

de Munck Victor C. & Ljupcho Risteski (eds). Macedonia – The political, social, economic and cultural foundations of a Balkan state. London: L.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013. ISBN 978 1 84885 936 4

“Macedonia – The political, social, economic and cultural foundations of a Balkan state” is a collection published in 2013 edited by Victor de Munck and Ljupcho Risteski, comprised of twelve texts and supported with various empirical research models; all of them conducted during 2007-2011. They tend to distance their articulation and evaluation from just another analysis of the “Macedonian question”, and from the concept of state = nation which seems pretty complex, while focusing on the multicultural, ethnic diversity and current daily life of Macedonians. The main focus of this ethnographical fieldwork are “ordinary” people, and their struggle with economic and natural disasters, the correlation between themselves and idealizing of others (in this case, Western Europe), or the relation towards other existing ethnicities, religion, space, gender and even international politics and European integration.

In the list of authors who have contributed to this collection one finds an introduction written by the editors that clearly elaborates and indicates the questions and areas that are covered by the articles in the following fashion: concretization of fieldwork, method used, survey of research area, its analysis and summarizing the conclusion. Thus, the introduction presents a well-organized preparation for the upcoming content. In this book I had the opportunity to meet with its authors and their research, and directly identify the difference in their approach and methodology. Most of the articles are based on a research that uses methods of participant observation and some are supported with detailed ethnographical presentations, having a strong emic perspective and reflexivity, analysis and historical approach, interpretive-postmodern approach, as well as at times confusing and problematic quantitative-systematic fieldwork approach.

Despite the fact that the goal of this book is not to cover the aspects of the “Macedonian question”, the latter is neither lacking nor dominating. In the first text, Victor Friedman describes a personal event, more specifically a promotion of the Greek-Macedonian dictionary by Vasko Karadza, held on 2 June, 2009 in Athens by the publishing house “Zora” and the direct attack with which he and the rest of the participants faced. The author’s speech is presented in the introduction in a transcribed form, while the barbaric intrusion, attempt for a direct assault, threats and confiscation of a presented copy of the dictionary by a group of the neo-Nazi party “Hrisi Avgi” (Golden Dawn) sympathizers is specified in the next section. Furthermore, he makes comparative historical analysis of Macedonian and Greek nationalism, their influences and radicalism, ending with a less explicit conclusion that Macedonia is becoming a beacon of multiculturalism and democracy on the Balkans. The sharp definition of the content provokes me to think about the motive of this text (the direct assault) and the extent of its influence.

Directly or indirectly, various aspects of identity are processed in a number of chapters. Ilka Thiessen speaks about the problems of European borders and their influence on the defining of specific identities. The research was conducted in Skopje and her

interlocutors are a group of women, electro-technicians in the period of 1988 – 2007; a period filled with “building identity”. It also reviews the changing of personal identity from a micro perspective, and establishes comparative analysis on the treatment of European identity in 1990 and today. The inclusivity and exclusivity with which Europe is viewed as the center of civilization in the European construction of borders (however, borders are not seen as physical entities), a modernism which promptly creates dualism with Yugoslavia as an example, identified as part of the Eastern block and lack of civility, “backwardness”, causing direct aversion and influences identity formation.

On the other hand, Davorin Trpeski focuses on nationalism, construction and creation of hegemony through mythologizing cultural space and usage of cultural heritage. He looks more into the theoretical aspect of nationalism by using archival and ethnographic materials, taking the nine-minute television commercial broadcasted on the Macedonian radio and television program in 2008 named “Macedonian prayer”, the “Following the alphabet and language of ancient Macedonians” project which referred to the Rosetta stone and Burushaski language, their identification to the Macedonian language and its origins as examples. Perceived from a political and cultural aspect, nationalism is presented as a product of the elite; while the difficulty stands in the manner people accept it.

The correlation between national identity and religion - in this case the Christian Orthodox religion – and how this fusion is perceived as equivalent to one another (identity = religion and vice versa) was researched by Violeta Duklevska Schubert. She uses descriptive historical analysis, through which she monitors the development of language, religion and its institutionalization as an inseparable part in the construction of national identity, and comparatively shows how religion and culture are ideologically and culturally intertwined in everyday life. Furthermore, through her field research dedicated to the “old bachelors” category in a village near Bitola, she draws a parallel between traditionalism and modernism, observing the influence of the Orthodox Church in private life, where it expresses its concern about abortion and the lack of holy matrimony. This kind of structure deals directly with the importance of reproduction, while, on the other hand, the endangered identity of the “old bachelors” who don’t fulfill the basic postulate for forming a family is elevated, consequently tightly connecting personal identity with the Church and State.

Prompted by the subjects of religion, ethnicity and minority, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic and Shayna Plaut focus on various segments of Roma life, while Akan Ellis devotes his article to the Turkish minority. Oustinova-Stjepanovic presents a rich ethnographical text from the field research conducted among the members of a dervish tekke in Macedonia during 2009-10. She focuses on the stereotypes with which Roma are faced regarding the transfer of religious dogmas and finding the “true path” to Islamic mysticism and its reforms in recent times, which are identified with education and theoretical readiness of the Sheikh more than the traditional oral transferring. Shayna Plaut examines the marginalization of this group as well, the lack of education possibilities, stereotypes, unemployment and shortage of institutionalized care for this group. Burcu Akan Ellis presents the multicultural issues and ethnic conflicts between ethnic groups and the marginalization of Turkish people, as well as the changes that have occurred with the exodus of the Turkish population from Macedonia to Turkey between 1953-1968 and how that reflects on identity.

Anastasia Karakasidou’s and Jonathan Schwartz’s research questions are connect-

ed to environment and ecology. Encouraged by field notes made in the 1980s in Mavrorahi, Greece, she illustrates the changes relating to the environment, more specifically expenditure and the decrease of available water, its contamination, technology which was implemented for production and responsibility for it in general, created in the name of modernization. Her ethnography presents a retrospective observation of water, air, fire and earth. Schwartz analyzes the decrease of water level and quality of water in the Prespa Lake on the Greek-Macedonian border. His research is based on a comparative method of study that periodically extends from 1977 to 2011. That which we can observe with Karakasidou and Schwartz is a tendency toward an activist anthropological research, which aims to encourage or ease the establishment of change.

The research approach and applied methodology, as well the conclusion, that require an additional and thorough consideration in this book, are the texts of Victor de Munck and Joseph Moldow, dedicated to the interethnic differences between Macedonians and Albanians, specifically identity limitations which create diversion, characteristics typical for one group on the expense of the other and specific differences between “us” and “them”. The texts rely on a positivistic approach and use a model of structured interview from which a statistical analysis is made at the end. That which is debatable is that this kind of research approach is conducted concerning a question which itself is very delicate. The research has been made in the centre of Skopje. The surveyed were asked to fill in their personal perception about their ethnic community and then the other one in written or in some cases oral form; for example, “Macedonians are ___” and the other way around, distinguishing four different perspectives in this manner. The written characteristics were derived and later edited in a table with four columns. While stumbling on synonyms and words, which had the same meaning, a single word was selected. The last phase and perhaps the most troublesome was the placement of these words in a multidimensional template divided into four parameters: socially good, socially bad, success and failure. This separation was made so that these terms, translated in English, were allocated by American participants in the research, striving towards greater objectivity and independence in decision making, thus disregarding the different cultural and linguistic concepts of the surveyed groups. In my opinion, a similar confusing matter which asks for further observation could be perceived in the text by Victor de Munck and Davorin Tpeski, who intend to explore the conceptualizing and division of gender, specifically how Macedonians conceptualize gender and its reflection on society and culture. For that purpose, an already existing published method of research previously applied in Sri Lanka and USA in 2002 has been used. Certain views have been separately derived at the beginning of the text, which deal with this question and have already been covered in the previous texts, focused on various subjects in this edition. The structure of patriarchy as a concept of cultural universality from which the very research starts and the perception of this concept as the most typical compared with a less typical equality is debatable. Such identification of gender segregation as connected to patriarchy at the very beginning does not leave any possibility for the conceptualizing to be viewed separately from it, which further raises many other questions. The participants were of different genders, ethnicity, nationality, and people from rural or urban environments who answered a variety of questions in written form. Besides filling the required data like gender, age, nationality and marital status, they were given an explanation on how the survey should be filled, which was done by encircling whether a certain characteristic, effect or

feeling is typical for men, women or both (for example: Which sex is physically more attractive? Which is more prone to jealousy? Which likes children more? Which takes more care of children?). That which I want to emphasize is the subsequent clarification that despite having the tendency to answer most of the questions as “both”, that should be avoided and socially objective reality needs to be presented. I believe that this setup in the beginning could later directly affect the participant and the concept of responses, as well as their precision. After answering the questions they’re given space to offer brief explanation for their answer in written form. Collected data passed through a series of statistical analysis on which to draw conclusions. Among other things, this research should comparatively contribute to intercultural studies according to received data from the research made in Sri Lanka and USA, which still leaves room for many questions regarding the success of this research. According to the authors, this type of research should contribute toward their suitable application in anthropological studies, which will contribute with a more detailed and precise analysis.

Drawing on the historical-materialistic method of Walter Benjamin, Rozita Dimova made an analysis of space and architecture; their representation of differing ideologies in Kumanovo, the manner with which they affect everyday reality of people and the forming of their view on “the others”. She addresses space creating and arrangement in the city through religion, class and ethnicity. From this text we could discern that in such a multicultural environment like Kumanovo the more the boundaries of separation between Macedonians and Albanians are increased, the more intertwined they are in the aspect of social space, which presents as a contradiction to the nation-state concept.

To summarize, this research collection presents different aspects of Macedonia regarding present state and everyday life in the multicultural society of a Balkan country. It holds our interest with its successful framing of multicultural relationships between different ethnic groups in Macedonia, the influence of the “identity” concept, ideology, encourages a fresh outlook and opens up new questions which ask for additional attention.

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