

Fable as History: the Macedonian Context 1  
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One of the first reactions I had when watching *Before the Rain* was a sense of disorientation, since I recognized the various churches and monasteries that were edited together to produce the effect of a single location (cf. Brown 1998: 169). At the end, as I left the theatre with the Albanian friend who had suggested that we see the film, which had just opened in New York, I was deeply moved and impressed, but also deeply disturbed at the thought that American audiences would take it as a kind of documentary about the Yugoslav Wars of Succession that were then still being fought rather than as a cautionary fable set in Macedonia. My Albanian friend agreed with me, and several weeks later Macedonian friends of mine in Chicago voiced the same misgivings when the topic of conversation turned to *Before the Rain*. In this essay, I shall contextualize some of the historical and political narratives and cultural practices that the film draws on to achieve its creative force. Of particular importance will be the distinction between what has been and what might be, since it is precisely the interweaving of these elements that gives the fable its historical meaning. I shall examine both larger issues, e.g. the portrayal of disintegration in public and private spheres, as well as smaller details that would have been missed by Western audiences (e.g. the use of Serbian, not Macedonian, in the restaurant scene in Part Two). I will also discuss the history of conflict in Macedonia over the past century, and the manner in which the film reflects both external (West European/North American) and internal (Macedonian) selective focus on aspects of those conflicts. The question of a third point of view, viz. Albanian, will also be raised. My organizing principle will be a close reading of selections of the text, music, and images of the film.

I shall deal with the opening lines at the end and begin instead with the last sentence of Marko the old monk's first speech: *Stom zagrmj me presekuva. Pomislavam i kaj nas zapukalo*. 'Whenever it thunders, it gives me a jolt. It makes me think they've started shooting here, too'. This sentence reflects life at the time the film was made in Macedonia, where the phrase, *samo da ne pukne*,

literally 'if only [someone] doesn't shoot' or 'If only it doesn't explode' was an everyday utterance both on the street during the day as people went about their business and at home in the evening as people watched television horrified as the towns and villages of their former country burned. It has often been argued that it was precisely the fear instilled by these images (sometimes referred to as 'the Sarajevo Syndrome') that helped prevent the outbreak of organized hostilities in the Republic of Macedonia. If, like the European Union (cf. Friedman 1996), one looks only at Macedonian - Albanian relations during this period - despite the complexity of interethnic relations in a country with six languages in official use (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Romani, Aromanian, and Serbian) and in which Christianity and Islam do not strictly follow ethnic lines (see note 8) - one sees a pattern of escalating tension in successive incidents, clashes, riots, bombings, and finally the flood of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Kosovo. As of this writing, friends in Macedonia say they live in a permanent state of psychosis, and indeed when I was in Macedonia during the NATO bombing and subsequent KFOR occupation of Kosovo, one had a sense that everyone was permanently on edge. 2 As Kiril and Marko return to the monastery, children play war with turtles as tanks in a circle of twigs. They set fire to the twigs and throw onto the fire bullets that explode and hit a turtle. In the near - by church a priest is chanting in Church Slavonic '. . . . Holy God, Most Holy Mother of God, save us. . . . '. The intercut scenes make one think of the break - up of Yugoslavia or the siege of Sarajevo on the one hand, and the numerous peace agreements that kept being signed on the other. (A joke from that period asks: 'What is shorter than a nanosecond? A Bosnian cease fire.') But another image could also be invoked. In Sarajevo, before the Yugoslav Wars of Succession, there was a museum at one end of the bridge where Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated. Among the displays at this museum was a political cartoon from the period shortly before the outbreak of the World War I. The cartoon shows a disorderly circle of powder kegs with dangling fuses and gunpowder spilling out. In the center of the circle formed by these powder kegs are a few thin, ill - shaven, dark - mustachioed men in national costumes of the Balkan nations looking around bewildered. Standing outside the circle, eagerly extending lit matches to them are plump, pale, well - groomed

politicians and arms dealers in the West European formal dress of the Great Powers. Thus was the concept of 'Balkan powder keg' understood in former Yugoslavia. 3 And so who is the turtle and who are the children? As Aleksander asks in a line from Part Three that was not used in the final version: 'Where did they get all those guns? We don't even have enough money for bread.' That evening the young monk Kiril returns to his cell and finds Zamira, an Albanian girl, hiding there. Zamira's clothing is misunderstood by one US reviewer, who describes her as 'an Albanian Moslem girl in boy's clothing' (Simon 1995:66). However, what the reviewer mistook for pants are known in Albanian as *citjane* or *cintijane*, a kind of loose pantaloons made of ordinary cloth, tight at the ankle and held up with a drawstring. They are characteristic everyday household wear of Muslim women in Macedonia and elsewhere in the Balkans, and they mark Zamira as a village, Muslim girl. She does not speak Macedonian nor does he understand Albanian, and this is itself a comment on the disintegration of Macedonian life (cf. Brown 1998: 165 - 6). Zamira's lack of knowledge of Macedonian can be read as a failure of the Yugoslav state and either a return to patriarchal village values or an assertion of new nationalist ones. Either way the result, albeit of different etiology, is the same: A reduction of communicative possibilities and the isolation that goes with it. As we learn later, both Zamira's mother, Hana and her grandfather, Zekir, can speak Macedonian. Zekir's ability reflects the old value of multilingualism that was characteristic of Macedonia, and the Ottoman Empire in general. Hana went to a mixed school (with Alexander) and speaks Macedonian, in part as the result of the post - World War II liberation of women and compulsory elementary education. Alexander, whom we will glimpse shortly (lying in one of the two coffins) but will not meet until Part Two, also speaks some Albanian, unlike Kiril, who is from the same village but of a younger generation. The fact that Zamira speaks no Macedonian means she has been isolated, either as a result of the resurgence of the conservative policy to keep girls at home rather than sending them to school (cf. Reineck 1991) or because of a breakdown in multilingualism in the school system since 1981. The next morning armed Macedonian villagers led by long - haired, bearded Mitre come searching for Zamira, whom they accuse of having murdered their relative. When the abbot, father Damja, tells them that the

monks are sheltering only some Bosnian Muslim refugees and continues, 'we are all the same before God', one of them, Stojan replies: A pet veka tursko? 'And five centuries of Turkish [slavery]?' This reply not only refers to the period of Ottoman rule in Macedonia (which lasted from the middle of the Fifteenth century until 1912), but invokes the narrative of servitude, struggle, and liberation that serves as the foundational myth (and explanation for backwardness and marginalization) of all the modern Balkan nation - states, including, ironically, the Turkish Republic, where various problems are blamed on spending 500 years of the Ottoman Empire trying to rule the Balkans. At the same time, Stojan's invocation erases almost the entire Twentieth century. If history really were the basis of the current tensions one could expect a reference to World War II, when western Macedonia was part of a fascist - ruled greater Albania and Macedonian Partisans (Communists) fought Albanian Ballists (members of the nationalist Balli kombetar, 'national front'). The reference to the Ottoman period is, in a way, a deployment of the 'ancient ethnic hatreds' myth that has been justifiably criticized as a specious explanation for the Yugoslav Wars of Succession (cf. e.g. Cooper 1993, Brown 1998: 166). In fact, it was precisely Turkey that supplied Macedonia with significant economic support during the early and middle 1990s when the country was blockaded by Greece to the south and was forbidden by the UN embargo to trade with its major partner, Serbia, to the north. Moreover, in Eastern Macedonia, where there are few or no Albanians but Turks constitute a significant ethnic minority, the tensions experienced between Macedonians and Albanians in the West are simply absent (cf. Friedman 1996: 94).

Having evaded the armed search party but not the monks, Kiril and Zamira leave the monastery that night, but the next morning they are found by Zamira's grandfather, Zekir, her brother, Ali, and other relatives. By the end of the encounter Zamira has been killed by Ali. This final scene of Part One takes place mostly in Albanian. The notable fact about this scene that would be missed by Western audiences (and some Macedonian audiences as well) is that while the Macedonian in the film is colloquial or dialectal, the Albanian is all literary rather than one of the dialects of western Macedonia. The Albanians are thus characters in a Macedonian drama. The significance of this point

is strengthened by scenes from Part Three, and so I shall return to it after considering Part Two.

By means of photographs of Kiril and Zamira from the end of the previous part and a telephone call from Macedonia for Alexander, presumably from Kiril, who is Alexander's sister's son, the sequencing of Part Two after Part One is established. It is the end of Part Two that contains material missed by Western viewers.

Alexander, a war photographer, has left for Macedonia. Anne, his lover, and her estranged husband, Nick, are in a restaurant. In the background, a customer and a waiter have a conversation in Serbian (not Macedonian) that becomes a quarrel. The customer puts money in the waiter's pocket saying *Evo ti pare*, 'Here's your money' and then begins throwing money at the waiter more and more aggressively saying *Pare, Pare. . . .*, 'Money, money. . . .'. They fight, the customer leaves, but the returns with a gun and shoots up the restaurant, killing Nick, among others, and walks out the door singing a song from the period of the uprising against the Turks. The line we hear is *Igrale se delije nasred zemlje Srbije*, 'The wild young heroes were dancing in the middle of the land of Serbia'. The next line of the song is *Igraj kolo do kola, cula se do Stambola*, 'Dance round dance after round dance, heard all the way to Istanbul', the implication being that of a rising against the Turks. Once again there is a reference to the beginning of the century, but this time the modern conflict that the scene refers to is one that was actually going on at the time the film was made.

Part Three begins with Alexander's return. The drive into Skopje shows scenes of a normal town except for two shots of a big white UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Forces) military vehicles that convey the sense of the proximity of the war. One of the shots, made at a major intersection in downtown Skopje, purposefully includes an actual graffiti, but one that only a Macedonian says *BUREK DA!* (burek, yes!, 'Burek, yes!'). Burek (from Turkish borek) is an oven-baked, savoury pastry made from very thin sheets of oiled, unleavened dough layered with ground meat, cheese, or spinach. It is popular throughout the Balkans and traditional burek-shops fulfil the function of Western fast-food restaurants. In a country where graffiti are often used in political functions (both government sponsored and anti-government), such a graffiti has multiple resonance. A slogan praising a popular local food item rather than a political leader,

party, or movement is a parodic rejection of political slogans in general. At the same time, however, the choice of burek for such praise is a kind of proud assertion of Balkan identity, and given the function of burek shops in Macedonia and the opening of a McDonald's a few blocks from the location of the graffito, it can also be taken as a rejection the cultural hegemonic homogenization of global (read: Western) capitalisam.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the slogan can be read as both locally apolitical and globally political.

Alexander reaches his village and is challenged by a machine - gun toting teenager, his cousin Stojan. At the festive meal welcoming him back, Mitre remarks: More, Siptari. . . . se kotat kako zajci. Ke ne preplavat. 'Damn Albanians. . . . breed like rabbits. Pretty soon they'll overwhelm us.' To which an older relative, Aunt Cveta, answers: Dosta so tie gluposti. Nikoj nisto nema da preplavi, 'Enough of that rubbish. No one's going to overwhelm anything. 'Without going into the politics of birth rates and the question of racist stereotypes, we can observe that while the sense of these comments will be clear to Western audiences, such audiences would be unaware both of the typical nature of the remark and the extent to which it represents a pre - 1991 stereotype. Already in 1970 a book published in England but distributed in Macedonia characterized Macedonia's Albanian minority in these words: 'The Albanians live on very little, hold tenaciously to their land and have many children.'(Edwards 1970:91). The interchange between Mitre and Cveta also highlights the issue of the role of gender in collective conflict. Hostilities are carried out by men, and women's bodies are transformed by male discourse into reproductive weapons. Cveta can protest this vision, but she cannot act to prevent its effects. Alexander goes to visit Hana Halili, his high school sweetheart, who is living with her father, Zekir, in the Albanian village. He encounters much the same hostility from armed Albanian teenagers that he encountered from Stojan, but eventually he gets to Zekir's house. The scene in Zekir's living room and Alexander's subsequent departure have two themes worth noting. The first is the breakdown of order on the Albanian side represented by the behaviour of Zekin's grandson. The scene develops in a context of very traditional Balkan hospitality. Although Alexander wishes to see Hana, Balkan Muslim custom dictates that he see her only when she serves him the traditional

sweetmeat and water with which guests are welcomed. The conversation can consist only of the exchange of formulaic expressions, and so looks must do the work of words. Hana leaves as required by custom, but the next moments show that for the younger generation the traditional order - and the peaceful coexistence that went with it - has fallen apart. Zekir calls in his grandson Ali. The youth does not come in immediately, which is a bad sign; when he does come in, he refuses to greet the guest at all, much less, as instructed by his grandfather, by kissing the guest's hand, a sign of respect preserved among conservative Balkan villagers; and upon leaving Ali threatens to kill Alexander. In the context of traditional Albanian society, this scene represents more than appalling bad manners; Ali's refusal to obey the male head of household and his violation of the laws of hospitality represents a complete rejection of the most cherished traditional Albanian values. Anarchy has undermined culture. Mutual mistrust has resulted in the destruction not only of social relations but of entire value systems. The second noteworthy feature in this scene is the extra - diegetic use of the melody of the Macedonian folk song *Jovano, Jovanke*, while Hana is serving Alexander and again when she is watching him leave the village.<sup>5</sup> The use of this melody, like the fact alluded to above that the Macedonian is colloquial while the Albanian is literary, emphasizes the role of the Albanian as subjects in a Macedonian film. Although Albanians are vital to the plot, no Albanian music is used. When Alexander enters the Albanian village, we hear, diegetically, the end of the *azan* (Muslim call to prayer), a melody universal to Islam. The Albanians are thus identified as Muslims rather than as Albanians.<sup>6</sup> In *Jovano, Jovanke*, a song known throughout former Yugoslavia, a young man laments that he is waiting for his beloved to come to him at home, but she does not come because her mother will not let her out. The point of view thus expressed is both Alexander's and Macedonian, even in the Albanian village. The Macedonian is pining for his lost Albanian love, the Macedonians are lamenting the loss of their peaceful life. Before the scene shifts, the music gives way to the beating of a *tapan*, a large, double-sided base drum. This is music shared by Macedonians and Albanians (and other Balkan peoples), and so could be taking place in either village, <sup>7</sup> but the next scene is specifically Macedonian; the drum beating becomes

diegetic and we see Mitre at his parent's graves fulfilling a custom of inviting them to a wedding. In the scenes that follow, Anne tries calling Alexander from England and the veterinarian delivers a lamb for Bojan (Mitre's brother, Alexander's cousin), sending him for some good home - made brandy to celebrate. As Bojan leaves, two Albanian girls (they are wearing cintijane) are watching him from the top of the next hill; one of them is holding a pitchfork.

After Bojan leaves, Alexander has a conversation with the veterinarian, Dr Saso. Here, too, we have some lines that are typical of things people were actually saying in Macedonia at the time the movie was made. When Alexander suggests that people in Macedonia are too peaceful to start shooting one another, Dr Saso answers: Taka i za Bosna vikaa. Sega Zapad seir gleda, ceka da se iskolat do posleden, 'That's what they said about Bosnia. Now the West is watching the show, waiting till they slaughter each other to the last man'. In Macedonian, gleda is a native (Slavic) word meaning 'watch while seir is a word of Turkish origin meaning 'spectacle' or 'sight worth seeing'. In combination, the implication is someone who watches uselessly. Dr Saso's sentiment was expressed in a cartoon that appeared in the principle Macedonian daily, Nova Makedonija (4 October 1992: 11) the year after the Wars began: A fat old man in a blue suit and black top hat labeled EZ (Evropska Zaednica, 'European Community') is sitting on a ledge looking out over a distant battle and conflagration. On his back, the word posmatrac, 'observer', printed in neat white letters, has been crossed out in black and below printed in a handwritten style is the word seirdzija, a Turkism with the same basic meaning, but with the connotation of 'bystander, rubberneck'. Questions of observation versus action, of nas, 'one of us' (literally 'our') versus 'outsider' are raised repeatedly. When Alexander's cousins use nas they mean only Macedonians, when any of the other characters (Hana, Dr Saso, the young soldier Atanas on the bus) use it, they mean everyone in Macedonia, or former Yugoslavia. When Alexander's cousins set off on their vigilante mission and Alexander asks 'Where is UNPROFOR?' it reflects a problem of the UN mission. De jure, the purpose of UNPROFOR in Macedonia was to quarantine its borders with Albania and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and that only in the function of a so-called trip-wire. In other words, the mission was entirely one of appearances,

since in the case of an actual invasion, the UN soldier's mandate was only to defend themselves, not Macedonia, although any aggressor would presumably be open to world censure. De facto, however, the UN mission was understood locally as contributing to Macedonia's stability, which meant the issue was not simply protection against external threats but also mediating internal conflict. That night Alexander writes to Anne and we learn that his desire for an interesting war pictures caused a murder. The next morning Bojan is dead, killed with a pitchfork; an Albanian girl is implicated, and Alexander's male relatives set off to capture her. That night, Hana comes to Alexander: it is her daughter they have captured.

At the end of the night scene, 8 Alexander tears up the photos of the murder he caused and throws them down. We see the image of the man who committed the murder for Alexander's camera and hear extra - diegetically the sound of the tapan and two zurlas (very loud double-reed wind instruments, related to oboe.) The music becomes diegetic, it is daytime, we see a horse's hooves, the tapan player, a procession of the type typical of traditional weddings in Macedonia. We view the corner of a flag. In a traditional Balkan weddings, the bride is brought in procession to the groom's house, and the procession is led by a standard-bearer carrying a staff decorated with ribbons, pieces of cloth, or a banner. In recent years, national flags have been used. The way this scene is photographed, however, we cannot tell if this is an Albanian wedding or a Macedonian one. At the time this film was made, both the Albanian and Macedonian national flags consisted of a red field with a symbol in the middle (in the Albanian case a black double-headed eagle, in the Macedonian, a yellow disk with sixteen rays). By showing only a lower corner of the flag and not letting us see the participants clearly, Manchevski creates a scene that is ambiguous. The procession could be either for a Macedonian or an Albanian wedding, since both could be accompanied by the tapan and zurlas and both could have a red banner at the head. Next we see Alexander heading for the sheep fold, than back to the wedding, where the nationality is revealed: The flag is Macedonian and the bride is in a traditional Macedonian costume. It is the wedding that Mitre had invited his dead parents to just after Alexander visited Hana's village, but for just a moment the boundary between Macedonian and Albanian was left undefined,

the two groups are not all that different. 9 Alexander continues on his way to the sheep fold, where his cousins are holding Hana's daughter, Zamira. Alexander takes her away; his cousin Zdrave kills him; Zamira flees. As Mitre looks down at Alexander the extradiegetic music is another well-known Macedonian folk song "I was born in pain, I will die in sorrow". Zamira heads for the monastery. The film ends almost at its beginning, but not quite. Kiril is picking tomatoes and is bitten by a fly. At the beginning of the film, however, Marko says: Ke vrne. Kasaat mu'ite. Ajde! Vreme e. Dolu veke vrne, 'It's going to rain. The flies are biting. C'mon! It's time. It's already raining down there'. It is only after several other lines are spoken that he adds: Vremeto nikogas ne si umira, a i krugot ne e trkalezen, 'Time never dies, and the circle is not round, either'. At the end however, two lines are reversed, and the pseudo-circularity of present events that reference the past is emphasized by a slightly different clause about time, one that is spoken sooner than at the beginning: Ke vrne. Kasaat mu'ite. Dolu veke vrne. Ajde vreme e. A vremeto ne ceka. A i krugot ne e trkalezen, 'It's going to rain. The flies are biting. It's already raining down there. C'mon! It's time. And time does not wait. And the circle is not round, either'.

A number of Western viewers, and even some reviewers (e.g., Lane 1995: 110), failed to realize that the narrative is intentionally, impossibly circular and not simply three parts told out of sequence. The point of the mechanical devices connecting Macedonia to England (the photographs and phone call in Part Two and the phone call in Part Three) is to establish the sequentiality of three parts, so that the end loops back to the beginning like Uroboros swallowing its own tail. Although the film has its inspiration in events that were (and were not) occurring at the time it was made, it is not a historical documentary, but, rather a historical document. In its own context it is a monitory fable inspired by what were at the time contemporary attitudes (whence the film's historicity). Utilizing elements of then-existing real life, it expresses concern over a possible future.

A Macedonian audience would immediately recognize that the Macedonia of *Before the Rain* is a composite and the events symbolic. Western audiences were given the same opportunity to recognize the contingent nature of the events-and the contingency was emphasized-by the warped circularity of the

story. Mistrust and hopelessness beget violence in a cycle that is nonetheless not literally endless and therefore not unstoppable. That many Western viewers did not see this is not a failure of the film but of the gaze.

Jordanova (1999:80), using Balkanism as a variant of Said's Orientalism—a timeless space onto which the West projects its phantasmatic content—quotes Žižek (1995:38) on *Before the Rain*: The ultimate ideological product of Western liberal multiculturalism [offering] 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.

Aside from the fact that quite a few Western viewers interpreted the film literally rather than symbolically (and were, therefore, a bit confused), this critique fails to take into account a Macedonian audience's perspective. In an analysis more nuanced than Žižek's, Brown (1998: 173) concludes, 'at times it may appear that the result of the analysis is to put in place a binary distinction between "non - Macedonian" and "Macedonian" readings of the film, and to suggest that the former are untrue while the latter are true. The principal point of comparison, though, is not in terms of any correspondence with any single "reality". Rather, the aim is to illuminate the existence of different modes of imagining by which realisms are constituted.'

As an epilogue to the film, I can observe that the foreboding it expressed has lasted the entire decade. Although gun-toting bands of hairy Chetniks and clean-shaven Ballists are not wandering through the villages of Macedonia, the tensions that existed when they used to call total war at UNPROFOR headquarters in Skopje, where I worked as policy analyst in 1994. When I was in Skopje in December 1998, I noticed graffiti that had not been there a year ago: On the left bank of the Vardar I saw UCK (Ushtria Clirimtare te Kosoves) the Albanian abbreviation of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army), on the right bank, (rusam dzamii, 'I destroy mosques'). During the 1999 NATO bombing and Milosevic's horrible Operation Horseshoe, as hundreds of thousands of refugees—most of them Kosovar Albanian, but also Roms, Turks, Serbs, Gorans, and others as well—poured into Macedonia, tensions that were simmering, especially among intellectuals, made their way both to the surface and more broadly among the population, like a

weed with shallow but strangling roots. In taxis and in the market place, drivers and owners kept their radios tuned loudly to Albanian or Macedonian radio stations, indicating their ethnic loyalties and which customers they would accept. At the same time, however, ethnic Macedonians and Albanians were cooperating quite successfully in a number of business enterprises spawned by the needs of the Western forces. Still, it remains to be seen whether a broad-based economic stability can be established and overcome the interests of ethnopoliticians and ethnoentrepreneurs. So far, however, *Before the Rain* remains the monitory fable it was intended to be.

Notes: 1. I am indebted to Kim Gareiss and Aneta Duseska, who made a transcript from the film that I was able to use. I would also like to thank Milco Mancevski for an earlier version of the script as well as other helpful comments, and June Farris for help in tracking down reviews of the film. This paper benefited from discussion at the conference *One Film -- Many Histories: An Inquiry into the film "Before the Rain"* sponsored by the European University Institute, Florence, April 1999.

2. During the bombing, I was unaware at first of the sound of NATO warplanes overhead that caused Macedonians to stop talking and listen with apprehension. The faint rumbling of a plane high in the air is a part of my everyday life in Chicago. For people in Macedonia, however, such noises were unusual and directly associated with war just across the border. Eventually I found myself reacting with same tension to sounds that in my home context I hardly notice.

3. See Todorova (1994:460) on recent attempts to resuscitate the myth of Balkan responsibility for World War One and Woodward (1995) on the complexities of the collapse of Yugoslavia, especially the role of the international community.

4. In Slovenia, the graffiti *Burek, nein danke!* ('Burek, no thank you') represents a similar albeit inverse parody. (I wish to thank Keith Brown for bringing this graffiti to my attention.) Based on the German anti-nuclear power slogan, the Slovenian version represents the rejection of the inclusion of Slovenia with Yugoslavia and the Balkans and an insistence on inclusion in the West. It should be noted, however, that after the territorial division following World War One, western parts of Slovenia were referred to as *Balkan Italy*.

5. Jovana and Jovanka are forms of a woman's name, etymologically related to English Johanna.

6. One of the problems of both the representation and the perception of Macedonian-Albanian relations is the identification of Macedonian ethnicity with Christianity and Albanian ethnicity with Islam despite the existence of Macedonian-speaking Muslims and Albanian-speaking Christians. This tendency to identify ethnicity with religion is encouraged not only by oversimplification in the Western media, but by some nationalist politicians and members of the respective clergies within Macedonia itself. Moreover, religion was the basis of communal identification under the Ottomans. The substitution of religion or language as the basis of nationality thus reflects a regression to the beginning of the century (c. Friedman 1996).

7. The failure of Western audiences to understand the implications of the music is seen in a comment made at the conference that Jovano, Jovanke sounded 'Islamic' while the drum seemed Christian.

8. See Brown (1998 169-170) for additional comments on this scene.

9. The momentary ambiguity of this scene is rendered all the more poignant by the use of flags as flashpoints for confrontation. See Danforth (1995: 163-67) on the conflict between Macedonia and Greece over Macedonia's flag. Of the many incidents in Macedonia involving the use of the Albanian flag, the one in Gostivar in July 1997 was the most serious.

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