

same role in the lives of young Macedonians as does Western television, advertising or consumer goods, their parents and grandparents, and the Tito regime. It takes two to make an “ethnic conflict”; as Thiessen presents it, it is little more than a discourse of difference.

Thiessen’s third goal was to present an image of how Macedonia “is” and “will be” based on her fieldwork. This is, to put it bluntly, epistemological nonsense. “Waiting for Macedonia” is a book published in 2007 on the basis of a dissertation submitted in 1999 based on fieldwork that took place from 1988 to 1996. It presents a wonderful image of what Macedonia “was” in that period and contributes a vital element to the mosaic that is contemporary Macedonian identity but it has little to do with what Macedonia “is” or what it “will be,” especially considering the course of events in the Western Balkans since 1996, the Kosovo War in particular, the “name debate,” and whatever else is on the political horizon. In her conclusion, Thiessen distances herself implicitly from this ambitious claim. She would have done better to not make this claim in the first place.

Reading the book is an irritating enterprise, but not only because Thiessen cannot seem to decide between thick description and the *longue durée*. “Waiting for Macedonia” is Thiessen’s PhD thesis, a fact that would have been apparent even if Thiessen had not mentioned it explicitly. It is the work of an author trying to find her voice, and as such the text is rampant with stylistic discontinuities and stylistic and, even worse, grammatical faux pas that a conscientious editor could easily have eliminated. But Broadview Press seems to be no exception to the prevailing tendency to make compromises on quality for the benefit of the bottom line.

One can hope that Thiessen is successful in finding her voice in her next publications. She has proven her potential here as an ethnographer and as a witness to a moving moment in European history. Her book “Waiting for Macedonia” is, everything having been said and done, an important stone in the mosaic that will one day make up the history of Macedonian identity.

Andreas Hemming

**Toffin, Gérard:** *Newar Society. City, Village, and Periphery*. Lalitpur: Social Science Baha, Himal Books, 2007. 443 pp. ISBN 978-99933-43-86-8. Price: Rs 790.00

Prof. Gérard Toffin is Director of Research at CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) and Professor of Nepali Civilisation in the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations, Paris. He has a wealth of experience, over 35 years of anthropological research among the Newar of the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal). He is one of the pioneers in that field providing important data through numerous publications and some major works: “Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal” (Paris 1984), “Le palais et le temple. La fonction royale dans la vallée du Népal” (Paris 1993),

“Entre hindouisme et bouddhisme. La religion néwar, Népal” (Louvain-la-Neuve 2000). “Newar Society. City, Village, and Periphery” (2007) is a synthesis of Gérard Toffin’s analyses. It brings together a selection of his articles in a single volume, which would be particularly useful for English readers, but also for those who are already familiar with his work mostly published in French. Precious updates have been made with special attention to the recent developments in the studied communities.

The Newar consider themselves as the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and clearly belong to the Indic mainstream, but at the same time exhibit a distinctive and unique culture. Stressing particularly its diversity, in his “Introduction,” Gérard Toffin provides a short chronological overview of the various directions taken by scholars of different backgrounds involved in the study of the Newar society and civilisation. Based on case studies among a number of caste groups from both cities and rural areas, this collection of papers illustrates the itinerary of Gérard Toffin’s research and his commitment in order to provide better understanding of the social system of the Newar. The main themes that emerge are featuring a complex society based not only on kinship, but also on the caste system and a specific type of multifarious associations called *guthi* that form the framework for organising numerous ritual activities. Some religious aspects are investigated as far as among this very multifaceted Himalayan community of Tibeto-Burman language, where Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism continue to coexist, the ceremonial life holds a major significance for the social order.

The author’s methodological approach and the critical emphasis of his study are apparent in the title of the book. He considers the role played by residence (city, village, and periphery) as fundamental and the formation of small territorial units turned in on themselves as a hallmark of the Newar society. By introducing the concept of territory, he brings out a topic which was rather evicted from the anthropological debate concerning South Asian societies particularly in French academic tradition. Following Louis Dumont’s theories, the main “social referent” was supposed to be the dominant caste and hierarchy. Moreover, several meticulous analyses in the present volume make obvious that the caste does not appear as a group which is solidary or united as a whole; in all cases, territorial affiliations take precedence.

Consequently, the organisation of the volume is following the scheme stated by the title with a first cluster of chapters consisting principally in monographic and empirical studies. More synthetic chapters of theoretical importance on territory, the *guthi* association system, gender, and the caste system come later. The first three chapters of the book are urban case studies focusing on some specific castes from Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur – the painters and mask-makers (chapter 1), the Brahman priests (chapter 2), and the farmers (chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the social organisation of the mono-caste farmers’ community of Pyangaon (Lalitpur District) and to its links with the

castes of the surrounding areas. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with two small population groups from the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley that sociologically stand between the categories of caste and ethnic group. Chapters 10 and 11 investigate the intercaste cooperation and interdependence in relation to domestic and collective ceremonies and are based on examples from the town of Panauti. Chapters 12 and 13, previously unpublished, are based on recent fieldwork and focus on the process of identity construction in modern context.

The author chose to start with three cities (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur), ancient capitals of the former Newar kingdoms (1620–1768/69, Malla dynasties) and still main urban nuclei of the Kathmandu valley. He introduces the historical context as an important frame for various issues concerning the contemporary Newar society such as social structure and hierarchy, religious practices and ethnic identity. Following the three territorial circles that constitute important points of reference, he deals first with the core of Newar society, the cities where intellectual, political, and artistic resources have always been chiefly located; then with the country, composed by farmers' villages which were formerly encompassed by one or another of these political centres; and finally with the outlying areas, the edges of the Kathmandu Valley, so far neglected by scholarship yet essential for the understanding of the whole system. By considering its periphery, this book introduces a new perspective on Newar society.

Another original aspect of this study is the special attention given to the farmers' castes both in urban (chapters 3 and 12) and rural (chapters 4, 5, 6) context. The farmers, a major group of the Newar society, are of primary importance for the understanding of its social structure and the interactions between different status groups. The comparison between these two types of farmers' societies points out some main common features such as kinship and marriage, the cult of a tutelary deity linked to a particular territory, and the membership in a particular type of associations (*guthi*). The principles of "blood" and of "territory" (chapter 6) in association with the formation of modern ethnic and national identities are well-known common features in several Himalayan societies. The Newar case is of special interest because it links territory with death. The affiliation of a person to a given territorial unit depends explicitly on his membership to a specific funeral society. This type of association (*guthi*) is a distinctive characteristic of the Newar society. Different types of associations (chapter 9) regulate several aspects of Newar social and religious life, and even possess economic functions in some limited cases. They are usually dissociated from kinship units, even if some of them are still anchored in kin groups. They are vital for the status of an individual and reinforce in many ways social relations within the community.

All together, the studies presented in this book show the fundamental unity of Newar civilisation. Gérard Toffin rightly argues that the anthropology of the Newar cannot be divided into a rural anthropology and an urban

anthropology. His approach is based on the analyses of the interactions between the centre and the periphery, the general and the particular. His wide and well-constructed applications of comparative methods lead us to perceive a dynamic, fluid, and situationally constructed society. When read as a whole, the chapters of this book present an overall picture of some of the essential features of Newar society.

Lubomira Palikarska

**West, Harry G.:** *Ethnographic Sorcery*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. 132 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-89398-3. Price: \$ 14.00

The author asserts: "This volume tells the story of a dawning perception that all that happens has happened before – that the ethnographer, like those he dreams, is himself susceptible to being dreamt" (xi). Unfortunately, this is not the only unclear statement in this brief volume. The author considers the problem of how he, an American social anthropologist, can understand and describe the beliefs of an alien culture, in this case, the Mueda of Mozambique. He earlier published a more conventional ethnography of these people. A repeated concern in his writings has been the persistence of African beliefs about witchcraft, sorcery, and magic, despite the influences of modern economic, political, and educational forces. The title of the present book derives from his argument that "sorcery and ethnography are in many ways one" (81). He reaches this odd conclusion through some questionable reasoning.

One reason is that because human explanations are based partly on metaphor and that beliefs in witchcraft are grounded in metaphor and symbols, and because such beliefs also help explain the conflicts and tribulations of social life, they are similar to anthropological models and explanations of society which also are grounded in metaphorical thinking. To him both these systems of explanation are equally persuasive. Of course, human thought also involves more than metaphors; it involves metonymy and other tropes as well as rationality. Our understanding can be based on critical investigation and rationality. It is true that thoughtful anthropologists, sociologists, and historians can recognize that different systems of thought work for different societies. This does not, however, mean that traditional ideas will continue to work as situations change due to contact with other cultures, new technology and the advent of calamities. There is no good reason then to see all sets of beliefs and values as equally valid either morally or substantively. One of the great achievements of Weberian sociology is its struggle to deal with the ways that some earlier forms of thought and values cannot effectively cope with modernity in its economic, scientific, or organizational aspects. It is, of course, true that modernity has also brought its own new and destructive forms of anti-rationalism, supernaturalism, confused cultural borrowing, and violence but such dangerous forms of thinking and behavior have not provided morally acceptable or long-term useful ways of helping humans to exist with satisfaction.