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**Vasiliki P. Neofotistos. *The Risk of War: Everyday Sociality in the Republic of Macedonia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 205 p. ISBN 978-0-8122-4399-4.**

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Ethnicity is a theme that has dominated the anthropology of the Balkans for the past twenty years. Anthropologists have questioned assumptions regarding the “natural” character of ethnicity and have shown both its construction and negotiation in everyday life. Yet very few authors have discussed ethnicity as potential: how does the risk of ethnic conflict, more than its actual presence, shape everyday life? This is the central issue Vasiliki Neofotistos tackles in her book *The Risk of War: Everyday Sociality in the Republic of Macedonia*. The author explores the case of Macedonia, a country that has experienced recurrent ethnic tensions and conflicts, leading in 2001 to a set of violent clashes between Albanian paramilitary and Macedonian security forces. Giving particular attention to the experience of the Albanian community, Neofotistos presents both the history and the effects of potential ethnic conflict, as lived through everyday interactions in Skopje, Macedonia.

The book is organized in two parts: the first three chapters trace the trajectory of ethnic relations from the Yugoslav era until the 2001 conflict. With factual precision and narrative clarity Neofotistos weaves together historical accounts that are usually presented as conflicting and mutually exclusive: drawing on both Macedonian and Albanian collective memory, this section describes such historical events as the Albanian demonstrations during the socialist time or the boycotts of the 1991 and 1994 censuses. The author crafts a syncopated history of Macedonia, where conflict abruptly reemerges from otherwise calm moments: dramatizing a number of crucial events, Neofotistos reproduces in her storytelling the feeling of uncertainty that punctuates Macedonian political life—a constant possibility of conflict, a looming tension, never fully exploding into open warfare.

The background and historical chapters are integral to Neofotistos’s argument: because of the specific way in which the conflict was produced and contained, tension was both denied and amplified. Happening in remote places, but suddenly reappearing close to the capital, emerging out of a socialist past of “brotherhood and unity” in which ethnic discrimination was officially nonexistent, the conflict seemed to be both omnipresent and evanescent, creating a permanent sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Everyday interactions between members of the Albanian and Macedonian community became charged with political significance: people were forced to find ways to cope with this uncertainty or at least to make sense of it in order to live together. It is to these vernacular social poetics that Neofotistos devotes the last three chapters of her book, where she

explores ethnographically the performances of civility, gender, and respect that allowed people to negotiate ethnic tensions.

Neofotistos calls “performances of civility” the interactions through which participants recovered everyday sociality as a space of mutual help and coexistence: this includes nostalgic remembrances of Tito—as a figure who was able to embody “brotherhood and unity”—but also casting ethnic conflict as an unavoidable “destiny” or a plot of politicians, against which *normal* people could not fight. The author then moves to discuss the crucial role that gender played in making sense of the war. Women and men in Albanian and Macedonian communities performed gender so as to impose or evade the discursive power hierarchies brought about by the risk of war. For instance, in a situation where the need to agonistically prove masculinity was heightened by looming conflict, Macedonian women were able to draw upon their motherly role to mobilize social capital—asking male members of the Albanian community to inform them of possible attacks for the sake of their children. Finally, Neofotistos describes the rituals of respect through which Albanians subvert and resist the stereotypes circulating in Macedonian society and find ways to perform their modernity and belonging.

These ethnographic chapters lead the reader through a wide variety of themes that range from postsocialism to nostalgia, from orientalism and stereotyping to gender and nationalism, from consumerism to selfhood. Neofotistos makes “performances” do a lot of work, both narratively and conceptually: performances become a window into the overall social world of Skopje, total social facts allowing the author to draw together different scales of analysis. While the short length of the book does not allow for an in-depth discussion of all of these themes, the reader gets a hint of the complexity of many issues that frame ethnic relations and negotiations. Perhaps more importantly, Neofotistos does not only describe the performances that effectively negotiate and reconcile power on everyday level, but recounts also those that reinscribe power.

But why performance? Neofotistos reconstructs carefully her conceptual framework by drawing on the available literature, but she chooses to leave *her own theorization* of performance unexplicated: she does not pull together the hints disseminated through her account so as to actually come up with her own theory of performance. In fact, the author chooses not to spend too much space in convincing the reader of why those interactions should be understood as performances rather than as phenomenological events or examples of ideology. This leads to a strange narrative paradox: the author’s overall preference for description over theorization is coupled with a “voice-over” interpretation of interactions that contrasts strongly with the otherwise factual narration. One is left to wonder if elaborating theoretical points further would not have helped overcome this issue, which is common to other studies of performance and interactions.

Neofotistos very nicely conveys the sense of uncertainty that has emerged in Skopje, giving us a window onto peoples’ everyday interaction. Yet this frame obscures the politics of uncertainty—or the perspective of those for whom the conflict was not uncertain at all. This includes people who were clear about where the ethnic

“fault line” lay, Macedonians and Albanians who lived in the zones where the conflict happened, but also those political actors who actually engineered, fought, and resolved the conflict. Neofotistos’s monograph does not give us an account of the war itself, as narrated, seen, and experienced by its actual participants: it is an ethnography of everyday sociality in the “protected” mixed neighborhood of Čair, in the capital city of Skopje—that is to say, a conflict seen from (relatively) afar. It is a book about the risk, or expectation, of war—not about the war itself. In this respect it is a magisterially written book, able to make very complex historical and ethnographic facts accessible to both specialists and undergraduate students in an extremely concise form.