honest and upright people are the Macedonians." See, Psarros, "A shootist for VMRO—a Double Redemption and a Sin," (Re)inventing Collective Identities—An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Film Dust, Leipzig University, January 15-17, 2004.

¹⁷ Ann Brochet does her best with this one-dimensional character who symbolizes the impossibility of female freedom, rebirth, or redemption.

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek also denounced *Before the Rain* as “the ultimate ideological product of Western liberal multiculturalism” [that] “offers to the Western liberal gaze... precisely what this gaze wants to see in the Balkan war—the spectacle of a timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anemic Western life.” Quoted in Victor Friedman, “Fable as History: the Macedonian context,” *Rethinking History*, Volume 4 No. 2. In part, the narrative circularity can be used to support this argument (and the rain metaphor in the film’s title can also be read in this context). Still, it seems that its basis lies rather in the interplay between the Western interpretations (some of which have even read the film, surreally, as a “documentary” about Macedonia) and the Western acceptance of the film’s “self-exoticizing” sequences. See also, Thomas Woodard, “Living/Reliving, Before the Rain” for a slightly different interpretation of the cycles of history in the film.

¹⁹ Iris Kronauer’s and Svetlana Slapšak’s articles seem to me to offer the strong response to support this claim and to address Psross’ critique. See, Iris Kronauer, “*Dust*—On Politics, War and Film,” and Svetlana Slapšak, “Luke Balkanwalker Shoots Down Corto Maltese: Milcho Manchevski’s *Dust* As An Answer to the Western Cultural Colonialism.”

²⁰ For an analysis of Manchevski’s editing technique, see Andrija Dimitrijević, “Kinestetika filma “*Dust*”—Kraj Drame,” (Re)inventing Collective Identities—An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Film *Dust*, Leipzig University, January 15-17, 2004.

²¹ I thank Angelina Ilieva and Nataša Nikolić for discussions of this point.

²² Cast in the role of Aleksandar, Rade Šerbedžija, perhaps the most well-known, highly accomplished film and theater actor from the former Yugoslavia, adds another layer of irony. A Serb who grew up in Croatia, capable of acting in virtually every language and dialect of the Slavic ethnicities in the former Yugoslavia, Šerbedžija found himself threatened by nationalists and without a country in the early 1990s. He established a fairly successful career abroad playing charismatic, passionate, rugged, at times slightly brutish, often intensely virile, characters.

²³ Edge of *Dust* will also be shown wearing a red shirt on his flight to the Balkans in the last scene of the film.

²⁴ Cartledge, to whom Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* (2003) is dedicated, also played a zealous Western journalist in Tanović’s *No Man’s Land*, one of her last roles.

²⁵ The film’s actual historical setting (Macedonian sequences) is subject to debate perhaps covering the period of the early 1900s.

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