

Format de citation

Nadège Ragaru, Assignés à identités. Violence d'État et expériences minoritaires dans les Balkans post-ottomans, Istanbul: Les Éditions Isis, 2019, in: Comparative Southeast European Studies, 72 (2024), 1, DOI: 10.1515/soeu-2023-0027, heruntergeladen über Website



copyright

Cet article peut être téléchargé et/ou imprimé à des fins privées. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, intégrale ou substantielle de son contenu, doit faire l'objet d'une autorisation (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

This volume is a collection of thirteen texts Nadège Ragaru wrote between 1998 and 2017, all of which have previously been published in journals or edited collections. Apart from the advantage of presenting a substantial part of the author's production over two decades in a single volume, it has two benefits. The first is that it allows us to read these texts in reworked versions, or in original versions that are longer and more detailed than the one actually published. It is not, therefore, a simple reprinting of texts available elsewhere, but a new publication aimed at making more visible the coherence and richness of a research path which, although it has often responded to demands linked to the regional political situation, nevertheless has certain strong through-lines. The second benefit of the collection is that it offers a thematic path through this research, by organising it into three parts in which the texts respond to and complete each other to form well-identified case studies whose common point is the exploration of "minority experiences". Readers interested in the Turkish minority in Bulgaria (Part One), in the fate of Bulgarian Jews during World War II (Part Two), or in the relations between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority in North Macedonia (Part Three) will find material and interpretations of great interest. Other readers will discover how these three research objects were built and nourished by a methodological approach that combines, across texts or within a single text, direct access to archives, historiographic criticism, and field research.

An introduction explains the choice of texts and the organisation of the volume. Written mainly in French (with the exception of three chapters in English), these are different kinds of texts that responded to various demands and objectives when they were first published: research articles, reports, bibliographical

essays, or popular texts. In the course of reading, these approaches and modes of writing appear to be complementary, and the inevitable repetitions are never annoying. On the contrary, they make it possible to link the chapters together and to see how the author progressively constructs her research objects.

The first part focuses on the question of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and its fate during the communist period and since 1989. The six chapters that make up this part give a good idea of Ragaru's diversity of approaches and their complementarity. The starting point is a long review of two books published a few months apart, in 1997 and 1998: one on the presence of Islam in Bulgaria, the other on the history of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. This analysis reveals the challenges and difficulties of producing historical knowledge on a figure of otherness that has been at the centre of "events so recent that they hardly lend themselves to an impartial reading" (43-4). While these works, and the author's account of them, trace a history that unfolds over the *moyenne durée*, they also reflect on the repressive policy of the Bulgarian state in the 1980s towards its Turkish minority and on the expulsion of tens of thousands of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey in 1989. The other chapters alternate between fieldwork (in Bulgaria and Turkey, but also between the two countries, following the mobility of Bulgarian Turks living in Turkey and making the journey back to Bulgaria) and historiographical surveys. This first part ends (Chapter 6) with a review of the French translation of *Imagining the Balkans* (2011),^[1] which warns against the "seduction of post-colonial studies" and global history, and reminds us of the methodological and, in particular, linguistic requirements of research on the Balkans, considered as a "plurality of spaces" whose interpretation "will come about through research that

questions not the contours of a historical region, but the horizons of their questioning” (136).

The second part consists of three texts on the persecution of Jews in Bulgaria and in the Greek and Macedonian territories occupied by the Bulgarian state during World War II, as well as on the memory of the Shoah. The first text (Chapter 7) offers a review of the contrasting fate of the Jewish populations in Bulgaria, who were largely spared from deportation, and in the Bulgarian-administered territories of Macedonia and Northern Greece, who were deported. This is a review of the available sources and of the historiographical questions they raise, which ends with a reminder of the memorial stakes of this history. The second text (Chapter 8) follows on from this by proposing a historiographical review of a particular issue, that of the spoliation of Jewish property in Bulgaria and in the occupied territories. The third text (Chapter 9), in English, is a fascinating history of historical knowledge about the fate of the Jews of Bulgaria and Macedonia and the memorial and commemorative processes associated with it since 1989. These texts work as an introduction to the subsequent book by the author.^[2]

The third part presents four texts on the question of identity in North Macedonia, before and especially after the crisis of 2001, and is particularly interested in the status of the Albanian minority. Ragaru writes about the Ohrid Agreement, relations with Kosovo, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) (Chapter 10), territorial networking (Chapter 11), and the controversy around the erection of a statue of Skanderbeg in Skopje (Chapter 12). It ends with a short text on the *querelle du nom* between the Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring Greece (Chapter 13).

These three case studies, whose common starting point is the treatment imposed by the states on ethnic or

religious minorities present on their territories, fully justify the title of the collection. However, there is no general reflection on identity or identification, nor on violence or the minority fact. The general framework, set out in the introduction with reference to the work of Gérard Noiriel, is to consider identification both as “public action mechanisms aimed at designating, framing and norming belonging” and as “forms of investment in identities by social actors” (10). It would be wrong, however, to stop at the title’s linkage of identification, violence, and minorities, because the collection of articles allows us to go further, or at least in other directions. In my opinion, what makes it so interesting is the way in which Ragaru constantly questions the conditions of the production of historical knowledge, and the tension that this production reveals between the academic world and political circles. The texts as a whole bear witness to the turning point represented by the end of the communist period. This was as a moment of identity questioning and a renewal of historiography, a renewal encouraged by funding available because of interest aroused by the crisis in ex-Yugoslavia. By making academic production an object of research, the book addresses a series of issues that cut across all three case studies and are of great relevance in postsocialist Southeastern Europe: the transformation of the status of historical knowledge, and tension between state policies and individual commitments; the constitution, alteration, and circulation of archival collections, both within a single country and across the region and beyond; the transformation of the historian’s profession, often including a decline in its social status; relations between history writing, memorial processes, and commemoration policies; and the effects of the globalisation of history writing, including the particular role of diasporas in the dissemination of knowledge and

the formulation of historiographic questions and controversies. This “questioning of the social functions of history” (194) sheds new and nuanced light on conflictual or violent situations, whose interpretations it helps to make more complex. It also contributes to a desire to decompartmentalise national writings of history by showing the extent to which questions about scale (244) and the relationship between memory and history (232) are common to the historiographies of both Western and Southeastern Europe.

This book, which can be read as an essay on the geopolitics of history writing in postsocialist Europe, is also an invitation to dialogue with historians, sociologists, and anthropologists and as such constitutes a very fine exercise in social science writing.