

**Macedonian Culture and Its Audiences:
An Analysis of "Before the Rain"**

by Keith S. Brown

This paper discusses Before the Rain, a feature film in which images that were displayed and understood as Macedonian were placed on view before a world-wide audience. It seeks to explore the ways in which studying such a site can contribute to understanding the relationship between representation and realism in the context of national culture. The particular focus of the paper is to try and theorize the different modes of interaction that were set up between different audiences and the cinematic images, at a time when the Republic with which the film was associated had yet to establish itself as a stable political entity.

Anthropology's distinctive methodology and mission are perhaps summed up in the title of a recent introduction to the discipline, Small Places, Large Issues (Eriksen 1995). The discipline's claim to a particular authority continues to rest on this combination of a empirical pointillism and theoretical broad-sweep, which separates its practitioners from travel-writers and local correspondents on the one hand, and armchair pundits of humanity on the other. The salience of the disciplinary self-perception can be glimpsed in the continuing salience of fieldwork and its paradoxical cornerstone, participant-observation.

Yet the curious location of anthropological knowledge, betwixt and between, is precarious in a world where information and images of the faraway seem to circulate far beyond their origins. Indeed, the very use of the notion of origin, where past borrowing and imposition are so thoroughly woven into the perceived present, is tantamount to declaring a commitment to an ever-receding ideal—the anthropologist as Tantalus craning after the fact. In recognition of the global interconnectedness of this modern world, the language of anthropology has stretched to try to do justice to the cultural forms implicated in these realities. From "culture contact" and "plural society," through more recent forays into the World-System and Creolization, the technical language of anthropology now deals in terms that blur the edges of accessibility; diaspora and ethnoscape, transnation and hybridity. By

such means, the sovereignty of the discipline is preserved, in a closed world of theoretical exchange.

Where anthropologists do still attend to local specificities, and seek to incorporate indigenous understandings of culture and society, they tend to employ terms that are part of ordinary language; identity, ethnicity, nation and home. In situations where tensions already exist they increasingly find that without the protective shading of language their work, intended to stand outside local disputes, can be recycled selectively as local knowledge. Thus, for example, a scholar's careful account of the processes of nation-building in Northern Greece, in which existing loyalties are reconfigured as either neatly subordinate or potentially threatening to a state project, can be itself read as an ongoing part of the debate about a state's legitimacy. In the adversarial politics of identity, the ethnographer finds her work put to work on one side or the other of questions whose validity she may not recognize (Karakasidou 1997).ⁱ

The division within anthropology between ethnology and ethnography is not, of course, a new one. But the demand now placed upon anthropologists, to write simultaneously for a hitherto unimagined range of audiences, cuts away at the space in which the two could coexist, however uneasily. And for those whose interest lies in the formation and maintenance of collectivities—in whatever form they are willed or imagined by their members—the problem is peculiarly acute.

One innovative response to the challenge is that set out by Arjun Appadurai and other scholars in what could be termed the Public Culture circle. They locate the terrain of anthropological study in what Appadurai terms the "historical present" and take seriously the notion of "-scapes" as sites of study.ⁱⁱ This paper seeks to engage with Appadurai's assertion that what must characterize ethnography in the 1990s and beyond is not a preoccupation with "thickness" of description which could be argued to represent little but the re-inflection of locally discovered data. Instead, he argues,

... where lives are being imagined partly in and through "realisms" that must be in one way or another official or large scale in their inspiration, then the ethnographer need to find new ways to represent the links between the imagination and social life.

(1991: 199)

The paper examines the connection between a set of "realisms" and the representations that can be taken simultaneously to constitute them, arise from them and depict them. It seeks in particular to engage with the notion of "frames of belief" (cf. Wolff, this volume) as a heuristic to explicate different modes of viewing and interpreting cinematic images, and to demonstrate that such modes constitute the stuff of human cultural life.

Ritual and Audience.

Milton Singer's definition of "cultural performances" as sites of anthropological study remains influential today. Much work on ritual, in particular, retains this focus on the notion that within such discrete units of observation key cultural and social meanings are encoded. The perspective has been applied to ritualized aspects of the domain of national sentiment, notably by Kapferer (1988), Handler (1988), Herzfeld (1992). In each case, following Durkheim, they are concerned with the presentation to an audience of a set of values with which that audience may identify. Such approaches emphasize what Turner (1986) considered as the reflexive as well as the reflective qualities of ritual performance. The implied focus is on rituals that affirm the existence of a community of which those performing and those watching are all members. Such rituals are in one sense or another held "at home," and "outsiders" are not customarily invited to peer at them.

In a recent overview of ritual theory, Catherine Bell considers the manner in which performance "distils" culture in a different context. Her example is an audience not of "natives" but of reflective intellectuals who cast themselves as eavesdroppers on the culture of others.

If culture is the giving of performances, then culture is that which is given to an “audience” or the outside theorist who has joined it. Researchers and theorists [are] repositioned in performance theory: no longer peering in through the window, they are now comfortably seated as members of the audience for whom the performance is being presented.

(1992: 39)

These two contrasting constructions of performance as cultural distillation—from one view reinvigorating its context, from the other serving as digestible synecdoche—point to the key dynamic in performance theory, which is the audience’s conceptualization of the relationship between performer, performance and the context of which it is a part. In particular, they raise the question of the status of the audience and the frames of belief that inform their spectatorship.

As scholars in various disciplines have noted, performance is never oblivious to its audience. Meaning is not simply present, and detachable, waiting to be found, but is rather constructed out of the interaction between the viewing subjects and their imagined object. John MacAloon, explicitly acknowledging Turner’s work, draws attention to the roles that spectators of the Olympic Games play in establishing the genre of particular performances, whether as spectacle, festival, ritual, or game (1984:258). He focuses in particular on framing and spectator position, as well as the international and political dimensions of the Games. In cinema studies, Rey Chow has sought to theorize a position for the “ethnic spectator” as active participant in the construction of meaning, when confronted with media representations of him- or herself or of their culture (Chow 1991).

These approaches demonstrate the complexity of cultural interaction and belonging in contexts where performances serve as the points at which difference is maximally apparent. At the Olympic Games, host countries in one way or another leave their particular imprint on festivities which bring countries together as competitors; Chow’s study of The Last

Emperor demonstrated a case where an Italian director marshalled a mainly Chinese cast to recount an episode from Chinese history. Such performances have world-wide, international audiences, for whom they may stand as emblematic of that which they depict, or of the creative qualities of their producer. But they also reach audiences who may consider the images presented as representing them, and who may embrace or reject what they see. Audiences may also align themselves with the producer or performer, and thus interact differently again with the mode of the representation.

In each case, it can be argued that the interaction between viewer and image is mediated by what will be called here "frames of belief." These frames are conceptualized as constituting the mode in which spectators take an active role, rather than being merely passive receptors. In the realm of cinema, such frames might include listening to a narrative, watching a director's craft, learning information, or indulging in nostalgia. In any and all such interactions, the frame can be argued to undergo some sort of re-evaluation by the viewer in light of the image. This evaluation may constitute straightforward re-affirmation of the frame's efficacy, or, under the impact of images, it may lead to some shift in the ongoing nature of that frame.

It might appear that the term "frame of belief" here represents little more than an attempt to render "culture" in a scientific vein. It might also appear that the individual viewer is privileged not only as interpreter, but as self-conscious creator or selector of such frames. The point of the formulation is not, though, to relocate the creation of meaning to the moment of its reception. If agency appears to be highlighted, it is because the goal is to illustrate that the impact of media texts cannot be understood without paying attention to the distinctive and persisting differences between modes of imagining that an audience may undertake.

The Example of Before The Rain.

The script of Before the Rain was written by its director, Milcho Manchevski in 1991 after a visit home to Macedonia from the United States. British Screen picked up the script for development in 1993. The film's production was orchestrated by companies in London and Paris, and it received backing from British, French and Macedonian sources. It was shot with a budget of under \$3 million in Macedonia for seven weeks and London for three. The crew and actors were drawn from more than half-a-dozen countries in total, including France, Britain, South Africa and Bulgaria (Pall 1995). This multi-national ensemble of money and labour created a film which shared the Golden Lion of Venice in 1994, and collected a score or so of other awards from film festivals. Its crowning achievement was a 1995 Oscar nomination for best foreign-language film.ⁱⁱⁱ

With regard to plot, the central story follows a photographer who returns to Macedonia after a successful career in the West, and gets involved in the ongoing conflicts of his homeland. This narrative unfolds in a non-linear fashion, through an episodic structure. The film has three parts, entitled Words, Faces and Pictures. In Words, a frightened Albanian girl is hidden by a young Macedonian monk. A group of armed Macedonian villagers interrupt a church service, looking for an Albanian girl who has killed their leader's brother. The monastery is searched, but they don't find the girl; the monastery officials do, and send her away with the young monk. The couple are met by a group of armed Albanians, led by her grandfather. They send the monk away: when she follows him, her brother kills her.

In Faces, a Macedonian photojournalist, tired of covering wars around the world returns to London from Bosnia. He tells his British lover that he plans to return to the peace of Macedonia. She refuses his offer that she go with him, and instead seeks a reconciliation with her estranged husband. In the restaurant where they meet for dinner a quarrel begins between a waiter and a stranger, conducted in a Balkan language. The quarrel escalates, shooting begins, and the husband is killed by stray shots.

In Pictures, the narrative refocuses on the photojournalist as he returns home to his native village. His visit to a former sweetheart, an Albanian widow, only reveals the hostility between Macedonians and Albanians. His cousin is knifed in unknown circumstances, and a

local group of Macedonians capture the young Albanian girl who they believe killed him. She is the daughter of the photographer's sweetheart; he rescues her, is killed by another cousin, and she runs away to the monastery. The film thus, as it were, begins again.

The view from outside.

The film's three-part structure defies straightforward chronology; a photograph is examined before it could have been taken, and a phone-call is received before it could have been made. Two dream sequences foretell events which immediately come to pass. These moments of rupture, and of apparent repetition, occur within a whole that sharply juxtaposes disparate locations and characters and also includes a series of apparently traditional rituals.

At any other time, such stylish aesthetic elements might have occupied the central attention of reviewers. Some did allude to the paradoxes in the timeline, and drew comparison to Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction. But the principal points of interest among the first wave of American reviewers were the visual impact of Before the Rain and its main subject matter; Balkan violence. In The International Herald Tribune, on January 25, 1995, under a headline which declared "Macedonia Movie Confronts Balkan Hatreds", the film was summarized as "a story of ethnic conflict set in London and Macedonia" (Pall 1995). In The New York Times on the same day, it was "a wrenching tale of ethnic hatreds with a love story that has its own mysterious power" (Maslin 1995). On February 21 1995, Richard Woodward wrote in The Village Voice that "Its three interrelated stories, built around the tale of a disillusioned war photographer returning to his native village in Macedonia, are concerned with ethnic hatred in the region" (Woodward 1995).

In a longer piece in Newsday, on February 24, Jack Mathews used the phrase "ethnic hatred" three times, while calling the film a "parable" (Mathews 1995). On the same day, The Los Angeles Times, ringing the changes on the theme of ethnic hatred, called it a tale of "fratricidal horror" (Rainer 1995). The Christian Science Monitor on March 1 told the reader

that in the film's third part, in Macedonia "ethnic strife leads to a tragic climax" (Sterritt 1995).

The San Diego Union-Tribune of March 9 reintroduced the romantic element, reporting that "... in the film love keeps being routed by political, ethnic and religious tensions" (Elliott 1995), while the BPI Entertainment Newswire called Before the Rain "a three-part story of ethnic conflict and romance set in Macedonia and London" (Ryan 1995). By the time the film reached Ohio in June love had disappeared again, and the film critic of The Columbus Dispatch wrote "Before the Rain is most effective in conveying the extreme hatred between ethnic factions" (Gabrenya 1995).

The dominating impression here is of ethnic hatred, violence and strife, as the principal impact of the film. That impact, clearly, fits into certain ideas that people in the U.S.A. had of Yugoslavia. Reporting on the Yugoslav War in the period of 1991-3 followed a similar pattern—irrational as it seemed, said a majority of reporters, Serbs, Croats and Muslims had returned to fighting, after the "unnatural" peaceful interlude of Yugoslavia. A further dimension to the reporting was an emphasis on the messiness of the fighting that resulted, as populations were so integrated. Indeed, in the coverage of the break-up of Yugoslavia it could be said that chaos and disorder were organizing tropes. This is perhaps true of war in general: where the coverage of the Yugoslav War was striking was in that chaos and disorder were presented at every level. Cease-fires, front-lines, refugee routes; all were disputed. Disorderliness extended to the men depicted as doing the fighting; paramilitaries, volunteers, irregulars, militias, all were in action. More often than not the images presented in the West were of scruffiness and improvisation.

The authenticity of the movie as Macedonian for a non-Macedonian audience, appears to be lodged primarily in the correspondence between the images depicted and other more familiar impressions. Manchevski's Macedonian villagers, seen in both the first and third sections, are an odd group, heavily armed with automatic weapons, yet dressed in a motley collection of clothes. Where the leader appeals to sartorial conventions of the past, others in his entourage pay homage to global fashion, whether with baseball caps or sneakers,

or with the Beastie Boys on a Walkman. Their appearance and demeanour correspond with pictures from the Yugoslav War that appeared either on television, or in the media in the early 1990s. The sentiments that these characters expressed also resonated with a prevalent idea that Yugoslavia was riddled with age-old hatreds, influentially promulgated in Robert Kaplan's best-selling Balkan Ghosts (1991).^{iv}

The authenticity of these characters appears to be reinforced by the other single quality of the film on which most foreign reviewers agreed, the visual impact of the landscape in which the action is set. Indeed, the scenery is for some Western reviewers the main attraction of the film. Whether they focus on "spectacular Macedonian hillsides" (Woodward 1995, in The Village Voice) or the "glowing Balkan countryside" (Billson 1995, in The Daily Telegraph), the "hard tan hills of Macedonia, the cobbled stone houses of the village" (Johnson 1995, in Maclean's Magazine) or "the limitless vistas and star-clustered night skies" (McKenna 1995, in The Los Angeles Times), reviewers were drawn to compete in their descriptions of Manchevski's images. Some made more explicit their recognition that the aesthetic element lay not in the landscape, but in the film's cinematography, and transferred their adjectives of approbation to the apparatus. The Village Voice also applauded the "wondrous shots of the forbidding landscape" (Woodward 1995) and The Times in England commented that "the camera feasts on the rolling Macedonian hills" (Brown 1995).

Despite this recognition of Manchevski's creative input, the various reviewers nevertheless all appear to have fallen under the spell of the landscape as a site of authenticity, which further contributed to the realism of the events that unfold within it. In this respect, viewers harnessed that landscape to their interpretation and stance. Where Maclean's Magazine, for example, described the "... fierce poetry to his images, but also a strong sense of authenticity" (Johnson 1995), the reviewer's phrasing echoed theoretical writing on cinematography. In 1960, Maya Deren described the manner in which "an artifice borrows reality from the reality of the scene" and "natural phenomena [can] be incorporated into our own creativity, to yield an image where the reality of a tree confers its truth upon the events

we cause to transpire beneath it" (1992[1960] 64). The actuality of the landscape thus confers actualité on events.

The framing of Macedonia.

Reviewers, then, did not doubt the beauty or authenticity of the images. Indeed, at times they appear to wallow in the tragic paradox that was created; that such violence could exist in a landscape so beautiful. In Maclean's Magazine, again, the film was seen as an unveiling of some essential truth, "as if the director is revealing his homeland to the world for the first time in all its beauty and pain" (Johnson 1995). In the words of another critic who was particularly transported, "the scenes near an Orthodox monastery could have been painted by Mantegna or Bellini, with stacked puddles of limestone and stubborn ascetics doing penance under a moth moon" (Woodward 1995, in The Village Voice).

In such reviews, nature's beauty, comprising the primitive and unspoiled, stands against the neo-primitivism of the people of the landscape. The contrast with and distance from the non-Balkan reviewer's home is absolute. For this audience, Manchevski's representation of Macedonia thus combines elements of otherness and distance: it is magnificent and unmodernized, and yet threatened by the forces of barbarism and backwardness. Running through the assemblage of North American and British reviews of the film are these two dimensions of the film as a whole, which are seen to encapsulate its message. Macedonia is a beautiful country, spoiled by those that inhabit it.

This impression, derived here from reviews, is confirmed by the immediate reaction that various amateur audiences in Europe and the USA had. Audiences there appeared to consider they were seeing the landscape of Macedonia, and the people of Macedonia. Jonathan Schwartz recalls that in discussion with Dutch University students, he had to convince them that the film was "not an actual documentary but a dystopian nightmare" (Schwartz n.d.). For a range of audiences outside Macedonia, then, the film documented recent Yugoslav history, and made contemporary Macedonia a part of that history. The

Republic is thus implicitly put into a celluloid realm—the same one inhabited, to all intents and purposes, by the rest of Yugoslavia. And the events of Yugoslavia hover in the background to such viewing as a road of destiny for the Republic. The effect is to suggest that violence must and will spiral out of control in reality, as it appears bound to in the film. In subscribing to such impressions, reviewers cast themselves as documentary-watchers, privy to an insider's snapshot, of Balkan brigands in a Balkan landscape.

In terms of work on cinema spectatorship, which resonates with that of Bell with regard to theorists, the audience, in this mode, interact as controlling spectators of a distant object.^v From such a viewpoint, Before the Rain is framed as a spectacle: the events depicted are thus cast as maximally distant and irrelevant to that viewer, an object of study or curiosity rather than engagement. Yet the mode is simultaneously that of documentary realism, whereby the screen images are taken to correspond to actual events in the Balkans. Here it could be said that a second dimension of a previously-constructed frame intervenes, to equate a set of cinematic images with those seen elsewhere as documentary reportage. The potential slippage between these frames could be argued to find its mediation in the central place of a Western-trained photo-journalist in the film. The character offers non-Macedonian reviewers and audiences a point of reference within the film to cast Macedonia as passive object of observation, in front of the lens. They concentrate attention on the locations and characters that the photojournalist encountered on his return. The country is thus simultaneously conceptualized as a place to which a spectator—in this case, the character of the photojournalist—travels from afar. Non-Macedonian viewers thus “gaze” at a distant object along with the camera and director, and label that object as “Macedonia.”

Beyond the frame.

Two ironies underpin this particular mode of imagining, in which realist qualities are ascribed to the film. In the first place, as Manchevski pointed out to some interviewers, Macedonia is the one Republic that has not yet seen ethnic conflict of the order of the other constituent parts of the former Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Army withdrew peacefully from

their Skopje barracks in early 1992, and a coalition government managed to restrain the extremists on both sides of the principal ethnic divide, between Macedonians and Albanians. The government has also welcomed the presence of both UNPROFOR, the United Nations Protection Force, and, after 1993, of US ground troops in the Republic.

The second irony is that the landscape that Manchevski depicts does not exist on the ground, but was produced in the making of the film. This was noted by some reviews; stressing the arduousness of the shoot, The International Herald Tribune reported

Occasionally, the crew had to build its own roads. Manchevski would sometimes shoot a single scene in places miles apart, then splice the footage together. Kiril's mountaintop monastery, for example, is a composite of four different monasteries.

(Pall 1995)

The creation of a single monastery, seen on film as comprising church, sleeping quarters, walled compound, vegetable garden, brings together a set of different places that are cherished as treasures of Macedonian culture. The exterior of the church is Sveti Jovan Kaneo, on the shores of Lake Ohrid in the Republic: the interior, however, is either a church in Skopje, the capital, or at the monastery of Sveti Jovan Bigorski, in the hills of north western Macedonia.^{vi}

More reviewers latched onto the road-building of the crew, in part because Manchevski drew attention to it. In an interview reported by The Seattle Times, he said "In general, the less accessible, the better the locations look" (Hartl 1995). Taken with the revelation about the roads being built, we discover then that the landscape we see on screen is not just a product of putting together images of different locations: to create the sweeping landscapes we see, the real landscape has been literally scarred.

Macedonian visions.

Manchevski creates an image of Macedonia: he does not recreate Macedonia. Much of the film is shot in sites that are spread across the Republic and constitute the historical legacy of Macedonia—a legacy that most of its inhabitants recognize. But although there can be no forgetting that those sites exist, a Macedonian audience is also aware that they are taken out of their context and relocated in close proximity to one another. This is not to suggest that people continuously monitor what they are watching and compare it with some pristine “reality.” But only an audience without experience or knowledge of the Macedonian landscape could read the film as documentation of an existing locality.

Similarly, Macedonian audiences in 1994, at least, when the film opened, knew that armed bands of this kind were not operating in their own country. They knew, as did the Western viewers, that violence had occurred in Bosnia—but they were also aware that by that time, Bosnia and Macedonia were no longer part of the same country, and that internal conditions in the two were very different. They were aware that they were watching a potential future, rather than an account of what was happening. Thus, when asked about Macedonian reactions in an interview in February 1995, Manchevski was able to give the following answer;

I was concerned that people would be upset with me Some people said, ‘We don’t all live in run-down villages, we also drive Mercedes cars. Why didn’t you show that?’ But most of them read the film just as I wanted them to, which is as a warning.

(Woodward 1995, in The Village Voice)

Macedonian reviewers and audiences could not straightforwardly connect Manchevski’s images to their own experiences. For the place depicted, although comprised of locations that were recognizable, was not as a whole familiar to them. As a consequence of this, the frames within which they read the film as Macedonian were thus strikingly different from those of their counterparts outside the Republic. Instead of viewing as Macedonian the object of the camera’s gaze and the photojournalist’s encounter, they focus instead on the

character who undertakes a journey to a war, and becomes enmeshed in the quarrels of those he once lived among.

Aleks, the photo-journalist, is a cipher for the director and author himself—in some sense Manchevski is documenting his own return to Macedonia from New York in 1991. The character is played by a famous actor from the Yugoslav period, Rade Sherbedzija. According to a variety of sources, he was one of the best-known faces in Yugoslavia, from stage and screen. The double impact of seeing such an actor lends additional textures to a Macedonian audience's reception, which are unnoted by foreign reviewers. In the final part of the film there is a short scene in which Aleks wakes up from a bad dream in the house he has inherited from his parents, and looks for a cigarette. The Los Angeles Times reviewer reduced the scene to a heavy-handed director's point, that by smoking, Alex is returning to his "Balkan" roots. In so doing, she takes smoking to be a sign of Balkan identity. A few months earlier, though, an essayist in a Skopje weekly, Mirko Kostovik, reacted differently to this same scene.

Sherbedzija opens a suitcase. In it is an issue of "Nova Makedonija" [the daily Macedonian newspaper] from the past, and one unsmoked cigarette. On the cover page Josip Broz Tito, and in the cigarette opium of past happy days. Rade smokes the cigarette in the role of Aleksander, Tito is still proud and happy in that picture, and in the darkness of the night the music of the Sarajevo band "Indexi" and Pimperkov's voice with the song "Sonuvam" [I'm dreaming].

(Kostovik 1994)

Kostovik here indicates how much is going on in this depiction of one of the most personal rituals of all. For what Manchevski presents here is a multi-layered evocation of the past, and simultaneously an image of what has come to be an increasingly familiar refrain from artists from the former Yugoslavia—a kind of "Yugo-nostalgia." The scene with the opened suitcase, is a return not to Balkan roots, but to a very different mode of life, in which Sarajevo stood as a symbol of co-operation between today's divided ethnic groups. and the

soft music from the Yugoslav period, tells the story of the actor as well as the character. Sherbedzija still considers himself “Serbo-Croatian;” he, as well as Aleksander within the film, has found himself without a place he can call home.

The grounds for such an interpretation are further strengthened by the nature of the music in this scene. Although it is extra-diegetic, the beginning of the song is preceded and accompanied by the rhythmic scratching that would be heard on an old gramophone recording. The foregrounding of the obsolescence of the reproductive medium complements the nostalgia encoded in the music itself—by a band from a country and a city whose meanings have radically changed.^{vii}

This emphasis by a “native” interpreter, on the complex relationship between Macedonia and the federal country of which it was once a part, is one that one would not expect from a western audience for whom Yugoslavia, Tito, Sarajevo, Macedonia, and the actor Rade Sherbedzija are not related in the way that they are for any Macedonian in their late twenties or older.^{viii} In this vision, Macedonia is not straightforwardly categorized as a site of the same violence that has overtaken the country of which it was once a part. Instead, it could be argued that Macedonia is located in the person of Rade the actor, Aleks the character, and the engaged audience, confronting a scenario where bitter confrontation has replaced former coexistence.

Film and political context.

Manchevski’s vision puts on offer a set of objects to the Yugoslav Macedonian viewer that compel a far more complex and interactive mode of imagining the connections between image and reality than that of non-Macedonian reviewers. The film does not simply reflect realism, nor is it some buttress to national ideas of authenticity. In evoking Yugoslavia and Macedonia alongside the forces that continue to play a part in their futures—local activism and global voyeurism—he reminds us that there are other ways to organize life, outside the contemporary idiom of nationalism that has forced people to locate themselves in ways that

they have not chosen. This the film accomplished not just in the dynamics of internal interaction but in its life as an artifact of culture.

When the film opened in Skopje in 1994, after its triumph in Venice, it reportedly outgrossed the Hollywood blockbuster “The Fugitive,” released at the same time (Woodward 1995). After the premiere at the beginning of October 1994, the Macedonian press described Before the Rain as the most distinguished Macedonian film ever. The film’s director was purportedly the second most popular public figure in the Republic—after the President, Kire Gligorov (ibid.).

The film thus came to be identified, both from within and without, as Macedonian, in the same time frame as a state of that name sought international recognition. Indeed, the film brought the Republic publicity—according to some interviews, a reason for its popularity within the Republic. In a conversation with Roger Ebert, Manchevski stated of Macedonia “It’s a country where, even in volleyball, the national team cannot be called the Macedonian National Team. Suddenly a Macedonian film does well. People respond to that” (Ebert 1995, in The Chicago Sun-Times). The identification of the film as Macedonian, in this vision, was connected to the legitimacy of the country of the same name. What is striking in this formulation is that the film’s identification as Macedonian, in the international sphere, preceded or anticipated that of the country. In some sense it could be argued to occupy an active role in the transition of the Republic, from part of Yugoslavia to a sovereign state.

Director and national identity.

In a parallel mode, the identification of the director himself followed a similar path, in the course of which the ontological status of Macedonian national identity was highlighted. Manchevski’s identity as “hybrid” was the subject of several of the reviews in the U.S.A. in late 1994 and early 1995. Writers picked on the juxtapositions in his own life and work—from Skopje to Carbondale, and art film to music video—to identify him and his work as bicultural (Mathews 1995; Pall 1995; Woodward 1995).^{ix} In this mode, his own location was separated

from that of the filmic images taken to embody Macedonian identity. Manchevski was cast as some kind of intermediary—giving outsiders a glimpse of Balkan life. By this mode of presentation, Manchevski's own connection with Macedonia is diluted. Indeed, it is only by disassociating Manchevski as creative artist from Macedonia that the latter can be imagined as object of the gaze of others. Manchevski's own relocation to a position behind the camera is implicitly considered as equivalent to losing his connection with Macedonia. It is also assumed that his critical perspective is a product of that very distance.

Macedonian visions of the director are very different. As stated above, he was considered the second most popular figure in Macedonia, and his featuring in such a poll demonstrates the extent to which he was regarded as insider. As one Macedonian reviewer picked out as significant not the images of violence, but a quiet moment which indexed a complex web of temporal and geographical connections, so in a similar vein Macedonian audiences embraced the film not as depiction of Macedonian life, but as an expression of Macedonian artistry. Where foreign reviewers saw the film as capturing Macedonian authenticity from the outside, and thereby cast the director as outsider, Macedonian audiences were more likely to include the director and his image in a single sphere, the whole of which—both creative and created—was Macedonian.

Macedonia and the World Stage.

This was, however, not the limit of what the Before the Rain offered to the Macedonian imagination of cultural identity. The film was screened in Skopje only after sharing the Golden Lion in Venice. It acquired status, then, in the sense that it had already occupied a stage of international attention. Macedonian audiences in 1994-5 were thus watching something that had been watched (and deemed worth watching) in the wider world. They were enjoying not simply a film, but also the fact that the film had been watched, or would be watched, by many others, elsewhere. Even those Macedonians who criticized the film did so with this international audience in mind. The limits of the

“imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of any particular film audience, then, do not lie at the edges of any nation-state. Watching any film on general release is to partake of “world culture;” when the film watched is connected to a small country, viewers in that country can imagine themselves as equal citizens in the film world.

The Award of the Golden Lion was the beginning of the film’s public life as Macedonian. Its final flourish came on the eve of the Academy Awards ceremony in March 1995, when Before the Rain was one of five films nominated for the award of best Foreign-Language Picture. Along with others involved with the production of the film, Manchevski threatened to boycott the ceremony because the Academy were planning to refer to its country of origin not as Macedonia, but as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (O’Steen 1995). Manchevski rejected the emendation and thereby signalled a call for a decisive separation, in the world imagination, of Macedonia from Yugoslavia. The terms in which he did so, as reported by the journalist, put the relationship of Macedonia with Yugoslavia as rhetorically equivalent to that between the United States and Britain.

“In the larger picture, the name is a small thing” said Director Manchevski, “But it would be like calling the U.S. ‘the former British colony of America.’ It’s an insult to the people back there in Macedonia.”

(O’Steen 1995)

In this moment, it could be argued, on the eve of its final international recognition as national, the transition of the film itself, and of its director, were complete. From being a process of co-operation in production, overseen by a bicultural hybrid, it became a product of a single nation and a director from that nation. It did so in the forum of the Oscars, in which a country’s entry confers status on the nation as a cultural producer, equal in ontological status to all others.

Conclusion.

This paper has sought to trace the parallel biographies of a film, its director, and the country which both came to represent in the course of 1995, when the images of Before the Rain travelled an international circuit. I have tried to demonstrate the utility of a notion of “frames of belief” in the analysis of the different interpretations of the film and its relationship to the recent realities of Yugoslav history. Simply put, the central goal is to show how different understandings of that history impact upon practices as seemingly apolitical as watching a feature film, or describing a director’s background.

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.

Arjun Appadurai notes that “Art cinema....is spread both more broadly and more thinly across the world” and constitutes a realm of its own (1995:218). At the same time, the artifacts of this realm may, as in the case of Before The Rain, retain or acquire particular significance for specific agents or groups. So too their creators may lead double lives, like Milcho Manchevski, and be characterized as being at home in different localities. To consider the global interconnections and implications of local cultural phenomena, and vice versa, it appears that some notion of “framing” may be useful. The appeal of such an approach is precisely that it allows an analytical demarcation between interpretive realms, while acknowledging that frames may co-exist and blur into one another.

The recognition of the expressive and artistic complexity of Before the Rain yields one further result. Anthropologists and others who are engaged in the debates over the legitimacy of the new Macedonian nation-state are frequently asked to classify and identify practices, customs, beliefs or norms that are characteristic of and unique to Macedonian culture. If they claim to do so, they find themselves cast as over-engaged Macedonian nationalists: if they challenge the validity of the classification project, in the language of cultural flows or

globalization, they are likely to be dismissed as irrelevant obscurantists. It is perhaps too glib a response for an anthropologist to respond to the challenge simply by pointing to Before the Rain. Nonetheless, to encourage focus on a site which demonstrates the different modes in which imagining, viewing and reviewing constitute a range of realisms could be a further step towards understanding the interconnections of cultural practice and political consequence.

Notes

- 1) The focus of Anastasia Karakasidou's work has been the Hellenization of the northern region of what became part of the Greek state in 1912. In the course of her research she has found herself caught up in rhetorics of continuity, ethnic identity and loyalty, as well as debates over academic freedom and publishing policies (Doyle 1996).
- 2) Public Culture's contributors include prominent members of the school of subaltern history, such as Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha, and other scholars of the post-colonial moment, including Pierre Balibar and Nicholas Dirks.
- 3) The movie's budget was under \$3 million. 65% of the funding came from British Screen, (including 20% originally provided by Channel 4, which was then withdrawn): 25% from Noe Prods, a unit of PolyGram France: and the balance of around 10% from the Macedonian Ministry of Culture (West 1995).
- 4) The prevalent ideas here described briefly are analyzed in greater detail by Todorova (1994), who claims that they constitute a discourse of "Balkanism."
- 5) This section draws on Laura Mulvey's pioneering work (1992)[1975], which argues that the effect of this alignment of the "gaze" of audience and apparatus is masculinizing, and serves simultaneously to feminize the object displayed for the audience's pleasure. Her argument stands at the beginning of an extended debate over relations of gender and power implicit in the gaze, and established the importance of making analytical distinctions between the multiple modes in which audiences can engage with images on screen.
- 6) Non-Macedonian reviewers frequently misidentified specific locations, and drew false inferences from the term "Macedonia." Among the misrepresentations were that the action took place in a Russian monastery, or in Northern Greece. One reviewer presented a bizarre vision by placing the church scenes in the landlocked Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia at the seaside.
- 7) This foregrounding of the reproductive medium, in music which is on the soundtrack rather than occurring in the scene, serves to blur the line between extra-diegetic and diegetic. By creating the impression that what we are hearing as audience is what the character is hearing inside his head, the director can be seen again playing with the boundary between the world and the world of the film.
- 8) See further Thiessen (n.d.). Sherbedzija became famous for playing Hamlet in Dubrovnik in 1974. Tito died in 1981, and his death is as mythological within Yugoslavia and Macedonia as that of John F. Kennedy in North America: most people claim to remember where they were when they heard the news. Sarajevo was the spiritual home of much of the best Yugoslav rock music of the 1970s and 1980s, including the most famous of the bands, Belo Dugme. It was also host to the Winter Olympics in 1984. A significant dimension of the shock felt in Macedonia when fighting began in Bosnia was the inability to locate ethnic hatreds in a city that had become synonymous with an easy urban cosmopolitanism.
- 9) Manchevski himself referred to feeling "culturally schizophrenic-and glad about it" (Woodward 1995).

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^{ix}Manchevski himself referred to feeling “culturally schizophrenic—and glad about it” (Woodward 1995).