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Shaping Social Identities After Violent Conflict

Youth in the Western Balkans

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Foreword

A number of Enlightenment philosophers and classic social scientists thought that as a result of social and economic progress, ethnicity would over time lose its allure, disappear, and become a phenomenon of the past. If these classic writers were right, the present book that focuses on social identities of young people in ex-Yugoslavia in the early twenty-first century would have studied other identities, and ethnicity would have been of no concern to young people. This book, however, shows that most, if not all, young people today in ex-Yugoslavia have to grapple with issues surrounding ethnic identity, ethnocentrism, and ethnic prejudice across many situations and, for many of them, ethnicity is possibly the most prominent category when it comes to central life decisions, such as whom to marry and whom not to marry, whom to befriend and whom not to befriend, and where to live and where not to live.

Ethnicity has not disappeared in the regions that constituted Yugoslavia, but in the 1980s, it strengthened and made a tremendous comeback, and in the 1990s it was responsible for the worst intergroup violence in Europe in the last 70 years. Previously, and for several decades, Yugoslavia was a country where many ethnic groups happily co-existed. In certain ways, Yugoslavia was a rarity in Europe, where most national states have been dominated by a single ethnic majority group. A visitor to Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s encountered a tolerant and successful multi-ethnic country. A visitor to Yugoslavia in the 1990s, however, encountered

a very different country—a country torn by ethnic conflicts and wars, a country that most ethnic groups wanted to leave in order to create separate and ethnically homogeneous national states.

Contemporary social psychological consequences of the wars in the 1990s and other inter-ethnic conflicts for young people are detailed in this book written by Iris Žeželj, Felicia Pratto, and their colleagues. This book presents results of an ambitious research project that studied a very large sample of young people from both ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups in eight cities and towns within four regions of ex-Yugoslavia. The researchers used a sophisticated research design that included various methodologies, such as self-reports, focus groups, interviews, videotaping, and document analyses. They obtained very rich data, both quantitative and qualitative, to thoroughly document what it means to be a young person in a part of the world that consists of mutually hostile and suspicious ethnic groups, with a recent history of inter-ethnic conflict. This research depicts how young people deal with a world where there are low levels of contact and trust between ethnic groups, and where people exhibit strong preferences for, and idealization of, ethnic ingroups, as well as outgroup hostility and even at times dehumanization of ethnic outgroups. As a result of living in such a world, ethnic identity for many young people may translate into rejection of those who are different.

This book also shows that ethnicity in ex-Yugoslavia cannot be understood without reference to two other large-scale social identities, namely those related to religion and national state. Although Yugoslavia was a secular state propagating Marxism and atheism, in the 1980s and 1990s, religiosity emerged as powerful force in the ethnic groups. Since classic writings on ethnocentrism by Gumpłowicz, Sumner, and Adorno and his colleagues, we know that ethnocentrism, ethnic prejudice, and religiosity reinforce each other, and that ethnicity has historically been often closely aligned with religion. Although it is difficult to disentangle which comes first, one may assume that ethnicity is more basic and ethnic groups use religion to justify their own importance. As shown in the book, for Serbs, ethnicity and religiosity are almost the same, and ethnic and religious identification overlap to such an extent that they are indistinguishable: being a Serb means being a Serbian Orthodox, and being a Serbian Orthodox means being a Serb.

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Towards Inclusive Social Identities in the Republic of Macedonia

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Ana Fritzhand, Agron Rustemi, and Admir Qose

Macedonia is a small Balkan country with a mixed ethnic composition: Macedonians make up two-thirds of the population of 2 million, Albanians—as one quarter of the total population—are the second most numerous ethnic group, whilst Serbs, Turks, Bosniaks, Vlachs, and Roma together account for about 11 percent. The dominant religion is Christianity: the most prevalent is Orthodox Christianity (64.78 percent), followed by Islam (33 percent) (Census of population, 2002). Analyzing ethnicity and religion, the same source shows a high level of overlap in regard to the affiliation to these groups—the majority of the ethnic Macedonians are Orthodox Christians, whereas the majority of the ethnic Albanians are Muslims.

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Macedonia in the Near Past and Today: Inter-Ethnic Relations Among Macedonians and Albanians

After the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia peacefully declared its independence through a referendum in which 98 percent of those who turned out to vote opted for separation. Macedonia adopted its constitution in which ethnic Macedonians were the constitutive people, and Macedonian was the official language. At the same time, the rights of all citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation were guaranteed. Albanian representatives in the parliament did not vote for the new constitution. What followed was a period of political turbulences, during which the relations between Macedonians and Albanians became polarized and tense. In regard to responsibility for the conflict, the two ethnic groups voiced different views. Macedonians attributed the responsibility for these growing animosities to radical Albanian politicians, and dismissed Albanians' statements they were "second class" citizens as absurd (for more details, see Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2009). On the other hand, Albanians claimed they were deprived of their rights as an ethnic minority, while Albanian politicians asked for pluralistic and multiethnic policies to be implemented.

The armed conflict of 2001, when the so-called Albanian Liberation Army (NLA/UÇK) from Kosovo attacked the Macedonian army and police, was justified by the Albanian political parties as an attempt of Albanians in Macedonia to acquire extended cultural rights and the status of constitutive people. It was put to an end after the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA, the peace agreement from August 13th, 2001), signed by Macedonian and Albanian political parties and the president of the Republic of Macedonia with mediation of the international community. Analyses showed that ethnic Macedonians saw the signing of the OFA as being dishonored by the international community, betrayed by the government, and humiliated by Albanians (Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2009). The entire process of its implementation was seen as a weakening of the Macedonian identity (Lesnikovski, 2011). On the other hand, for Albanians it did not maintain the national integrity of the citizens who

do not belong to the majority—those who are not ethnic Macedonians (Reka, 2011).

After these events, findings on inter-ethnic relations between Macedonian and Albanian youth revealed that the separation between them became greater than before (in surveys in 1996, 1998, and 2000)—Macedonians perceived Albanians as more hostile and dangerous, while Albanians saw Macedonians in a more negative light, but viewed them as harmless (Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2002). Similar results on how Macedonian and Albanian youth perceive mutual differences were reported in a recent study by Pajaziti, Sela, and Trajkovska (2015). If tendencies for explicit manifestation of differences are a strong sign of tension between ethnic groups (Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2002), then evidence implies that fostering inclusiveness in Macedonian society is needed. As noted in Verkuyten and Martinovic (2016), many authors argue that it is important to find a balance between the need for distinctiveness and for similarity. In that sense, identification with a superordinate group—such as national—together with the identification with one's own ethnic group could be a beneficial basis for the recognition of similarity and distinctiveness at the same time. This could be a way to simultaneously foster inclusiveness and stress that identification with a superordinate group is not always a threat to the subordinate group affiliation.

Given the history of inter-ethnic tensions and the current political climate in Macedonia, we aimed to investigate the salience of ethnic, religious, and national identities among young ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Additionally, we examined the contact between the two groups in various contexts.

In this study, quantitative data were obtained on a sample of 264 young adults from Skopje (100 of Macedonian and 61 of Albanian ethnicity) and Tetovo (76 of Albanian and 26 of Macedonian ethnicity), aged from 18 to 35 years ($M = 24.85$, $SD = 3.2$). Ethnic Macedonians are the local majority in Skopje, while Albanians are the major local ethnicity in Tetovo. Taking into consideration both their status on the state and on the local level, Macedonians who live in Skopje are a “double majority,” while Albanians in this city represent a “double minority.”

Us and Them: Identification With Ethnic, Religious, and National Group Among Macedonian and Albanian Young Adults

Social identity denotes social categorization based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and so on. Social identity thus indicates the similarities among members of one group and the differences with members of other groups. Among the most important social identities that develop at an early age are gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation (Verkuyten, 2005). When affiliation is accompanied by emotional attachment to the group, then there is identification with that group.

Individuals simultaneously belong to a great number of social categories, which implies that they have multiple identities. These could be mutually exclusive, depending on the circumstances and the way they are defined and articulated. Studies conducted before the events in Kosovo in 1998 and in Macedonia in 2001 (Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2002) showed that Macedonian and Albanian students perceived their own ethnic group in a positive way, as very valuable, especially the latter group. These results replicated several years later: both Macedonian and Albanian students demonstrated relatively high degrees of ethnocentrism and exclusive acceptance of values of their ethnic ingroup (Jashari, 2005).

However, events starting in 2014 demonstrated that common goals are a good basis for connection between the groups. Namely, students of all ethnic groups together with university teachers started protests against the new controversial law on higher education in December 2014. In January and February of the following year, students “occupied” state universities in Skopje and Bitola, advocating that the autonomy of the university cannot be bounded by the law. Both Macedonian and Albanian students acted together toward the same goal. Many protests have been organized since, and through a series of events the state fell into a serious political crisis that lasts even today. Macedonian and Albanian citizens, as well as all other groups, are faced with the same problems—economic and social insecurity and instability.

The separation between Us and Them (Macedonians and Albanians) can be viewed through the existing psychological distance and mutual stereotyping. The salience of ethnic, religious, and national identities among young ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians and the contacts between the two groups in various contexts were the focus of this study. In the following text, the results of the quantitative analyses on three types of social identities and contacts among members of both ethnic groups are presented.

The findings demonstrated that young Macedonians and Albanians ascribe different levels of importance to the investigated social groups.¹ Namely, the level of ethnic ($M = 2.21$) and religious ($M = 2.46$) identification of the surveyed young Macedonians from Skopje was low; the identification with ethnic ($M = 2.85$) and religious ($M = 2.92$) group of Macedonians from Tetovo was slightly below the mid-point of the scale (hereinafter, the mean of a scale will be noted as the average); the national identification of both groups—Macedonians from Skopje ($M = 3.05$) and Macedonians from Tetovo ($M = 2.96$)—was assessed as average (Table 7.1).

In contrast, Albanian young adults from Skopje and especially from Tetovo expressed relatively strong identification with their ethnic ($M = 3.30$ and $M = 4.07$, respectively, which were reliably different) and religious identity ($M = 3.90$ and $M = 3.95$, respectively) group. Regarding national identity, it could be noted that identification was above the average among surveyed Albanians from Tetovo ($M = 3.45$), while Albanians from Skopje reported a relatively strong sense of national identity ($M = 3.80$). As shown in Table 7.1, the test of differences between

Table 7.1 Mean scores on ethnic, religious, and national group identification by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town		Total	t-test
		Skopje	Tetovo		
Macedonian	Ethnic group identification	2.21	2.85	2.34	-1.12
	Religious group identification	2.46	2.92	2.56	-1.48
	National group identification	3.05	2.96	3.03	0.27
Albanian	Ethnic group identification	3.30	4.07	3.72	-3.26**
	Religious group identification	3.90	3.95	3.93	-0.18
	National group identification	3.80	3.45	3.61	1.51

Macedonians from Skopje and Tetovo and between Albanians from Skopje and Tetovo in regard to the level of identification with the investigated social groups revealed that the first two groups did not differ in their expressed identification with their ethnic, religious, and national affiliation, probably due to their majority status on the state level ($t(124) = -1.12$, *ns*, $t(124) = -1.48$, *ns*, and $t(124) = 0.47$, *ns*, respectively).

On the other hand, despite their majority status on the local level, Albanian youth from Tetovo had a significantly stronger attachment ($M = 3.30$) to their ethnic group compared to Albanian youth from Skopje ($M = 4.07$) ($t(135) = -3.26$, $p < 0.01$). It is likely that their minority status on the state level plays a more important role than their position as a local majority. In addition, societal pressure to conform might be stronger in smaller communities, such as Tetovo, than in the capital Skopje. For example, Kenig's study (2003) showed that higher orientation to collectivism (importance of group affiliation and cohesiveness) was related to stronger ethnic and religious identification. In other words, this means that the higher the collectivism, that is, the more one gives priority to their ingroup and to the attitudes and behavior of its members, the higher the conformism of the individual. Differences in regard to religious and national identification among Albanians from Skopje ($M = 3.90$ and $M = 3.80$, respectively) and from Tetovo ($M = 3.85$ and $M = 3.45$) were not found ($t(135) = -0.18$, *ns*, and $t(135) = 1.51$, *ns*, respectively).

In general, the Macedonians' attachment to their ethnic and religious group was evidently lower in comparison to their Albanian peers. Their relatively weak ethnic identification could probably be explained through what Verkuyten (2005) stated about the ethnic identification of majority groups. One explanation of such results could be that majority group members view themselves as the rule rather than as the exception, so they can more easily deny the psychological importance of ethnicity, which could be true for religious group attachment as well. However, it could also be plausible that Macedonians, who are representatives of the majority, reported weaker identification with ethnicity and religion due to their high disapproval of the current state of the society in the Republic of Macedonia—the governmental policies, the economy of the country, and

so on. Such disapproval is evident on a daily basis, demonstrated through the unrest of thousands of people who frequently take to the streets of the major cities in the country, expressing their rage against the political parties who have been running the country for the last eight years.

The psychological effect of ethnic minority membership—sensing a threat to one's social identity (Tajfel, 1982)—could be seen as a reason why Albanian youth ascribed high psychological value to their ethnicity. In addition, there was a tendency for even higher religious identification among the Albanian participants in this study. This could be explained by the fact that emphasizing distinctiveness in relation to outgroups is the foundation for the development of homogeneity in the ingroup (Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2002) and for the strengthening of one's sense of "personal security and certainty" (Brewer, 2009, p. 17). On the one hand, religious identification is probably an additional form of distinctiveness in addition to ethnic identification, while on the other hand, religious beliefs can possibly be seen as a factor for increasing feelings of security. It is also true that, in recent years, there has been an evident increase in the religiosity of Muslims in the Balkan region in general, so these findings in Macedonia are in some way expected.

Surprisingly, Albanian respondents reported a slightly stronger sense of national identity than Macedonian study participants. This finding contradicts the notion that identification with a superordinate group can be seen as a threat by the minority ethnic subgroup (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2016). However, the expressed national identification of ethnic Albanians could be explained in light of the indispensability of a subgroup for the national category. It is possible that Albanians perceive their ingroup as more indispensable to the national group (Republic of Macedonia) than other outgroups that are minority as well, but are evidently less represented in the state. Some similar findings are reported in the study of Brewer, Gonsalkorale, and van Dommelen (2013), in which the Chinese-Australian minority demonstrated higher Australian national identification than the Anglo-Australian majority. Our research in Macedonia was conducted in specific circumstances: Macedonian and Albanian students were joined together in a collective action, cooperating towards the same goal (opposition to the proposed education law). It is also possible that the Albanian respondents gave biased answers in order to represent themselves

in a more positive manner or that they demonstrated a tendency to rate all three types of social identities higher in comparison to the Macedonian participants. Alternatively, these might be genuine responses because of the fact that many of these participants have Macedonian friends, so they might be more positive and open to cooperation and accepting differences (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, compared to the empirical results reported three years before ours by Hristova and Cekik (2013), the Albanian sample in our study is slightly more nationally identified, but the Macedonian sample is significantly less nationally identified. This decrease could be due to the prolonged economic hardships, grim possibilities for the future employment, and anomia among young Macedonians (Fritzhand & Blazhevaska Stoilkovska, 2016) that lead to detachment from the country they live in. Even though young Albanians share the same social reality, their disillusionment might be less pronounced due to lower initial attachment. This unexpected pattern of identification is yet to be replicated and its mechanisms further explored.

The qualitative analysis on ethnic, religious, and national identity and contacts between ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian youth supports the quantitative findings in regard to ethnic and religious identification. Albanian participants from Tetovo showed a tendency to hold tightly to their identity, both ethnic and religious. When asked about their identity, they readily proclaimed themselves to be Albanian and Muslim, perceived as the core of their being and inherited from their ancestors. They felt proud to emphasize their identification with the ethnic and religious groups, as demonstrated by the following statements:

I'm a patriotic Albanian... as for religion, I am a deist (God created the universe). (Albanian, male, Tetovo)

Albanian, a patriotic one... I'm a nationalist; I recognize myself and feel as an Albanian, even though I live in Macedonia, even though my citizenship defines me as a citizen of the Republic of Macedonia. Circumstances forced me to live with this... but, in the meantime, if somebody offends Macedonia, as a matter of fact, I do not feel attached, I do not care. (Albanian, male, Tetovo)

Supported by many others, the second statement demonstrated a low level of attachment to nationality as a social identity. Additionally,

participants pointed out their distance from the official name of Macedonia—through the well-known phrase “Don’t FYROM² me!”—and the image that the country has worldwide. They stressed the tendency to introduce themselves by their ethnic identity rather than the country they come from (the citizenship). Instead of saying “I’m from Macedonia,” they tend to emphasize that they are Albanian, and they feel more related to Albania as their homeland. They insist on this strong feeling even when they go to Albania (trips, vacations, etc.). When they are identified by Albanians (from Albania) as Macedonian, Albanians from Macedonia strongly refuse the term and try to convince them that they are all compatriots.

Statements of the Albanian focus group participants demonstrated their tendency to emphasize the salience of their ethnic affiliation, their strong commitment to Albanian ethnicity, and their distinctiveness from Macedonians as a majority in the country. That is particularly in line with the quantitative findings on identification with ethnic group among Albanian study participants who live in Tetovo. Considering national identification, the qualitative data are opposite to what was revealed in the quantitative analysis. Taking into account the explanations of quantitative study results on this type of social identity, and especially the similarity of the obtained data with previous research findings (e.g., Hristova & Cekik, 2013), the focus group data can probably be seen as a result of the tendency to be similar with ethnic ingroup members, to meet group expectations, and to avoid group pressure. Further research on social identification, particularly national, should be conducted on other samples.

Unlike the Albanian participants, Macedonian participants reported that ethnic and religious identity are not important for them. The way they described their weak identification with the ethnic group can be seen in the following statements:

I perceive myself as a citizen [of Macedonia] more than I identify as an ethnic Macedonian because... I think that defines me more, that I was born here and I've got that citizenship... I do not know... somehow it was more like—I've been put here, and now I'm trying to manage that, than trying to harbor some feelings and traditions. (Macedonian, male, Skopje)

I think, for me, to be an ethnic Macedonian should mean that I am different from someone who is Albanian or Turkish, or whatever she/he is... for example, in my family we never made a big difference and I've never had to separate from someone, like I am Macedonian and you're not. (Macedonian, female, Skopje)

Macedonians gave different explanations for their level of attachment to nationality than Albanians. For many of them, being Macedonian and living in Macedonia is not imperative, as the country and its institutions are not meeting their needs as citizens (employment opportunities, safety, health care, quality of life). This can be illustrated through the following statement: "If we were from Sweden, we would be happy to say we are Swedes, but we are in Macedonia, so... it is not about what to say, just, you do not consider, recognize it as your personal identity" (Macedonian, male, Skopje). Similar statements were given by other focus group participants, which lead to the conclusion that they were expressing their resentment toward the state, that is, state institutions. However, at the same time, the statement "In sports, in situations when someone represents my country, then yes [I feel Macedonian]" (Macedonian, female, Skopje) leads to the conclusion that the importance of the national background is expressed in specific contexts, for instance when the country is represented abroad. This is true for Albanians, as well. They said that they would be proud to hear of any success of Macedonia, in sports, in the international arena, and so on.

The given statements could be considered through the perspective that various identities become more or less salient in different contexts (e.g., Wentholt, 1991, as cited in Verkuyten, 2005). Statements demonstrating the influence of the context on the salience of national identification, especially those of Albanian focus group participants, could present support for the obtained quantitative data on attachment to national group. A previous study (Back, 1996, as cited in Verkuyten, 2005) demonstrated that ethnic identity was denied in favor of local and sub-cultural identities, but at the same time exclusive notions of ethnicity were registered.

Similarly, when put in situations in which they are forced to consider the malleability of their ethnic and religious identity in the next five years

(for instance, marriage with a member of a different ethnic group), most of the Macedonian participants stated that they would not change their ethnicity and/or religious affiliation. Similar and even stronger statements were noted among Albanian participants. For instance:

I have found myself in Islam, and I'd never trade that for anything in the world. And I'm a man. There's no issue that would change my mind, like money, profit, or bad reputation, like mixing Islam with terrorism, Islamic state, etc.
(Albanian, male, Tetovo)

When it comes to nationality, Macedonian participants demonstrated a readiness to change their citizenship. The following statement shows their reasons:

So, as for the future, I sincerely think that maybe I will leave the country because of employment. So, if, as an external factor, if I find work there, most likely I'll become a citizen of that other state... but ethnicity, as a Macedonian, I think you carry that wherever you go... I will still keep some traditions... and my religion, I do not believe that it would be changed either. (Macedonian, female, Skopje)

Another participant added: "Due to work and depending on how things will go in Macedonia, right now I feel that it is unstable" (Macedonian, male, Skopje).

Similar reasons to change their nationality were pointed out by some of the Albanian participants, for example, "Yes, definitely, for a better life" (Albanian, male, Tetovo) and "I'd prefer every possible country, better than Macedonia, preferably Switzerland, Germany, USA" (Albanian, female, Tetovo). One participant noted how their social environment sees this issue in the following statement: "I think there is some bias here [in Macedonia], if you change your nationality or religion that it will be perceived as betrayal" (Macedonian, female, Skopje).

Confirming previous research findings (Beshka & Kenig, 2002; Pajaziti et al., 2015; Petroska-Beshka, Popovski, & Kenig, 1999), and in line with the expressed strong ethnic and religious identity, Albanian participants reported a clear distinction between Us (Albanians and Muslims) and

Them (Macedonians). Perceiving their own group in a positive way, they defined themselves as follows: "We are... Albanians, patriotic, people of their word (*Besa*³), people of faith (religion), people of strong belief, humanists, hardworking persons etc.," and for the other group they said: "They are... Macedonians." Thus, it could be proposed that negative stereotyping of the outgroup is still as present as before (e.g., Petroska-Beshka & Kenig, 2002; Petroska-Beshka et al., 1999).

In the Macedonian group, we registered more heterogeneous answers in regard to the Us and Them relation. One participant said: "They are human and we are human" (Macedonian, male, Skopje), indicating that both Macedonians and Albanians belong to the human race. However, the same respondent still recognizes, as many others, that distance/separation does exist as something deeply rooted in our society, and that should definitely be changed. Another participant added:

When I observe them [ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians] as two groups, I think there are disagreements because they have different values, I think, I feel that Albanians are more collectivistic as a community and group affiliation is very important to them. We are trying somehow to become more individualistic. (Macedonian, male, Skopje)

Still, no negative attributes were expressed in reference to the Us and Them distinction. The following statement also reflects the perception of the Us and Them relationship: "All of us live in Macedonia and we are all Macedonians [citizens], we have the same rights and obligations in Macedonia, privileges, except for those who feel that they are not [citizens of Macedonia]" (Macedonian, female, Skopje). This is in line with the common ingroup identity model, which proposes that outgroup members will be treated as ingroup counterparts based on the more inclusive group (e.g., national identity) (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Contact between groups can have an important role in the process of creating a common identity and overcoming mutual stereotypes (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The following section presents results from quantitative and qualitative data analyses of intergroup relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.

Contacts Between Macedonian and Albanian Youth in Skopje and in Tetovo

Cross-group interaction can make salient membership in a superordinate group of those affiliated to different subgroups simultaneously leads to positive relations between those subgroups (Brewer, 2009). Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, and Bachman (1993) proposed that the process of re-categorization leads to a transition from Us and Them to We. Study findings reported by van Dommelen, Schmid, Hewstone, Gonsalkorale, and Brewer (2015), that contacts with members of religious and ethnic outgroups are associated with a more inclusive social self, indicate the importance of communication across groups for social identity inclusiveness.

As previous research suggests, although Macedonian and Albanian young adults have opportunities for contact in many public places, such as universities, work settings, cinemas, cafes, and so on, close relations among them are mostly rare. This fact probably reflects the psychological distance reported in the aforementioned research studies. Macedonian and Albanian students in primary and secondary schools are, in some cases, separated in double shifts or even in different schools. Occasionally, there are inter-ethnic tensions (e.g., during sports competitions among, in most cases, football fan groups; see Anastasovski, Aleksovska Velichkovska, Zivkovic, & Ajdini, 2013; Anastasovski & Stojanoska, 2010).

In general, contacts can be seen as a way of facilitating a context that fosters mutual acceptance of members of different groups (Jonas, 2009). As Wright (2009) pointed out, contacts with cross-group friends have a bigger effect on positive attitudes towards outgroups than those with co-workers and neighbors. Therefore, the frequency of contacts among ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian youth in different contexts was examined. Results showed that both groups in this study meet each other at the places where they study or where they work (Table 7.2).

As expected, Albanians from Skopje and Macedonians from Tetovo, due to their minority status in the mentioned towns, had greater opportunity to meet majority group members and thus reported more frequent

Table 7.2 Frequency of contacts in different contexts by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town		Total
		Skopje	Tetovo	
Macedonian	Contact at university/work	3.20	4.08	3.39
	Contact in neighborhood	2.34	3.69	2.63
	Contact in free time	2.30	2.92	2.43
Albanian	Contact at university/work	3.87	3.12	3.24
	Contact in neighborhood	2.40	2.01	2.08
	Contact in free time	2.67	2.12	2.21

Note. Answers were given on a 5-point scale ranging from 1—never to 5—very often; a higher score means more frequent contacts

contacts with the outgroup in formal settings such as university or the workplace. In the community, that is, the place where they live, and during their leisure time, communication among Macedonian and Albanian youth from both cities, as they stated, is rare, indicating an evident separation of these groups in everyday life. Wright (2009) stressed the importance of cross-group friendship, explaining that—through friends who are members of the outgroup—the outgroup itself can be included in the self and can become salient. The author, further, argues that real membership in certain outgroups is impossible, but what is important for fostering social identity inclusiveness is the psychological connection. In addition, it should be pointed out that many studies revealed that the quality of contacts, such as close friendship, is more important than the number of friends or frequency of contacts (e.g., Wright, Brody, & Aron, 2004). This implies that attention should be focused on fostering contacts, especially in one's free time when there is more possibility for establishing closer relationships.

The investigation of the quantity of contacts (direct communication with outgroup friends) and the quality of contacts among Macedonian and Albanian respondents revealed that Macedonians from Skopje and Albanians from Tetovo have little direct contact with outgroup members, but both groups assessed the quality of contacts as above average (Table 7.3). Albanians from Skopje reported the widest network of direct communication with Macedonians, the quality of which was assessed as above average, whereas Macedonians from Tetovo were second in regard to the quantity of direct communication with outgroup members

Table 7.3 Quantity of direct contacts and quality of contacts by ethnicity and town

Ethnicity	Variables	Town			Test of difference
		Skopje	Tetovo	Total	
Macedonian	Quantity of direct contacts (Mdn)	2.0	4.50	3.0	-2.06*
	Quality of contacts (M)	3.47	3.62	3.51	-0.68
Albanian	Quantity of direct contacts (Mdn)	8.5	3	5.0	-3.41**
	Quality of contacts (M)	3.68	3.02	3.31	4.67***

Note. An open-ended question was used to measure the quantity of direct contacts; participants were asked to answer how many of their friends are members of the other group.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

(Albanians), also with an above-average rating of the quality of contacts. In general, study participants typically reported the number/quantity of direct contacts with members of the outgroup as relatively small, while they stated that the quality of their contacts was above the scale midpoint. Differences in regard to the quantity of direct contacts among Macedonians from Skopje and Tetovo and among Albanians from these towns were analyzed performing the Mann-Whitney U test. Analyses revealed that Macedonians from Tetovo have more direct contact with Albanians (Mdn = 4.5) than Macedonians from Skopje (Mdn = 2.0) ($U = 912$; $z = -2.06$; $p < 0.05$). The results are opposite in the Albanian subsample, that is Albanians from Skopje reported more direct contact with Macedonians (Mdn = 8.5) than their counterparts from Tetovo (Mdn = 3.0) ($U = 1390$; $z = -3.41$; $p < 0.01$). These findings are in line with previous results on the frequency of contacts in different contexts, thus strengthening the aforementioned conclusions. When it comes to the differences in quality of contacts, examined using the t-test, it was found that Macedonians from Skopje and Tetovo did not differ in the assessed quality of contacts with Albanians, whereas Albanians from Skopje rated the quality of contacts with Macedonians significantly higher ($M = 3.68$) than Albanians from Tetovo ($M = 3.02$) ($t(135) = 4.67$; $p < 0.001$).

Results in Tables 7.4 and 7.5 showed that ethnic, religious, and national identification among Macedonians were negatively and significantly related to quality of contacts with members of ethnic outgroup; among

Table 7.4 Correlations between study variables in the Macedonian subsample

	1	2	3	4	5
ID Ethnicity					
ID Religion	0.735**				
ID Country I live in	0.428**	0.496**			
Quantity of contacts with members of the other ethnicity	-0.12	-0.00	-0.027		
Quality of contacts with members of the other ethnicity	-0.242**	-0.214*	-0.212*	0.10	

Note. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

Table 7.5 Correlations between study variables in the Albanian subsample

	1	2	3	4	5
ID Ethnicity					
ID Religion	0.488**				
ID Country I live in	0.315**	0.364**			
Quantity of contacts with members of the other ethnicity	-0.15	-0.04	0.079		
Quality of contacts with members of the other ethnicity	-0.215*	-0.036	0.048	0.18	

Note. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

Albanians quality of contact with ethnic out-group correlated significantly only with their ethnic identification. As can be noted, quality of intergroup contacts can decrease distinctiveness among both ethnicities.

Taking into consideration intergroup relations, many Albanian participants in the focus group reported that they have Macedonian neighbors, that they are friendly, exchange visits, and have contacts at universities and at work. But, on the other hand, they pointed out a tendency to be very careful in their relations. As one participant stated:

I'd never try their red eggs they color for Easter. On the other hand, they accept baklava for our Bayrams [holidays]. We exchange best wishes for our holidays... but, there are some nationalistic policies, maybe not only from their side but ours too, making us hold back. (Albanian, male, Tetovo)

The lack of readiness to accept Easter presents from an outgroup member could reflect a lack of trust. On the other hand, most of the Macedonian focus group participants reported that they have infrequent contacts with

Albanians, while some participants noted having Albanian friends, but those Albanians who are atheists. Literature suggests the contrary, that contacts with outgroup members who are typical representatives of their group are most important for altering stereotypes (Wright, 2009).

The Albanian participants recognized politics and politicians as responsible for the distance between the two groups. They also noted other factors that contribute to the infrequency of contacts, such as stereotypes and prejudices, different value systems and culture, and the way media reports events. As one participant stated:

I think there are still those prejudices. We should try to overcome them. It is not an easy process... I think, if we have more communication, if we have a common goal, somehow more contact between people and not separation... from start they tell us... some stories or some gossip... you should be more cautious... later, when you think about it, basically there is no reason for that. (Macedonian, female, Skopje)

This statement also recognized the tendency of being cautious in contacts with outgroup members, seeing it as imposed by others and without objective reasons. Another participant noted: "I think that until recently we were moving toward segregation [Macedonian-Albanian relations], but now I think we have much bigger problems... you see those more... the question whether you will survive [referring to the economic situation]" (Macedonian, male, Skopje).

In line with the quantitative data, the focus group analysis showed that direct and close intergroup communication is relatively rare, and at the same time, it indicated the possible factors contributing to that situation. Namely, the existing negative stereotyping and prejudice toward the outgroup and the evident lack of mutual trust were recognized as the barriers of cross-group contacts. As Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) argued, contacts can have an extended effect. Fostering close intergroup contacts through civic actions and friendship development is of great importance for positive attitudes toward outgroups.

Almost all the Macedonian participants in the focus group recognized that a larger number of contacts, more frequent communication, and defining common goals and interests are needed to overcome the distance between the groups. They stated that both Macedonians and Albanians

would like to live in a peaceful and prosperous environment, but according to them, one's opinion on how to achieve that depends on several factors, such as the level of education, training, place of residence, and so on. Albanian participants stated that they would like to live with Macedonians, in the same neighborhood. Referring to identity inclusiveness, one participant said: "If we want to overcome these tension issues we have, we must not think this way" (Albanian, male, Tetovo). At the end of the discussion, one participant stated:

I'd argue for coexistence in a multiethnic country. It should not be so important [ethnic, religious, and national identity] if everyone is really interested... to put behind those things and go toward a more collectivist life. That will bring only good and not... not make even greater discord. It is true on a global, institutional level. (Macedonian, female, Skopje)

According to the aforementioned statements, there are tendencies to affiliate with humankind as a superordinate identity that will include national, ethnic, and religious categories.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to discuss ethnic, religious, and national identity of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the specific cultural, social, and political context of the Republic of Macedonia. The study focus was the salience of these social groups for young adults. The presented quantitative and qualitative data analyses indicate several important differences between Macedonians and Albanians in terms of complex social identities.

With regard to the ethnic and religious identification of young Macedonians from Skopje (where Macedonians are the majority), findings suggest a low sense of both types of identity. At the same time, Albanians from Skopje and especially those from Tetovo expressed relatively strong identification with their ethnic and religious groups. Identification with ethnic and religious groups for Macedonians from Tetovo (where they are the minority) was slightly below average. The

national identification of both groups of Macedonian ethnicity was assessed as average. Contrary to that, national identification of Albanians from Tetovo was above average, while Albanians from Skopje surprisingly reported a relatively high sense of national identity. In general, members of the national majority tend to embrace national identity, while the minority group identifies more with their ethnic and religious identity. This should be taken into account while creating intervention programs that focus on complex social identities (national, ethnic, and religious), since the representatives of majority and minority groups analyzed in this study are considering its importance very differently.

Findings on the strong positive relation between ethnic and religious identity should be especially noted. Young Albanians and Macedonians—as shown in the results section—perceive a clear distinction between Us (Albanians/Muslim or Macedonian/Orthodox) and Them along both ethnic and religious lines. As focus group participants of Macedonian ethnicity pointed out, this phenomenon is deeply rooted. Thus, they perceive it as almost impossible to make a conscious choice to be one but not the other, or not to be perceived by the social environment as Muslim and Albanian or Macedonian and Orthodox at the same time. This intertwining between ethnicity and religion can be traced back to the political organization of religious groups during the Ottoman Empire. It is during this time that religious communities became the bases for ethnic identity construction. These ethnicity-religion parallels are obstacles in intergroup mixing because they make the groups more exclusive.

Regarding mutual contacts between young adults of the two ethnicities, results clearly show that those who have local minority status (Albanians from Skopje and Macedonians from Tetovo) have a greater opportunity to meet local majority group members. Therefore, they reported more frequent contacts with the out-group in formal settings, such as university or the workplace. There is also evidence that Albanians, as a minority on the national level, usually speak or at least understand the Macedonian language while the opposite is not as frequent (Tankersley, 2001). However, in the community, that is, the place where they live, and during their leisure time, communication among Macedonian and Albanian youth, as they stated, is rare—indicating the evident separation of these groups in everyday life in both cities. Such results are not

optimistic and they need to inform the future policies (e.g., introducing educational programs for ethnic cooperation and understanding, building the culture of peace, etc.). Additionally, among Macedonians, ethnic, religious, and national identification were negatively related to the quality of contacts with members of the ethnic outgroup. Among Albanians, the quality of contact correlated only with their ethnic identification, which could be explained with the importance of being Albanian in the first place—a phenomenon called “Albanism” among Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia, but also among Albanians in Kosovo.

In view of the given analysis, one of the ways to increase the frequency and improve the quality of intergroup contact is organizing various social events (e.g., sports events, concerts, trainings and seminars, art events, etc.), which would be of interest for both groups. Education could be another cornerstone for overcoming segregation and other negative side effects of the lack of knowledge and the lack of mutual trust. In the case of the Republic of Macedonia, which is a multicultural and multiethnic society, the given findings call for further investment in the education system, with the goal of promoting inclusiveness and decreasing separation among youth. Altogether, this could foster cooperation and learning more about Them—who are different from Us, but also similar to Us in many ways.

There are many examples (e.g., Students’ Plenum, Professors’ Plenum, Colorful Revolution, etc.) that show how Albanians and Macedonians can stand side by side, working together—even fighting together—for common goals. The fact that both Skopje and Tetovo are multicultural and multiethnic cities can be used as an advantage in creating opportunities to bring young people together on various occasions. In Skopje, there is already one famous part of the city called “The Old Bazaar” where Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, and others are circulating on daily bases, for centuries. This area is recognized by its cultural monuments, cafeterias, and shops and shows how young people from different national, ethnic, or religious backgrounds can spend effective time together. Therefore, if there is a better future for All of Us—Us defined in the most inclusive way, only then can there be talk about complex and inclusive social identities, which can result in real cooperation and mutuality, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

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