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Historical lessons of Macedonian
multiculturalism

Max Planck Institute for the Study of
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

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und multiethnischer Gesellschaften



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Abstract

Politicization of Macedonian history in domestic and foreign historiography has led to a focus on the Macedonian nation building processes at the expense of a more nuanced approach that would allow everyday multicultural practices from the past to become visible. Macedonia's diversity was acknowledged by the Macedonian revolutionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Despite this fact, it remains underreported in the historiography dominated by nation-state formation in the Balkans. The paper contrasts the available evidence about the Macedonian revolutionaries' multicultural mindset with the nationalistic perspective dictated by the great powers and regional expanding nation-states. Finally, by sketching out the early and late Ottoman inclusive policies and their preference for conviviality and coexistence, I argue against the historiographic paradigm of discontinuity characterised by abrupt changes in favour of a processual perspective of adaptive transformations.

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Introduction

Ethnopolitics dominate the public sphere in independent Macedonia and this is reflected in every aspect of social life. Ethnonationalist politicians have managed to create and to actively cultivate political representations of Macedonian society as deeply divided, irrevocably proceeding down the path of dissolution along ethnic lines. At the turn of the twentieth century, while still part of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, Macedonia was famed for her diversity. In the course of the century, the eventful political and military developments contributed towards reduced ethnic diversity. Emerging from the ruins of the Yugoslav federation in 1991, Macedonia's greatest challenge today is the accommodation of the political aspirations of the Albanians, the second largest ethnic group in the country. The political tensions culminated in 2001 when Albanian armed units attacked the uniformed state forces and demanded immediate constitutional amendments. The first decade of the twenty first century has been marked by creation of parallel society.

Describing Macedonia today and in the past as a divided society will certainly contribute towards divisions along ethnic lines. Macedonian multicultural reality is challenged by current political representations that manipulate and single out only the negative aspects of Macedonia's diversity. The dominant representation of the past, as offered in official Macedonian historiography, fails to correct this distorted picture. These historians subscribe to a ruling paradigm that revolves around defence and promotion of their own national cause. In this exclusivist and excluding setting, various ethnic groups in Macedonia are forced to carve their own histories, quite often at the expense of each other.

The dominant political/historical representations of the past and present disregard and overlook many layers and various aspects of Macedonian multicultural accommodation. All the various modes of conviviality and cross-cultural communication that have emerged bottom-up through centuries of contact in shared neighbourhoods, markets, workplaces etc. are marginalized in the historical narratives. The defence and promotion of the "national cause" is causing the greatest historiographic distortions, and this one-sided approach neglects Macedonia's multicultural past and especially the explicit internationalist and cosmopolitan character of the Macedonian liberation movement. In this paper, I will first outline the extreme politicization of Macedonian history in the Balkan context. I will then suggest that we ought to rethink our approach and understanding of the Ottoman past. I will also look at the early beginnings of the Macedonian revolutionary movement and

argue that their project was cosmopolitan, multiethnic, multicultural, inclusive and opposed to nationalism. The abuse of the representations of the past for the legitimization of contemporary party agendas makes this correction necessary to prevent the future decline of the multicultural social order in Macedonia.

I approach Macedonian history not as a set of unravelling events but as the object of a fierce proprietary battle over historical symbols. Harrison's (1995) analysis of symbolic conflict distinguishes four modes and strategies of political manipulations of symbolic capital: *valuation*, *proprietary*, *innovation* and *expansionary* conflict. Each of these categories is just an analytical tool and in reality these types often overlap. The relentless onslaught of the neighbouring nationalistic historiographies in turn provoked the development of a nationalistic historiography in Macedonia. With the Macedonian national identity at stake, expectedly there is great emphasis on asserting a firm and uncontested national identity in Macedonia. This political-historiographic development fits the processes that Harrison defines as *innovation* contests that are essentially 'schismogenic' processes of competitive differentiation. Harrison himself uses the Greek-Macedonian dispute over the name and other symbols from the past as an exemplary case for *proprietary* contests (258–259). As he explicitly states, this symbolic contest over the name of Macedonia is used "to legitimize the ownership of territory". Both Greece and Macedonia, each in its own way, are simultaneously engaged in *innovation* conflict by extending their claims to the ancient past and the figure of Alexander the Great. With Bulgaria Macedonia is involved in a *valuation* and *expansionary* conflict over the denial of the Macedonian national identity as separate from the Bulgarian. Without further exploitation of Harrison's analytical framework, we may conclude that Macedonia, willingly or not, is engaged in a number of symbolic conflicts on almost every side.

The fissions and schisms are not confined to interstate relations but in the Macedonian case can lead to internal segmentation, too. The nationalist paradigm of Macedonian historiography received due criticism in the works of Troebst (2003), Brown (2004) and Brunnbauer (2005), but they overlooked the hostile environment in which it emerged. As Frusetta puts it, "[I]n the Macedonian case, there are few historical symbols utilized by the Republic of Macedonia that are not disputed by conflicting historical traditions in neighbouring states" (2004: 110). As a consequence of this historical exclusionism, nationalist feelings are heated, and this in turn shrinks the public and political space to leave little room for the ideas of multiculturalism to flourish in this country despite its remarkable ethnic mixture. This is the central problem treated in this paper.

The politicisation of Macedonian history

The political dimension of the historiography is immensely present in the Macedonian context. Macedonian history has been subject to greater controversies and polemics than other parts of the Balkans (Djordjevitch, 2003: 18). The contested Macedonian national identity is at the core of the dispute over Macedonian history and makes any well-intended research a highly political act. Even a cursory look at the history of historiographies, or the circumstances under which the historical writings on Macedonia emerged, should help us better understand the entanglement of academia and politics.¹ In the Balkans the historical literature, especially of the region, is still seen as a repository of historical facts that gives legitimacy to the past and current political affairs. In a great number of important texts that deal with the turbulent Balkan history, the Macedonians are recognized as existing today but are suspiciously absent from the past. Macedonians receive a similar treatment from Stavrianos (2000 (1958)), Castellan (1992), Pavlovitch (1999) or any other historian of the Balkans.² What stands behind this kind of reasoning that allows Macedonians to exist today but denies them historical existence? They all seem to have followed Eley's dictum, and it seems the general rule still applied today, that "the faculty of attained statehood is an indispensable condition of historiographical legitimacy".³ This statolatrous tendency is obvious in the historical literature about this region.⁴ As a consequence of late nation-state formation, Macedonians are denied their historical presence.

1 Roudometof (2000) uses the metaphor of a 'tangled web' to illustrate this relationship.

2 Macedonian historiography makes continual efforts to show that Macedonia as a separate nation has a much longer historical existence. See Dimevski (1981: 222 *passim*) for a lengthy catalogue of the usage of the terms Macedonia and Macedonians on maps, in documents, church and official exchange etc. since antiquity, through medieval times, until the emergence of the Macedonian national movement.

3 Quoted in Djordjevich (2003: 15). The author actually identifies the stubborn development of historical narratives around empires and nation-states as the major weakness of the discipline in regard to former Yugoslav lands.

4 Additionally, the Balkans received orientalist treatment and Western historiography still has to be emancipated from its ills. Todorova points to some important aspects that served the development of Balkanism, which she defines as not just a sub-species of Said's Orientalism (1994: 454). She argues that the Balkans conveniently "served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'the west' has been constructed", and even more conveniently locating the otherness in geographical Europe, among white Christians, "exempted 'the west' from charges of racism, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and Christian intolerance" (1997: 455).

Even in the contemporary, supposedly objective, academic analysis what was a political issue in the past remains enwrapped in current political disputes. The Macedonian Question emerged as part of The Eastern Question that addressed the controlled elimination of the Ottoman Empire. Macedonia at the heart of the Balkans, still in possession of the Ottomans, became the most obvious territory for neighbouring home-grown irredentist aspirations for territorial expansion. This process is best captured by Hupchick: “All of the post-Berlin Balkan nation-states shared a common national imperative: To satisfy their ‘rightful’ territorial ambitions within the context of existing Great Powers relationships” (2002: 281). Apparently, the Macedonian Question owes more to political than to academic considerations.⁵ Eric Hobsbawm a decade ago warned about even graver consequences, “[This] is dramatically obvious in situations in which international conflicts hinge on historical argument, as over the present phase of the always explosive Macedonian question. Everything about this incendiary issue, which involves four countries and the European Union and may once more launch a Balkan war, is historical” (1997: 274).

Concurring with Brown (2003), I locate identity as a central issue of the Macedonian Question as the two other components of the Question, the political organization and geographical distribution, are dependent on it.⁶ Gounaris and Mihailidis point out that: “... the very nature of the Macedonian Question has always been a matter of identity: whose was Macedonia or who were Macedonians” (2000: 122)? Rossos (2003: 141) states that the Macedonian Question concerned the future, the fate of Macedonia. To put it simply, creation of Macedonia as a nation-state seemed improbable at the turn of the twentieth century, the high time of nationalism that came to South-East Europe from the north and the west of the continent. Firstly, the incredible mixture of religions, languages, cultures and ethnic groups was too complicated for the simplistic and unsophisticated nationalist ideology dominant at the time. Secondly, the strategic position of the territory and the famed agricultural riches of the land and abundant raw materials for exploitation required one of the

5 The latest contribution to the debate by a former German ambassador in Macedonia is titled “The Macedonian Knot” (Steppan, H.-L., 2004). Gounaris and Mihailidis (2000), who reviewed the literature on the Macedonian Question, directly address the link between politics and academia and use the metaphor of the pen and the sword.

6 All of the four most recent anthropological works on Macedonia focus on identity as the main research question and all of them are or were made acutely aware of the political dimension of their academic endeavour (Danfort (1995), Karakasidou (2000, 1997), Cowan (2003, 2001) and Brown (2003)). Except for Brown, three of them work in Northern Greece, or Greek Macedonia to be correct.

great powers to prevail over the others, which was equally impossible. Thirdly, it was the most precious part of the shrinking Ottoman Empire. Therefore, it is not surprising that Macedonia and Macedonians were treated as a non-entity in much of the Western and Balkan historiography. The historical literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in great measure simply reflects the official policies.⁷

Todorova ascribes the development of nationalistic historiography to the “then dominant trend of romanticism and positivism” that is characterised by “a conscious effort to belittle, to ignore, to distort, to deride and even to negate (1995: 73).⁸ Using this as a starting point, I argue that the denial of Macedonian history as a separate unit for historical study, as it is practised by the neighbouring historiographies a century ago to the present, is a conscious effort to negate the existence of the Macedonians. All of them invested so heavily in creating a version of history without Macedonians that any revision of their historiography will lead to a catastrophic breakdown of their respective nationalistic discourses.⁹ Without history Macedonians cannot exist as a nation. This reasoning is not simply chauvinistic as Todorova presents it. It is one level more dangerous than that and irredentist at its core. This historiographic denial comes from the irredentist drive of Macedonia’s neighbours to conquer this land at the time when they were all expanding their ‘national’ territories. This negation of history tends to negate the nation and the state and challenges the nation on the basis of a lack of history. It bears the danger of creating a historiographic Bermuda triangle for Macedonians to disappear in.

Today, there is no such thing as a Macedonian Question anymore as all the main aspects of the complex question have been answered already. Sporadic efforts to

7 Gallagher (2001: 62) uses Rothschild’s comment that Macedonia’s rival claimants “encouraged their so-called ‘scholars’ to ‘demonstrate’ with historical, geographic, ethnic and linguistic ‘evidence’ that the Macedonians were a branch of their own respective nations” (1958: 171).

8 Although Todorova was critical of the Balkan historiography we must be aware that this mode of historical writing was neither invented nor established in the region. It is illustrative to consult the arguments put forward regarding West European historiography in Berger, Donovan and Passmore (eds.1999).

9 See Litoksou, D. (2004 (1998): 8) as the most serious effort at deconstructing the nationalistic historiography in Greece by unearthing the documents that undermine the powerful myth of the Greek struggle for Macedonia. The author literally sets out to reveal the counterfeit and proposes that this period, 1904–1908, instead of the glorified and officially promoted Greek construction as “Macedonian struggle”, which explains the occupation of the southern parts of the geographic territory called Macedonia as a liberation of Greek lands, be renamed as an “anti-Macedonian struggle”, whose main objective was to destroy the national-democratic autonomist Macedonian movement.

reinvigorate the Macedonian Question even today are clearly a political position set to undermine the legitimacy of the existence of an independent Macedonia. Petiffer's *The New Macedonian Question* (2000) and Roudometoff's *The Macedonian Question* (2000) are two examples that keep the Question alive as they question Macedonia's viability in the long run as an independent state. The former author is especially cynical about Macedonia and Macedonians' existence (see Janev (2002)) while the latter author fails to provide space for even a single Macedonian author to be included in his collection of essays claiming to provide answers to the Macedonian Question. Rossos (2003) distinguishes between the Macedonian question as a Balkan problem that involves the great powers and neighbouring Balkan states in the struggle to conquer Macedonia (pp. 142–152) and the Macedonian Question as a Macedonian problem, i.e., the resistance to those external claims and the development of an indigenous national movement that aims at Macedonian statehood (pp. 152–6). Rossos sees these two aspects of the Macedonian Question as more or less resolved, but the final solution will only emerge after the neighbouring countries accept the existence of the Macedonian nation. He insists on “genuine acceptance” of the existence of a Macedonian nation, Macedonian national minorities and the new independent state by its neighbours (p. 158).

The liberation movement: multicultural from the onset

As it is treated in the Anglophone literature, the Macedonian national movement appears to exist only upon the emergence of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) formed in 1893.¹⁰ While the MRO is rightly treated as the ultimate articulation of the political will and ideals of the Macedonians, it was not the only organization or the sole form of expressing national feelings and political ideals. The Macedonian liberation movement has deeper roots and emerged in various other forms of expressing the ideals of a free Macedonia. The most fascinating feature of the Macedonian liberation movement, not confined only to the activities of the organization, is the progressive concept of inclusive nationhood. Various documents, as constitutions and rules that initiatives and groups involved in different uprisings

10 The violent and spectacular actions of the revolutionary struggle attract a great deal of sensationalism to which academia is not immune. See Perry (1988) whose title “Politics of Terror” is suggestive enough.

gave themselves or other sources expressing political visions and goals unquestionably testify to the multicultural mindset of these revolutionaries.

It suffices to read the Constitutional Rules of the Macedonian Revolutionary Committee of the Kresna Uprising, which came as a reaction to the decisions of the Berlin congress in 1878. Another example is the Constitution of Macedonia written by the Macedonian League in 1880. These two documents alone precede the creation of the famous MRO by two decades. Here we see their obvious intentions of liberating Macedonia together with fellow countrymen like Turks, Albanians, Jews and Vlahs. Shifting the focus from the spectacular actions of MRO to the parallel and preceding forms of Macedonian national movements will further strengthen the claims of legitimate historical development of the Macedonian national consciousness and the inclusive nature of the Macedonian nationhood that embraces all indigenous ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.

Dokmanovich (2005) demonstrates the multinational character of the constitution project of 1880 where Macedonia is defined as a state of the Macedonian people and other nationalities living within its borders. The author also looks for the origins of multiculturalism in Macedonia in the Kresna Uprising and Ilinden Uprising – official documents that defined Macedonia as multinational state. Milosavljević (2003) singles out the inclusive political and constitutional arrangements of Macedonia, from Ilinden onwards. Since the inception of the idea for the establishment of a Macedonian state, it is apparent that Macedonia's ethnic mixture was considered with utmost respect. A comprehensive system of political arrangements aiming at accommodating this diversity emerged alongside the ideas for liberation. The Kresna uprising, which came as an immediate reaction to the Berlin congress, clearly states the inclusive nature of the desired state (Dimchevski, 1987: 55–62). This inclusiveness is an essential part of the Resolution for Macedonia's future that was the direct outcome of the "National Assembly", which took place in Gremen in the spring of 1880, where 32 delegates from many parts of Macedonia representing different ethnic groups attended and agreed upon rules for proportional representation in the executive, legislative and juridical government (Dimchevski, 1987: 82, 96).

All of this preceded the MRO, and it should not be surprising that we find an equally sensitive treatment of Macedonian ethnic composition in the documents of the organization before (Pandevski, 1974) and after the Ilinden Uprising in 1903 when Macedonian revolutionaries established the first, although short lived, republic in the Balkans (Pandevski, 1998: 74, 125, 244–248). Manol Pandevski pays great attention to the national question in the Macedonian liberation movement and

provides a systematic account of this particular aspect. He emphasizes the internal “internationalist” character of the liberation movement (1974: 66) and points to its two pillars: first, to unite everyone in the struggle and second, to fight against nationalism and chauvinism (p. 84). He is even critical towards the works of his colleagues at the time for the obvious tendency to neglect this component of the liberation movement (p. 85). The “internationalist” character of the liberation movement is still neglected in contemporary Macedonia almost half a century after the publication of that warning.

The public sphere, political discourse, media and even academia are almost completely immersed in the ethnopolitical games and offer a picture of a divided society. At the core of this divisive representation is the advancement and defense of the political positions of the two largest ethnic groups. Therefore, I suggest we pay much greater attention to the links between the Macedonian and Albanian national movement. Though separate and unique, the development of the Albanian national movement was neither in parallel nor in conflict with the Macedonian national movement. On the contrary, available evidence suggests that the two last nations to remain within the Ottoman Empire sought ways of cooperation for realisation of a common goal. Such cooperation would have been possible only within framework of an inclusive, open and “internationalist” liberation movement.

Paying closer attention to the liberation movement in Macedonia, there are many historical processes that reveal the closeness and cooperation between Macedonian and Albanian national movements that are largely neglected in the literature.¹¹ Two publications, however, document these processes of immense importance for creating the joint historical narrative that could and should be developed in the multicultural Macedonia of tomorrow. Naumovska (1995) presents evidence about this collaboration by examining the “L’ Autonomie”, the official newsletter of the Central Committee for Autonomous Macedonia and Albania.¹² By focusing on the interweaving national liberation movements of the Albanians and Macedonians and their cooperation, Todorovska (2002) demonstrates the existence of mutual links far stronger than the separate nationalist historiographies have acknowledged. Most importantly, as the author reminds us, the awareness of the need for cooperation and undisputed

11 See also Poulton, who emphasizes this neglected historical feature (1995: 79, 90–92).

12 “L’autonomie” was published in London during 1902. However, this was not the first publication witnessing the joint activities for creating Albano-Macedonia, and the newsletter appeared under the same name in Bucharest in 1893. This cooperation goes back to 1887 when the Macedonian–Albanian league was formed in Athens.

equality has been continually pointed out as in the example of the Macedonian uprising in Kresna that started in 1878 and managed to control liberated territories until 1880. The temporary and short-lived government formed in late spring 1880 was composed of three members, one Macedonian, one Macedonian–Greek and one Albanian, and the slogan put on the emblem was “equality” (2002: 39).¹³ These two works bring to the surface the neglected aspects of Macedonian and Albanian history. Most importantly, these works point to the preference for the concept of civil nationalism rather than ethnonationalism among the Macedonian liberation fighters. Let us now turn to the most important Ottoman legacy, the specific arrangement of inter-communal relations that was acknowledged by Macedonian revolutionaries as we have seen above.

The Ottoman multicultural legacy

The feudal society of the Ottoman Empire was characterised by a high degree of political centralisation and a peculiar religious accommodation. A great amount of autonomy was granted to the separate religious communities that were almost given a right to self-government under the *millet* system. This principle was applied to the relations in the market as well. The guilds, *esnafi*, were organized around the separate professions with a rounded system of rules, awards and punishments that transgressed the ethnic and religious boundaries. Neighbourhoods in the urban centres, *mahala*, were mostly homogenous in terms of religious belonging, but, as Barkey (2008: 145) points out, this was not always general practice. The *komshi* (neighbourly) and *carshija* (market) relations, on which the Macedonian model of multicultural adaptation is based, developed in this framework where the immediate surrounding of family and locality encapsulated the world of the citizens of the empire. However, reconstructing the social life during the Ottoman period is a difficult task as the greatest part of the historical literature has given prevalence to the diplomatic at the expense of social history. This is additionally burdened by the heavy political bias discussed above.

13 Paying attention to the Macedonian-Albanian Revolutionary League formed in 1887, we can see this organization as preceding the MRO. Todorovska documents an even earlier awareness for mutual interests, and she points to the activities of Stojan Vezekov, who called on Albanian and Macedonian freedom-fighters from the 1860s to work together.

To illustrate this point further, let us examine the treatment of the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. Lowry (2003) sets out to refute the widely accepted “*gazi* thesis” for the emergence of the Ottoman Empire advanced by Wittek in the late 1930s. Lowry provides substantial evidence that the Ottomans were not Islamic conquerors who were waging a Holy War led by *Gazi* warriors, and he emphasizes the crucial role of the strong alliance between the first Ottomans and two other Christian houses, led by Kose Mihal of Byzantine nobility and Evrenos, of Catalan descentance (Lowry, 2003: 55–66). Barkey (2008: 45–58) insists on Osman’s incredible ability to forge alliances and to create a wide network of partners with him as a nodal point. It seems, however, that the revision of the early history of the Ottoman Empire requires and implies a change in ideological approach. In the case of the Ottoman Empire it is hard for us to accept the fact that it established itself and experienced growth over several centuries and successfully enlisted the active participation of the local nobility and incorporated these families into the system. Moreover, it requires a paradigmatic shift away from a representation of history as a series of successive events that take the shape of abrupt discontinuities in our perception towards a more nuanced perspective that allows for the continuous transformation of social relations and figurations, stressing contact and influence, and mixture and diversity over the dualistic oppositional reasoning of “us” and “them”, “here” and “there”, “before” and “after”.

We find the same dualistic bias as we move to the more recent past. In spite of the popular imagination and historical portrayal of the late Ottoman Empire as a backward, despotic oriental occupation of Christian lands, Gawrych (1983) shows that cultural pluralism was the official political ideology of the empire in the nineteenth century. The portrayal of nationalistic movements, both of the rebellious and emerging Balkan nations and of Turkish nationalism, dominates the literature on the Ottoman history (1983: 519). This resulted in neglecting the ideology of cultural pluralism called Ottomanism or *Osmanlilik*.¹⁴ The quest for harmonious relations based on tolerance and mutual respect and aiming at equal treatment for all subjects of the empire is an underreported aspect of the Ottoman past. Gawrych explains this development as a shift from religious to cultural tolerance, as a governmental doctrine that marked the Ottoman nineteenth century (523). Barkey explains the establishment and durability of the Ottoman Empire on the basis of a successful management of differences and the “incorporation of diversity” (2008: 294). The

14 On Ottomanism see also Davison (1954), Deringil (1993) and Karpat (1972).

Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876) when “Ottomanism emerged as a discourse based on the multinational, imperial mode of the empire, maintaining the integrity of the empire with equality among its citizens (p. 290)” were the last effort to maintain the empire based on the principle of toleration and incorporation. It was soon to be followed by the emergence of Pan-Islamic tendencies and finally by the concept of nation-state promoted by the Young Turks (290–4). Further exploration of the links between the emergence and the nature of the Macedonian liberation movement with the larger social figurations on the meso and micro level of analysis would enrich the black and white picture portrayed by the local national historiographies. Gawrych supports his argument about the existence of harmonious inter-communal relations in the empire by the widespread multilingualism that in turn demands steady interaction between neighbours, which is accompanied by some borrowing of customs and values.¹⁵ Gallagher (2001: 21) also uses the linguistic argument to emphasize the communication and contact within the Ottoman Empire and goes beyond it to point out that, even before, the Byzantine Empire, unlike the exclusivist Latin part, allowed for greater diversity.

Conclusion

We can see that both in the early and the late Ottoman period everyday practices and elite policies were far more inclusive and even progressive regarding the management of diversity. If we modify and unify the conceptual vocabulary we could speak of a description of multicultural societies. This conceptual unification allows us to connect the debate of contemporary Macedonian multiculturalism and its historical roots to these earlier historical accounts. Furthermore, in light of the most pressing problems of contemporary societies regarding the management of diversity today, particularly in Western Europe, there are some historical lessons to be learned from these experiences.

In my research I explore Macedonia’s autochthonous multicultural model that I call *komshi* or *carshija* multiculturalism. I argue that the long tradition of good neighbourly and market relations, as they developed in the *komshiluk* and in *charsija*, created a culture of inter-communal relations based on mutual respect. Unlike the contemporary forms of formalised multiculturalism that result in imposed inter-

15 This description resembles Drummond’s (1980) theory of intersystems.

communal behaviour based on the notion of tolerance, the Ottoman model, as it developed over centuries at least on Macedonian soil and in other Balkan regions, was based on notions of mutual respect. At the level of everyday practice this meant that people respected each other's traditions and this respect on an individual basis became the way of life. This ancient practice of communitarian multiculturalism functioned well until nationalism infected the imagination of the Balkan people. Today, there are still remnants of this multicultural adjustment, but these intercultural arrangements are receding under ethno-political pressures.

In this paper, I presented the politicisation of the history of Macedonia to explain the external pressures that feed Macedonian nationalism. Contesting the dominant Macedonian national historical narrative from outside invites the unnecessary reaffirmation of the certainties of the Macedonian nation from within and nurtures romantic nationalism until today. From another perspective and in reaction to Macedonian nationalism, Albanian nationalism seeks equality in the newly independent state. I also demonstrate that there is much more in common between these two groups, in the past and in the present, than either of these two nationalist programs is ready to embrace and emphasize. Instead, separate national projects developed and clashed. The ethnic composition of Macedonia in Ottoman times was an extraordinary mixture, and the *millet* system contributed greatly towards the development of interethnic relations on the basis of mutual respect. This was reflected in the Macedonian liberation movement, which was ethnically inclusive rather than exclusive unlike the nationalist movements of the time. We should pay due attention to this overlooked and immensely important aspect of Macedonian history.

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