

**The Risk of War: Everyday Sociality in the Republic of Macedonia. By Vasiliki P. Neofotistos. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. vi, 216 pp. Appendix. Abbreviations. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Maps. Photographs. \$55.00, hard bound.**  
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*The Risk of War* explores everyday social interactions and performances of middle and working class Macedonians and Albanians during a six-month armed conflict between Macedonian government forces and the NLA (Albanian National Liberation Army). Anthropologist Vasiliki Neofotistos' ethnographic account considers the strategies through which Macedonians and Albanians in Skopje made sense of social reality in conditions of uncertainty, violence, and political turmoil. Neofotistos contributes to a body of literature that illuminates how social actors construct and make meaning of their reality within the context of violence and war. *The Risk of War* expands on this literature by examining the ways in which Macedonians and Albanians negotiate their relative positions within the socio-political structure during a period of political instability.

This book also adds to anthropological studies of former Yugoslavia. The ethnographic account of everyday social interactions and practices in the Republic of Macedonia helps us understand how it has avoided escalation to full civil war even though the specter of ethnonational unrest persists. Finally, Neofotistos wishes to amend the record within circles of political science that celebrate the Ohrid Agreement of 2001 which ended armed hostilities between the Macedonian governing forces and the NLA (Albanian National Liberation Army) as a success of Macedonian and international political cooperation. An accurate account of the cessation of the 2001 armed hostilities, Neofotistos argues, must also recognize the agency of individual actors in helping to avert the escalation of violence.

Neofotistos had been conducting fieldwork in Skopje, the capital of the Republic of Macedonia, for ten months when armed violence erupted in February 2001. A group of NLA insurgents "kidnapped" a team of journalists working for Macedonian TV station A1 and claimed to have "liberated" the village of Tanusevci. According to an NLA statement the goal of the insurgency was to secure greater rights for Albanians residing in the Republic of Macedonia. Neofotistos, who had been studying social relations between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, narrowed her research focus to the practices of everyday life within the context of armed conflict. Her methodology centers on discursive strategies and performative practices.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the socialist history of the Republic of Macedonia, the socio-political hierarchy of Macedonians and Albanians within the state, and sustained experience of uncertainty and anxiety. To explicate developments which lead up to the armed conflict Neofotistos relies on "critical events." These events "disrupted everyday life and brought about new modes of sociopolitical action." (p.15) This methodology is particularly useful in framing

events as socio-political as opposed to simply ethnic or religious. The Republic of Macedonia was formed in the shadow of Tito's institutionalized policies of ethnic nationalism. The post-socialist constitution attempted correction through rights of proportional representation but this continued nationalist differentiation. The critical events are discussed as "politically organized attempts to change the distribution of power between the two dominant ethnonational groups and (re)define the categories and meanings of political membership in post-independence Macedonia." (p. 12)

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with uncertainties about reality, efforts to mitigate anxiety and fear, and the emergence of "regimes of truth." The 2001 conflict resurrected symbolic images and somatic experiences associated with recent violent conflict in the Balkans. Rumors signified the intensification of anxiety. Jokes about the risks associated with everyday life surfaced as an attempt to create sense of control. Macedonian and Albanian media outlets produced competing and mutually exclusive "regimes of truth" regarding the insurgency and the social landscape (p. 63).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 demonstrate the strategies through which Macedonians and Albanians negotiate relationships of power in their everyday social interactions. Both Albanians and Macedonians associate hospitality with honor. Social ties were preserved across ethnic boundaries even as armed conflict intensified. These interactions were a key site of negotiated social positions. Performances of civility enacted the tropes of *politika* (the practitioners of which serve their private interests at the expense of the public) and "ordinary people" (decent/honest people) to avoid choosing sides or legitimating armed conflict. As the conflict intensified, Macedonian men and women enacted strategies to attempt to establish "a fixed set of relationships of power." (p. 84) These efforts were blunted by "Albanian men who cultivated an aura of fluidity and inconclusiveness with regard to relations of power and introduced alternative understandings and representations in the realm of everyday sociality." (p. 100) Albanians enacted performances of respectability and modernity "whereby members of the Macedonian community were left with no choice but to give respect to Albanian individuals and meet them on an equal footing." (p. 107)

Neofotistos argues that a sense of indeterminacy in each of these interactive forms avoid "suggestion of definitive truth about the nature of social reality and the configuration of everyday life." (p 127) Neofotistos suggests that the performative practices she has described exemplify alternative methods of negotiating relationships of power without resorting to armed conflict.

The performative strategies did not completely eliminate the risk of war in Macedonia; they did help to open the possibility of new social and moral order (p. 128). The ethnographic evidence convincingly supports her argument. Future work might elaborate on how these conflict avoidance strategies came to be present within the performative vocabulary of the Albanians and Macedonians. Did the Albanian performances draw upon strategies of survival developed during the times of severe Albanian persecution that were detailed in chapter 1? Further insight may come to light in cross-cultural comparison with other conflicts in the Balkans.

*The Risk of War* would be useful for readers in peace and conflict studies, political anthropology, performative studies, and area studies of the Balkan region. Neofotistos' work makes transparent theoretical connections; the writing is compact and comprehensible. *The Risk of War* is appropriate for use in advanced undergraduate and graduate courses.