BOOK REVIEW:

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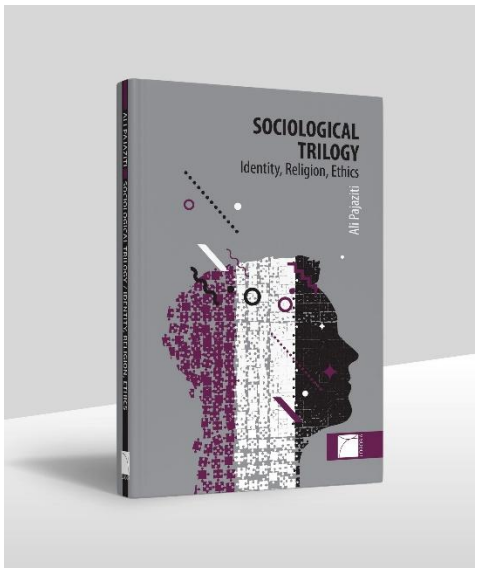
ALI PAJAZITI, *SOCIOLOGICAL TRILOGY: IDENTITY, RELIGION, ETHICS*, LOGOS-A & ASSOCIATION MACEDONIA'S SOCIOLOGISTS, SKOPJE, 2026, 378 pgs.



In this book, *"Sociological Trilogy: Identity, Religion, Ethics"*, through several focused observations, Professor Ali Pajaziti manages to convey an exceptionally clear and detailed picture of the contemporary socio-cultural dynamics in North Macedonia. The author portrays all of its divergences, diverse cultural affiliations, and differences in attitudes and behavior, which stem from their foundational identities—historical, cultural, religious, value-based, traditional, and customary in the broadest sense.

Another significant quality of this work is the proper distance the author maintains toward the treated phenomena, consistently respecting the Weberian perspective of *Wertfreiheit*—namely, freedom from value judgments and the idea of value neutrality (*avalutativity*), which is essential in science. Pajaziti knows perfectly well how to navigate this delicate terrain, which is full of difficulties and traps, and highly susceptible to misunderstandings.

Independent of Yugoslavia since 1991, North Macedonia has gone through various and turbulent events, especially on a nominalistic level with neighboring Greece, which also has a region named Macedonia with Thessaloniki as its capital. For a long time, the country has been in a transition from the old Yugoslav federal system toward a pro-democratic governance of the state, facing historical challenges in managing

interculturalism, nationalism, linguistic-cultural identities, and interreligious relations. Precisely for this reason, the subtitle of this collection of essays—"Identity, Religion, Ethics"—seems more appropriate than ever.

Furthermore, the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on August 13, 2001, clearly defined the key problems, starting with the need to end any form of conflict, as explicitly stated in point 1.1 of the basic principles: "The use of violence to achieve political goals is completely and unconditionally rejected." The legacy of the past is too heavy to repeat its consequences. On the contrary, the goal is different: "The multi-ethnic character of Macedonian society must be preserved and reflected in public life."

The Agreement itself prioritizes two dominant realities: Macedonians and Albanians, but also the communities of Turks, Vlachs, Roma, and others. This is an exceptionally complex mosaic that is reflected in Ali Pajaziti's contributions to our reflexivity. The same applies to the multiple government and social presence of religions, such as the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, and other minority religious entities. For all of them, freedom of religion is secured, along with other typical rights of religious communities (schools, humanitarian activities, etc.).

But this is not the only selection of topics raised by the author. In the Macedonian social context, other urgencies stand out: the spread of a consumerist mentality, the trend of individualization, the ethnization of economic activities that contribute to the status of an "immature state" or "proto-democracy", abuses in privatization, high unemployment, widespread poverty (which affects more than one-third of the population), and ethnic tensions.

In this highly problematic scenario, the author moves cautiously, describing every phenomenon down to the smallest detail, so that the reader can understand the complex phenomena, complications, and antagonisms that permeate the space and the population. Above all, the conclusion forces itself upon us that the crucial issue is the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the leadership managing public affairs. This aspect is directly related to the moral factor, corruption, and the capacity for good governance.

Furthermore, numerous intersections are noticeable with the religious factor, which influences both political leaders and the national-cultural affiliation of citizens. Here we see a strong tendency to equate religion with ethnicity. In this context, naturally, manifestations of low tolerance also emerge, leading to confrontations over the way spirituality is lived. Even the COVID-19 pandemic created, or at the very least prompted, new situations, with the so-called "return of the sacred" (observed through the prism of Albanian intellectuals).

Nevertheless, the core of all the author's analyses is undoubtedly the concept of identity and everything it implies, as it is the guiding thread throughout the entire discourse and is present in each of Pajaziti's readings. The religious dimension has its weight, but it seems to depend on—or at least constantly dialogues with—the identity perspective.

The author also highlights the specificities of the globalized world through an analysis of Austrian Albanians, torn between integration and the defense of their own specific culture. On the other hand, he introduces the idea of a Balkan "Silk Road" (instead of the Chinese one) between Skopje and Istanbul, emphasizing the long-lasting bond between North Macedonia and Turkey. Additionally, the economic issue of trade practiced mainly within intra-ethnic frameworks is elaborated, namely the restriction of exchange and the market almost exclusively among members of the same national-cultural community.

Last but not least, there is a pronounced initiative for opening Balkan sociology toward Europe—a process that has been ongoing for a long time and has received support from the European Sociological Association (ESA) and the European Council of National Sociological Associations, which advocate for comprehensive cooperation.