

Thiessen, Ilka, *Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a changing world*, Tabahon, Skopje 2010, ISBN 978-608-4566-03-8

Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a changing world, a book by Ilka Thiessen, was published in Skopje, 2010 by the publishing company Tabahon.

Ilka Thiessen, a professor at Vancouver Island University, is regionally specialized on Macedonia, the Balkans and Southeastern Europe. Thiessen completed her doctoral studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science; this book is in fact her doctoral dissertation. Thiessen takes interest in various theoretical - methodological innovations and interdisciplinary research on key aspects of identity, health, inequality and variety. Thiessen, in her introduction to the Macedonian edition, notes her ties to Macedonia, as well as with the young women and their families which she writes about in her book (Thiessen, 2010:13).

Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a changing world, was published for the first time in English in 2007, by the publishing company Broadview Press in Peterborough, Ontario. In her piece, she follows the everyday life of a group of young female engineers in Yugoslavia and Macedonia during the time of her research, from 1998 to 1996. By tracing various aspects of the women's lives, at the same time Thiessen traces the global processes which took place in the social, economic and cultural lives of Yugoslavia and Macedonia following the break-up of Yugoslavia and during the period of transition. She also brings up issues concerning the analysis of wider cultural politics in independent Macedonia, large social changes and the process of re-identification.

With her research in Macedonia, Thiessen wanted to break away from the usual stream of Western research in socialist and post-socialist countries, which mainly concern collectivization and national farms. The author is interested in the life-stories of young, educated women in Skopje, and through them she reveals the global processes which occurred in the social, economic and cultural life in Yugoslavia. Among notable commentators of her book, are Anastasia Karakasidou and Wendy Bracewell, who gave positive reviews of the piece and noted Thiessen's attempt to examine the transformations in a post-socialist society through the lives of "normal" women.

In the period of formation of an independent state, the search for identity is one of the key aspects of self-representation. Thiessen suggests that western discourses on former socialist states can influence the ways that the young generation of Yugoslavia and Macedonia sees itself. The young women, whom this book is about, attempt to form their future and surroundings through control of their own bodies and ideas about sexuality and national identity. According to Thiessen, provided that the past shaped the young women into what they are today, then the future is what will transform them into what they will be. Society gives these women an idea of who they are, who they want to be and how they are connected among each other. These young women's identities are equal to the situation of the society in which they find themselves. Their identity is not fixed in one place; it is in constant development and is specific to only one moment in time. Thiessen states that the transformations which are taking place in the political and economic areas are also taking place on a local and individual level.

At the beginning of the book, Thiessen sets her thesis that ethnic tensions and the separation of definitions of traditional and modern in Macedonia are a result of concerns

about relations with the West which arose with the independence of the country. Most Macedonians saw Yugoslavia as a link to global modernity and Europe. The break-up of Yugoslavia and Western perceptions of the Balkans as an undeveloped area greatly influenced the young generations and their self-representations. It is in this state that habits intended to prove Macedonia's belonging to the West developed. Thiessen gives her point of view that taking in account the fact that Yugoslavia provided Macedonians with a key to Europe, nostalgia for Yugoslavia is in fact nostalgia for Europe to a point.

In the larger part of the book, Thiessen describes the lives of her young friends. She uses their examples of comparisons of modern and backwardness to show how young women form and plan their ideal lives and roles. Those young women, in their aims towards modernity and their moving away from the outdated way of life of their ancestors, take interest in foreign branded clothing and various body treatments. According to Thiessen, this phenomenon is not a simple imitation of the West. In fact, as a result of oriental and negative views of the Balkans, the young generation proves its belonging to Europe through so-called Western habits of consumption.

Throughout her whole book, Thiessen uses ethnographic examples to prove her arguments. After long friendships with the young women who she writes about, the author gives the impression that she truly comprehends the situations in which she found herself. She moves away from the Western approaches to research in the Balkans at the time and succeeds in following the processes of transformation and formation of identity in a post-socialist state through an example she personally takes interest in and views as extremely important. She provides an extensive and detailed picture of several young lives, which along with Macedonia went through a period of transition and formation of identity. Her piece is a representation of Macedonia's transformation for the world outside of Macedonia, yet also a point of view for the people within Macedonia who are searching for explanations of their own transformation.

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