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From Inclusive Identities to Inclusive Societies: Exploring Complex Social Identity in the Macedonian Context

Ali Pajaziti, Biljana Blaževska-Stoilovska, Ana Fritzhand

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Abstract

Republic of Macedonia is an entity described as cultural mosaic, with strong multiethnic and multi-confessional basis, it is a point where East and West meet, it is well-known for the system of Macedonian salad. But, this society even after 25 year of social transition and 2001 Ohrid Agreement did not achieve to find the way of conclusive peace, stability and social eudemonia. The diversity is issue that from time to time produces turbulences, especially at the line of two main identity groups Macedonians-Christian Orthodox and Albanians-Muslim community.

Quantitative data in this study were obtained on a sample of 219 young adults from Skopje (95 of Macedonian and 17 of Albanian ethnicity) and Tetovo (76 of Albanian and 31 of Macedonian ethnicity), aged from 18 to 35 years (M = 24.85, SD = 3.2). Main research question is that if there exist differences between young Macedonians and Albanians in their ethnic, religious and national identity? The objective of this paper is to give a scientific picture how categories as gender, marriage, family, ethnicity, religion, living place, Balkan, Europe are perceived by the youth, all this in favour of using them in producing affirmative actions, more productive societal policies and constructive society-building. Multiple social identities: their complexity and inclusiveness, the correlation of

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identity variables with SII and SIC are among issues analyzed in this paper. National dominance was more frequent among Macedonians. Our findings demonstrate that Albanian participants expressed strong social identity, as Albanians and as being Muslims. Only social identity inclusiveness is significantly related to societal and political attitudes, but ethnicity should be taken into consideration when this relationship is explored.

Key Words: Macedonia, identity, young people, perception(s), ethnicity, religion, complex identities

1. Ethnic and Religious Identity: Theoretical Background

The concept of social identity, "proved fruitful for the analysis of various social problems" (Westin at al., 2010) refers to an individual and/or collective aspect of social being. Judith Howard and Ramira Alamilla observe that identity is based not only on responses to the question "Who am I?" but also on responses to the question "Who am I in relation to others?" (2001, as cited in Allen, 2011) Social identity indicates how the person is defined in terms of social characteristics such as gender, age, ethnic background, religious affiliation, nationality. These characteristics define people's position in social structure or space (Verkuyten, 2005). Social identities are closely related to the context. So, ethnic identity, for example, could be highly relevant in one situation, but almost unimportant in other circumstances. For Wentholt (1991, as cited in Verkuyten, 2005) this depends upon the situations and upon the relations between and within the groups in those situations. It was concluded that adolescents expressed their feelings in regard to ethnicity in accordance to the situations and people in that situations (Phinney, 1990, as cited in Verkuyten, 2005). Back (1996) demonstrated that ethnic identity was denied in favour of local and sub-cultural identities, but at the same time exclusive notions of ethnicity were registered.

It should be emphasized that context does not refer only to the local environment, but broader historical, economic, and political circumstances need to be taken into consideration (Ashmore et al., 2004).

Group Identification is a psychological process depending on personal characteristics, preferences, needs, experiences, and circumstances. As Verkuyten (2005) stated, identification with the group to which one belongs can also be resisted or denied, that is when the person does not want to

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belong to that group which often results in criticism from other members of that group.

Ethnic identity is an affinitive construct, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group. (Trimble & Dickson, 2010) Another important dimension of identity is the religious one, which is in the focus of academic fields like psychology and sociology. The first presentation for the possibility of a psychological construct for religious identity (empirically measurable and separable from other identity domains) was recently given to the American Psychological Association's Division 36 Conference (Psychology of Religion) (Bell, 2009). Among others religious identity related issues include questions such as under what circumstances should one change one's religion, how should one feel about interfaith marriage? (Waterman, 1993, as cited in Bell, 2009).

The link between religion and identity especially with reference to youth religiousness and search for identity is very important item in Balkan context, where last decades we face a kind of religious revivalism or the phenomenon of return of the sacred.

Social identity complexity denotes the degree of perceived overlap between groups of which an individual is member at the same time, i.e. it reflects subjective representation of her/his multiple identities (Roccas and Brewer, 2002) Higher level of SIC was related to more positive attitudes toward multiculturalism and affirmative action (Brewer & Pierce, 2008) and was associated to more positive out group attitudes (Schmid et al., 2009). More complex social identity was registered in majority group (Anglo-Australian students) and less complex social identity reported members of minority group (Asian-Australian students). (Brewer, Gonsalkorale & van Dommelen, 2012)

2. Macedonia: The Context of Cultural Diversity

The focus of this paper is the ethnic and religious group identification, social identity complexity and inclusiveness among Macedonian and Albanian young adults in Macedonia.

Macedonia is a historical, political, economic and cultural reality, and it is known for its ethnic and cultural diversity, for its multicultural history. Its territory has been inhabited during all periods of human civilizations; it has further been a part and even centre of big empires and civilizations. Macedonia is historically known as 'Catena Mundi' (The Clasp of the

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World) due to its favourable geographical position as a crossroad of the important roads (Muhiq, 2007, 4).

Macedonia is a "civilization corridor" where West and East, Christianity and Islam are being brought together, exemplified by the many mosques and churches throughout the country.

A good example to this is the capital city of the country, Skopje. If Skopje is a Macedonia in small and the Old/Ottoman Bazaar is one of its segments, then we can focus on it as a space in which we shall find many elements of this cultural diversity. Skopje has another element by which it can be easily identified, the Stone Bridge, an ancient building which has a specific significance, both for the citizens of this city and for the ones who would come to visit it.

The cultural mosaic is described also as a "deep diversity" (Taylor, 1994), it is a natural condition. If we have a look at the statistic data, we shall notice that diverse ethnic and religious belongings can be found there, which in turn create a heterogeneous situation. In this multicultural or heterogeneous context, Macedonians are major ethnic group, followed by Albanians, Orthodox Christianity is dominant religion and the second is Islam.

There are many places where Macedonian and Albanian young adults meet together, such as universities, working settings, cafes, but those relations among them are mostly rare. Previous actions/events and conditions demonstrate that common goals are good base for their connection. High unemployment rate-the biggest problem for youth in Macedonia regardless of ethnic or other social group where they belong or through which they define themselves.

It is however to conclude that the ethnic membership issue is much more sensitive, as it coincides with the religious affiliation. The majority of the ethnic Macedonians are Orthodox Christians, whereas the majority of the ethnic Albanians are Muslims (Pajaziti, 2012).

As Atanasov (2012) states "Instead of losing the importance, the ethnic dimensions in Macedonian society are just getting stronger on both sides, Macedonian and Albanian." (pp. 9). Namely, the author points out that the country is closer to ethnic democracy than to multicultural model.

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3. Ethnic and Religious Identity Complexity and Inclusiveness among Skopje-Tetovo Youth

3.1. Quantitative study

3.1.1. Sample

The sample included a total of 219 young people from Skopje (95 of Macedonian and 17 of Albanian ethnicity) and Tetovo (76 of Albanian and 31 of Macedonian ethnicity). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 (M_{age} = 24.85, SD = 3.2). Detailed sample structure by gender and education level is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Sample structure by gender and education

		Skopje		Tetovo	
		Macedonian	Albanian	Macedonian	Alba nian
Sex	Male	45	10	11	44
	Female	50	7	20	32
Education status	High school	44	3	5	12
	University	51	14	26	64

Source: Authors' own calculations

3.1.2. Measures

The data on ethnic and religious group identification, social identity complexity and social identity inclusiveness were collected in the period January-February, 2015. Following measures were used:

Group identification measure – respondents assessed relative importance of ethnic and religious groups on a 5-point Likert scale (1-not important, 5-very important); higher score denoted stronger identification to the actual group.

SIC scale with 6 statements; respondents estimated the degree of overlap between pairs of in-groups (ethnic, religious, national) on a scale ranging from 1 to 11; higher score indicated lower SIC.

SII measure- respondents were asked to sort 24 cards with silhouettes with factious names into their in-group; range of obtained score was from 0 to 24; four SII subscores were calculated for four situations of the card sorting task – when the fictitious target shared three, two, one, or zero in-

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groups with a given participant; SII score was higher when the target shared more in-groups with the participant.

3.1.3. Results

Group identification refers to the relative importance prescribed to different social groups. In this study ethnic and religious groups were taken into consideration. Results in Table 2 demonstrated that identification of Macedonian young adults from Skopje and from Tetovo with their ethnic group was low if compared to the scale midpoint which is 3 (ranging from 1 to 5). Considering their identification to religious group, it could be seen that it is slightly below the scale midpoint. Contrary, Albanian young adults from Skopje and from Tetovo expressed relatively strong identification to their ethnic and religious group. This is especially true for religious group identification among Albanian youth in Skopje. The findings could be explained through the cultural orientation - while Albanians are more collectivistic, Macedonians are somewhere in the middle on the collectivism-individualism continuum with tendency to manifest individualistic behaviour.

Table 2: Mean scores on ethnic and religious group identification by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town		
		Skopje	Tetovo	Total
Macedonian	Ethnic group identification	2.21	2.85	2.34
	Religious group identification	2.46	2.92	2.56
Albanian	Ethnic group identification	3.75	4.07	4.01
	Religious group identification	4.56	3.95	4.05

Source: Authors' own calculations

Social identity complexity (SIC) is perceived overlap between the national, ethnic and religious groups a person belongs to. The higher score

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on the scale means lower perceived overlap between the groups and higher level of the identity complexity. The mean score for social identity complexity in the whole sample was 4.81, slightly below the theoretical midpoint of 6 at the 11-point scale from 1 to 11. However, the results can be meaningfully interpreted only when we split the data by ethnicity, since the Macedonians and the Albanians respond to different questions, related to their different identities[1]. These identities objectively overlap in different manner, due to the fact that the Macedonians are the majority and the Albanians a minority in the country.

Table 3 provides the means for different SIC measures, separately for Macedonians and Albanians both in the Skopje and in the Tetovo subsamples. As expected, Macedonians respondents expressed lower identity complexity compared to Albanians, the difference being most prominent in their perception of overlap based on nationality, probably due to majority position of Macedonians and minority position of Albanians.

Apparently, Albanians in Tetovo had more complex social identity complexity than Albanians in Skopje. Macedonians from Skopje and from Tetovo reported similar level of social identity complexity. In particular, their social identity complexity in regard to religion was highest, whereas among Albanians highest social identity complexity was registered in nationality domain. It should be mentioned that strong identification with religious group among Albanian study participants from Skopje was followed by evidently low social identity complexity.

[1] For Macedonians these identities are: Macedonian (ethnicity), Ortodox (religion) and Macedonia (nationality), while for the Albanians they are Albanian (ethnicity), Muslim (religion) and Macedonian (nationality).

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Table 3: Mean scores on social identity complexity (SIC) variables by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town	
		Skopje	Tetovo
Macedonian	SIC (higer values indicate greater complexity)	4.50	4.26_a
	SIC Ethnicity	3.82	3.63_a
	SIC Religion	5.28	4.66_a
	SIC Nationality	4.40	4.50_a
Albanian	SIC (higer values indicate greater complexity)	3.82	5.64
	SIC Ethnicity	3.74	5.40
	SIC Religion	3.29	5.55
	SIC Nationality	4.44	5.97

Source: Authors' own calculations

Social identity inclusiveness (SII) is the range of people a person identifies with (i.e. categorises as "Us" rather than "Them") through shared group membership. SII refers to how inclusively or exclusively one defines the in-group from the combination of multiple cross-cutting categories.

In Table 4 the means for different SII measures, separately for Macedonian and Albanian youth both in Skopje and in Tetovo were presented. The mean score for social identity inclusiveness - the number of persons respondents sorted into their in-group - across all participants was 13.53, slightly above midpoint on the scale from 0 to 24 which was 12. On average, Macedonian participants demonstrated relatively the same level of inclusiveness as Albanian participants.

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Table 4: Mean scores on social identity inclusiveness (SII) variables by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town	
		Skopje	Tetovo
Macedonian	SII higer values indicate greater inclusiveness	13.52_a	13.22_a
	SII (3 overlaps)	5.85_a	5.52_a
	SII (2 overlaps)	4.38_a	4.06_a
	SII (1 overlaps)	2.41_a	2.64_a
	SII (0 overlaps)	0.87_a	1.00_a
Albanian	SII higer values indicate greater inclusiveness	13.00_a	13.79_a
	SII (3 overlaps)	5.53_a	5.80_a
	SII (2 overlaps)	4.18_a	4.51_a
	SII (1 overlaps)	2.35_a	2.56_a
	SII (0 overlaps)	0.94_a	0.91_a

Source: Authors' own calculations

3.2. Qualitative study

This part of the paper is based on a focus group discussions. One was done in Tetovo in July, 2015 with 11 young participants, 7 males and 4 females from 21 – 27 years old. All of the Tetovo participants/respondents identified themselves as ethnic Albanians and Muslims. Some of them were students/ex students coming from different fields of study; two of them employed in the private sector, two had their own small businesses (self-employed) and 2 others were unemployed. Participants provided information in two ways: written responses and moreover, group discussions.

The discussion was designed to gather information from the group in regard to the following outcomes:

1. To understand their own identity, the ethnic and religious one and which one feels the most
2. To understand the coexistence with other communities, as a need or as a matter of choice

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3. To understand what impact their identity perception has on their daily life and constructing the future
4. To understand the importance of recognizing and embracing their fate as citizens of the same country, or looking at each-other as exclusive examples on their respective lives
5. To understand until where a relationship between "those" and "us" can go, depending on ethnic identity, religious identity, language etc.
7. To understand what society does (milieu's role) - building bridges or dividing people - if rare cases of coexistence are showed up (mixed marriages or religious converts)

In addition, a case study (an interview) with a Macedonian ethnic respondent representing the minority in Tetovo (a girl, in her early twenties) was also conducted.

The young girl showed a type of social identity, mostly based on ethnicity and religion, and a more flexible perception on citizenship.

The research findings confirmed once again that the Balkan's mindset is still strong and active among young Albanians in regard to perception and social inclusiveness, where ethnicity and religion are very highly ranked on the social identity scale.

Albanians in Tetovo tend to keep tight to their identity, both ethnic and religious. When asked about identity, they loudly say its "Albanian" and "Muslims", as the core of their human being, inherited by their ancestors. Living in the mixed society of Macedonia, they do feel proud of emphasizing their identity. They relate themselves and their identity, with places, dates, or events. For example, they feel more Albanian on November 28th (The Independence day of Albania), when they visit any historical site like Vlora (where Albanians raised the Flag of Independence), Bitola (Alphabet House), when the Albanian national team is playing soccer, when they hear about heroes or celebrities like Skanderbeg, Mother Teresa, Rita Ora, etc.

This perception is kept even abroad. Albanians tend to introduce themselves by the Albanian identity rather than the country they come from (the citizenship), i.e. Macedonia. Instead of saying "I'm from Macedonia" they tend to emphasize that they are Albanians, and feel more related to Albania.

As mentioned above, participants showed a strong social identity, as Albanians and being Muslims. Compared to Albanians from Albania and

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from Kosovo, the Macedonia's Albanian community identifies itself with two un-separate elements, religion (Islam) and ethnicity (Albanianism*).

Endogamy is a type of marriage that Tetovo's Albanians tend to embrace. If an Albanian ethnic marries with a Macedonian woman, then the bride is considered as "us", no matter of the identity or religion she actually is. This is considered as a "conquest", taking in consideration the tradition that from now on, the woman is going to act (live the life) according to Albanian traditions and customs or by converting to her husband's religion – Islam.

But if an Albanian man is changing either the ethnical identity or the religious one, Albanians consider it as "a pure act of betrayal" (*male 21 yrs old, student*). *"I'm very stable and stoic to my religion."*- one of the participants said, trying not to mix up the religion with marriage.

In this category, it is obvious that religious element determines the companionship with Muslim based on ethnic identities, like being Turk, Bosniak or Macedonian Muslims (torbesh) and a gap with non Muslim communities (in local and global perspective).

The inter-ethnic marriages are approved from them, if the two sides share the same belief (i.e. Islam): (*"If Mirsad, yes... maybe… his name seems to be like an Albanian one… and moreover we have common elements, common things… If any Dragan or Vlado, no!"* – a participant says.

Strong refusal when in situations if an Orthodox woman (even Albanian) from Albania marries a Serbian or a Macedonian man... To the participants, the bride is definitely not from "us".

Except of religion and ethnicity, another strong indicator of the marriage is the language too. *"As some of the participants emphasized, if she (the bride) refuses to learn my language.... I'll look for other alternatives".*

All the respondents expressed a high refusal of identity conversion, both religious and ethnical, but they feel more open on changeability of nationality or citizenship. *"Yes, if I'd have the chance, yes!"* (male, 22 yrs old, student) *"Yes, definitely, for a better life…"* (male, 21 yrs old, self-employed) *"I'd prefer every possible country, better than Macedonia, like Switzerland, Germany, USA…"* (female, 24 yrs old, unemployed).

As it is shown so far, participants reflected enhanced social identity complexity, by in-group and out-group belongings.

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* Albanianism is referreing to the Albanian ethnocentrism, it is a feeling of belongness, as panalbanian ideology, kind of civic religion.

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Participants stood after the "we" form, only in two cases, if Albanians and if Muslims. The strong ethnic identity was mostly referred to sentences like: *"We are... Albanians, patriotic, people of word (Besa*), people of faith (religion), people of a strong belief, humanists, hardworking persons etc."*

Participants perceive Albanians in general as peaceful people who and never looked for war or trouble in the region, stressing attributes like pride, peace, culture, history, faith etc.

When asked directly what's representing "them" (the out-group), participants immediately took hard stance, defining the other major community in Macedonia, Macedonians. By completing the sentence: "They are.... Macedonians, orthodox", participants continued to elaborate these characteristics for Macedonians, as people which cannot be trusted easily. Participants defined Macedonians as Slavs, and always "ready for troubles".

The case study with an ethnic Macedonian girl from Tetovo showed a very open minded and cosmopolitan approach (*I'd like to speak all languages of the world. The more languages you know, the more you matter to other people and the world"*) her identity still is "dressed" by the Balkan's mindset (closed to other ethnic marriages - and highly affected by the environment).

Even though, according to her "it is the love itself that needs to be heard" as she said first, still the consent from the family is more than necessary. She didn't totally exclude the family and the society. *"I'd analyze things first, listening to my family and friends, and then taking a decision, which certainly would be "No""* - she said.

This refusal comes even though, the respondent tends to make a coexisting life with other ethnic and religious group, (taking in consideration the fact that her best friend is an Albanian). *"My very best friend is a Muslim girl, an Albanian one. And even the milk my family buys is coming from and Albanian merchandiser. Trust is not a question."*

Regarding religion, she was a very open-minded respondent too. But when directly asked what the Big Cross and Mosque Minarets mean to her, she says: *"Nothing at all, but I'd like to add something here: These religious elements have to be treated equally. God offered this land to allow us live all. And a*

* Besa is refered to the word keeping among albanians, if the word is literally given and kept as a promis and as an word of honor.

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message to all the politicians, policymakers etc: Do not divide people on ethnic bases, because it's not about a community, but about the entire country".

"I trust my friend so much... I love baklava, but what I love most is ashura, and I love the way Albanian people prepare it."

Focus group in Skopje had 9 participants, 5 female and 4 male participants, aged from 21 to 30 years, 4 of them were graduate students, 1 was postgraduate student, 1 had master degree, 1 completed higher education, 1 was full time employee and 1 was postgraduate student and full time employee at the same time. The focus group was realised in May, 2015.

All participants strongly emphasized vocational identity (they described themselves primarily as employees, students, members of student organizations, volunteer associations. It was reported that ethnic, religious and national identity are not important. But in the same time, from the statement *"In sport, in situation when someone represents my country, than yes* [I feel as Macedonian]" (female, graduate student, 3th year of study) it can be concluded that the importance of the national background is expressed when the country is presented abroad. Considering changeability of social identity, nationality (citizenship status) could be changed due to low employment rate in Macedonia, greater opportunities for employment and abilities/knowledge/potentials utilization abroad and as a result of unstable and uncertain situation in the country, as was perceived by participants. But religious and especially ethnic identity would not be changed though they are seen as unimportant. The social environment, i.e. its pressure was recognized as a factor of un-changeability of ethnic and religious identity, as well. *"...That will be perceived as a betrayal"* stated female participant, graduate student. Additionally, participants assessed neighbourhood and workplace as contexts where national, religious and/or ethnic identity are important, because an individual ought to be accepted in that groups on the bases of "membership requirements" fulfilment. On the other hand, family was recognized as a context where social identity is the least important. This was explained by the notion that the family will accept you unconditionally.

Participants perceived national, ethnic and religious group as not overlapping – to be Macedonian citizen does not mean to be ethnic Macedonian in the same time. But, in everyday life, overlaps between ethnicity and religion exist, as a result of the strong influence of family, education, the broader environment, peers, the role of tradition and

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culture. *"...People identify with both together ... they are imposed, according to the tradition and culture..."* noted female participant, postgraduate student. It is obvious that young ethnic Macedonians perceive the other as Albanians (Thiessen, 2007: 166) Stereotypes and prejudices, different value system and culture, as well as due to the problems created by politicians and the way media report the events were stressed as factors of segregation among ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Language was identified as the largest barrier. So, strengthening the complexity of social identity should be based on larger number of contacts, more frequent communication, defining common goals. In this regard, Students' Plenum was mentioned as an example where all the students acted together toward the same goals. It was expressed that both Macedonians and Albanians would like to live in peaceful and prosperous environment, but that Albanians' opinion on this question depends on several factors, such as the level of education, training, place of living.

4. Conclusions

In Macedonia, the level of identity complexity and identity inclusiveness doesn't depend much upon the place of living (Skopje or Tetovo). Only among Albanians who live in Tetovo, social identity complexity is higher than among Albanians who live in Skopje. On the other hand, the way Macedonian participants see the inclusiveness and the way in which Albanians see themselves should be taken into account - while Macedonians recognize citizenship as a base for inclusiveness, Albanians expressed low affiliation/commitment to the nationality. But there is openness / willingness to enhance social identity complexity by better communication, by setting common goals and overcoming the language barrier. Another mutual characteristic is that both youth groups want better life. Very differently to adult young Albanians, for ethnic Macedonians religion is not seen as belief but as denominator of identity.

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