

07. Reimagining Collective Identity: Ideology, Cultural Representation and Aesthetic Transformation in Macedonian Cinema¹

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Abstract

National cinema histories often narrate archives, state institutions and post-independence production as successive stages of a coherent national tradition. This article challenges that teleology by examining how Macedonian cinema represents collective identity across the pre-socialist moving-image archive, socialist Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav independent/transnational field. The purposive corpus contains twenty-five analytical units: twenty-four individual films and one group of Manaki actualities. Ten nodal units receive extended close readings, while fifteen satellite films provide targeted comparisons. The analysis connects time and space, framing and light, and sound and music to the institutions and practices through which collective subjects become perceptible. Three relational concepts organise the findings. Archival territoriality concerns the retrospective national attribution of images. Institutional collectivity concerns the production and regulation of collective visibility through studios, language, public institutions and recognisable social roles. Precarious assemblage concerns relations sustained through repeated practices without secure guarantees of continuity. These mechanisms overlap rather than replace one another. Socialist films already expose vulnerable solidarities, while post-Yugoslav films continue to depend on institutions and to stage their demands for recognition. The comparison therefore does not describe a passage from collective ideology to individual freedom. It identifies changing arrangements of bodies, spaces, media and labour through which a “we” becomes representable. Its contribution is a long-duration, form-sensitive account of cultural representation that does not treat 1991 as an absolute origin. The findings remain bounded by purposive selection, unequal analytical depth and the absence of audience-reception research.

Keywords: Macedonian cinema, collective identity, cultural representation, national cinema, post-Yugoslav cinema

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Kolektif Kimliğin Yeniden Tahayyülü: Makedon Sinemasında İdeoloji, Kültürel Temsil ve Estetik Dönüşüm ³

Öz

Ulusal sinema tarihleri arşivi, devlet kurumlarını ve bağımsızlık sonrası üretimi çoğu zaman tutarlı bir ulusal geleneğin art arda gelen aşamaları olarak anlatır. Bu makale, Makedon sinemasında kolektif kimliğin sosyalizm öncesi hareketli görüntü arşivi, sosyalist Yugoslavya ve Yugoslavya sonrası bağımsız/ulusötesi alan boyunca nasıl temsil edildiğini inceleyerek bu teleolojik yaklaşımı sorgulamaktadır. Amaçlı korpus, yirmi dört ayrı film ile bir Manaki aktüaliteleri grubundan oluşan yirmi beş analitik birim içerir. On odak birim ayrıntılı yakın okumayla incelenirken on beş karşılaştırma filmi belirli ilişkileri sınamak için kullanılır. Çözümleme, zaman ve mekânı, kadraj ve ışığı, ses ve müziği kolektif özneleri algılanabilir kılan kurum ve pratiklerle ilişkilendirir. Bulgular üç ilişkisel kavramla tartışılır. Arşivsel teritoryalite, görüntülere geriye dönük olarak ulusal aidiyet atfedilmesini açıklar. Kurumsal kolektivite, kolektif görünürlüğü stüdyolar, dil, kamusal kurumlar ve tanınabilir toplumsal roller aracılığıyla üretilmesini ve düzenlenmesini belirtir. Güvencesiz asamblaj, devamlılığı güvence altında olmayan ilişkilerin tekrarlanan pratiklerle sürdürülmesini ifade eder. Bu mekanizmalar birbirinin yerini almak yerine örtüşür. Sosyalist filmler kırılğan dayanışmaları görünür kılarırken Yugoslavya sonrası filmler de kurumlara bağımlı olmayı ve kurumsal tanınma taleplerini sahnelemeyi sürdürür. Karşılaştırma, kolektif ideolojiden bireysel özgürlüğe geçişi değil, bir “biz”i temsil edilebilir kılan beden, mekân, medya ve emek düzenlemelerinin değişimini ortaya koyar. Çalışma, 1991’i mutlak başlangıç saymayan, uzun erimli ve film biçimine duyarlı bir kültürel temsil açıklaması sunar. Bulgular amaçlı seçim, birimler arasındaki çözümleme derinliği farkı ve izleyici alımlamasının araştırılmamış olmasıyla sınırlıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Makedon sineması, kolektif kimlik, kültürel temsil, ulusal sinema, Yugoslavya sonrası sinema

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1. Introduction: National cinema as cultural representation

National cinema is not simply a catalogue of films made within state borders. It is a cultural representational practice through which territory, language, memory and collective belonging become meaningful. Representation, in Hall's account, does not transparently mirror a reality that already exists but participates in the production and circulation of meaning through signifying practices (Hall, 1997, pp. 15–19). This distinction is particularly important for Macedonia. Its moving-image archive begins under Ottoman rule, its first sustained production institutions were built within socialist Yugoslavia, and many of its most visible recent films are European co-productions that circulate through festivals and international distribution networks. To call these heterogeneous works "Macedonian" therefore names a contested attribution made by archives, institutions, funding systems, critics and publics rather than a stable property lodged inside the films. Film archives are central to this process because preservation, programming and digitisation select the works through which national and regional histories remain available (Mazierska, 2025, pp. 811–813).

Higson's foundational critique remains pertinent because national cinema is often reduced either to films produced within state borders or to films presumed to express an already constituted national character. He argues that its boundaries must be drawn through consumption as well as production and that national cinema frequently functions as a cultural and economic response to dominant external cinemas (Higson, 1989, pp. 36–37). Neither definition is sufficient on its own for Macedonia. The Manaki brothers filmed before a Macedonian state existed. *Frosina* was made by a republic-level company within a federal Yugoslav system and directed by a filmmaker whose career exceeded a single republican frame. *Before the Rain* became a privileged emblem of the newly independent state through a production structure that was transnational from the outset. *Housekeeping for Beginners* is set in Skopje, spoken across several languages and organised around marginalised lives, yet it also belongs to the itineraries of an Australian-Macedonian director and an international financing network.

The concept of the small national cinema clarifies this apparent contradiction without resolving it into an essence. Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie describe small nationhood as a relational condition rather than a self-contained identity: small cinemas persist through changing relations among national, regional, transnational and global forces (Hjort & Petrie, 2007, pp. 1–2). Their framework is especially productive when it identifies unequal access, visibility and cultural power rather than treating smallness as a picturesque virtue (Hjort & Petrie, 2007, pp. 6–7). For Macedonian cinema, transnational co-production does not simply dilute national specificity. It is often the material condition under which films can be made, distributed and recognised, even while national funding, language and festival branding continue to organise their legibility (Hjort & Petrie, 2007, pp. 14–15).

The periodisation follows political and institutional orders: the pre-socialist moving-image archive, the socialist Yugoslav film system and the post-Yugoslav independent/transnational order. These boundaries distinguish political biography from institutional history. Josip Broz Tito died in 1980, whereas Yugoslav Macedonia and its film institutions persisted until 1991. *Happy New Year '49*, *Hi-Fi* and *Tattooing* belong to a late-socialist crisis of legitimacy. Gilić similarly cautions against histories that turn the dissolution of Yugoslavia into an absolute break. Republican differentiation, decentralisation and national cultural formation developed within Yugoslavia, while post-Yugoslav films retained industrial, aesthetic and ideological continuities with the preceding system (Gilić, 2017, pp. 102–105, 116–117).

The article develops three relational terms to distinguish operations that a period label alone cannot explain. Archival territoriality concerns the later attribution of images to a national territory. Institutional collectivity concerns the production and regulation of collective visibility through organisations, language, public roles and material infrastructures. Precarious assemblage concerns relations that must be repeatedly sustained because their continuity is not institutionally secured. These are not three names for the same collective, nor does each belong exclusively to one historical period. They ask different questions about attribution, authorisation and maintenance. A film may involve more than one mechanism, and the relation between the institution that produces a film and the collective represented within it must be examined rather than assumed.

A regional frame remains necessary, but it must not turn "the Balkans" into a single cultural personality. Iordanova argues that a comparative Balkan perspective can reveal recurring production conditions, thematic concerns and visual formations without denying the region's linguistic, religious and political differences (2001, pp. 23–24). The films considered here cross Greek, Yugoslav, Ottoman, European and global histories. Their Macedonian specificity lies less in isolation than in the density of these crossings. The archive does not move smoothly from local record to sovereign expression. It repeatedly changes the scale at which belonging can be seen. Tracing these changing scales requires connecting the regional account to research on particular Macedonian films and production institutions. The literature below clarifies those connections and the limits of existing comparisons.

Scholarship specifically addressing Macedonian cinema provides valuable but discontinuous coordinates. Akova's (2020) intercultural communication account, published in RumeliDE, foregrounds the Manaki legacy, Vardar Film, Balkan cultural plurality and institutional development. Goulding (2003, pp. 32–84) traces Yugoslav cinema's movement from federal centralisation towards decentralisation, republican ascendancy and critical new film. Gilić (2017, pp. 102–105, 116–117) explains why dissolution cannot be treated as an absolute aesthetic break. *Before the Rain* has prompted different emphases: Iordanova (2000, pp. 147–156) addresses Balkan contextualisation, Marciniak (2003, pp. 63–84) examines transnational exile and national purity, and Crnković (2011, pp. 116–136) develops an ethics of listening. Warner (2020, pp. 154–171) maps the post-2008 industry's negotiation of national branding, neoliberal constraint and transnational circulation. These studies clarify key films, institutions and transitions, but generally concentrate on a particular period, filmmaker, film or industrial problem.

Recent scholarship further sharpens the regional frame. Mitrić and Kolarić (2021) map the fragmented markets and cross-border circulation of post-Yugoslav cinema, showing that regional audience formation remains uneven despite some shared thematic and stylistic preferences. Jaugaitė (2024) examines how contemporary films contest imposed ethnic identities and representations of otherness in post-conflict societies, while Makarević (2025) theorises non-representation as a means of engaging the unresolved shadows of war. Horvat (2023) and Jelača (2021) likewise examine how historical trauma and national memory are reorganised through queer representation, female witnessing and transnational production.

What remains underdeveloped is a long-duration, form-sensitive comparison of how collective identity is culturally produced across the pre-state archive, socialist institution-building and contemporary co-production without making 1991 an absolute origin. The study addresses this gap through three research questions:

RQ1. How do narrative, visual, sonic and spatial forms make a collective subject perceptible?

RQ2. Which film archives and institutions authorise particular bodies, spaces or practices to represent a collective in the selected films?

RQ3. How do changing political and production orders reorganise the temporality and scale of belonging?

The study examines film as its primary medium. Other media are considered as communication forms represented within the selected films, such as photography, television reporting and smartphone circulation, rather than as a separate corpus of media texts.

The questions separate the formal construction of a collective from the agencies that authorise it and the historical scales across which it persists. Sections 3–9 examine these relations through the nodal units and their satellites. Sections 10 and 11 return explicitly to RQ1–RQ3.

2. Corpus and method: Comparative cultural-textual analysis

2.1. Sampling frame, sources and the unit of analysis

The study uses a qualitative comparative design based on historical contextualisation and close textual analysis. Its sampling frame is the historically differentiated field of moving images materially associated with Macedonia, from early twentieth-century actualities to *Housekeeping for Beginners* (2023), the corpus endpoint. Location, language, production organisation, authorship and archival attribution establish different forms of association. Eligibility concerns these material relationships rather than exclusive national ownership.

The corpus is literature-guided. Akova (2020) supplies a broad account of Macedonian cinema, Guţtin (2023) addresses the Manaki archive, Goulding (2003) and Gilić (2017) situate republican production within Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav film history, and Warner (2020) examines the industry's national and transnational conditions. Angelov (2022) and Sinadinov (2022) provide a specific institutional reference in the Cinematheque publication on *Frosina*. These sources establish the historical and institutional coordinates of the selected works.

The European Film Gateway's description of the Macedonian Cinematheque collection identifies a Manaki compilation containing 44 short documentaries (European Film Gateway, n.d.). This distinction between an archival compilation and its constituent works informs the unit of analysis. The collection total describes archival holdings, not the number of works selected for this study.

The corpus comprises twenty-five analytical units: twenty-four individual films and one group of Manaki actualities. Nine individual films and the archival group form the ten nodal units. The other fifteen films are satellites. The Manaki material is analysed at group level through recurring labour, ritual and public-gathering motifs. Figure 1 identifies three constituent works through their published source: *Village Wedding*, *The Religious Holiday All Souls' Day* and *Wallachian Dance* (Guţtin, 2023, p. 18).

Selection follows a purposive comparative logic rather than a systematic numerical screening design. Tables 1 and 2 document the final corpus, the analytical role of each unit and the reasons for extended attention. They support scrutiny of inclusion and comparison, not estimates of selection rates or claims

to an exhaustive survey of production.

2.2. Inclusion, exclusion and the boundaries of comparison

Four considerations explain inclusion. A material or institutional association with Macedonia defines eligibility. Historical reach enables comparison between different production and political orders. Formal contrast prevents the sample from reproducing a single preferred genre or aesthetic. Analytical relevance concerns how a film organises collective visibility through migration, labour, authority, scarcity, violence, ecology, media or care. Historical prominence and international visibility are reasons to examine a work, not evidence of its aesthetic superiority.

The scope excludes works without an identifiable material or institutional connection to Macedonia and treats alternate release titles as the same work. Still photographs are distinguished from moving-image works, and theatrical texts and television adaptations are distinguished from feature films. Tetoviranje (*Tattooing*, 1991) and the differently constituted Tetovirani duši (*Tattooed Souls*) are therefore treated as separate works. These boundaries define eligibility. Within the eligible field, purposive selection prioritises the historical and formal contrasts set out in Tables 1 and 2. Animation, television, short films beyond the Manaki group and the wider documentary field fall outside the study's systematic coverage.

2.3. Nodal and satellite roles

Nodal status marks an analytical junction. Four criteria explain that allocation: N1, a historical threshold whose implications extend beyond release date, N2, an institutional relation that materially shapes production or the represented collective, N3, the convergence of multiple formal dimensions through which that relation becomes perceptible, and N4, a national or transnational circulation problem affecting the film's representative position. The criteria make the rationale for extended attention explicit. They function as qualitative reasons for comparison rather than a numerical ranking.

Table 2 specifies the decisive conjunction for each nodal unit. The satellites provide narrower contrasts rather than abbreviated versions of the same full analysis. *Miss Stone* and *A Quiet Summer* test the diversity of early institutional cinema. *Thirst* and *Stand Up Straight, Delfina* vary the relation between infrastructure and bodily endurance. *Hi-Fi* and *Tattooing* complicate late-socialist authority. Later satellites test the recurrence of historical memory, genre, mobility and intimate labour. A satellite comparison can qualify a nodal interpretation, but the two levels do not carry equal evidentiary weight.

Table 1. Corpus, analytical roles and rationale

Political order	Year	Analytical unit, film and director	Analytical function
Pre-socialist archive	Early 20th century (dates disputed)	Nodal unit Selected Manaki actualities Yanaki and Milton Manaki	Labour, ritual and imperial plurality, archival territoriality
Socialist Yugoslav	1952	Nodal unit Frosina Vojislav Nanović	First feature, language, migration and institutional modernity

Political order	Year	Analytical unit, film and director	Analytical function
Socialist Yugoslav	1958	Satellite film Miss Stone Živorad Mitrović	Historical epic, revolution and international address
Socialist Yugoslav	1961	Satellite film A Quiet Summer Dimitrie Osmanli	Comedy, everyday sociability and the crowded public/private boundary
Socialist Yugoslav	1971	Nodal unit Black Seed Kiril Cenevski	Camp modernism, coercion, displacement and collective dignity
Socialist Yugoslav	1971	Satellite film Thirst Dimitrie Osmanli	Scarcity, rural hierarchy and uneven modernisation
Socialist Yugoslav	1977	Satellite film Stand Up Straight, Delfina Aleksandar Đurčinov	Female endurance and the representative athletic body
Socialist Yugoslav	1986	Nodal unit Happy New Year '49 Stole Popov	Noir state memory, surveillance after the Tito-Stalin split
Socialist Yugoslav	1987	Satellite film Hi-Fi Vladimir Blaževski	Political imprisonment, rock music and generational discontinuity
Socialist / post-Yugoslav hinge	1991	Satellite film Tattooing Stole Popov	Carceral masculinity and institutional collapse
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	1994	Nodal unit Before the Rain Milcho Manchevski	Fractured national time, image circulation and ethical responsibility
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2001	Satellite film Dust Milcho Manchevski	Revisionist western, transatlantic narration of Ottoman history
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2004	Satellite film The Great Water Ivo Trajkov	Orphanage memory and ideological pedagogy
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2004	Satellite film Mirage Svetozar Ristovski	Youth precarity, humiliation and institutional failure
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2005	Satellite film Bal-Can-Can Darko Mitrevski	Border absurdity, war residue and the grotesque road film
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2007	Nodal unit I Am from Titov Veles Teona Strugar Mitevska	Polluted infrastructure, female embodiment and post-socialist afterlife

Political order	Year	Analytical unit, film and director	Analytical function
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2011	Satellite film Punk's Not Dead Vladimir Blaževski	Subcultural reunion across post-Yugoslav borders
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2014	Satellite film To the Hilt Stole Popov	Revolutionary memory through action and western conventions
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2015	Satellite film Three Days in September Darijan Pejovski	Female trauma, mobility and withheld testimony
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2019	Nodal unit God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya Teona Strugar Mitevska	Ritual, gendered authority and institutional legitimacy
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2019	Nodal unit Honeyland Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov	Multispecies ethics, extraction and sustainable film praxis
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2019	Satellite film Willow Milcho Manchevski	Reproduction, temporal recurrence and intimate authority
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2021	Nodal unit Sisterhood Dina Duma	Platformed shame, peer complicity and the networked public
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2022	Satellite film Kaymak Milcho Manchevski	Class, sexuality, care and moral economy
Post-Yugoslav / transnational	2023	Nodal unit Housekeeping for Beginners Goran Stolevski	Queer-Roma kinship, domestic labour and bureaucratic recognition

Note. There are 25 analytical units: 24 individual films and one Manaki actuality group. The group is not a single film. Ten units are nodal and 15 individual films are satellites. English release titles are used. The period boundaries are analytical, and dates within the Manaki group are not treated as uniform.

Table 2. Nodal allocation and targeted comparisons

Nodal analytical unit	Decisive junction	Criteria	Comparative link
Manaki actuality group	Retrospective attribution of recorded social spaces to a national archive	N1, N2, N3	Cross-period contrast with Frosina
Frosina	Language and feature production linked to maternal loss and migration	N1, N2, N3	Miss Stone, A Quiet Summer
Black Seed	Institutional coercion made perceptible through collective exposure and bodily constraint	N2, N3	Thirst, Stand Up Straight, Delfina

Nodal analytical unit	Decisive junction	Criteria	Comparative link
Happy New Year '49	Late-socialist reinterpretation of founding history through noir and divided kinship	N1, N2, N3	Hi-Fi, Tattooing
Before the Rain	Fractured chronology within a nationally emblematic, transnationally circulating film	N1, N3, N4	Dust, The Great Water, Mirage, Bal-Can-Can
I Am from Titov Veles	Industrial inheritance linked to colour, bodily dependency and fractured speech	N2, N3	Punk's Not Dead, Three Days in September
God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya	Ritual and institutional authority reorganised through spatial enclosure and bodily centrality	N2, N3	Three Days in September
Honeyland	Regeneration and extraction organised through scale, duration and livelihood	N2, N3	Thirst
Sisterhood	Networked judgement organised through screens, off-screen circulation and uneven knowledge	N2, N3	Hi-Fi, Mirage
Housekeeping for Beginners	Care and official recognition connected through domestic form and transnational production	N2, N3, N4	Willow, Kaymak

Note. N1 = historical threshold. N2 = institutional relation. N3 = formal convergence. N4 = circulation and representative position. Criteria identify reasons for extended attention, not a quality score or a selection threshold. A satellite may be relevant to more than one nodal unit. Frosina is listed as a cross-nodal comparison, not as a satellite.

2.4. Analytical procedure and the status of visual evidence

Analysis connects three technical axes to a four-part interpretive matrix. Time and space concern narrative order, recurrence, duration, movement between settings and the organisation of access or enclosure. Framing, camera and light concern shot scale, angle, composition, blocking, depth, camera movement, colour and the distribution of visibility. Sound and music concern dialogue, voice-over, ambient sound, music, silence and the relation between audible events and the image. For each axis, the interpretive questions are who authorises the collective, which body or object represents it, which spatial or medial arrangement joins its members, and what temporal logic sustains it.

The comparison proceeds from an identifiable formal feature to its local function and then to a bounded claim about collectivity. Shared costume, for example, can create visual equivalence without proving solidarity. A central composition can intensify exposure rather than grant authority. A household can be spatially crowded without being politically inclusive. Interpretations therefore consider contradictory evidence, including coercion within institutional collectivity and institutional dependence within precarious assemblage. Circulation enters through the cited historical literature and production context, not through an original survey of spectators.

Four analytical collages support the close readings. Figure 1 reproduces the three Manaki stills identified

by Guţtin (2023, p. 18). Figures 2–4 draw on the author's image set for *Black Seed*, *God Exists*, *Her Name Is Petrunya* and *Housekeeping for Beginners*. Each collage contains three panels labelled a–c. The component images retain their source proportions and visual content. Panel order organises a comparison of spatial and bodily relationships rather than reconstructing a sequence of consecutive shots.

The four collages provide case-based visual evidence rather than an illustration attached to every title. Their selection contrasts the spatial formation of a gathering in the Manaki archive, shared exposure and individual burden in *Black Seed*, bodily centrality under ritual and institutional scrutiny in *Petrunya*, and administrative frontality versus everyday care in *Housekeeping for Beginners*. Other nodal readings develop their technical arguments through sequence analysis and the studies cited in those sections. Satellite films provide narrower comparisons and are not assigned the same visual apparatus as the nodal cases.

The collages provide evidence of composition, bodily placement, visible objects and tonal relationships. Sequence-level interpretation addresses narrative order, movement, speech, music and performance through the films and the scholarship cited in the relevant sections. Published production testimony and soundtrack credits are identified separately from close reading. Lighting is discussed through visible distribution, contrast and the cited production accounts, without equating a reproduced still with a record of the lighting setup. This distinction keeps each interpretation tied to its evidential basis.

The period boundaries remain deliberately porous. The early archive survives through later institutions that preserve and nationalise it. Socialist films can articulate republican specificity, transnational collaboration and criticism of the state. Post-Yugoslav cinema inherits personnel, genres, memories and infrastructures from Yugoslavia while entering European funding and festival networks. Gilić's account of overlapping post-Yugoslav traditions is therefore preferable to a model in which new national cinemas suddenly appear in 1991 (Gilić, 2017, pp. 103-105). The three political orders used here are analytic pressures, not sealed containers.

The design does not reconstruct audience reception, quantify production or distribution across the full period, or offer an exhaustive national filmography. The aggregate Manaki entry and the different depth of nodal and satellite readings further restrict comparability. The resulting claims concern mechanisms made visible within the selected material, not their statistical prevalence in Macedonian cinema as a whole.

3. Archival territoriality: The Manaki actualities

The Manaki brothers' films have often been made to inaugurate several national cinemas at once. That competition is already evidence against an uncomplicated origin story. Yanaki and Milton Manaki were Aromanians born in Avdella, worked in the Ottoman cities of Ioannina and Manastir/Bitola, photographed imperial and revolutionary figures, and filmed communities whose later national classifications do not exhaust their historical identities. Maţa Guţtin situates them in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious "third Europe" whose borders were being violently renegotiated as cinema arrived (Guţtin, 2023, pp. 11-13). Their images belong to Macedonian film history, but not because they reveal a nation waiting intact behind the Ottoman surface. They belong because later archives, institutions and publics have made them central to the visual history of the territory.

The uncertainty surrounding the date of the first Manaki recording - variously assigned to 1905, 1906 or 1907 - is instructive. The dispute concerns when Yanaki obtained the Bioscope camera and when the well-known image of their grandmother Despina spinning was filmed. Guţtin's reconstruction favours caution and places the earliest surviving work within a range extending from 1905/1906 or 1907 to 1911 (Guţtin, 2023, pp. 17-18). Rather than forcing an exact birthday for Macedonian cinema, the uncertainty should be retained. It dislodges the nationalist desire for an uncontested first moment and directs attention to what the films actually organise.

3.1. Time and space: Labour, routes and collective occasion

The Manaki actualities record spinning, weaving, washing clothes, shearing sheep, market exchange, religious feasts, weddings, schools, processions and political visits. Labour supplies the rhythm by which the filmed territory becomes social. In the celebrated view of Despina, the repetitive handling of fibre makes duration visible. The frontal arrangement stages an encounter between camera, kinship and work. The elderly woman's body connects technological novelty to embodied continuity, placing everyday practice at the centre of an image later made to carry national historical significance (Guţtin, 2023, pp. 17-18, 29-30).

The films' static camera has sometimes encouraged the assumption that they are raw records. Guţtin shows instead that the brothers varied shot scale and location, arranged bodies for the frame, used in-camera cutting and displayed an early narrative intuition (Guţtin, 2023, pp. 29-30). *Village Wedding*, for example, gains meaning through a sequence of arrivals, departures, exchanges and processions. Space is articulated by movement across it. In crowd scenes, participants look at the camera, pass before it or momentarily perform for it, producing a public that is aware of being imaged. The camera does not invisibly capture a self-contained community. It enters the social field and changes its choreography.

3.2. Framing and light: Three arrangements of a public

Figure 1 makes three spatial arrangements available for direct comparison. In panel a, figures occupy several depths but remain close to the camera, and the front row interrupts any view of a homogeneous crowd. Panel b makes the gathering readable at a larger scale through densely occupied rising ground and the position of a building within the composition. Panel c leaves an open foreground before a line of participants, allowing bodily grouping and the limits of the gathering to be seen together. A collective is thus represented through differences of distance, density and access to the frame, not simply through the presence of many people.

Figure 1. The Manaki archive: Three spatial forms of gathering



(a) *Village Wedding*. (b) *The Religious Holiday All Souls' Day*. (c) *Wallachian Dance*. Proximity, crowd

density and open foreground distinguish three forms of collective presence. Source: Guţtin (2023, p. 18). Source marks are retained. The panels show different works and are arranged for comparison.

The distribution of light and dark areas helps separate faces, garments and surrounding ground in these reproduced images. In panel a, differentiated faces and clothing preserve the visibility of individual participants. In panel b, the accumulation of small figures produces a denser visual field. Panel c gives the open foreground greater compositional weight, making the gathering's boundary visible. These tonal and spatial differences concern the surviving images as reproduced. Read together, the panels show why later national classification cannot exhaust the distinct forms of participation recorded by a wedding, a religious occasion and a dance.

3.3. Sound and archival mediation

For these early actualities, recorded movement and later sonic presentation belong to different historical layers. The analysis locates collective rhythm in repeated labour, bodily arrangement and movement through a gathering. Exhibition accompaniment belongs to the images' subsequent audiovisual mediation, rather than serving as the recorded voice of the original event. This separation has conceptual consequences: archival territoriality involves the ways an image is presented and heard after recording, as well as the national category under which it is preserved.

Archival territoriality names the mismatch between the social field recorded by an image and the political container later assigned to it. In the Manaki corpus, space is produced by routes, trades, rituals and encounters rather than an already bounded national landscape. Collective presence is dispersed across workers, kin, worshippers, officials and passers-by. And national ownership is authorised retrospectively through preservation and exhibition. The territory is not empty land or intact folklore but a network of Aromanian domestic life, Ottoman administration, Orthodox ritual, Young Turk politics and urban modernity. Yugoslav and Macedonian institutions give these images a national home, yet the images exceed it. Archives, as Mazierska argues, make canons through selection and exhibition as well as conservation (2025, pp. 827-828).

The Manaki case consequently establishes the methodological problem for the entire corpus. Macedonian cinema begins not with sovereignty but with retrospective organisation. The films become national through conservation, narration and exhibition while retaining evidence of a social world that cannot be fully nationalised. Every later period returns to this tension between the image's material location and the political scale at which it is made to signify.

4. Instituting the collective: *Frosina* and the socialist screen

If the Manaki archive precedes the nation-state, *Frosina* (Vojislav Nanović, 1952) marks Macedonian-language feature cinema as an institutionally organised project. Post-war documentary production preceded Vardar Film's feature. Angelov places its emergence within reconstruction through roads, railways, electrification, literacy and public health, and describes its aesthetic as socialist realist (2022, pp. 3-6). Goulding situates republic-level filmmaking within an early Yugoslav system that joined cinema to federal cultural construction before decentralisation increased republican initiative (2003, pp. 1-31). The film's firstness is therefore institutional rather than merely chronological.

4.1. Time and space: Departure and the household

The film makes that institutional ambition intimate. *Frosina* is not introduced as the triumphant representative of a new political order. She is a mother marked by poverty, labour migration, infant death and war. Her husband leaves as an economic migrant. Her surviving son Klime is taken by another historical catastrophe. The national feature begins, then, with interrupted family reproduction. What the new society promises - mobility, education, collective reconstruction - appears against a maternal history in which movement has meant male absence and bereavement.

4.2. Framing and visual emphasis: The representative burden of the maternal body

Departures and returns are set against *Frosina*'s restrained physical presence. Male mobility carries the promise of wages, politics or historical action, while medium and close framings concentrate their costs on the mother's face and body within domestic space. The restriction of scale makes historical loss intimate: migration and war acquire meaning through their effect on a figure who cannot control either process. Transitions towards public action enlarge the spatial field, but the household remains the point from which that expansion is judged (Nanović, 1952).

The alternation between domestic proximity and public action distributes historical experience unequally. The mother is the figure through whom departure is registered as loss, while Klime's trajectory gives maternal attachment a collective destination. This contrast makes the household the ethical measure of institutional reconstruction rather than treating it as the private background to national history.

4.3. Sound and language: An institutional public

The production history reinforces that reading. Stojan Sinadinov aligns *Frosina* with the contemporaneous institutionalisation of Macedonian literature and the standard literary language. The film was produced by Vardar Film, used Macedonian as a narrative medium and appeared amid a cluster of cultural "firsts" that established the infrastructure of modern Macedonian culture (Sinadinov, 2022, pp. 7-10). Yet this republican culture developed inside Yugoslavia rather than in opposition to it. Nanović's prior work in Serbian/Yugoslav cinema and the movement of personnel across republican institutions demonstrate the federal, interdependent character of the project.

Language functions as an audible organising medium. Macedonian dialogue carries intimate family experience into the feature film's public address, connecting the speaking household to the cultural infrastructure described by Sinadinov (2022, pp. 7-10). The relation between voice and institution is consequential: the studio enables a recognisable speaking world, while the maternal figure gives that world an experience of loss to answer. The national language's public presence and the household's grief are joined through speech without becoming interchangeable.

4.4. Satellite contrasts: Historical spectacle and domestic comedy

The films that follow broaden the socialist screen's repertoire. *Miss Stone* (Zivorad Mitrović, 1958) converts the 1901 kidnapping of an American missionary into a colour and widescreen historical spectacle. Its revolutionary band, mountainous routes and international hostage plot make Macedonian history available through the vocabulary of the adventure epic. Where *Frosina* uses maternal suffering to ground the collective, *Miss Stone* externalises it as organised struggle and geopolitical address. The

foreign woman's changing sympathy provides an audience surrogate through whom local rebellion becomes internationally intelligible.

A Quiet Summer (Dimitrie Osmanli, 1961), by contrast, relocates collective life into comedy. A couple seeking privacy in an Ohrid museum is progressively overwhelmed by relatives, friends and acquaintances. The recurring invasion of domestic space turns socialist sociability into a problem of scale. The joke is not that collective life is false, but that its claims can become exhausting when no boundary protects work, intimacy or rest. The museum is especially apt: a public institution temporarily becomes a home, only to be reclaimed by an expanding social network. The film's lightness reveals an everyday tension that monumental reconstruction narratives cannot register.

Together these works show that institutional collectivity was never aesthetically uniform. Social realism, historical spectacle and urban-domestic comedy offered different ways of imagining participation in a new public culture. The institution did not merely finance images of an existing collective. Through language, genre, stars, studios and exhibition, it helped produce the audience that could recognise itself as one.

5. Collectivity under pressure: *Black Seed*, scarcity and the female endurance film

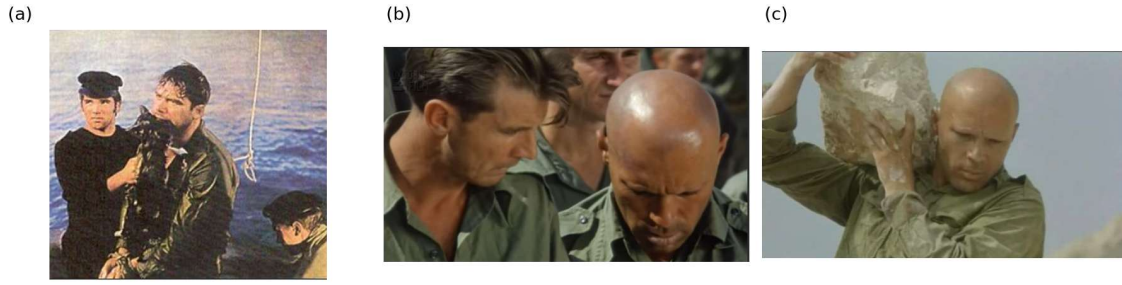
By the early 1970s, Macedonian cinema could turn the institutional means built under socialism against triumphalist accounts of collective history. Kiril Cenevski's *Black Seed* (1971) is decisive because it relocates the collective from the reconstructed homeland to a prison island during the Greek Civil War. Macedonian soldiers serving in the Royal Greek Army are detained, tortured and pressured to renounce political and ethnic affiliation. The group is not formed by a shared programme announced from above. It emerges through exposure to thirst, beating, forced declaration and death.

5.1. Time and space: Exposure without freedom of movement

The island setting joins physical openness to institutional confinement. Water and distance offer exposure without a usable route of departure. Figure 2a places a compact group of bodies against an expanse of water, bringing open surroundings and constrained bodily space into the same composition. The relatively close grouping keeps attention on the prisoners' mutual proximity rather than allowing the landscape to dominate them as spectacle. Freedom of vision and freedom of movement consequently diverge: the exterior is visible, but the captives remain enclosed within an imposed social arrangement.

5.2. Framing and light: Grouping, separation and physical burden

Figure 2b compresses several faces into a shallow field. Similar clothing joins the figures visually, while differences in head position and gaze interrupt the appearance of unanimity. In panel c, a stone occupies much of the upper frame and presses against the central figure's shoulder. The raised arms, tilted head and heavy object make physical burden legible through bodily scale. Brightness on the head and stone draws attention to their contact, while the muted background reduces competing detail. Across the panels, imposed grouping gives way to the particular body that bears the load. Collective exposure and individual endurance remain connected, but neither guarantees political solidarity.

Figure 2. Black Seed: Collective exposure and the burdened body

(a) A compact group against open water. (b) Closely framed faces with different gazes and postures. (c) A stone-bearing figure at bodily proximity. Shared clothing and compressed space connect the prisoners, while the burdened body concentrates coercion on an individual. Source: *Black Seed* (Cenevski, 1971), author's image set. Panels are arranged for comparison.

5.3. Sound, repetition and the limits of the collective voice

Commands, impacts, footsteps and strained breath establish an unequal acoustic relation in *Black Seed* (Cenevski, 1971). The command turns speech into an instruction directed at another body. Impacts and strained breathing return the bodily cost of that instruction to the soundtrack. Repeated line-ups, interrogation and punishment give this relation a temporal form: coercion is renewed through recurring demands for compliance. Where Figure 2 distinguishes grouped bodies from the individual bearing a load, the auditory relation distinguishes the capacity to order from the obligation to respond. Collective identity is tested through this enforced exchange rather than announced by a unified collective voice.

The film's title condenses its refusal of immediate redemption. A seed conventionally promises futurity, but this seed is black: buried, displaced and forced to persist in hostile ground. The captive body becomes the location where national identity, class solidarity and political conscience are tested rather than proclaimed. The prisoners' differing responses prevent the group from becoming a pure emblem. Some resist, some collapse, some calculate survival. Collective dignity remains possible, but it is neither automatic nor evenly distributed.

This transformation of socialist historical cinema is crucial. *Black Seed* retains emancipatory commitments while asking whether they can survive institutions that demand obedience through violence. Its severity belongs to a Yugoslav cinema moving from post-war centralisation towards republican production and critical experimentation (Goulding, 2003, pp. 32-84). Severe space, attenuated causality, bodily duration and the refusal of consoling spectacle turn regional exclusion into an immanent critique of the state. Republican capacity does not guarantee freedom, but it gives a suppressed history a material position from which to indict coercive power.

5.4. Satellite contrasts: Scarcity and female endurance

Dimitrie Osmanli's *Thirst* (1971) makes scarcity literal in a different register. A rural community's lack of water exposes the unevenness of modernisation and the persistence of local hierarchy. Water is both material necessity and developmental promise. The village is asked to imagine entry into a modern order, yet that order is experienced as delay, dependency and conflict over access. Read beside *Black Seed*, thirst connects the prison camp's deliberate deprivation to the village's structural neglect. In both

films, the collective is defined by the distribution of a resource that should sustain life. The comparison changes the spatial scale from island confinement to unequal access within a village. Keeping those settings distinct prevents the shared motif of thirst from making deliberate deprivation and delayed modernisation equivalent.

Stand Up Straight, Delfina (Aleksandar Đurčinov, 1977) shifts the problem from a captive male group to a woman's athletic body. Delfina's attempt to cross the English Channel is organised through flashback, training, memory and physical crisis. The achievement can be read as socialist self-realisation, but the film complicates the exemplary sports narrative by stressing disappointment, dependence and the difficulty of maintaining self-respect. Her body becomes a public project watched by trainers, officials and companions, yet the decisive struggle remains irreducibly embodied.

The sea has a different function from the water denied in *Black Seed* and *Thirst*. It is excessive rather than absent, an environment that resists possession and tests the limits of disciplined will. Delfina's endurance does not simply masculinise her. It makes visible how a woman's success is mediated by institutions that can recognise, manage or diminish her. The title's command - stand up straight - contains both empowerment and social demand. She must become upright for herself, but also legible as a representative body.

These three films broaden the meaning of socialist collectivity. It can be captive, thirsty or carried by a single swimmer. The collective remains a political horizon, yet its justice is measured through vulnerable bodies and uneven infrastructures. Macedonian cinema's critical turn is therefore not a rejection of collective aspiration. It is a demand that collective language answer for the material conditions under which bodies live.

6. Late-socialist memory: Noir, sound and the carceral threshold

6.1. Time and space: Happy New Year '49 and divided historical time

Stole Popov's *Happy New Year '49* (1986) returns to the Tito-Stalin split of 1948 from the vantage point of a socialist order entering its final decade. The historical event had helped define Yugoslavia's political autonomy, but the film refuses a retrospective language of uncomplicated emancipation. It recodes the founding split through noir, melodrama and the crime film. Night interiors, contraband economies, surveillance and divided brotherhood turn the post-war city into a space where public loyalty and private survival contaminate each other.

This temporal doubling distinguishes the film from a period reconstruction made solely to judge the past. Goulding identifies 1973-1990 as a period in which new Yugoslav cinemas negotiated institutional fatigue, changing genre forms and intensifying republican differentiation (2003, pp. 143-185). The 1986 production context permits the founding narrative of ideological discipline to be read alongside late-socialist institutional strain, without establishing how contemporary audiences actually interpreted it. The film's generic mixture permits that double address. Melodrama preserves the emotional cost of divided loyalties, while noir makes the social field opaque and morally unstable. The result is not an anti-socialist fable in which private life is innocent and politics corrupt. The black market, family ambition and state power are mutually entangled.

6.2. Framing and light: Noir as unequal visibility

The brothers at the narrative centre do not merely represent opposing political positions. They show how geopolitics enters kinship. Suspicion does not stop at the threshold of the home. The state recruits intimacy as evidence. The film's urban darkness is consequently more than atmosphere. It makes illegibility structural. Characters cannot know which conversation, object or relationship will be reclassified as betrayal. The late-socialist return to 1948 converts heroic state memory into a crime scene.

Low visibility in the night interiors gives suspicion a spatial form. Restricted illumination allows parts of a room or a face to remain less legible while the narrative makes ordinary contacts potentially incriminating. The viewer's access to kinship through melodrama is placed under the pressure of noir's partial knowledge. Darkness thus mediates the relation between intimate attachment and institutional judgement: those who appear close to one another can remain politically unreadable to one another.

6.3. Sound and music: Political speech and generational listening

In *Happy New Year '49*, spoken allegiance and intimate conversation share a field of political suspicion. Words exchanged between relatives can acquire a second function as signs of loyalty or betrayal. The auditory problem is therefore one of address: speaking to a familiar person does not secure control over how the utterance will be interpreted. In conjunction with the restricted visibility of the night interiors, this instability connects private exchange to the state's demand for legible political positions (Popov, 1986).

Vladimir Blaževski's *Hi-Fi* (1987) moves the crisis into sound and generation. An older man marked by political imprisonment confronts a younger world organised around rock music, performance and different expectations of public speech. Popular music is not simply a Western token imported into Yugoslavia. It produces a temporal disjunction inside the family. The younger generation inhabits amplification, rehearsal and subcultural affiliation. The older one hears the unresolved frequency of surveillance and punishment. "High fidelity" becomes ironic because no medium faithfully transmits one generation's experience to the next. Recent work on post-Yugoslav film music similarly shows that sound actively constructs historical imagination and collective identity rather than merely decorating an already formed past (Golubović, 2025).

The film's attention to musical performance also changes the scale of collectivity. The band is voluntary, provisional and affective, unlike the official organisations that structured the older man's political life. Yet it is not outside the social order. Access to equipment, venues and recognition still depends on institutions. Music can articulate refusal, but it cannot erase inherited fear. The intergenerational conflict thus anticipates post-Yugoslav cinema's recurring problem: how can a group be formed without repeating the authority it rejects?

The comparison turns on how an address becomes collective. In *Happy New Year '49*, a conversation's political meaning exceeds the intimacy of its immediate speakers because loyalty and suspicion determine how words can be received. In *Hi-Fi*, amplified performance assembles a listening group, yet shared audibility fails to transmit a common historical experience. Speech and music organise different publics within late socialism. One is subject to the reinterpretation of words as evidence, the other to the uneven reception of a repertoire across generations. Both expose the difficulty of sustaining a collective

whose members hear the same event differently.

6.4. The carceral threshold: Tattooing

Tattooing (1991) brings the late-socialist sequence to a carceral threshold. Its protagonist is caught in an absurdly punitive institutional world in which masculinity is inscribed, humiliated and circulated through bodies. The tattoo is an image of identity that cannot be removed, but it is also a mark produced under conditions that compromise self-authorship. Where *Black Seed* located coercion on a remote island tied to a suppressed regional history, *Tattooing* brings the prison logic into the immediate present of a collapsing system.

The film's 1991 date should not be used to force it neatly into either Yugoslav or independent Macedonian cinema. Its value lies precisely in the hinge. The institutions remain Yugoslav in material and memory, but their legitimating narrative has thinned. The collective appears as inmates, guards, family fragments and damaged solidarities. By the time political sovereignty changes, cinema has already registered the erosion of the social contract.

7. Post-Yugoslav time: *Before the Rain* and the broken national circle

7.1. Time and space: Recurrence without chronological closure

Before the Rain (Milcho Manchevski, 1994) is the unavoidable centre of any account of independent Macedonian cinema, not simply because of its international awards but because it turned the problem of national emergence into a problem of cinematic time. Its three parts - "Words", "Faces" and "Pictures" - move between a Macedonian monastery and village, a London publishing world and the return of war photographer Aleksandar to his place of origin. Characters and events recur across the sections, but their chronology cannot be made fully consistent. The much-cited circle is scored by a gap.

Sean Homer reads Manchevski's form as making the past discontinuous even while remaining attached to a specific landscape (Homer, 2017, pp. 94-95). Zamira's flight, Anne's encounter with Aleksandar's photographs and Aleksandar's return alter one another's causal status whenever they recur. Homer therefore describes a helix or spiral rather than a closed circle (2017, pp. 101-104). Marciniak likewise argues that the film's exilic form unsettles national purity by refusing to stabilise who belongs inside or outside the nation (2003, pp. 63-68, 78-82). Repetition introduces difference rather than an automatic Balkan destiny.

7.2. Framing, landscape and the circulation of the still image

Monastery walls, dry hills and Orthodox iconography give the landscape a powerful national address. Homer argues that these motifs can produce a Slav Orthodox master narrative in which Albanian Muslim life appears as an internal other (2017, pp. 105-107). Iordanova's Balkan contextualisation cautions against treating that iconography as transparent national truth or evidence of an eternally violent region (2000, pp. 147-156). The composition and recurrence of recognisable places make belonging spatially legible, while the fractured chronology unsettles the continuity that those places seem to promise. Temporal experimentation and exclusionary national imagery can therefore coexist within the same film.

Photography remains the film's ethical hinge. Aleksandar has profited from conflict images, but return

places him where kinship, ethnicity and masculine authority demand that he take sides. Anne receives photographs whose chronology is not yet secure. The still image documents and anticipates at once. The moving structure changes the causal status of what is seen, so a picture can testify, accuse or arrive too early. Pictures do not resolve words and faces. They participate in violence's circulation.

7.3. Sound and music: Listening against visual mastery

Crnković shifts the ethical emphasis from seeing to listening. Kiril and Zamira's silence, the monastery's layered soundscape and the abrupt London restaurant shooting undermine the fantasy that visual distance grants moral knowledge (2011, pp. 116-121, 126-133). The monastery is traversed by a fugitive Albanian girl and Kiril's failed protection. Gunfire ruptures cosmopolitan London. Aleksandar's photojournalism likewise grants no mastery. Images circulate distant violence, while sound returns the spectator to bodily proximity.

Obradović's (2023) analysis of audiovisual discontinuity in *Depth 2* demonstrates how a break between voice and image can itself function as historical argument by defamiliarising testimony and exposing failures of cultural memory. Read alongside Makarević's (2025) account of non-representation in post-Yugoslav war cinema, this regional comparison clarifies why *Before the Rain*'s gaps and disjunctions should not be reduced to an art-cinema mannerism.

Anastasia's ethno-rock score contributes an affective continuity that the narrative's chronology refuses to secure. Its significance must be distinguished from the monastery's layered sounds and the abrupt intrusion of gunfire in London. Music can join dispersed spaces, while a sudden sound can interrupt the spectator's presumed distance from them. The comparison does not treat national musical address and ethical listening as equivalent. Their tension helps explain why the film can make a collective perceptible without reconciling its exclusions. This distinction connects Crnković's (2011, pp. 116-136) discussion of listening to Homer's (2017, pp. 105-107) critique of national address.

The film's international visibility is reducible neither to national triumph nor to a Western appetite for Balkan conflict. Its festival legibility used familiar figures of ancient landscape, ethnic hostility, war photography and cyclical time, but unsettled their temporal certainty. Iordanova (2000, pp. 151-156) locates the work within a Balkan context, while Marciniak (2003, pp. 78-84) reads its transnational challenge to national purity. These approaches identify tensions in a film that acquires national visibility without receiving a seamless chronology.

7.4. Satellite contrasts: Historical memory and generic fracture

The subsequent corpus revisits this broken time. *Dust* (2001) joins Ottoman Macedonia to New York through a revisionist western and unreliable narration. Manchevski describes it as contested storytelling and genre collision rather than historical reconstruction (Coover, 2004, pp. 2-8). *The Great Water* (Ivo Trajkov, 2004) recalls an orphanage that manufactures ideological subjects. *Mirage* (Svetozar Ristovski, 2004) shows poverty, humiliation and crime closing a schoolboy's future. Jelača identifies this regional contradiction: young subjects are required to manage themselves while post-socialist structures narrow their agency (2017, pp. 121-123).

Bal-Can-Can (Darko Mitrevski, 2005) responds through velocity and grotesque comedy. Its road-movie structure crosses borders, mafias, bureaucracies and post-war ruins, transforming Balkan circulation into a chain of absurd transactions. The film risks packaging regional dysfunction as carnivalesque

spectacle, yet its excess also refuses the solemn fatalism often attached to the post-Yugoslav image. Together these works demonstrate that post-independence cinema did not settle the past. It multiplied the forms - western, memory film, youth realism, black comedy - through which unresolved histories could return.

8. Toxic afterlives: *I Am from Titov Veles* and the orphaned infrastructure

8.1. Time and space: Infrastructure as an active inheritance

Teona Strugar Mitevska's *I Am from Titov Veles* (2007) locates post-socialism in an inherited environment. The old socialist name remains in the title after the city has officially become Veles, and the factory built under the previous order continues to poison the present. The three sisters inhabit an infrastructure whose material life outlasts the political promise that justified it. Historical change is registered through continuing exposure rather than a clean break between past and present.

8.2. Framing, colour and visibility: Body and factory in a shared field

Mennel reads the poisoned factory, saturated colours and exposed female bodies as parts of a post-socialist labour regime in which work, sexuality and mobility no longer promise emancipation (2019, pp. 64-69). The sisters' dresses and grey industrial residue share the same widescreen field. Colour marks a desire not to disappear but offers no escape. Smoke, ruined surfaces and female embodiment become one environment. The factory remains a socialist collective after death: materially present, politically orphaned and continuing to enter the body.

The shared widescreen field makes environmental pressure part of the relation between body and setting. A dress or exposed skin can stand out chromatically while remaining inside the same contaminated space. Colour differentiation grants perceptual prominence without granting mobility. This tension gives visual form to the sisters' position: they can become conspicuous within the industrial landscape without securing an exit from its material conditions (Mennel, 2019, pp. 64-69).

8.3. Sound and voice: Narration beyond spoken dialogue

The youngest sister, Afrodita, does not speak, and the film avoids treating silence as empty passivity. Voice-over, gesture, bodily dependency and visual attention distribute narration across forms that exceed conventional dialogue. The camera repeatedly makes her face the centre of scenes whose social pressures continue beyond her speech, turning muteness into a principle of narration rather than a lack to be repaired. This also unsettles the national-cinema expectation that language will transparently secure identity. Macedonian speech is present, but the film's most sustained perspective belongs to a character whose relation to speech is fractured.

Voice-over and bodily silence produce an asymmetry between narrative access and social participation. A perspective becomes available to the spectator without becoming ordinary dialogue within the represented world. Afrodita's limited participation in conversation therefore coexists with sustained narrative attention. The separation between audible narration and visible speaking shifts the question from possessing a national language to having one's experience recognised by others. In contrast to *Frosina's* institutional public of speech, this speaking world contains a perspective that exceeds its conversational relations.

Jelača describes transitional precarity as limiting agency while demanding constant self-management (2017, pp. 121-123). This clarifies the sisters' strategies of endurance: sexual mobility, care, aspiration, refusal and fantasy. Their intimacy is strained by dependency, desire and pressure to leave. Mennel likewise shows that neither work nor mobility offers reliable liberation (2019, pp. 64-69). Post-socialism is not blank space after state withdrawal but an uneven inheritance whose smoke, concrete and gendered labour relations remain active.

Transnational production and festival circulation further complicate the local/global division. Stojanovska describes a Macedonian in-betweenness in which local specificity meets the returning gaze of European art cinema (2009, pp. 47-55). Warner likewise shows how limited production, international markets and national self-representation remain entangled (2020, pp. 154-171). Poisoned industry and female suffering risk becoming consumable signs of a post-socialist periphery. The film counters this through sensuous excess and subjective opacity.

8.4. Satellite contrasts: Inherited routes, repertoires and trauma

Several later films turn the orphaned infrastructure into different collective problems. *Punk's Not Dead* (Vladimir Blaževski, 2011) reunites an ageing punk band whose tour across post-Yugoslav space tests whether subcultural memory can survive new ethnic and economic borders. The band resembles the provisional collective of *Hi-Fi*, but age and geopolitical fragmentation have changed the stakes. Reunion is comic, compromised and materially difficult. Nostalgia is less a return than an improvised transport system.

To the Hilt (Stole Popov, 2014) returns to the late Ottoman revolutionary landscape through action and western conventions. Its scale and genre energy reclaim national history as spectacle, but the very borrowing of the western reveals that sovereign memory is cinematically assembled from transnational forms. *Three Days in September* (Darijan Pejovski, 2015) narrows the scale to two women, a train journey and concealed trauma. Mobility no longer promises modernisation or cosmopolitan escape. It becomes a fragile interval in which violence can be narrated, withheld or redirected.

Across these films, post-socialism appears as an afterlife rather than an aftermath. The past persists in factory emissions, band repertoires, revolutionary iconography, railway routes and embodied memory. The collective is no longer secured by the institution, but neither is it reducible to isolated individuals. It survives through damaged materials that characters must inhabit and repurpose.

9. Reassembling the collective: Ritual, ecology, platforms and queer care

Recent Macedonian cinema does not abandon collective politics. It relocates it. *God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya* (Teona Strugar Mitevska, 2019), *Honeyland* (Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov, 2019), *Sisterhood* (Dina Duma, 2021) and *Housekeeping for Beginners* (Goran Stolevski, 2023) move belonging away from socialist representative institutions. Warner identifies the post-2008 pressure to combine national self-assertion with international financing (2020, pp. 154-171). These films make inadequate publics their subject: a male ritual, a human-bee economy, a networked peer group and a queer-Roma household. Each asks how common life can be made without consensus.

9.1. Petrunya's unauthorised public

9.1.1. Time and space: From ritual participation to institutional enclosure

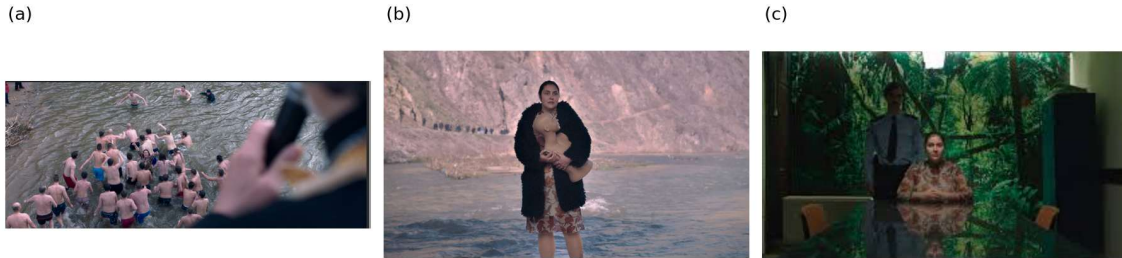
In *God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya*, a communal object becomes politically volatile when a woman takes it. During the Epiphany ritual in Ttip, a priest throws a cross into the water for male participants to retrieve. Petrunya enters the water, catches the cross and thereby exposes a rule that everyone treats as binding although no one can convincingly ground it in law. Her act is powerful precisely because it is not initially framed as a programme. She does not arrive as an activist addressing an organised movement. She takes the ritual at its word and refuses the gendered qualification that has silently governed participation.

The move from river to station changes the conditions of collective visibility. In Figure 3a, the camera looks past a blurred foreground figure towards the gathering below. Unequal scale, depth and sharpness separate the position of address from the bodies being addressed. Figure 3c places a seated woman at a reflective table, with another figure standing behind and a wooded display covering the back wall. The desk interrupts access to the central body while its surface repeats the room through reflection. Central visibility is therefore compatible with confinement: the institution presents Petrunya for scrutiny without giving her control over the encounter.

9.1.2. Framing, objects and light: Exposure is not the same as authority

Figure 3b centres a clothed figure holding a mannequin fragment against the river landscape. The contrast between the dark coat and the pale, incomplete model places two forms of the female body in immediate contact: a living figure and a detachable display object. Piedras and Andreu da Fonseca identify this object as preceding the struggle over the ritual cross (2023, pp. 20–21). Its visual force lies in this bodily comparison. Panel c subjects the living figure to another arrangement of display through a desk, reflective surface and institutional viewpoint. The collage connects different ways of making a woman visible while distinguishing bodily presence from authority.

Figure 3. *God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya*: Ritual space, bodily comparison and institutional framing



(a) A river gathering seen past a blurred foreground figure. (b) A solitary figure holding a mannequin fragment. (c) A centrally seated figure at a reflective table. The panels compare ritual hierarchy, bodily display and institutional scrutiny. Source: *God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya* (Strugar Mitevaska, 2019), author's image set. For the mannequin motif, see Piedras and Andreu da Fonseca (2023, pp. 20–21). Panel order is comparative.

The movement from early handheld proximity towards the station's more fixed, darker compositions

makes institutional pressure a change in cinematic form. Piedras and Andreu da Fonseca trace this contrast and distinguish it from the later forward travelling shot (2023, p. 22). Fixity holds the body within the encounter, while darker surroundings narrow the field of attention. The silent frontal images of women and the subsequent departure operate as separate moments. The former make looking and being looked at reciprocal, while the latter gives spatial movement renewed importance after the station's confinement.

9.1.3. Sound and music: Singular address and the claims of the public

The opening's extradiegetic thrash song and the later silent frontal images of women establish contrasting forms of address (Piedras & Andreu da Fonseca, 2023, pp. 16, 22). The song introduces an assertive musical register outside ordinary environmental sound. The silent frontal images suspend conversation and interrupt the expectation that the women will explain themselves. Instead of supplying an institutional answer, their sustained visibility confronts the terms on which a public demands one. Music and silence consequently distribute agency differently from the exchanges surrounding the ritual object: the women become subjects of address rather than objects awaiting classification.

Petrunya takes a communal object without accepting the community's terms of recognition. Her final return of the cross is not submission. Having demonstrated that possession was never the central issue, she exposes the institutions that need the object to restore their authority. The film's festival success can encourage a familiar East/West reading in which an emancipated spectator judges a belatedly patriarchal Macedonia. Piedras and Andreu da Fonseca warn that such circulation may reproduce an Orientalising measure of political modernity (2023, pp. 23-24). The film partly resists that address by making the state, church, media and crowd internally contradictory rather than presenting a single backward culture.

9.2. *Honeyland* and the multispecies collective

9.2.1. Time and space: Regeneration against urgent extraction

Honeyland relocates collective ethics beyond the human. Hatidze Muratova's practice of taking half the honey and leaving half for the bees is not simply an individual virtue or an ecological slogan. It is a distributive rule that recognises the hive as a participant in the conditions of livelihood. When a neighbouring family begins intensive extraction under pressure from a buyer, the conflict is not between pure tradition and corrupt modernity. It is between incompatible temporalities of survival: one calibrated to regeneration, the other to urgent cash, debt and scale.

9.2.2. Framing and light: Shifts of scale within a shared environment

The landscape differs sharply from the national sublime of *Before the Rain*. Extreme long shots place humans within rock and weather, while close views attend to hands, combs, insects, skin and flame. Sözen describes *Honeyland* as observational yet deliberately constructed through camera distance, editing and speech-image relations (2020, pp. 21-29). Spadafora shows how fixed and handheld images with natural or minimal light let the environment shape production as well as representation (2025, pp. 264-266). Shifts of scale continually renegotiate which life is central.

Shifts between landscape-scale views and the proximity of hands or combs change the unit of attention. Rock and weather establish a scale that exceeds human possession, while close views return labour to

contact with living material. Natural or minimal light ties visibility to environmental conditions, as Spadafora's production account shows (2025, pp. 264–266). The combination makes ecological dependency a property of filming and framing. The human body takes its place within a variable field of insects, surfaces and available light.

9.2.3. Sound and speech: Address without explanatory mastery

Hatidze's speech moves among bees, her mother, traders and neighbours. Without an explanatory narrator to rank these encounters, words remain situated acts of care, bargaining and negotiation. Speech does not confer mastery over the filmed environment. It marks dependency on others within it. The extended, small-crew production supports this proximity while remaining subject to environmental and logistical conditions. Spadafora's concept of a "film ecology" connects such relationships to equipment, lighting, schedule and production footprint (2025, pp. 261–263, 266–269). The film's ecological form resides in how it listens and works within these relations, as well as in the rule of leaving honey for the bees.

That alignment is ethically productive, though not innocent. The film's global circulation transforms a marginal livelihood into a prestigious cultural object. The market that threatens the bees also enables the documentary's international life. The distinction is not erased by invoking sustainability. Rather, the film makes extraction visible at several scales: honey removed from the hive, labour converted into commodity, private life converted into image. Its achievement lies in refusing to isolate ecological damage from family pressure and market demand.

The collective in *Honeyland* is therefore multispecies and economic. It includes bees, flowering cycles, maternal care, children, cattle, buyers, filmmakers and distant spectators. Unlike the state collective of early socialist cinema, it has no institution capable of enforcing its rule. Reciprocity survives as practice and knowledge, vulnerable to immediate need. This is precarious assemblage in its clearest ecological form.

9.3. Reproduction, intimacy and moral economy

Manchevski's *Willow* (2019) places reproduction across medieval and contemporary temporalities. Three stories connect fertility, pregnancy, adoption, loyalty and loss without reducing motherhood to biological destiny. The film's historical structure differs from *Before the Rain*: temporal separation is explicit, yet recurring dilemmas produce an affective continuity. Reproduction becomes a site where religious authority, medical knowledge, intimate desire and social expectation compete to define legitimate futurity.

Kaymak (Manchevski, 2022) turns from reproductive grief to sexual and classed exchange in contemporary Skopje. Its interlocking relationships use black comedy to expose how intimacy is shaped by housing, care work, money and social permission. The title's promise of richness is morally unstable: pleasure and generosity coexist with exploitation and self-deception. In both films, the family is no longer the unquestioned cell of collective continuity. It is an arrangement whose terms must be negotiated, concealed or reinvented.

These works complicate any account in which recent Macedonian cinema simply becomes more "individualistic". Intimacy is shown as infrastructure. Pregnancy, adoption, sex, cooking, housing and elder care distribute resources and recognition. The political question is not whether private life replaces

public life, but how the public order is reproduced through supposedly private arrangements.

9.4. *Sisterhood* and the pocket-sized tribunal

9.4.1. Time and space: Circulation beyond the visible gathering

Dina Duma's *Sisterhood* shifts the collective into the smartphone. The film follows teenage girls whose complicity in recording and circulating a sexual encounter reorganises friendship, shame and responsibility. The central violence is not located in a single malicious image. It lies in the networked passage from event to recording, from recording to message, and from message to an audience that can expand without becoming visible as a crowd.

9.4.2. Framing and mediated visibility: Faces, screens and off-screen knowledge

The screen within the screen changes cinematic space. Close framings, mobile-phone interfaces and off-screen reactions make circulation more consequential than physical distance. A school, bedroom or party remains exposed to events elsewhere because a recording can carry one space into another. boyd's account of networked publics identifies four relevant affordances: persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability, together with audiences whose boundaries are difficult for users to know (2010, pp. 46–53). The public sphere becomes a pocket-sized tribunal in which witnessing, distribution and judgement overlap.

The framing separates a visible reaction from a distribution process that exceeds the image. A close view gives access to a face, but it cannot contain all those who have received the recording. Off-screen space consequently becomes socially active: the effect of an image depends on people outside the immediate encounter. The discrepancy between bodily proximity and mediated reach is central to the film's account of responsibility. Those who circulate the recording can act together without occupying one place or acknowledging themselves as a group.

9.4.3. Sound and music: Speech, withholding and composed address

The recording's circulation redistributes the power to speak about the encounter. Friendship binds the girls through what they acknowledge to one another and what they withhold from others. In this arrangement, withholding speech protects an alliance while displacing responsibility for the recording. The music supplies a separate composed register. Igor Vasilev Novogradska's published soundtrack credits orchestral strings, vibraphone and soprano, distinguishing the score's musical resources from communication within the peer group (Novogradska, 2022). These credits establish the production of the musical layer, while the close reading concerns the distribution of speech and knowledge. The distinction matters because the film addresses a listener beyond the fictional network without turning that network into a single, authoritative collective voice.

This structure distinguishes *Sisterhood* from narratives in which patriarchy is imposed exclusively by adult men or formal institutions. The girls inhabit and reproduce the regime that harms them. Friendship offers protection, but it also produces loyalty tests and collective denial. The title is thus deliberately unstable. *Sisterhood* names a desired solidarity and the social mechanism through which responsibility can be displaced.

The film withholds the distance from which an adult spectator could safely diagnose adolescent cruelty.

Faces and screens place viewers inside the peer group's uneven knowledge: characters know an image exists before they know its reach. Jelača's regional account supplies a useful comparison, showing that post-cinematic proliferation can intensify the precarity it appears to document (2017, pp. 137-139). *Sisterhood* makes that contradiction infrastructural. The collective forms through forwarding, looking, withholding and imagining who else has seen.

The film extends a line running from *Hi-Fi* to contemporary media culture. In the late-socialist film, music created an intergenerational public that official language could not contain. In *Sisterhood*, platform circulation exceeds both family and school, but it does not create autonomous counterculture. The infrastructure belongs to commercial systems whose speed and opacity intensify social judgement. Collectivity is abundant, yet common responsibility is scarce.

9.5. *Housekeeping for Beginners*: Family as labour

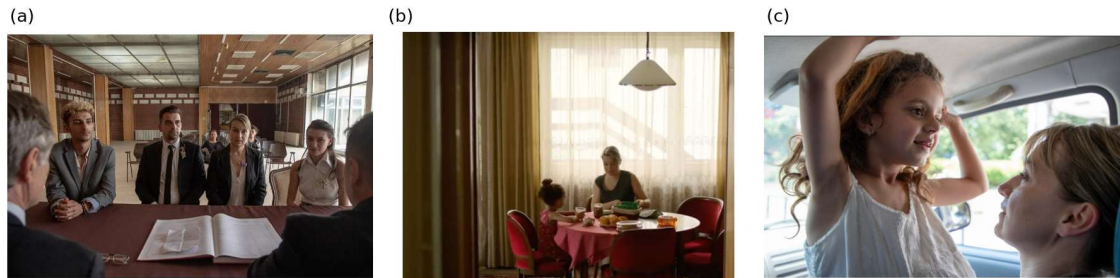
9.5.1. Time and space: Care and the demand for official recognition

Housekeeping for Beginners brings precarious assemblage into the home. Dita lives in a crowded Skopje household with her partner Suada, Suada's daughters, queer friends and other dependants. Illness and death expose the household to legal and bureaucratic regimes that do not recognise its existing relations of care. The film's title is exact: family appears first as work - cooking, cleaning, medication, transport, money, conflict management, paperwork and mourning - before it appears as identity.

Figure 4 contrasts three settings in which relations must be sustained or made legible. Panel a arranges a group across a desk from foreground figures, with an open register marking the encounter's administrative form. Panel b places a shared meal within a curtained domestic space. Panel c confines a child's raised arms and an adult's upward look within a vehicle interior. The difference is not between a public scene that matters and private scenes that do not. Each setting gives care or recognition a material arrangement, but only the administrative setting offers a visible procedure for recording a relation.

9.5.2. Framing and light: Official frontality and everyday proximity

In Figure 4a, the desk divides the encounter into two sides and makes the seated group face an institutional viewpoint. Panel b arranges care differently through a shared meal. Curtains diffuse the window brightness behind the table, enclosing the figures within an ordinary domestic setting. Panel c compresses bodies inside a vehicle and places their faces at unequal heights. The child's raised arms and the adult's upward look connect the figures through an exchange of attention. Across these compositions, official frontality, domestic space and intimate proximity assign different roles to the same practical problem of sustaining relations. Closeness permits care, but it does not erase conflict or the demand for institutional recognition.

Figure 4. Housekeeping for Beginners: Administrative legibility and everyday care

(a) A group facing an administrative desk and open register. (b) A meal within a curtained interior. (c) Bodily proximity and an exchange of looks inside a vehicle. Frontality, diffused window brightness and close framing distinguish official recognition from everyday care. Source: *Housekeeping for Beginners* (Stolevski, 2023), author's image set. Panels are arranged for comparison.

9.5.3. Sound and performance: A collective without unanimity

Overlapping dialogue makes the household audible as simultaneous demands rather than the speech of a unified family. The handheld camera and bodies entering and leaving the frame connect this acoustic competition to unstable visual attention. In his interview with Forde (2024), Stolevski describes a layered approach in which a late disclosure can change the meaning of what preceded it. He also emphasises the significance of Dita's restrained delivery and silent performance. Vocal density and withholding thus coexist: audibility gives household members a presence without reconciling their needs. Figure 4 supplies the spatial comparison, while dialogue and performance explain how those relations persist through interruption, resentment and renewed attention. Family as labour is a repeatedly negotiated practice.

The household's queer and Roma dimensions are inseparable but not interchangeable. Butler's question whether kinship is always already heterosexual matters because recognition regulates which bonds become legible as kinship (2002, pp. 14-22, 34-38). Bureaucracy translates care into categories that may exclude its actual practitioners. Yet the film does not idealise marginality: adults fail children, children resist adults and precarity limits every ethical choice. Chosen family is an improvised institution, not a utopian outside to law and descent.

The film also unsettles the ownership implied by "Macedonian cinema". Stolevski's transnational career, multilingual setting and international production context make the work legible across several cinematic formations. Horvat's (2023) account of queer memory and transnational production elsewhere in post-Yugoslav cinema helps situate this household not outside national history but within a regional field in which minority belonging and war memory are renegotiated through mobile production structures. Yet Skopje is not a generic backdrop. Its apartments, roads, administrative spaces and social hierarchies determine what the household can do. The film belongs to Macedonian cinema not because it displays a purified national culture but because it makes the city's unequal structures dramatically operative.

The final movement from *Frosina* to *Housekeeping for Beginners* is therefore not from collective life to private life. Both films organise historical change through care. In *Frosina*, the bereaved mother anchors a new institutional cinema whose public promise remains outside her control. In *Housekeeping*, a non-normative household builds a practical public from below because official recognition is inadequate. The

later film does not resolve the earlier one's grief. It changes the political form through which care can become collective.

10. Discussion: From collective body to precarious assemblage

10.1. RQ1: The formal production of a collective subject

The answer to RQ1 is that a collective becomes perceptible through relations between bodies, spaces and media rather than through the number of people represented. The Manaki examples distinguish proximity, density and the open boundary of a gathering. *Black Seed* places shared exposure beside individually borne constraint. Petrunya makes central visibility compatible with institutional subordination. *Housekeeping for Beginners* distinguishes official frontality from the practical arrangements of a meal or an exchange of looks. Figures 1–4 therefore support different mechanisms of visual organisation, not a sequence of representative national portraits.

Temporal and sonic forms complicate these visual relations. *Before the Rain* prevents recurrence from resolving into a single national chronology. *I Am from Titov Veles* separates spoken interaction from narrative perspective. *Honeyland* connects duration and situated speech to the contested renewal of a livelihood. *Sisterhood* places responsibility between mediated circulation and withheld acknowledgement. *Housekeeping for Beginners* makes shared life audible through competing speech and restrained performance. Together, these readings distinguish the visibility of a group from its capacity to listen, respond and sustain a common relation.

10.2. RQ2: Attribution, authorisation and maintenance

RQ2 distinguishes the institutions through which the selected films circulate from the authorities represented within their narratives. Film archives preserve and classify images, while studios, language infrastructures and exhibition networks make cinematic public address materially possible. Within the films, prisons, police, religious authorities and administrative procedures regulate participation, testimony, punishment and kinship. Photography in *Before the Rain*, television reporting in *Petrunya* and smartphone circulation in *Sisterhood* are analysed as represented communication practices through which visibility and judgement are organised. This distinction keeps the analysis focused on films while accounting for the other media they incorporate.

Table 3 separates the three concepts by their explanatory task. Archival territoriality asks how a recorded social space acquires a later national location. Institutional collectivity asks through which organised capacities and recognisable roles a collective is produced or regulated. Precarious assemblage asks what repeated acts sustain relations whose continuation is not guaranteed. Their common concern is collective visibility, but their mechanisms and units of explanation differ. Archival attribution operates chiefly at the relation between an image and its afterlife. Institutional collectivity and precarious assemblage can operate both in production conditions and in represented social relations. The analysis states which level is under discussion rather than treating a fictional institution as direct evidence about an industry.

Table 3. Distinct mechanisms and cross-period tests

Concept	Explanatory question and evidence	Boundary and counterexample
Archival territoriality	How is an image assigned a national place after recording? Evidence concerns the relation between the recorded social field and preservation, classification or exhibition.	A landscape alone is insufficient evidence. Later custodianship of the Manaki images keeps the mechanism active beyond the pre-socialist period.
Institutional collectivity	How do organised capacities and recognised roles produce or regulate a collective? Evidence concerns language, studios, public institutions and the allocation of access, voice or status.	Institutional presence does not prove solidarity. <i>Black Seed</i> exposes coercion, while <i>Petrunya</i> and <i>Housekeeping</i> retain institutional demands after 1991.
Precarious assemblage	Through what repeated practices are insecure relations maintained? Evidence concerns dependence, reciprocity, care and threatened continuity.	Vulnerability alone is insufficient. Relations must be practically sustained. <i>Black Seed</i> and <i>Hi-Fi</i> provide earlier tests, while recent households remain entangled with law and funding institutions.

Note. The concepts are relational propositions, not mutually exclusive period categories. Production institutions, represented institutions and archival afterlives are distinct levels of analysis.

10.3. RQ3: Overlapping times and scales rather than successive stages

RQ3 is answered through changes of scale and temporal obligation rather than a replacement of the collective by the individual. The archive joins local events to later national histories. Republican production joins households and labouring bodies to a federal cultural system. Post-Yugoslav co-production joins local settings to international circuits, while the films repeatedly organise belonging around the time required to maintain a livelihood, manage a mediated image or care for another person. Political dates matter, but they do not determine the beginning or end of a formal mechanism.

Black Seed is a counterexample to identifying precarious assemblage exclusively with the post-Yugoslav period. The captive group's exposure does not guarantee solidarity. Its differing responses make the continuation of a common relation uncertain. At the level of production, the film belongs to institutional cinema, while the relation it represents is vulnerable and contested. *Hi-Fi* similarly locates provisional affiliation in a musical group before 1991. These cases do not turn every experience of suffering into an assemblage. They show why attention must be paid to the practices that join or divide those exposed to it.

The reverse test is equally important. *Petrunya* does not inhabit a world without institutions. Its conflict depends on the interaction between ritual, police, media and public recognition. In *Housekeeping for Beginners*, the register and desk in Figure 4a make an institutional procedure visible within a narrative of improvised care. The household's persistence does not remove the need to negotiate that procedure. At the production level, transnational financing and circulation provide another continuing institutional condition. Precarious assemblage therefore names incomplete security within institutional relations, not an autonomous space beyond them.

Archival territoriality also survives its first historical examples. The present availability and classification of the Manaki films depend on later custodians and exhibition structures, including the

collection described by the European Film Gateway (n.d.). Preservation is not a neutral bridge between an early image and a contemporary viewer. It is part of the process through which the scale of belonging changes. This overlap supports Gilić's account of continuities across the Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav boundary without erasing changes in political organisation and production (2017, pp. 102–105, 116–117).

10.4. What the three concepts add to the literature

Hall provides the account of representation as meaning-making on which this study depends (1997, pp. 15–19). The contribution here is not to replace that account, but to specify three historically distinguishable operations through which collective meaning is made: retrospective attribution, institutional authorisation and practical maintenance. The film comparisons make these operations answerable to arrangements of bodies, sound, space and time. They narrow a general proposition about representation into questions that can be asked of particular cinematic evidence.

Higson's critique establishes why national cinema cannot be defined solely by production territory or presumed national character (1989, pp. 36–37). Archival territoriality extends that problem to images made before the state to which they are later attached. Institutional collectivity distinguishes the organisation that enables a film from the public that it represents. Precarious assemblage identifies relations that the national category does not securely encompass. The contribution concerns the formal and institutional dimensions of national attribution, with audience reception remaining a separate empirical question.

Hjort and Petrie's relational account of small cinemas explains the importance of unequal access and transnational dependence (2007, pp. 6–7, 14–15). This study adds a formal question: how does the representative burden carried by a small cinema become an arrangement of landscape, body, voice or household within a film? The comparison connects production and circulation conditions established in the literature to the formal organisation of selected works. Festival visibility is examined as a condition of representative position rather than a measure of audience agreement.

For post-Yugoslav cinema studies, the contribution is the extension of comparison backwards to the pre-state archive and sideways across institutions, ecology, digital circulation and care. Gilić's (2017) emphasis on continuity, Warner's (2020) account of national/transnational conditions, and Mitrić and Kolarić's (2021) analysis of fragmented circulation remain necessary. The three concepts connect those histories without converting 1991 into a universal aesthetic break. Their value lies in the cross-period tests they permit. Their applicability beyond this corpus remains a proposition for further research, not an established typology of all small or post-socialist cinemas.

11. Conclusion

11.1. Answers to the research questions

RQ1 asks how cinematic forms make a collective subject perceptible. Within this corpus, the answer is through the allocation of bodily proximity, spatial access, audible address and historical duration. A gathering does not become a collective merely because it fills a frame. The organisation of that frame, its relation to sound and its place within the film's temporal structure determine whether shared presence appears as participation, coercion, judgement or care.

RQ2 asks which film archives and institutions authorise collective representation in the selected films. Archives confer retrospective national attribution, production and language infrastructures enable cinematic public address, and represented institutions regulate participation and recognition. Photography, television reporting and smartphone circulation matter insofar as the films incorporate them into those relations. Archival territoriality, institutional collectivity and precarious assemblage distinguish attribution, organised authorisation and the practical maintenance of insecure relations. Their overlap is a finding of the comparison.

RQ3 asks how political and production orders change the time and scale of belonging. The selected works move between local occasion and archival afterlife, household and republican institution, federal memory and transnational circulation, and everyday practices whose continuity remains uncertain. The comparison does not establish a passage from collective ideology to individual freedom. It shows that different arrangements of collective life can coexist within the same period and even within the same film. Socialist vulnerability and post-Yugoslav institutional dependence are essential counterexamples to a linear three-stage history.

11.2. Limits and scope of the contribution

The corpus supports analytical comparison rather than statistical generalisation. Its twenty-five units comprise twenty-four individual films and one group of Manaki actualities. The ten nodal units and fifteen satellites receive different depths of attention, and the Manaki material is interpreted at group level. The selection privileges historical and formal contrasts relevant to collective representation. It therefore establishes relations within this corpus rather than the prevalence of tendencies across all Macedonian films or genres.

The study's empirical scope is film analysis contextualised by published research, archival descriptions and identified production testimony. It does not include original interviews, audience surveys, ethnographic reception research or a comprehensive account of exhibition and distribution. The reproduced stills support compositional comparison, while temporal and auditory arguments concern audiovisual form and the sources cited for it. Differences in source resolution constrain fine-grained comparison of tonal and colour values. These boundaries distinguish formal address from demonstrated audience response and visible form from production measurement. The four collages provide case-specific support rather than uniform visual documentation of all twenty-five analytical units.

The contribution is a historically extended framework for asking how a “we” becomes representable and what supports its continuity. Macedonian cinema is examined neither as a sealed post-1991 tradition nor as an undifferentiated part of Yugoslav film. Archival attribution, institutional authorisation and practical maintenance provide distinguishable points of comparison, while the films show where those operations meet, conflict or fail.

Declarations

Ethics statement. Ethical approval was not required because the study involved no human participants, personal data or non-public records.

Conflict of interest. The author declares no potential conflict of interest.

Funding. No external funding was received for this research.

Data availability. Tables 1–3 report the corpus, analytical roles, selection rationale and comparative concepts. The evidence comprises the films listed in the filmography, the stills attributed in Figures 1–4 and the published sources cited in the text. The study generates no participant data or quantitative dataset. Access to films and third-party images remains governed by the respective holders' distribution and rights conditions.

Use of generative artificial intelligence. ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with revision of the manuscript, organisation of the analytical presentation, drafting of the response to reviewers and preparation of labelled layouts from supplied images. No film image was generated, colourised or reconstructed using generative AI. Responsibility for the accuracy of the final text, interpretations, citations and image attributions remains with the author.

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