YUGOSLAV TRANSGENDERED HEROES: "VIRGINA" AND "MARBLE ASS"

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Two films from Yugoslavia in the early 90s feature transgendered heroes/heroines: Srdjan Karanović's *Virgina* (*Virdžina*, 1992), about a girl raised as a boy in the early 1900s, and Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass* (*Dupe od mramora*, 1994), about a transvestite prostitute in contemporary Beograd. Marjorie Garber argues that the presence of a transvestite in a text "indicates a category crisis elsewhere."[1] One need not look far for such a crisis in Yugoslavia at the time, and if, as Garber writes, transvestism is "the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself,"[2] how do Karanović and Žilnik use the transvestite figures in the films to destabilize other categories?

Set in the mythic past, Karanović's *Virgina* is about a sworn virgin – a village girl raised as a male because the family had no male children. *Virgina* shows a culturally conservative society in which the expectation that the sworn virgin will live as a man comes into conflict with her desire to live as she wants. In the West we usually think of transvestites and transgendered people as going against societal norms to perform their desired identities, but in the case of sworn virgins, it is the patriarchal society that forces the women to live as men. Though informed by ethnography, Karanović's film does not strive for complete cultural verisimilitude, and he writes about the many significant changes from conception to final completion in his book *Dnevnik jednog filma: Virdžina 1981-1991*.[3] I would like to discuss the cultural context, the actual sworn virgin on which the film was based, and the two

1 Garber, M. (1993) *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. NY: Harper Collins, 17.

2 Garber, M. (1993) 17.

3 Karanović, S. (1998) *Dnevnik jednog filma: Virdžina 1981-1991*. Beograd: Institut Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti.

screenplays for the film, the first unrealized one written in 1984 and the final version filmed in 1990-91.

Sworn virgins (virdžina, tobelije, muškobanja) lived and live in the mountainous regions of Northern Albania and neighboring Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro. They swear an oath of celibacy and adopt male dress and roles in society. Some are made sworn virgins by their parents in childhood, usually because there is no male child to inherit and rule the patriarchal household. Others choose to become sworn virgins themselves to avoid marriage to an undesirable husband (otherwise rejection of a betrothed would lead to blood feud with the offended groom's family). In *Women Who Become Men, Albanian Sworn Virgins*, Antonia Young analyzes a number of cases of actual sworn virgins living and dead.[4] (Other scholars who have written on them include Barjaktarović, Vukanović, Dickemann, Grémaux, and Whitaker.[5]) Interestingly, the phenomenon appears to be independent of religion and ethnicity: they are Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox[6] as well as Albanian and Serb.[7] The details are much the same: the sworn virgins cut their hair, take a male name, don men's clothing. They are respected as men and well known in their local villages, where they participate in councils, carry guns, and take part in blood feuds like the other men. They smoke, spit, do heavy labor, and are not confined to the household, as the women sometimes are. Women in the pastoral patriarchal society are subordinated to the sworn virgins as they are to other men.

The culture in which the sworn virgins live is marked by profound differences in gender roles and status. Women are referred to as "a sack for carrying things"[8] or "a sack made to endure."[9] They are segregated at home, perform household chores, carry water and firewood, and bear children. Rural Albanian society has been governed by the *Kanun*, the Laws of Lek Dukagjini, for centuries. This customary law has the bride's parents give the groom a cartridge to use if his wife

4 Young, A. (2000) *Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins*. Oxford: Berg.

5 Barjaktarović, M. (1965) Problem tobelija (virdžina) na Balkanskom poluostrvu. *Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja*, Knjiga 28-29 (1965-66): 273-286; Vukanović, T. P. (1961) Virdžine. *Glasnik Muzeja Kosova i Metohije* 1961, 79-112; Dickemann, M. (1997) The Balkan Sworn Virgin: a Cross-Gendered Female Role, in Stephen O. Murray, and Will Roscoe, /eds./ *Islamic Homosexualities*. NY: NYU Press, 197-203; Grémaux, R. (1989) Mannish Women of the Balkan Mountains, in Jan Brenner, /ed./ *From Sappho to De Sade*. NY: Routledge, 143-172; Whitaker, I. (1981) "A Sack for Carrying Things": The Traditional Role of Women in Northern Albanian Society. Anthropological Quarterly (54): 146-56.

6 Young, 92; Vukanović, 110.

7 Vukanović cites Turkish and Gypsy examples as well, 84.

8 Whitaker. Victor Friedman points out that this phrase occurs in article 29 (Chapter 3) of the *Kanun* and the exact wording (Stefan Gjećov's arrangement) is "Grueja âsht shakull per me bajtHE." (Personal communication)

9 Young, 20.

is found guilty of adultery or breaking the laws of hospitality.[10] Since the rural society of the whole region is patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal, sons are much more highly valued than daughters. When asked about children, one Montenegrin informant responded "Two boys, and excuse me, three girls."[11] In such a culture it is only logical that women could be raised as men, while, as Young and others point out, there are of course no men who live as women, which would be a shameful loss of status.[12] The sworn virgins thus fit Garber's model of the "progress narrative,"[13] and indeed many researchers highlight the economic motivations of the virgins and their families.[14]

As Young demonstrates, the sworn virgins provide a perfect example of "gender as a culturally constructed concept."[15] They support Judith Butler's argument that gender is "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[16] "Woman" or "man" as a stable subject is completely absent, replaced by the rigid system of gender roles and the "stylized repetition of acts" that produces the effect of gender.[17] Young's account shows no evidence of subjectivity or an agency that might be at odds with the sworn virgins' performed role as men. While they may not marry because of their oath of celibacy, some flirt with women and challenge anyone who impugns their masculinity with violence.[18] Garber argues that we should look at transvestism as "a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture."[19] On the one hand, sworn virgins are not invisible as transvestites – some keep female names, some use feminine gender, almost none deny being sworn virgins – yet they still do not "confound culture." In fact, they function instead to reinforce the patriarchal structure. It's as if one of the regulatory rules of hegemonic culture – that a man must be born with a body of the male sex – were trumped by another – that a household must have a man as its head. Young writes that "the phenomenon of 'sworn virgins' sparks little interest within Albania itself."[20] In other words, the sworn virgins are invisible in the culture as a whole – hardly what we would expect if they were the disruptive rebels Butler writes of, whose parody of gender deprives "hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim

10 Young, 20.
11 Young, 30; "Dvoje muško i, da prostiš, troje žensko," Vukanović, 102.
12 Young, 91; Vukanović 98, 106-7.
13 Garber, 67-71; interestingly Garber seems to be ignorant of the whole issue of Balkan sworn virgins.
14 Barjaktarović, 285.
15 Young, 120.
16 Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feministm and the Subversion of Identity*. NY: Routledge, 33.
17 Butler, 140.
18 Young, 77.
19 Garber, 17.
20Young, 6.

to naturalized or essentialist gender identities."[21]

Karanović was inspired to make the film *Virgina* by reading a newspaper story about an Albanian woman who lived for 25 years as a man, fought with the Partisans near Trieste, and was wounded and discharged, when it was discovered that she was a woman.[22] The sources list her as Fatima Aslani from a village near Orahovac and Prizren in Kosovo, who had been raised as a boy named Diljoš or Daljuš.[23] She later married and had two children, taking back the female name "Fatima," for which her mother never forgave her.[24] This real life story is exceptional for several reasons: the sworn virgin really passed as a man, she served in the army outside her region, and she gave up her vow of celibacy in order to marry. Vukanović points out that "Retko se dešava da virdžine sakrivaju svoju žensku pripadnost" [Sworn virgins rarely hide that they are women].[25] Fatima also renounced her oath to reclaim her name and gender, to marry and have children. (If her oath had been taken to avoid marriage, the *Kanun* would require her fiancé's family to take revenge by stoning her[26] or killing her kinsmen).

Based on Fatima's story, Karanović set the first screenplay for *Virgina* among the partisans in WWII near Trieste. Subtitled "a love story about freedom" Karanović's screenplay was meant to be universal and metaphorical: "Through her fight for liberation of the country the main heroine fights for her own personal liberation, her identity and right to be what she is – a woman!"[27] Born the fourth daughter into a poor Serb family with no sons, the heroine is named Stevan and raised as a boy. In the mid 1980s, Karanović wanted his film to be a multi-ethnic, multi-religion, multi-republic project— even an international one. The screenplay features a Serb hero/heroine in a romantic triangle with a Croatian or Bosnian nurse and a Slovene soldier. Karanović's co-writer, the American Andrew Horton, wanted to add still another layer, by having a Muslim heroine meet an American journalist who is Jewish. (To place this multiculturalism in context, Karanović's previous film – *Za sada bez dobrog naslova*, 1987 – was a recasting of *Romeo and Juliet* with Albanian and Serb lovers in Kosovo.)

The dramatic tension in *Virgina* comes from Stevan's passing as a man in the wartime army setting – he is in constant danger of being discovered or uncovered as a biological woman. When a German sees Stevan's prosthetic wooden penis, Stevan cuts off the

21 Butler, 138.

22 Karanović, S. (1998) *Dnevnik jednog filma: Virdžina 1981-1991*. Beograd: Institut Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti, 7.

23 The sources disagree here: Vukanović, 92; Barjaktarović, 274; Young, 62-63.

24 Barjaktarović, 276.

25 Vukanović, 84.

26 Grémaux, 146.

27 Karanović, 28.

German soldier's head.[28] Stevan becomes attached to Mitar, a teacher and communist from Beograd. Their friendship is interpreted by another soldier as homosexual, which requires Stevan to prove his masculinity by fighting and by attempting to assault a woman. Fortunately for Stevan, everyone who threatens his role – his fiancée from home, a nurse who falls in love with him, the homophobic soldier – all are killed before they can out him as a woman. As the army liberates Trieste, Stevan finally reveals himself as a woman to Mitar (appropriately, the scene of undressing takes place in the costume room of a theater) and we learn from the credits that they later marry and have children.

This early version of the screenplay does not shy from engaging – alongside gender – identities that have been more contentious in Yugoslavia. When learning to perform his identity verbally, Stevan repeats "Ja sam Stevan Djordjević, Srbin od oca Dragutina. Muško sam."[I am Stevan Djordjević, Serb, father's name Dragutin. Male.][29] Stevan and Mitar both parrot the Communist rhetoric about the equality of women and other categories: Stevan protects the nurse from another soldier, saying "Ona nije 'žena', nego je drugarica."[She is not a ''woman'' but a comrade.][30] Stevan has learned to spit, smoke, and shoot like a man; Mitar, on the other hand, sews a button on Stevan's shirt and tells him he too should learn to sew and cook.[31] Mitar claims that "U slobodi nije sramota biti seljak, radnik, musliman, hrišćanin, Jevrejin, Ciganin, Sloven ili žena." [In a free country it is not shameful to be a peasant, worker, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Slav or woman.][32] (Notice that woman is the last category in this listing!) There is a scene in which the partisans show that even religion is a performed identity: only those who can cross themselves like Catholics are chosen to infiltrate a church service.[33]

None of these categories, though, survives explicitly into the final version of the film, which is set not in 1944, but at the beginning of the century. The category crises elsewhere – the nationalist tensions that came with the breakup of Yugoslavia – are completely outside the frame of the film as shot in 1990 and 1991. The 1990 version centers on Stevan as an adolescent and is set completely within his community. At the end s/he escapes with relatives to America. National and religious differences do not appear in the film as shot: while it is clear the characters are Serb and Orthodox, these categories are never juxtaposed to others or even named. Now, when Stevan performs his identity, he says "Ime mi je Stevan Djordjević… od ćaće sam Timotija." [My name is Stevan Djordjević… born to father Timotije][34] "Serb"

28 Karanović, 169.
29 Karanović, 156.
30 Karanović, 191.
31 Karanović, 194.
32 Karanović, 186.
33 "Ko ume katolički da se krsti." Karanović, 202.
34 Karanović, 258.

has been deleted. In part Karanović's avoidance of overt politics may be explained by motivations like those Gordana Crnković ascribes to Croatian and Serbian women writers who also avoid politics: "their novels had to exclude, out of necessity, the most powerful discourse in Yugoslavia, the overwhelming political discourse, because this discourse would smother, in the noise of its many voices, the newly-born women's individualities."[35]

Karanović explains his motivation for the changes in his book, *Dnevnik jednog filma*. The war scenes would have been expensive to shoot. Stevan's native village was moved from the Sjenica valley in the Sandžak, Southern Serbia, to near Knin in Krajina, the Serb enclave in Croatia because Karanović had won a prize for the screenplay in Zagreb and could use the money only if the film was shot in Croatia. A stay in the United States convinced him that the only foreign films that have commercial success in the States are comedies and films about children. The new setting allowed for a more universal, almost mythic story. But because the setting was moved to Krajina, where national tensions were already heating up in 1990, any mention of the war and military hostilities could be misinterpreted. Nationality and religion are obvious in the film, but not explicitly named. The re-localized story resulted in a few inconsistencies: for one thing, the tradition of the sworn virgin does not exist among the Krajina Serbs, as Karanović was well aware. But more crucial to the drama itself, passing as a man, while logical if Stevan is surrounded by the culturally different army, makes no sense if he is in his own village. Karanović's limited knowledge of sworn virgins (though he did consult ethnographers) perhaps blinded him to this crucial detail; nevertheless, he should have realized it when, early on, Kosovo Film declined to shoot the film because its theme was "too ordinary" -further proof, by the way, that the sworn virgin transvestites are hardly culturally disruptive.[36]

Even with explicit national and ethnic details in the film deleted, the setting of the shoot proved problematic. Karanović has called *Virgina* "the last Yugoslav film." Scripted and directed by a Serb, the film was shot in Krajina with a predominantly Croatian cast and crew as a Serb-Croatian-French co-production. During filming the crew encountered barricades as Krajina declared its independence from an increasingly nationalist Croatian government in Zagreb. Some Croats on the shoot were afraid to work when they encountered armed local Serb militia. It was just as well the film didn't stir up old war wounds: according to Karanović, a few dozen people from the Serb village it was filmed in had been killed by Ustaše from the neighboring Croat village in the war.[37] Though not without a hitch, the shooting was completed in 1991. But by that time the breakup

35 Crnković, G. (1999) Women Writers in Croatian and Serbian Literature, in Sabrina Ramet, /ed./ *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. University Park, PA: Penn. State Univ. Press, 240.

36 Karanović, 11 FN 4.

37 Karanović, 80.

of Yugoslavia was in full swing, and in 1998 it had never been shown in Slovenia or Croatia, in spite of the film's "universality."

Both screenplays and the final film show a fascination with the body, sexual attraction, and bodily functions absent from most accounts of real sworn virgins. The Lacanian "urinary segregation" Garber describes[38] plays a crucial role in increasing dramatic tension in the film: there is a scene in which Mijat suggests to Stevan that they piss together and measure to see whose is bigger. When Stevan declines, his sisters taunt him "Pišaj ako si muško!" [Piss if you are a man!] – and we later see him run outside the home compound to piss in a squatting position. None of the case studies mentions urination, which topic would probably be beyond the pale for the modesty required of traditional culture. Still, we do know that if only the family were aware of Stevan's "true" sex, they would be unlikely to flirt with outing him. In effect Karanović ascribes a kind of modern rebelliousness to Stevan's sisters. In the patriarchal rural culture it would be in their best interest to protect the family secret. Later, Mijat and Stevan spy on a couple having sex; Mijat talks about erections, and Stevan claims to have one too. Stevan's prototype, Fatima/Daljuš, did manage to avoid another ritual – circumcision – that is left out of Karanović's treatment, since his hero is Orthodox.[39] Menstruation, on the other hand, is shown in the film – ironically it comes just as Stevan is playing rooster in a Christmas ritual (earlier his mother says, "Bolje biti jedan dan pjevac, nego cjeli život kokoš." [Better to be a rooster for one day than a hen all your life.][40]). Both of Karanović's screenplays also refer to prosthetic wooden penises, though these were apparently dropped in the final version.

The film shows various rituals in the highly stylized performance of Stevan's gender as his family cuts his hair, dresses him in formal clothes and hands him a gun. These ritualized performances are both typical of traditional rural societies and ideal for showing the repetitive acts meant to coalesce into a naturalized idea of gender. Butler's "regulatory frame" – "the forces that police the social appearance of gender"[41] are in plain view in the film as well. Not only is Stevan threatened with death if anyone discovers his sex, but he is beaten by his father for even minor transgressions in his performance.

Guns as a characteristic male attribute play a central role in both the plot and the symbolism of the film. Carrying guns and participation in war and blood feuds are strictly men's activities and are regularly mentioned in accounts of real sworn virgins.[42] The con-

38 Garber, 13-15.

39 Barjaktarović, 275.

40 Karanović, 260.

41 Butler, 33.

42 Whitaker even claims that for some Albanians shooting and participation in blood feud were the only male activities, all other work, even hard labor in the fields, being performed by women 150.

nection between guns and masculinity became even more clear in the war years, though it was already encoded in the language and culture, as the film shows. Ivan Čolović demonstrates the connection in his essay, "Bordel ratnika" (Soldier's Bordello): "Muškarac je čovek s puškom." [A male is a man with a gun.][43] Ugrešić points out that the connection between sex and guns goes the other way too: Yugo-men refer to having sex with a girl by saying, "Zabio sam joj metak." [I rammed a bullet into her.][44] The film begins when yet another girl (Stevan) is born into a family whose bad luck is ascribed to the lack of a male child. Her father Timotije, who carries a gun through most of the film, takes her out to a field to shoot her, but then relents and declares he will raise her as a boy. At Stevan's christening Paun (whom we later learn is a sworn virgin himself – played in the film by a man) asks "Da mu vidim oružje" [Let me see his gun] – meaning his penis -but is stopped by Stevan's father just in time. At the end it is Timotije who is shot by Paun, which frees Stevan to escape his oath.

Karanović's "Love Story about Freedom" is about Stevan's freedom to live life as he – or rather she – chooses, as a woman. We see her expressing her inner, essential desires as she avoids her fiancée, is attracted to Mijat, and most of all as she longs to play with her sister's doll. The doll serves as a kind of antonym to the gun: while the family places the gun in Stevan's hands again and again, she herself steals the doll from her sister and even hides it and lies to deny her theft. At the end of the film Stevan breaks her oath in order to flee with Mijat to America, presumably leaving the patriarchal oppression of life as a sworn virgin behind.

Interestingly, Alice Munro's story, "The Albanian Virgin," concludes much the same way. In it, a British woman is captured by Albanians and becomes a sworn virgin to avoid marriage to a Muslim. She is eventually smuggled out of the country with the help of a Franciscan priest, who abandons his own vows to marry her and move to Canada.[45] Another Western work, the children's book *Pran of Albania*, by Elizabeth Cleveland Miller, similarly hinges on the sworn virgin's abandonment of her vow in order to marry the man she loves.[46] Both of these combine an Orientalizing fascination with the sworn virgin tradition with a projection of Western subjectivity onto the heroine, and both contain unlikely inaccuracies in terms of the tradition itself. An Albanian literary treatment similarly focuses on a sworn virgin's dissatisfaction with her role because of romance. The play *Nita* is a tragedy written by Josip Relja (1895-1966), a native of

43 Muškarac je čovek s puškom. Čolović, 75.

44 "Zabio sam joj metak." Ugrešić, 117.

45 Munro, A. (1994) The Albanian Virgin, in *Open Secrets: Stories by Alice Munro*. NY: Knopf, 81-128.

46 E. C. Miller, Pran of Albania (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Doran & Co., 1929), quoted in Young, Women who Become Men, 64.

Zadar of Albanian descent.[47] Nita is in love with Zef, but while he is away a marriage to another is planned by her family. Her only recourse is to become a sworn virgin. When Zef returns, she sees no solution except suicide. Though the writer is Albanian, his perspective from Zadar in Croatia makes him an outsider like Karanović. All of these literary treatments focus on the conflict between the virgina's subjective desire to live as a woman and her enforced role as a sworn virgin.[48] They all project Western or urban romantic ideology onto the traditional rural culture.

Western critics have pointed out that the conclusion of *Virgina*, in which Stevan reclaims her female identity as wife and mother, is hardly feminist.[49] The film is thus less about the transvestite figure causing gender trouble than about reaffirming essential gender difference. In a crucial scene she says she wants to leave in order "to live my life as I want" – and Paun, also a sworn virgin, understands and supports her. Mijat, whom Paun is raising, praises his uncle's understanding by saying, "Čovek je on''. [He is a man.][50] As he dies, Stevan's father realizes that he has been wrong to insist on her remaining a man, giving her the best compliment he can with his dying breath: "Imam ja i sada sina. Najboljeg." [I do have a son now. The best one there is.][51] A woman who claims her identity as essentially female is thus worthy of the highest compliment, being called a son. And Stevan's last line confirms her chosen identity as wife and mother, as she agrees to go to America as Mijat's wife, taking her infant sister with them as their daughter. She says "Oću da budem tvoja žena, al' da znaš, ćer već imamo."[52]

In spite of what we might expect from Butler, Garber, and Young, hegemonic gender constructions are challenged neither by the sworn virgin tradition, in which women are raised as men to preserve the patriarchal family, nor in Karanović's film about them, in which the transvestite reclaims her essential female identity at the conclusion. *Virgina*, though orig-

47 Young, 63-64; See Robert Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature* (Boulder: East European Monographs, no. 379), 650-51.

48 At the time of this writing a Canadian film about sworn virgins, *Women without Wings* (dir. Nicholas Kinsey) was in production. See http://www.cinegraf.com/Projects/Women_Without_Wings/women_without_wings.html.

49 Iordanova, D. (1996) Women in New Balkan Cinema: Surviving on the Margins. *Film Criticism* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Winter 1996-97): 24-39; Daković, N. (1996) Mother, Myth, and Cinema: Recent Yugoslav Cinema. *Film Criticism* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Winter 1996-97): 40-49.

50 Karanović, 316.

51 Karanović, 320.

52 Young misreads the conclusion, or had it described to her incorrectly: she claims Stevan's sister is a boy and that she gives the child away to Paun, thus confirming Stevan's own status as household head; Young, 63. In the film Stevan says, "I will be your wife, but you know, we already have a daughter" ("Oću da budem tvoja žena, al da znaš, ćer već imamo"); Karanović, 322.

inally a multicultural project, thus ends up reaffirming traditional gender roles. The only gender trouble Stevan's performance causes is to herself.

Another film from Yugoslavia – Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass* – proves much more radical in its critique of culture. Žilnik's heroine, Marilyn, is a male to female transvestite prostitute. In the traditional world of *Virgina* female to male transvestism was motivated by the pressures of gender inequality in rural Balkan society. Male to female transvestism, on the other hand, was viewed in the Balkans as deviant and regulated with hatred and ridicule. Vukanović found only a few references to the rare phenomenon, and the name "mučuče," which he could not find in any South Slavic dictionary.[53] "People despise them," he writes, and they and their relatives are taunted.[54] Because female work and female dress were considered shameful for a man, dressing men in female garb and parading them through the town was even used as a form of punishment, especially for those who refused to go to war.[55] Žilnik inverts this practice by making the heroine of his anti-war film a transvestite.

Marjorie Garber points out that transvestism is often read as homosexuality: on the one hand hegemonic culture wants to be able to *see* the difference between gay and straight "to guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in question."[56] On the other hand mainstream culture always assumes that biological sex, gender, and sexual orientation always line up in the same polarity: if one is born male one performs the male gender and desires women. Transvestism destabilizes all these binaries.[57] Yet the discomfort in Žilnik's anti-war film remains focused not on the instability of gender or sexuality, but on violence and its effects. Contrary to what we expect, the heroine Marilyn's transvestism is not problematized at all. Neither is her sexuality. Given that transvestism is often conflated with homosexuality (and Marilyn is a biological male who sleeps with men), it is useful to consider the role homosexuality plays in the Serbian cultural imagination.

The wartime ideology of Serbia in the 1990s resulted in what Yugoslav feminists call the "new patriarchy."[58] Patriarchal village values were extolled in the media over elitist cosmopolitan values. In gendered terms this resulted in an inversion of the usual Western correlation between nature-woman and culture-man.

53 Vukanović, 98.

54 Vukanović, 98.

55 Vukanović, 106-7. The practice recalls classical Greek themes from Achilles' youth on Skyros disguised as a girl to avoid the Trojan war to Pentheus' punishment in Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which he is paraded through the streets dressed as a woman.

56 Garber, 130.

57 Garber, 133.

58 Marina Blagojević, ed. *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji: Diskursi i prakse* (Beograd: Asocijacija za žensku inicijativu, 2000), Summary.

In Serbia, Marina Blagojević writes, the structure is different: macho men are natural, while women are associated with culture.[59] Serbs are associated with the male principle, with masculinity connected to warring, the rural, archaic, anti-modern, and the Balkans as opposed to feminine Europe, the urban, and civilization. She quotes Aleksandar Tijanić's claim that Serbia is an oasis of phallusoid culture in Europe, which is threatened with loss of erections and loss of territory (castration).[60] The myth of Serbian sexual prowess and legendary Serbian endowment supports Serb masculinity.

Masculinity is proved in battle.[61] Either one is a real man who participates in the war or one is a "mamina maza" [Mummy's pet], a homosexual, a deserter.[62] Macho soldiers call their opponents "gospodjica" [miss] and tell anti-war demonstrators "Pripremite svoje zadnjice, dupeta, i guzice" [Get your posteriors, bums and asses ready].[63] Those who are against the war "nisu pravi muškarci," [are not real men] because a man is a "čovek s puškom."[64] Nationality is thus constructed as both male and heterosexual. Opponents of the war are labeled "homosexuals" or rejected "as not being 'real' Serbs."[65] Blagojević points out that Tijanić never names women as "Srpkinje" – only the macho male is "Srbin." Similarly, when thugs attacked the gay pride parade in Beograd in 2001 they chanted, "Srbija Srbima, napolje sa pederima!" [Serbia to Serbs, out with fags!] – fags (like women) clearly cannot be Serbs.

Interestingly, the Balkan construction of sexuality may be in part constructed through Western discourses about Balkanism. Edward Said points out that "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe."[66] Rudi Bleys analyzes how homosexuality was projected onto non-Western cultures; European discourse postulated an analogy "between the vertical classification within the West (mainstream versus minority) and the horizontal one across the world (cultural, especially racial otherness).[67] Similar projections extend to

59 Marina Blagojević, "Patriotizam i mizoginija: mit o srpskoj muškosti," *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji*, 305. See also Čolović, 85-94.

60 Marina Blagojević, "Patriotizam i mizoginija," 284.

61 Jasmina Lukić, "Media Representations of Men and Women in Times of War and Crisis: The Case of Serbia," in Susan Gal and Gail Kingman, eds., *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2000), 407.

62 Čolović, 118.

63 Čolović, 74.

64 Čolović, 166, 75.

65 Dubravka Žarkov, "Gender, Orientalism and the History of Ethnic Hatred in the Former Yugoslavia," in Helena Lutz, ed., *Crossfires: Nationalism, Racism, and Gender in Europe* (East Haven, CT: Pluto Press, 1995), 112.

66 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage, 1978), 190.

67 Rudi Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behavior outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918* (NY: NYU Pr., 1995), 267.

Eastern Europe, as imagined by the West.[68] In Russia even Casanova improvised on his own sexuality by indulging in homosexuality.[69] Yet the Balkans were the Orient with a difference. Maria Todorova writes of Balkanism as a variation of Orientalism, where the difference is mapped along gender lines. Whereas the Orient was perceived as a realm of wealth and femininity, with sexually available women and men, the Balkans were a male world of brutality and primitive barbarism.[70] Hence Rebecca West's repeated claims that there is very little homosexuality in Yugoslavia.[71] Her claims have more to do with the desire to differentiate Yugoslav sexuality from that of her British urbane Bloomsbury acquaintance.

That sexuality is deeply implicated in perceptions of nationality can be gauged by the different positions of homosexuality in the former Yugoslavia. Slovenia, always the most European and least Balkan republic, had the first gay and lesbian festival in Eastern Europe in 1984.[72] Slovene tolerance of homosexuality was used by Serb nationalists to fan anti-Slovene sentiment even then. The tactic continued in efforts to blacken Janez Drnovšek, who was branded as queer. In 1995 Ljubljana hosted an International Conference on Homosexuality; a report on the conference in the Serb press was entitled "Politička elita pozdravila pedere." [The political elite greeted queers.] The article was ludicrous in its exaggeration of gay power in Slovenia.[73] Among the preposterous claims: the Roza klub supposedly has 32 thousand members, and the leader, Brane Mozetič, supposedly visits the prime minister regularly. The alleged 500 international guests of the conference (actually there were 5-6 of us) were supposedly given police protection and a stipend from the state. As one of the participants in the small conference, I can assure you none of this was true.

Slovenia's first gay pride parade went off without a hitch in 2001. When Beograd held its first gay pride parade the same year, on the other hand, the gay-bashers far outnumbered the gay marchers. The reaction on both sides was cast in terms of Europeanness: pro-gay spokesmen lamented that the counter-protests show how far Serbia is

68 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford U Pr., 1994).

69 Wolff, 55.

70 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1997), 13-14.

71 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (NY: Penguin, 1940/1994), 158, 163, 470. Curiously she makes the claim in a context that would suggest male-male bonds are very close: it is in fact the lack of suspicion of homosexuality or the lack of homophobia that allows these intimate bonds to be expressed. "These young men strolled about talking with a peculiar intensity that was untinged by homosexuality but spoke of male friendships more acute and adventurous than anything we know in the West." (470)

72 Roman Kuhar, *Mi, drugi – oblikovanje in razkritje homoseksualne identitete* (Ljubljana: Lambda, 2001); http://www.kud-fp.si/siqrd/history.php (12/6/02).

73 D. Petrović, "Politička elita pozdravila pedere," reprinted in Revolver Sept/Nov 95, p. 5.

from democracy and from readiness to join Europe: "Srbija nikada neće ući u Evropu sa takvim ponašanjem prema slobodi ličnosti... Kako može čitava Evropa da normalno prihvata gay, bisex, lezbo i sl. a Srbija i dalje ide korak natrag?" [Serbia will never enter Europe if it continues to treat the freedom of the individual in this way... How can the whole of Europe accept gay, bisex, lesbo and the like quite normally while Serbia remains a step backward?][74] "Da li je ovo samo još jedna potvrda da živimo na zaostalom Balkanu?" [Is this merely yet another proof that we live in the backward Balkans?] Anti-gay protesters, on the other hand, take pride in the idea that Serbia is an oasis of patriarchal values: "Ako je to deo onoga da bi kao morali zbog toga da budemo deo Evrope, onda bolje da nikada to i ne postanemo." "Ako je Evropa a pogotovo Amerika krenula djavoljim putem u popularizaciji homoseksualaca i njihovih prava da li i mi trebamo ići njihovim putem?" [If this is part of what we'd have to be in order to be a part of Europe, then it's better that we never become that. If Europe, and America in particular, has opted for the Devil's path in popularizing the gays and their rights, do we have to follow their example?] Both sides frame the conflict in terms of Europe/Serbia or the West/the Balkans.

Nationalism in Serbia produced a reaffirmation of traditional gender roles: men are macho warriors, women are to stay home and continue the nation through childbirth, and homosexuals are traitors to the nation. Homosexuality was perceived as a foreign import in much of Eastern and Central Europe.[75] While homosexual behavior naturally existed, the construction of sexuality as an obligatory dichotomy between gay and straight identity was in fact new, and Western-style gay identity was promoted by Western activists and their local counterparts. This situation provided a rich context for nationalists to use discomfort with nonstandard sexuality to amplify hostility to national and ethnic others. Homophobia was often exploited by Serb nationalists, who hoped to discredit their enemies by claiming they were gay. *Serbian Diaries*, by Boris Davidovich, provides ample documentation of the charge of homosexuality against the nationalists' opponents.[76] According to Davidovich, "Duke" Šešelj was called "duchess" by Đinđić, and Šešelj countered that Đinđić had once worn an earring himself.[77] Even comrade Tito was

74 Queeria, http://www.queeria.org.yu/queeria/komentari.htm (12/6/02) (Further quotations from the same site, which records reactions from B92)

75 Moss, K. (1995) The Underground Closet: Political and Sexual Dissidence, in Eastern Europe in Ellen E. Berry, /ed./ *Genders 22: Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, 229– 251.

76 Davidovich, B. (1996) *Serbian Diaries*. London: Gay Men's Press. Many of the same examples are quoted in an article by Boris Liler (probably a pseudonym of Davidovich) of Arkadija, the Serbian gay and lesbian organization: Liler, B. (1992) Homosexual Rights in Yugoslavia: The Political, Mass-Media, and Physical Oppression of Homosexuals in Yugoslavia (for IGLHRC); http://qrd.diversity.org.uk/qrd/world/europe/serbia/serbian.homo.conspiracy.theory (5.5.01).

77 Davidovich, B. (1996), 120.

called a faggot on the pages of *Borba*.[78] Of course homosexuality is not native to pure Serbia, it is not even European, but an import associated with an even more threatening other: The leader of the Serb National Renewal Party warned against "the occupation of Europe by alien Indo-Arab-Black hordes who will only bring us the narcotics trade and homosexuality."[79]

Tatjana Pavlović explains the same phenomenon in the context of Croatia, where it is the Serbs who are the target of Balkan homophobia.[80] The homosexual is by definition not one of us, anyone who is not Croatian. Anxiety about the Nation and the family make gender roles even more rigid than before. "The domestication of women goes hand in hand with the creation of a new male category: hypermasculinity."[81] "Since woman is only a cunt, *homo balcanicus* is not threatened by her. However, *homo balcanicus* is obsessed by its own, more threatening Other: the homosexual."[82] A straight homophobe crystallized the typical Serbian view in a reaction to the Gay-Serbia site: "Ovde to ne može ovo je normalna patrijahalna zemlja, junačkog naroda koji je uvek cenio junaštvo, moral i muževnost iznad svega." [It is not possible here, this is a normal patriarchal country of a heroic people that has always valued bravery, morality and manliness above all.][83] Similar language was used against gays at the site who criticized a homophobic priest: "Naš SRPSKI narod je od uvek bio ratnički, a za pedere se bas i nije čulo da su junaci osim kod jebanja. Da smo svi "pičke" ko vi, danas nas ne bi ni bilo. Vi pederčine sigurno niste branili Srbiju, ni sada niti bilo kada. Samo mi pravi i zdravi ljudi to mozemo." [Our SERBIAN people has always been a nation of warriors, and the only thing fags are good for is fucking. If all of us were ''cunts'' like you, we'd have perished long ago. You faggots have never defended Serbia, that's for sure. Only us normal and healthy people are capable of that.][84] Note how the dichotomy between macho-military and queer is deployed here. At the same time faggots are equated with "cunts," i. e. women. Pavlović quotes Dubravka Ugrešić's comment that women are portrayed as lower beings, women are trapped

78 *Borba*, Dec 1, 1991, quoted in Davidovich, 83.

79 Borislav Jović in *Politika*, Oct. 7, 1991, quoted in Davidovich, 126.

80 Pavlović, T. (1999) Women in Croatia: Feminists, Nationalists, and Homosexuals, in Sabrina Ramet, /ed./ *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. University Park, PA: Penn. State Univ. Press, 134.

81 Pavlović, 133.

82 Pavlović, 134.

83 "Normalan." (2000) *Da li ste normalni?* Gay Serbia. http://www.gay-serbia.com/srb/personals/065.shtml (05.05.01).

84 "Bane" (2000) *Re: Mitropolit Amfilohije osudio homoseksualnost*. Gay Serbia Forum: homofobija i društvo Oct. 1 2000. http://www.gay-serbia.com/cgi/UltraBoard/UltraBoard.pl (05.05.01).

by male jargon and reduced to their sexual organs.[85]

According to Pavlović, opposition to the war was linked with homosexuality, as the Osijek newspaper *Slavonski magazin* put it, "Serbs, Reds, Leftists, Feminists, and Faggots Lead a War Against the War."[86] Likewise in Serbia, Radoš Smiljković declared, "Our opposition is under the direct influence of international organizations comprised of masons and homosexuals."[87] Homosexuals supported the peace demonstrations, and they were associated with the enemy. Dragoš Kalajić (SNO) labeled the staff of the radio station B-92 (the same station that produced *Marble Ass*) "a group of American mercenaries and national defeatists who propagandize homosexuality."[88] In fact, gay activists did oppose the regime, at least in Beograd. The rainbow flag was flown in student marches,[89] and in 2000, the editor of the gay website Gay-Serbia called for nonviolent civil disobedience to protest Milošević's non-recognition of the elections.[90]

When the NATO bombings began, gay Serbs became targets of increased homophobia. Now it was the Western enemy who was branded as homosexual, and, by association, local gays were Western agents. According to a gay activist, a TV news anchor in Beograd talked about the gay government of Tony Blair and called both his wife and Hilary Clinton lesbians.[91] Even Clinton was a "possible homosexual," which was paradoxically only confirmed by his affairs with young women.[92] When one of the founders of the gay organization Arkadija was killed, the investigators dwelled on the "seditious activities" of Arkadija, which was accused of conducting a "special war against our country."[93] Graffiti sprayed on the American Center in Beograd read "Clinton Faggot" and

85 Pavlović, 134; Davidovich comments that the connection between penetration and feminization explains why homosexual rape played a major role in torture and humiliation in the wars: "a man who is fucked by another becomes a sort of woman;" Davidovich, 100.

86 Pavlović, 152.

87 Liler, B. (1992).

88 *Borba*, Nov. 1, 1991, quoted in Davidovich, 126.

89 *Balkan Peace Team Report Jan. 23* (1997). Social Media, Protests in Serbia Archive; http://www.ddh.nl/fy/serbia/bpt-2301.html (17.02.01). Intriguingly, Davidovich claims that it is precisely his sexuality that made him an anti-nationalist and a cosmopolitan; Davidovich, 91.

90 Maljković, D. (2000) *Apel!* Gay Serbia. http://www.gay-serbia.com/srb/news/00-09-30-izbori.shtml (05.05.01).

91 Friess, S. (1999) Gay Serbians Find Acceptance is a Casualty of War, *The Advocate*, May 11, 1999.

92 Tea Nikolić, "Serbian Sexual Response," forthcoming in *Sexualities in Transition*.

93 Booth, K. (2000) Enemies of the State: Gays and Lesbians in Serbia, *Lavender Magazine*, Vol. 5, issue 123, http://www.lavendermagazine.com/123/123_news_11.html (06.05.01). The murder of Dejan Nebrigić, though it provoked a homophobic response, appears to have been unrelated to his homosexuality.

"Madeline Albright, we don't practice sodomy."[94]

This nationalistic homophobia is the context for Žilnik's film. While *Virgina* was a major studio production shot on the eve of the breakup of Yugoslavia, *Marble Ass* is a small-budget independent film made while the war in Bosnia was still raging. The moral of the film is "make love, not war." Marilyn makes love often, usually for money. She is described in the press release as a kind of lightning rod to relieve tensions. Johnny, her ex-boyfriend, has come back from the war to Beograd, where the macho hero plans to use his wartime skills to make a living by cheating at pool and extorting money. Marilyn's stability and deflection of violence are again and again juxtaposed to Johnny's instability and violence. The film opens with Marilyn sunning herself languidly, telling her fellow transvestite Sanela not to carry a weapon. It then cuts to Johnny riding into town, and his first line connects sex and weapons: "Na bajonetima možeš sve, osim da sediš – ko je to rekao? Napoleon!" [You can do everything with bayonets, except sit on it – who said that? Napoleon!] But he was wrong: Johnny cuts into his seat with a knife, hides his gun and knife, and bounces up and down on them humming a crazed march. Sanela first flirts with Johnny and indulges in some fighting herself, but Marilyn eventually convinces her that he's crazy. It certainly looks like he is: on the one hand he is the macho fighter from the war, but on the other hand he has violent mood swings, snorts coke, and enters sitting metaphorically on a bayonet. Even his relations with "real" women are inverted: the women are on top, and one of them is a dominatrix-like butch officer the transvestites first take for a man. She sits astride him and chokes him while he cries "Komandante moj!" (masculine!) [My commander!]

Marilyn and Sanela paint the house, create order and domestic peace; Johnny stables a goat in the bathroom and uses it for target practice, then his butch officer slaughters it. Marilyn confronts his violence: "Ja dovodim ljude u ovu kuću; ali oni dolaze da me jebu, da ostave pare. Tebi dolaze ljudi samo da izgube glavu." [I bring people to this house, but they come here to fuck me, to leave their money here. People come to you only to get killed.] Militaristic macho values prove destructive, while pacifism and the feminine values of domesticity win out.

The most interesting scenes in terms of transvestism occur with the appearance of Ruža, a biological woman who knew Marilyn before her current incarnation as a female. As the transvestites are referred to throughout the film in the feminine gender, it is striking when Ruža uses the masculine and Marilyn's male name: "Dragane, šta si to uradio?" [Dragan, what have you done?] But in an inversion of the Hollywood staple of the gay/transvestite trying to act butch (*La Cage aux Folles* – both versions, *In and Out*), here it is Marilyn who tries to teach Ruža how to act as a woman and a prostitute.[95] Marilyn dresses

94 Booth, K., *ibid*.

95 This seems to be characteristic of films about real transvestites, as opposed to the Hollywood version: Willy Ninja of *Paris is Burning* went on to teach models how to walk the runway.

Ruža and explains how to pick up clients, but Ruža eventually fails the condom test and goes back to her domestic role – cooking. Still Marilyn won't give up: she uses the rolling pin to demonstrate how to put on a condom, and the two enact another inversion of their biological sex, with Ruža fucking Marilyn with the rolling pin. Here the tools of domesticity are sexualized, as weapons are for Johnny in the opening scene. Johnny instead uses weapons in the domestic sphere: he cracks an egg with his gun and kneads dough with a karate chop.

Another nexus of gender constructions involves Sanela and her fiancé Dejan. Dejan is a bodybuilder, and the constructed nature of his body is pointed out by Marilyn. Sanela says he's not a client, but "ozbiljan čovek," [a serious man] and Marilyn makes him strip to prove he is a bodybuilder. When he does, she says "On ima veće sise od mene!" [His tits are bigger than mine!] It is logically at Sanela and Dejan's wedding that Marilyn's identity is dramatically called into question.[96] Things begin smoothly in the ritual here, with Marilyn playing the "kuma" [female marriage witness]. Dejan's uncle, the "kum" [male marriage witness] calls her a "prava dama" [a real lady], but he eventually becomes suspicious of this non-patriarchal family: "ima li gazda?" [Is there a boss here?] He asks where their money is from – perhaps prostitution? – and questions Marilyn's gender/sex as well: "Jesi muško ili žensko?" [Are you a man or woman?] The wedding goes awry in a carnivalistic way, while Johnny fucks Ruža in a mound of dough.

Judith Butler argues that drag reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency, that occur "in the relations between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary."[97] Butler quotes Esther Newton's analysis of drag in terms of a double inversion: "my 'outside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' (the body) is masculine." At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion: "my appearance 'outside' (my body, my gender) is masculine, but my essence 'inside' myself is feminine."[98] Both these inversions come into play in Žilnik's film. While she uses the feminine gender and a female name, Marilyn tells Johnny, "Šta misliš, da sam budalo? Da ljudi ne znaju šta sam i ko sam? Svi znaju, da sam muškarac. Ovo je show business." [What do you think I am, you fool? That people don't know what or who I am? Everyone knows that I'm a man. This is show business.] – a line that also stresses the performative nature of her identity. At the same time she explains her transformation to Ruža by saying "Vratila sam se svojoj prirodi." [I have returned to my real nature.] – *i. e.*, her female "essence."

In Beograd during the war, though, it is this destabilizing figure who proves the more resilient. In the real world the director met Vjeran Miladinović/Marilyn, whom he

96 Garber comments on the centrality of wedding dresses in the transvestite project, mimicking the most sacred of hegemonic heterosexual ritual structures. Garber, 142.

97 Butler, 137-38.

98 Butler, 137.

had shot in an earlier film, on the Beograd street known for prostitutes; she cried out, "Hey, I used to be the weirdest person in Beograd, but now everything here is so weird that I'm the only one who is normal!" Žilnik says that statement made him decide to shoot this film.[99] In the film Marilyn tells Johnny, "Neću ja izgubiti glavu, ti izgubiš" [I won't lose my head, you will.] and her prophecy is borne out. The macho fighter from the Serbian army loses his life, while the transvestite flourishes. Make love, not war. Sex is better than violence. As Marilyn explains to Ruža, who is afraid of being beaten by a trick: "Neće da te raspizdi, ako mu je digao kurac." [He won't beat you if he's got a hard-on.] It shows particular chutzpah on Žilnik's part to take up the charge usually leveled at opponents of the war – effeminacy, homosexuality – and make the hero(ine) of his film not a biological woman, but a biological man who plays one, a transvestite prostitute.

Traditional sworn virgins, as the name implies, took an oath of celibacy. Žilnik's Marilyn works as a prostitute. Prostitution, like homosexuality itself, is often portrayed by nationalists as a foreign import or as a locus of colonial exploitation and as a metaphor for exploitation in general.[100] Though nationality is never an issue overtly in *Marble Ass* (as in *Virgina*, all the characters are Serbs and nationality is never mentioned), Marilyn and Sanela read English-language magazines and listen to songs sung in English; the source of Marilyn's name is not hard to guess, even if the subtitles do lead us astray with the spelling "Merlin." The transvestites plot to find a boyfriend to flee abroad. In one hilarious scene they ask friends in a rock group for an impromptu lesson in English for hookers to be used on Unprofor guys and diplomats. Yet Žilnik includes Western culture and English not as political commentary, but for their comic camp value. In Žilnik's film homosexuality, transvestism, and prostitution are neither problematized nor projected onto a national or ethnic other. They are not a metaphor for something else, but realities in their own right, embraced because they are anathema to the regime.

In *Virgina*, particularly the original screenplay, much of the plot is motivated by homophobia. After Stevan's fellow soldier Mile sees him put his head on Mijat's shoulder as they sleep, he complains, "Ja ovde sad možda za pedere treba da ginem?!"[101] [Am I supposed to get killed for the sake of faggots?!] In the final film Mijat and Stevan play at foreplay, but keep their eyes closed, so the object of their affections will not be seen as being of the same sex.

99 Žilnik, press release from B92.

100 Wiktor Grodecki has made a career out of films in which Czech rent boys are portrayed as the victims of Western capitalist exploitation, a metaphor for the exploitation of Eastern and Central Europe by the West. See especially Wiktor Grodecki's films on Czech male prostitutes: *Not Angels, but Angels* (1994), *Body without Soul* (1996), and *Mandragora* (1997); Volchek, D. Sperma visel'nika "Mandragora." Gay.ru. http://www.gay.ru/art/kino/kino9.htm (5.5.01).

101 Karanović, 206.

Iordanova points out that Karanović's film, in which Stevan never once experiences attraction to girls as the opposite sex, still pays "some toll to a homegrown Balkan homophobia and misogyny."[102] Homophobia plays no role in *Marble Ass*, in spite of the setting in urban Beograd during the war in Bosnia, where it certainly existed, as Davidovich and others have documented.[103]

Instead of deploying homophobia, Žilnik uses the subversive power of the transvestite to challenge the stability of all identities. Its playful, carnivalistic satire spills over, infecting the audience and challenging hegemonic culture in ways that *Virgina* does not. National and ethnic hatred, civil war and ethnic cleansing make sense only if nationality is somehow essential, if national differences are biological and natural, rather than constructed. Davidovich claims that the filmmaker Emir Kusturica thought Gypsies and homosexuals have a higher body temperature and special blood.[104] It is hard to imagine a clearer embodiment of the essential biological nature of ethnicity and sexuality than blood. But Žilnik's transvestite prostitutes, by revealing the constructed nature of their own gender, explode such notions to deprive hegemonic culture of its claim to naturalized essential identities. *Virgina*, though originally a multicultural project, ends up reaffirming traditional gender roles, while *Marble Ass* utilizes the performative nature of gender to destabilize national and ethnic identity as well. Both films are conceived as anti-nationalist, yet only *Marble Ass* challenges nationalism at its core, by subverting the very idea of a natural, essential, identity.

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102 Iordanova, 28-9.

103 Davidovich, B. (1996); Booth, K. (2000), Friess, S. (1999), Nikolić (2002).

104 Davidovich, 66.

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