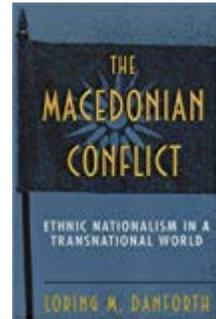




**Loring M. Danforth.** *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. xvi + 273 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-04357-9.



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## The Construction of Macedonian National Identity

Loring M. Danforth's *The Macedonian Conflict* examines the formation of the national identity of the people of Macedonia from an anthropological perspective, and it is an absorbing work. For all of the immediacy of the conflict between Greece and Macedonia that the book describes, the work makes its most intriguing contribution by taking the question of the origins of national identity out of the speculative realm and providing the reader with a case in progress.

Danforth divides his book into eight chapters that reveal the wide range of the study. A brief overview of the various theories of nationalism is followed by a chapter on the background to the conflict between Greek and Macedonian Slav claims to the territory and history of Macedonia. The third chapter delineates the development of a Macedonian national identity, and the fourth concerns the "transnational" nature of that process. A chapter on the status of the Macedonian-speaking population of northern Greece is followed by a discussion of the use of symbols in the conflict between Greece and Macedonia. The seventh chapter is a case study of an individual's odyssey from Greek emigrant to Macedonian

nationalist in Australia. The final chapter draws conclusions regarding the construction of national identity among emigrants from northern Greece in Australia.

Danforth believes that Macedonian, Greek, and other national identities are socially constructed and therefore in flux. This is not a radical departure, as he demonstrates in the review of literature that constitutes much of the first chapter. The work of Fredrik Barth provides his framework, although he pays homage to recent contributions by Ernest Gellner, E.J. Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, and others. When Danforth writes, "Any successful analysis of nationalism must, therefore, balance an emphasis on the obvious modernity of nationalism as a political principle with the equally obvious preexistence of the identities, traditions, and cultures from which it draws" (p. 16), he is mediating the contributions of Gellner and Smith. Gellner is an advocate of the interpretation of national identity as a necessity of the modern industrial state, whereas Smith urges the examination of the historical depth of ethnic identities. The value of the Macedonian case is precisely that the observer can trace with some precision exactly

how the preexisting identities and traditions are reinterpreted and ultimately recast in the modern nation.

Danforth then examines the history of the construction of Macedonian identity. He is rightly cautious about providing a particular date for the emergence of a Macedonian nation. Few Slavs in the region saw themselves as a separate Macedonian people until after the First World War. Greece came into possession of southern Macedonia (as part of Greece, it is known as Aegean Macedonia) in 1913, and thereafter the Greek government's hostility to the Slavs of the region helped convince those Slavs that they were a unique people. The interwar period "was the time that many of them finally came to the conclusion that they were Macedonians and not Greeks" (p. 72). Greek hostility to the Slavic communities of northern Greece produced tensions that eventually found expression in separatism, of which the Greek civil war was an example. That separatism was reinforced by Yugoslavia's support of the Communists in the civil war, since Yugoslavia's new regime encouraged the growth of Macedonian national consciousness. Following the war, the Slavs of Yugoslav (Vardar) Macedonia did begin to feel themselves to be Macedonian, assisted by a government policy that nurtured the separateness of that population. The former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia is now the home of the Macedonian nation.

In contrast to Yugoslavia after 1945, in Greece the rigid nationalist identification of the Greek state and the Greek nation has never permitted the existence of citizens who do not "speak Greek, who are not Orthodox Christians, or who simply do not identify themselves as Greek..." (p.110). Greek educational policy, judicial behavior, and rights of citizenship all are affected by official refusal to admit the existence of people in Greece who do not consider themselves Greek. In spite of official Greece's attempts to stifle Macedonian identity, "[t]he existence of a Macedonian human rights movement effectively refutes the Greek government's claims that there are no Macedonians in Greece, only 'Slavophone Hellenes with a Greek national consciousness'" (p. 108). So the Greek refusal to recognize Macedonians as citizens now faces a Macedonian movement demanding that the government recognize their human rights – in this case, the right to use one's mother tongue and the right to claim a given nationality.

There are parallels elsewhere in southeastern Europe: Kosovo springs to mind, where Albania demands that the Serbian government recognize their rights are lost on a Serbia that will not acknowledge the validity of the Alba-

nian presence in the region – although the Serbian government has never asserted that the Kosovars are "Albanophone Serbs". Other examples of government refusal to acknowledge the presence of minorities include the Pomaks and Turks of Bulgaria – although it should be noted that none of these cases is a direct parallel to the Macedonian situation in Greece.

Given the inability of Greeks and Macedonians to communicate successfully or to mediate their differences, Danforth evaluates the state of contemporary Greco-Macedonian relations in their proper context: as the outgrowth of a symbolic discourse, which makes those relations difficult to decipher for the uninitiated. "The most hotly contested symbol in the global cultural war taking place between Greeks and Macedonians has been without a doubt the name 'Macedonia'" (p. 153), he writes. The Greek position regarding the name is simple: "because Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians were Greek, and because ancient and modern Greece are linked in an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, only Greeks have the right to identify themselves as Macedonians" (p. 32). The Macedonian position is that "a Macedonian is defined as 'a person by inheritance who speaks a Slavonic language coming from that area of Europe known as Macedonia whether such is part of Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, or Albania'" (p. 44).

The fundamental inability of Greeks and Macedonians to agree on the very status of the name of the land and its people seems to be a product of their use of entirely different criteria in defining basic terms – for Greeks, the word "Macedonia" and all that it symbolizes is the critical issue; the goal of the Macedonians is recognition of their ethnospecificity. Other symbols are contested: they range from Alexander the Great to the star of Vergina (possibly an emblem of Alexander's dynasty), but also include the personal names of the people of Macedonia. Petkov becomes Petropoulos, Markov becomes Markidis: "We all have two names," noted one of Danforth's interviewees (pp. 160-61).

The hostility of the Greek government to the development of a Macedonian national identity has driven the Macedonian nationalist movement out of Greece proper. Australia has become one of the focal points of that movement, Canada another. Today there are between 20,000 and 50,000 Macedonian speakers remaining in Greece, of which Danforth estimates 10,000 have a Macedonian national identity (p. 78). There are, according to Danforth's sources, 323,000 Greeks in Australia, of which 55,000 are Greek-Macedonians (Greeks from Macedonia)

(p. 86). In 1988, there were about 75,000 Macedonians in Australia, of whom one-third had come from Greece.

Danforth's treatment of that diaspora community and its role in the development of a Macedonian national identity is one of the major focuses of his book. The diaspora has played a critical role in the formation of Macedonian identity: it has given immigrants from northern Greece "the freedom to express an identity which they were unable to express freely before" (p. 200). Danforth believes that more attention should be paid to "the construction of national identity as a short-term biographical process that takes place over the course of the lifetime of specific individuals" (p. 197). He pursues that goal in the final chapter of the book, entitled "Construction of a National Identity," which treats case studies of emigrants from northern Greece who live in Australia.

In this chapter, it becomes clear that the rigid definitional battles fought between Greeks and Macedonians only serve to give their struggle an imaginary finality: "No one buys his nationality; no one chooses his mother. I inherited this nationality. It's my inheritance, the milk of my mother" (p. 224). Such a statement could come from the mouth of either a Greek or a Macedonian. "Real Greeks" and "real Macedonians" understand each other, even in their often violent struggle. But in the comparative freedom of the diaspora, the most compelling of Danforth's case studies concern those whose identities break down our assumptions and the strictures of official nationalist ideologies.

Danforth's thesis is that national identity is constructed, not primordial, and the most compelling evidence (to my mind) for the verity of his assertion is that there are individuals today who confound the definitions, break the barriers that seemingly divide Greeks and Macedonians. One, who speaks Macedonian, is "a Greek first...a Greek from Macedonia" (p. 233). Others claim varying degrees of Greekness or Macedonianness, usually with certainty. In many of those cases, the subject's identity has shifted within his or her own life-

time. "From a Macedonian and even a Greek nationalist perspective, such people may seem incongruous, their nationality suspect, but from an anthropological perspective, the claims to Greek national identity of people who were born in Greece but speak Macedonian and not Greek are just as legitimate as the claims to Macedonian national identity of people who earlier in their lives identified themselves as Greeks" (p. 225). As a historian, I can only wish that such confounding individuals speaking so clearly could be found in my sources.

Perhaps it is too bad that this wonderful book does nothing to refute the old cliché about the ultimate inscrutability of Macedonia. The converse is actually true: Danforth adds to the complexity of our understanding of Macedonia and Macedonian and Greek identities, but in a rich and ultimately rewarding way. Because it is resolutely not reductionist, *The Macedonian Conflict* will be of much less use to the concerned policymaker trying to "solve" the difficulties in Greco-Macedonian relations than to the scholar of identity formation, who will rejoice at its use of evidence from the field. It is an outstanding book: it ranges widely, treating historical and modern political issues with dexterity.

National identity has become the pervasive form of self-identification and political action in the modern world. This book can stand as a warning, both to historians who precipitously attribute firmly developed national identity to peoples in the past and to politicians who assume the validity of simplistic national categories. I must leave to reviewers with anthropological expertise the evaluation of the theoretical contribution that Danforth's study makes, but from a historian's perspective, the book is a rich consideration of a problem that will vex those concerned with southeastern Europe for some time.

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