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**TOWARDS THE BOOK "INTERBELIEVERS: INTER-RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE  
 IN A VILLAGE IN WESTERN MACEDONIA." A STUDY FROM THE FIELD OF  
 SOCIOCULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY" BY DR. MARCIN LUBAŚ**

The book "*Interbelievers: Interreligious coexistence in a village in western Macedonia. A study from the field of sociocultural anthropology*" deals with interreligious coexistence in a village in western Macedonia. The author is prof. Dr. Marcin Lubaś [Marcin Lubaś] - a Polish researcher, sociologist and anthropologist from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. In order to collect materials for the intended research, M. Lubaś came to Macedonia in the year 2000. With the help of academician Zuzana Topolińska and her assistant Sonja Milenkovska, he started learning the Macedonian language. Thanks to the cooperation between the Institute of Sociology of the Jagellonian University and the Institute of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, he frequently traveled to Macedonia and slowly developed his research. For the last six years, from 2006 to 2010, he stayed in the area of Dolna Reka and its administrative center, the village of Rostuše, where he focused on researching the inter-religious coexistence of the inhabitants, and in 2011 he published the book "Interbelievers" in Polish. In 2021, the book was translated from Polish to Macedonian by Marija Bartoshevich - Atanasovska, under the professional editorship of Ljupco S. Risteski, and was published by the Macedonian Student Ethnological Society - MSSED. The publication and translation of the book were financially supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia in accordance with the Annual Program for financing projects of national interest in the field of publishing for 2021.

In general, the topic of this work is the research and analysis of social coexistence between people of different faiths in Dolna Reka (village of Rostuse), where members of two monotheistic religions live: Muslims (Sunni) and Orthodox Christians. The research shows that interreligious coexistence has a complex and multifaceted character and that it consists of various complex interactions and relationships, as well as "social boundaries", that is, it is normatively sanctioned, which practically means practicing specific forms of contact or avoiding them between members of different religions. The purpose of this research is to answer the question of why people of different faiths avoid contact in certain areas of social life and support them in others.

When researching the contemporary cultural diversity of Macedonia, it is necessary to take into account three questions: first - the content of the culture, which is subject to fast and slow changes, then - the cultural differences that are socially created and maintained and depend on the actions of the actors, and finally - the limits of these

units of analysis as a condition for all aspects of human activities. The author also emphasizes that, in this research, it is important to take into account the socio-economic changes in Macedonia after its independence.

The author M. Lubaś notes that in the Balkans, cultural differences often do not coincide with linguistic, religious and identity differences. This corresponds to the theoretical concept of Frederik Barth, which states that the distribution of ethnic identifications does not coincide with the distribution of other cultural characteristics and that inter-ethnic contacts enable people to create a sense of distinctiveness.

In this research, attention is focused on four areas of interreligious coexistence:

Religious practices and rituals;

Rules and practices for marriage, consanguinity and family relations;

Public spaces in the village and neighborly relations;

Political and local government relations in the research site.

As a theoretical foundation, he utilizes the theory of interdependencies and social boundaries:

M. Lubaś considers and interprets social interdependencies through the idea of relationism, which is opposed to the idea of seeing the research subjects as self-existent objects, and rather paying attention to the dependencies between them.

Social boundaries, according to M. Lubaś, represent a set of rules that regulate all types of contacts, and according to F. Barth also regulate social life. They represent prohibition and limitation of certain segments of mutual contact, while at the same time they are a source of social and cultural difference between people. These boundaries form disjunctiveness (e.g., Orthodox and Muslim religious practices are practiced separately).

He considers religious diversity as one of the forms of cultural diversity, and in the second part he gives an explanation of his perspective on cultural diversity, explaining culture as a set of information produced and communicated by people. He also supports the idea of cultural modularity which postulates that it cannot be assumed in advance that cultural contents are interconnected in one integrated system. There is variability to be found within the different forms of cultural organization.

## Rituals and boundaries

In this section, the author builds on the views of Anthony Cohen who states that rites are symbolic representations of communities and their social boundaries, i.e. that within them - difference is manifested through symbolic actions and performances. Lubaś, realizing the fact that Dolna Reka's social boundaries are mostly preserved in the sphere of religious rituals (there is no person who participates equally in the rituals of both religions), he comes to the conclusion that rituals recreate social boundaries. However, in certain situations, there is also a combination of elements from both religions. That

happens when people seek help from supernatural forces in case of illness (if someone casts a spell on them, etc).

### Practices of religious endogamy

In Dolna Reka, the principle of religious endogamy is observed, that is, choosing a spouse of the same religion. One of the reasons for that practice is the difference between rituals and the avoidance of conflict. People see the identification of the offspring of spouses of different faiths and their exposure to social condemnation (“...you have a kaurka mother...”)<sup>1</sup> as the biggest problem. Interfaith marriage is socially sanctioned, thus representing a social boundary between Muslims and Christians. Sanctions range from social condemnation to burying the deceased member of such a marriage outside the cemetery of the religious community. However, M. Lubaš’s interlocutors point out that, although rare, there are such exceptions of marriage between two spouses of different faiths even though they were brought up in the spirit of religious endogamy. A notable statement is cited from the interviews of M. Lubaš where one of the interlocutors says that “faith lies in the soul and over time comes to the fore, while love is in the first two years of marriage, and then everything comes down to respect. Over time, if the wife is orthodox, she will start to advocate for her religion, which will cause discord in the family.” Others, on the other hand, with more progressive views, let the young people marry, but, nevertheless, they say they had certain reservations due to the celebration of different holidays, different customs, etc. The author concludes that although interfaith marriages are sometimes possible, he has not encountered a case of practicing both religions by one person at the same time.

### Neighborhood

In the section dedicated to the neighborhood, the author investigates whether there is a form of spatial segregation of people in this area based on religious or ethnic criteria. The villages in this area are densely populated with many buildings in a small area and are divided into settlements - neighborhoods. Residents of different faiths live scattered throughout Rostuše, and this is due to the changes that took place in the 1950s and 1960s in Yugoslavia. Namely, many Muslims immigrated to Turkey and sold their homes to Orthodox Christians. Furthermore, when it comes to religious buildings, they are divided into Muslim and Orthodox - it does not happen that Muslims enter a church and Orthodox enter a mosque. However, despite this, local Muslims were involved in the construction of tombstones and the renovation of the church. There is an exception, in the search for medicine, water with healing properties, i.e. help from God, for Muslims to enter the Orthodox monasteries. The author also explores friendships of people of different faiths and their social life - more specifically, playing cards. Among them, there is an unwritten rule that people of different religions should not play cards together in order to avoid an argument which once again emphasizes the boundaries between people

1 V9, Orthodox Christian, 65, from Velebrgo 1

of different religions that regulate social life. In Rostuše, good neighborly relations are important for the people. Among them there are valid rules that regulate that relationship – greeting on the street, visiting guests during holidays, exchanging eggs for Easter and baklava for Ramadan, mutual aid, etc., the non-compliance of which usually leads to conflict.

### People of different faiths in politics

In this section, the author wants to examine whether there is a social boundary between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in the political sphere. The political scene in Macedonia is ethnically divided into a “Macedonian bloc” and an “Albanian bloc”, which means that Macedonians basically vote for one of the Macedonian parties, and Albanians for one of the Albanian parties. Lubaš’s analysis leads to the conclusion that in local politics, there are no social boundaries between people of different faiths in the sense that belonging to a religious community imposes affiliation or support to a particular party, although there is, however, a difference between Orthodox and Muslims in their political activity. Until now, Orthodox Macedonians have not been involved in the political activity of Albanian parties which means that although the political boundary between Orthodox Christians and Muslims is sharply drawn. This is not the case with Macedonian-speaking Muslims and Orthodox Macedonians on the one hand, and Albanians and Muslims who speak Macedonian on the other hand. So, their political relations are devoid of disjunctive differences, as a result of the fact that Macedonian-speaking Muslims do not fully accept Macedonia’s national framework for the organization of culture. The author suspects that the reason for this is that in the Macedonian national narrative, Orthodox Christianity and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) occupy a prominent place. Institutions of power and elite organizations are concerned with promoting a national ideology among different population groups. The responses to nation-building policies can vary, which becomes the basis for different categorization of the population – “nation-forming majority” and “national minorities”. This can be a complex process in which a part of the group adopts the national ideology, a part modifies it and a third rejects it, as is the case with Macedonian-speaking Muslims. Some of them accept the national cultural framework created by the Macedonian elite, but some oppose and lean towards the Albanian parties. However, the author emphasizes that voting for a certain political party primarily depends on what benefits the person will receive from the party, and the ideology of the party plays a secondary role. Finally, the author investigates the level of cooperation between the two sides - Orthodox Christianity and Islam, for which he concludes that Dolna Reka is generally characterized by good inter-religious coexistence and cooperation. This is reflected in various brochures that show the costumes of the two religious groups, appearances in ensembles from both groups, etc. together.

The description of the social order of interreligious coexistence contained in this work can serve for any theoretical thinking, as well as for opening many questions regarding the social conditions of interreligious and interethnic coexistence, and various forms of cultural differentiation. As can be seen, relations and social boundaries between people of different faiths take many different social forms depending on specific

conditions, so the author's goal is not to "reveal" interreligious coexistence as an unchanging form, but quite the opposite: to show that it is a process subject to cultural and social conditions. In this paper, the author also tries to highlight the importance of social boundaries and relationships in a religiously diverse place that are used to minimize conflicts between people.

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