



## Macedonia & Its Questions. Origins, Margins, Ruptures & Continuity

edited by Victor Friedman, Goran Janev and George Vlahov, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2020, vii, 371 pp., \$73.95 (paperback)

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Macedonia & Its Questions. Origins, Margins, Ruptures & Continuity**, edited by Victor Friedman, Goran Janev and George Vlahov, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2020, vii, 371 pp., \$73.95 (paperback)

A common problem with any book that deals with the Macedonian Question(s) is that as soon as it is published, it often quickly becomes somewhat superseded by new developments. This is the case here too: the editors and authors obviously made a serious effort to put together a timely book that would deal with many of the open issues related to Macedonia (no matter how it is defined). For instance, this edition ends with an analysis of the Prespa agreement (i.e., the name change deal between Athens and Skopje, PA), but by the end of 2020 another urgent (political and geopolitical) aspect of the Macedonian Question has grabbed centre-stage. Hence one can soon anticipate the publication of new books attempting to deal with what looks like an endless story. This collection of essays by authors from different academic and national backgrounds has an ambition to offer overarching views on Macedonian Questions, unlike anything that has been previously published in relation to Macedonian matters. From the very outset, the editors communicate to their readership that the originality of this interdisciplinary book lies in questioning 'those who would be the questioners'. In other words, instead of taking the so-called (the old as well as the new) Macedonian Question for granted, the contributors have embarked on an academic journey that accepts 'Macedonian', without any hesitation, as a referential term that is on the same level as 'Greek', 'Bulgarian', 'Serbian', 'Albanian', etc. In addition to the brief introduction, the book comprises three sections containing a total of eleven chapters. The sections focus on a question of language, genealogies and consequences, and human rights and wrongs. A significant weakness of the book project as a whole is the failure to provide a conclusion. It looks as if the editors did not reach a consensus over the issues or maybe they decided it was too soon to come out with some more specific findings. The 'language section' builds on previous linguistic and historical research in relation to the genealogy and intertwined trajectories of the Balkan Slavic languages. Each of the four chapters deal with different aspects of the question of language; the end result does indeed question the questioners of the Macedonian language and presents pertinent evidence for the development of the Macedonian language from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Among the well-grounded historical and sociolinguistic articles, one chapter appears to provide a bird's eye view of the so-called name dispute and the deeper identity conflict that questions the very existence of the Macedonians as a distinct ethnicity and nationality even in the 21 century. According to the title, the second section is supposed to deal with genealogies and consequences of Macedonia's questions. However, it says almost nothing consistent about the origin, ruptures, continuity or consequences of the Macedonian Question(s). This section consists of three contributions by a writer, a historian and a philosopher. The first one traces the origins of the Greek nationalist imaginary regarding the Macedonian issue. The second one is a discussion of the political fate and victimhood of the first head of the state of socialist Macedonia (Metodija Andonov Čento), during the communist regime. The third one makes a leap to more recent times by focusing on the authoritarian rule of Nikola Gruevski (2006–2016). It is a relevant contribution in the context of the recent rise of authoritarianism and stabilitocracy in the Balkans. However it would have been usefully followed by a chapter that offered a

glimpse of the continuity of autocratic and corruptive governance after the fall of Gruevski and the deepening of internal ruptures within the Macedonian political scene and society in general. The third section seems to be the most coherent one: it deals with the violation of the minority rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria and Greece, including the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. The chapter about the continuing oppression of Macedonians in Greece, is particularly well written. The most up-to-date and most thought-provoking is the last chapter, which not only deals with the latest re-modelling of the Macedonian Question through the PA but also comes out with a fresh theoretical and analytical approach. It presents an innovative view in regard to 'questioning the questioners' via different theoretical approaches (human rights, multiculturalism, social justice theory, misrecognition and personhood). The author claims that the PA is a textbook case of misrecognition because it implicitly patronizes a distortion of the identity of Macedonians in both Greece and what was the Republic of Macedonia. The end result is a book that keeps the focus on Macedonia and its definitions and open questions, as it is obvious that neither the Prespa Agreement nor the Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighbourliness, and Cooperation with Bulgaria have offered any closure or healing potential for the turbulent Balkan region. *Macedonia & Its Questions. Origins, Margins, Ruptures & Continuity* is an admirable contribution to the growing literature on Macedonia. It offers many important insights especially in the controversial topic of a language (or better, questioning of one's distinct language and cultural history), and primarily of misrecognition in the Balkans, but also in the wider European context. There is enough to hold the attention of readers with specialist interests in Macedonia and although some chapters may leave the reader yearning for more detail, in a collection of eleven essays this can only be a good thing. Anyone interested in Macedonia and its endless questioning, which has again acquired such urgent topicality, will find this excellent volume richly rewarding.

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