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Minos-Athanasios Karyotakis 

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Macedonian name dispute (MND) in Greece as a qualitative instrumental case study. Through participant observations, artifacts and field notes, it researches the reasons behind the success of sustaining and using the MND as a tool in political competition. The study highlights the creation of a name (sign) whose meanings and importance are also related to non-existent facts that can be used to disseminate fabricated narratives, which is happening in other territorial name disputes worldwide. Consequently, through the examined name dispute, there is a distortion or alteration of facts, criminalising different viewpoints, threatening political opponents, spreading hate and provoking mob attacks against those that challenge Greece's dominant national narrative that wants to secure the monopoly of the word Macedonia.

KEYWORDS

Macedonian name dispute; censorship; securitisation; territorial name disputes; identity


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1. INTRODUCTION

Using different names to refer to a geographical location could reveal the maintenance of a socially constructed dominant narrative empowered primarily by the state to keep its claims alive and create a related dispute between other competing countries. These powerful territorial name disputes might even be connected with a security threat, such as challenging a territory's status (Cayli, 2020; Karyotakis, 2023; Yorgason, 2017).

For instance, in 'Nagorno-Karabakh', the Armenian state prefers to use the name 'Artsakh' to keep its dominant nationalistic narrative alive, which argues that the disputed region belongs to the old Kingdom of Armenia. Such an argument goes against the national narratives of Azerbaijan, which avoids the use of that name in order to not support the Armenian claims. (Keddie, 2020; Rasizade, 2011).

Many disputes over territorial names arise from contesting a particular geographical location. However, some name disputes are not attached firmly to any territorial claim as they do not deal with well-defined geographical locations and territorial borders. Therefore, disagreements do not necessarily arise about who controls the territory. That is the case in the territorial name dispute

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between the Arab countries and Iran over naming the Persian Gulf. The dispute does not deal primarily with the ownership of the Gulf but its name.

On the one hand, Iran uses the term Persian Gulf to secure its presence in the region. It even has a ‘National Persian Gulf Day’, which started in 2005, and it is celebrated each year on 30 April. On the other hand, despite the UN decisions, the Arab States use the name ‘Arabian Gulf’ to tackle the Iranian narrative (Levinson, 2011). The claims concern the countries’ aspirations of expanding their regional grip and influence. Similarly, in the case of the East Sea/Sea of Japan, South Korea uses the term ‘East Sea’ to refer to that part of the sea, and Japan uses the name ‘Sea of Japan’ (Short & Dubots, 2022).

In addition, in the case of East Turkestan/Xinjiang, disagreements do not arise exclusively about the ownership of a well-defined location, leaving space for abstract claims associated with the dominant nationalistic narratives of Uyghur, which challenge the Chinese ruling of the region (Xu et al., 2014). Furthermore, in the case of Kurdistan, the dispute has developed around the right to self-determination based on the Kurds’ dominant nationalistic narrative (O’shea, 2004). ‘Kurdistan’s importance lies not in its existence as a geographical region, nor even as a geopolitical zone, but rather its potential’ (O’shea, 2004, p. 2).

Moreover, in the dispute between Palestine and Israel, there is no exclusive focus on the territorial aspect but on the dominant nationalistic claims about the construction of Israel and Palestine dismissing views challenging these narratives. Subsequently, it is worth remembering that, at the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, one of the places where the Israelis would create their homeland was part of Uganda (Alroey, 2008).

Maintaining the different names for a geographical location is significant to keep alive the dominant nationalistic narrative connected with the country’s national identity (Karyotakis, 2023) and subsequent imagined geography. This is why the states employ several methods to keep dominant this alternative dogmatic version of reality in the countries’ societies. Although there is no extensive research on that phenomenon, the current paper aims to reveal such techniques through the case study of the Macedonian name dispute (MND). The MND is one of the oldest territorial name disputes worldwide, revolving around the fact that Greece does not want to give the name Macedonia to its neighbouring country in the north (Heraclides, 2019); this territorial name dispute is similar to other global disputes (Table 1).

Table 1. Some worldwide examples of territorial name disputes without disagreements exclusively arising over the control of a well-defined territory.

Name A	Defender of name A	Name B	Defender of name B
Nagorno-Karabakh	Azerbaijan	Republic of Artsakh	Armenia
East Sea	South Korea	Sea of Japan	Japan
East Turkestan	Uyghurs	Xinjiang	China
Kurdistan	Kurds	1. Eastern and Southeast Anatolia or Eastern Turkey 2. Northern Iraq 3. Western Iran 4. Northern Syria	1. Turkey 2. Iraq 3. Iran 4. Syria
Palestine	Palestinians	Israel	Israelis
The Arabian Gulf	Arab countries	The Persian Gulf	Iran

The MND, as a case study, shows that territorial name disputes could be independent of conflicts over a well-defined geographical location as they do not firmly deal with the physical borders. For studying this phenomenon, the current paper uses the MND as an instrumental case study, following other studies that used a similar methodology (George, 2007; 2016; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). According to Punch (2014, p. 121), the case study as a method ‘gives a unitary character to the data that being studied by interrelating a variety of facts to a single case’ and ‘provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details that are often overlooked with other methods’. Therefore, a case study can include several field methods (Punch, 2014), and therefore, there is a wide range of data in the current paper based on participant observations, artifacts (i.e., documents and records) and field notes from the conducted fieldwork of the author that lasted for six months beginning from the end of April 2019. Through the use of diverse data, ‘an in-depth description of the case, including the context, history, and important events surrounding the case’ (Allen, 2017, p. 118) can be provided.

Therefore, why is the MND, like other similar territorial name disputes, so powerful even though it’s not strictly attached to an actual territorial claim? A preliminary answer to this question is (a) because symbols (names) have power and (b) because of the ideological work (i.e., censoring the different perspectives to maintain the dominant nationalistic ideological narrative) done to sustain the MND as a powerful resource. This paper studies that work by explaining that people interpret the signs according to their beliefs and ideas.

Therefore, the paper first reviews the relevant literature on the symbolic power of names, the construction of an existential threat and the relation with the MND. After that, two sections that present empirical evidence follow, revealing how Greece has succeeded in keeping the MND alive as an existential threat to the country’s discourse throughout so many years despite being the most powerful country in the dispute.

2. THE POWER OF NAMES (SYMBOLS) AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT: THE CASE OF THE MACEDONIAN NAME DISPUTE (MND)

Names and meanings are crucial elements of language based on people’s ideas, beliefs, viewpoints and perspectives. People give meanings to objects through naming to communicate these meanings with each other. Semioticians have explained this communication process thoroughly, as anything can be perceived as a sign (Eco, 1976).

Two parts define a sign: (a) the concept (signified) and (b) the signifier (words, sound-image). Those two parts get their meaning by how people use them (Saussure, 1959). Words are also symbols, complex signs that include abstract values and meanings that usually are constructed (Eco, 1986; Saussure, 1959). Some signs are transformed through time, gaining different meanings that can evoke and mobilise the citizens’ sentiments. Some of the most sensitive names (or complex signs called symbols according to semiotics) that bear significant power are those associated with the territories of countries, as they are parts of the construction that forms a nation. Like the national flags, the geographical territories of the countries and their names (symbols) are crucial components of the nationalistic narratives that connect the nation’s people (Baycroft, 2005; Smith, 2010). As Pred (1989) has pointed out, symbols and words, as a part of social life, constitute worlds that are kept alive because of language.

This symbolic power of the geographical regions can be identified in territorial name disputes, in which different groups compete. Territorial name disputes are conflicts that have played an essential role throughout time in shaping the discourse on a national and global scale in political competition. The symbolic power of the names also provides an imagined geographical body for each nation. This representation of the national territory as an actual human body aims to

legitimise the national and international consciousness and the actions for protecting or expanding the national territory (Yorgason, 2017).

Studies related to critical toponymy have revealed that the names of places are crucial for promoting power, such as colonial rule (Short & Dubots, 2022). As Short and Dubots (2022, p. 188) have pointed out, 'places have multiple meanings to different groups at different times'. Imposing a name against others and their realities is an act of power aiming to create a dominant reality that cannot be challenged. Nevertheless, across the globe, there are many cases in which there is constant resistance from the local population, such as in Australia with the Aboriginals, who have challenged colonial rule and achieved the use of dual names for particular locations. Place naming and the importance of supporting only one name is often associated with national identity and the ideas of nationalism (Short & Dubots, 2022).

Similarly, in the case of New Zealand or Aotearoa in the Māori language, we can see that a country's history is strongly associated with its place names. The symbolic power of a name could provide legitimacy for the dominant political actors to shape a place based on their ambitions. For example, Israel gave names to administered territories connected to the Zionist ideology (Kearns & Berg, 2002).

Adding to the relevant discussion, Umberto Eco (1986; Eco et al., 1992) showed how people use signs within specific settings and argued that general rules about how people signify something cannot be applied. Each individual defines the world and gives a coherent definition according to his unique reading of the signs. As a result, the names as complex signs called symbols by semioticians are not only contestable and subjective, but also powerful.

The fact that place naming was associated with imposing the power of the settlers and colonial rule, proves that place names must be understood as 'social facts' shaped by the cultural interrelations and dimensions that the study of space offers (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2016, p. 9). Studying this power struggle is of great importance, as 'the hegemonic toponymies acquire – as a part and parcel of people's intuitive "common sense" – a largely taken-for-granted status' (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2016, p. 11). At this point, it should be highlighted that, according to Azaryahu (2016), even the name of the streets could sustain and empower the sociopolitical order that the ruling elites want through the narratives that these names are associated with.

Names (symbols) could be perceived as a component of creating a modern nation contributing to the power distribution that played a significant role in the awakening of some communities that shared the same unique characteristics separating them from other communities and groups (Hardt & Negri, 2001; Kumar, 2010).

According to Anderson (2016), nations are imagined communities that are shaped and formed by collective forces that are being developed throughout time by the country's (or nation's) citizens. The names, as complex signs and, therefore symbols, seem to become a tool in the political competition through the notion of identity politics and the securitisation process. The tendency to promote political collaborations with parties that support people with specific characteristics, such as race, sex, religion and social background, strengthens the notion of identity politics. According to the notion of identity politics, politicians abandon seeking broad-based solutions for all citizens. They aim to please and benefit their audiences (Heyes, 2018). According to Neofotistos (2013), identity can become 'a tool to frame political claims, promote political ideologies, or stimulate and orientate social and political action'.

The paradox of the shared consensus in the Greek discourse results from the real power of identity (identity politics), which becomes far more powerful when an existential threat is created. In the examined case, eventually, the name Macedonia gains such power because it is represented and policed in the Greek discourse as an issue of the ultimate loss of a part of the actual Greek identity. The name of Macedonia becomes a sign that has to be secured without considering that a solution to the name dispute will put Greece in a more powerful position. Thus, using the securitisation process and supporting identity issues can result in the fabrication of a threat.

Adding to the above information, securitisation theory can provide the theoretical framework for understanding the construction of a security issue (or an existential threat). The securitisation process of an issue is supposed to begin with a speech act from a prominent actor (usually the state). As an action, the securitisation process can provoke intense emotions and feelings in the public (Balzacq, 2005; Balzacq et al., 2016).

For the success of the securitisation, the following conditions must be met: (a) the creation of an existential threat, (b) the implementation of emergency action(s) for the defence of the threatened referent object and (c) the acceptance of this procedure by the audience. The public must be convinced that if there is no solution to the securitised issue, then there could be no other chance for tackling the threat in the future. The securitised object can also be associated with a broad spectrum of concepts, including identity (Buzan et al., 1998; Kaunert & Yakubov, 2017).

In the MND, we have the name Macedonia (symbol), which Greece's neighbouring country can steal. That possible threat resulted in the mobilisation of the Greeks, who thought that the loss of the name Macedonia could lead to the monopoly of Macedonia and its cultural heritage. Macedonia is essential to the main nationalistic ideological narrative for constructing the modern Greek state. As a result, without its monopoly, a part of the national narrative collapses (Karyotakis, 2021). The massive protests that have taken place from the 1990s until the successful ratification of the 'Prespes Agreement' and the electoral power that many prominent societal actors gained in Greece throughout these almost 30 decades of the dispute demonstrate the power that the name Macedonia holds for the Greeks.

As a result, the following part of the literature review presents the issues connected to the MND more thoroughly, moving on from the general theoretical discussion to a more practical one by focusing on the paper's case study.

More specifically, the MND is associated with the Macedonian question, one of the oldest international issues, 150 years and counting without a universal solution. Throughout the last 27 years, the name dispute has been developed around the viewpoints of two countries (Greece and the country now-named North Macedonia). The dispute is supposed to have been solved after signing the so-called 'Prespes Agreement' on 17 June 2018 and its activation after the successful confirmation process on 12 February 2019. For many Greeks, the main problem with the agreement was that it gave the neighbouring country the name Macedonia by renaming the country from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to North Macedonia. Macedonia was no longer a monopoly of the Greek heritage connected with the legacy of Alexander the Great (Heraclides, 2019).

In the MND, no other allied country of Greece (e.g., Germany, France, USA, etc.) can understand how the small, weak, poor, enclosed and ethnically divided country of North Macedonia can become an actual threat to a powerful country like Greece in the Balkan context. However, this incomprehensible dispute has such power in mobilising the Greeks, as it has provoked the largest recent protests in the country's history during the negotiations for the 'Prespes Agreement', and probably the most massive demonstration in the country's history. On the 14 February 1992, almost one million people gathered in Thessaloniki to demonstrate their support in securing the Greekness of the name Macedonia, shouting slogans such as 'There is only one Macedonia, and it is Greek', 'Macedonia is our soul' and 'History is our soul'. These slogans were almost identical in 2018 and 2019 throughout the incidents concerning the aforementioned agreement (Heraclides, 2019).

Furthermore, many prominent politicians, even from the New Democracy's (ND) government, which was formed after the national elections on the 7 July 2019, have argued that the agreement is a threat to Greece (Goutzanis, 2019). ND has dominated the local political scene since the creation of the modern Greek state after the junta's fall in 1974 (Psycharis et al., 2021).

These arguments go against the facts as the ND's government has declared its support towards North Macedonia and the 'Prespes Agreement' officially on several occasions (Avgi.gr,

2021; Marusic, 2019). Besides, Greek armed forces have started to police the airspace of North Macedonia (Hellenic National Defence General Staff, 2019; Michalopoulos, 2019), and further economic developments were scheduled to empower the financial dependency from Greece, which is one of the most important foreign investors of North Macedonia (Michalopoulos, 2019; Nenovski & Smilkovski, 2012). The creation and maintenance of dogmatic imagined nationalistic narratives that overemphasise the emotional aspects rather than presenting the plain facts and shape another version of reality is a characteristic observed in other territorial name disputes around the globe, such as the Persian/Arabian Gulf, East Turkestan/Xinjiang, East Sea/Sea of Japan, etc. (Karyotakis, 2023).

North Macedonia's claims used to be based on the idea that its citizens shaped the Macedonian nation, spoke the Macedonian language and the rightful name of their country should have been the Republic of Macedonia (Drezov, 2001). The animosity between the Greeks and the Macedonians became more prominent when Nikola Gruevski was the country's Prime Minister from 2006 to 2016. Gruevski became powerful by emphasising the country's connection with the ancient kingdom of Macedonia (Bechev, 2018; Petkovski, 2015).

Under his presidency, Skopje, the country's capital, was transformed into a 'neoclassical-themed amusement park presided over by a humongous statue of Alexander the Great perched upon a fountain in the main square' (Bechev, 2018). Gruevski's tactics empowered the Greek perspective that the Macedonians actually wanted to 'steal' the Macedonian legacy and culture from the Greeks, making a compromise more difficult between the two countries and helping the populist Greek politicians that were using the MND as a tool for gaining electoral power (Heraclides, 2019).

In addition, Gruevski accused Zoran Zaev of deceiving the Macedonians through the 'Prespes Agreement', pointing out that his government fought with Greece to secure that Alexander the Great's legacy is associated with North Macedonia. With the 'Prespes Agreement', he underlined that 'all antique history is exclusively related to Greece and that the other party, meaning us, has nothing to do with it' (Rudic, 2019). That is one of the reasons why the Macedonians organised several protests to show their disapproval of the government for realising the Greek demands and accepting the name change of the country, which included the non-connection with the ancient kingdom of Macedonia and the Macedonian language (Arabnews.com, 2018; Rferl.org, 2018; Theguardian.com, 2018).

The 'Prespes Agreement' provoked many serious incidents such as protests, demonstrations, physical attacks against politicians and individuals, diplomatic conflicts with other countries such as Russia, and influenced the results of the Greek elections on the 26 May 2019 and on the 7 July that led to the change of government. ND became the new government of Greece. ND was the most prominent political party in Greece that was against the signing of the Agreement. However, it completely changed its approach towards the 'Prespes Agreement' after forming the government.

Eventually, the Agreement was valuable and essential for further developments between Greece and North Macedonia. Here lies an element of importance for studying the cases of territorial name disputes, which do not exclusively arise from disagreements on well-defined territorial claims such as the MND. The MND has been used for several years as a political tool for gaining electoral power in the political competition (Ellinas, 2010), forming a name (sign) that its meanings and importance are also related to fabricated facts of a specific version of reality that can be used for disseminating lies (Eco, 1976), like that which is happening in other territorial name disputes.

3. THE USE OF THE MND AS AN ELECTORAL TOOL IN POLITICAL COMPETITION

The empirical evidence provided in the next two sections of the paper offers insights into how Greece has succeeded in keeping the MND alive as an existential threat to the country's discourse

throughout so many years despite being the most powerful country in the dispute. In the beginning, the study shows that Greek nationalism must be understood as a live political project, and not as some natural or automatic outgrowth from ancient Greek history. That history is a political resource, not a 'given' in such territorial name disputes. Secondly, it reveals the successful creation of an existential threat in the MND and the policing methods employed by the Greek state to maintain this threat in the country's discourse.

Greece is a prominent example of the nationalist uprising as it was the first country that shared a common identity and decided to fight against the Ottoman Empire. The Greeks exploited the shared understanding amongst European countries that were supporting the creation of a country called Greece due to the legacy of the ancient Greeks. The construction of the Greek identity was mainly based on the idea of the territory, in which the ancient Greeks living there had forgotten their real identity. Therefore, the intellectuals of Europe had to transform the barbarians into the proper ancestors of ancient Greeks (Anderson, 2016).

At the beginning of Greece's nationalistic construction, the legacy of Macedonians was not included in the official narrative. According to one of the first fathers of Greek nationalism, Adamantios Koraes, Macedonians were treated as barbarians who conquered the Greeks and not as an actual part of the country (Xenophontos, 2019). This narrative, though, was altered a few years after the success of Greek independence.

In 1992, probably the largest demonstration in the country's history occurred. Almost one million people were gathered in the largest city of the land of Macedonia, Thessaloniki (Chrysopoulos, 2018). According to a resolution published in this demonstration, the people called;

... on our European fellow citizens and their Governments not to associate their name with an act, and specifically with the usurpation of the name of Macedonia, which directly harms not only the history and identity of Greece but of the whole of Europe. (The New York Times, 1992)

This unrest was a result of the fall of Yugoslavia and the failure of efforts to create an independent country that was next to Greece. This new country was about to use the word Macedonia in its name, but Greece had to recognise the country to pave the way for the European Community and the United Nations access. Thus, a paragraph was added to the possible agreement in the meeting on 8 September 1991 (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2010). The paragraph clarified that the new state, in order to be recognised, must not have 'territorial claims towards a neighbouring Community State and that it will conduct no hostile propaganda activities versus a neighbouring Community State, including the use of a denomination which implies territorial claims' (Turk, 1993, p. 73).

Greece did not seem pleased with the addition of the paragraph and the use of the name Macedonia by the neighbouring country. As a result, it was blamed for the failure of the negotiations, and questions were raised about its stance, as it seemed that it was the one that was having actual territorial claims. Moreover, the further jeopardisation of the negotiation process was due to an inner conflict between the Greek government formed by ND and the Prime Minister named Konstantinos Mitsotakis. The former Foreign Minister of the government, 'Samaras, who had resigned from the ruling New Democracy Party, declared his intention to mobilise his supporters in Parliament and bring the government down if Mitsotakis agreed to a name that included the term "Macedonia"' (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2010, p. 180). In the end, the government fell as it lost its majority in the Greek parliament.

Throughout the Greek political competition years, many individuals and parties or groups were set in a prominent position on the Macedonian issue, supporting the Greekness of Macedonia and the non-negotiation with the neighbouring country if there was the word Macedonia in its official name. For instance, PAMME (Panhellenic Macedonian Front) was a political party founded by Stelios Papatthemelis and Kostas Zouraris (a former member of the Communist Party of Greece and a member of parliament after the national elections of 2019 with the party that

implemented the 'Prespes Agreement'). The core goal of PAMME was to support the Greekness of Macedonia and to oppose a deal that would undermine this principle (Gemenis, 2010).

Elliniki Lysi (Greek Solution) is a more recent example and another political party, which was founded in June 2016 and used the MND successfully as a core issue of its political campaign throughout the European and national elections of 2019. Its founder and leader, Kyriakos Velopoulos, was one of the most visible politicians in 2018 during the demonstrations against the 'Prespes Agreement', expressing publicly extreme opinions in favour of the Greekness of Macedonia and highlighting the threat to the country by giving the name Macedonia to Greece's neighbouring country (Stamouli, 2019). For example, Velopoulos on Twitter (25 March 2018) argued that Kosovo is Serbia and Macedonia is Greek. His Tweet said, 'One is the Solution for Macedonia borders with Orthodox Serbia! Greece Serbia Alliance!'

The MND as a threat, which includes the imagined loss of a component of the Greek identity, has been used in political competition by most parties in Greece, especially, from political parties that share a right or far-right ideology. In several cases, the MND provided significant electoral power to the parties against giving the name 'Macedonia' to the neighbouring country. One of Europe's most extreme far-right parties, the Golden Dawn, was revived due to the MND (Baskakis & Psarras, 2018; Ellinas, 2013). It is not a surprise that both front pages of the Golden Dawn's newspaper about Macedonia on 10 January 1993 and 10 January 2018 had the same headline, 'No Compromise for Our Macedonia'. The party's leader even showed the headline in the Greek Parliament during a related discussion (Iefimerida.gr, 2020).

In addition, the most popular right-wing party in Greece, New Democracy, has also used the MND in several elections to gain electoral power. The politicians in Greece gained significant influence throughout their electoral campaigns by highlighting and supporting the benefits for the group that they represent, including the nationalistic sentiment that protects the Greekness of Macedonia (Baskakis & Psarras, 2018; Ellinas, 2013). Such an example was Elena Rapti (ND's MP) during national elections in 2019, who distributed a newspaper as a part of her electoral campaign. She was portrayed with a Greek flag on the front page with the text saying, 'In the front line for our Macedonia', urging the readers to read more on page three. The third page was dedicated to her efforts, mostly through interviews and speeches to demonstrate that 'Macedonia is Greek', that 'The Prespes Agreement is nationally detrimental to the country' and that ND argued that 'it [the Prespes Agreement] encourages Skopje's redemptive claims'.

In the case of the MND, Greece, from the powerful actor, has to be represented as the oppressed, weak entity that is being exploited by the more powerful countries and international organisations (e.g., United Nations) that dictate the loss of the Macedonian identity. This loss could even lead to the loss of the Greek territory of Macedonia in the future. To show the paradox of the Greek claims again, in 1994, Greece imposed a complete embargo against North Macedonia, resulting in a 40 percent reduction in food supplies and an 85 percent reduction of the exports in North Macedonia. Furthermore, until the signing of the 'Prespes Agreement', around 140 countries had recognised the country with its constitutional name 'Republic of Macedonia'. Some powerful countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Australia and Spain, despite referring to the country as 'Macedonia', were siding with Greece, and did not recognise it officially as the 'Republic of Macedonia'. Lastly, the change of the country's name to 'North Macedonia' is unprecedented in international politics. North Macedonia altered its name and constitution through a bilateral agreement despite the principles of self-determination and international law (e.g., the principles of sovereignty and no interference in domestic issues) after 75 years of the use of a different name (Heraclides, 2019).

In the case of MND, all three components of the securitisation process are fulfilled as there is the creation of the existential threat of losing the Greekness of the Macedonian identity, the emergency actions (e.g., harsh financial sanctions against North Macedonia by Greece, the recent deportation of Russian diplomats by Greece during the ratification of the 'Prespes Agreement',

the near fall of the Greek government during the vote in the Greek Parliament that confirmed the Agreement, etc.), and the acceptance of the threat of the agreement by the audience through events with enormous public support such as some of the biggest demonstrations in the history of the country. As a result, the hardening of the identity issue as a threat to Greece has contributed to keeping alive the Macedonian name dispute so dominant for so many years. For all that, the next section focuses more closely on the actual methods for policing the debate in the Greek discourse for all these years.

4. POLICING THE NAME OF MACEDONIA IN THE GREEK DISCOURSE

4.1. The use of different names and the blurring tactic

The name of Macedonia is one of the cases of territorial name disputes, in which many different methods of policing were employed to secure the nation's authority in monopolising a name. The least extreme and common method for hiding the discussion about the name dispute was the use of different names. In the examined case, instead of the name Macedonia, the Greeks used the names FYROM (the former name of North Macedonia according to the United Nations resolution), the Greek translation of FYROM and Skopje (the capital of North Macedonia).

Furthermore, many times, the interpreters of public figures undertook the task of correcting the original speech by transposing the Greek national correct term during translation, distorting the speaker's will. Similarly, TV channels covered with white colour North Macedonia's abbreviation 'MKD' in sporting matches or during the recent heated debate on the refugee crisis, Macedonia was always translated as 'Skopje' (Tsitselikis, 2016). A case of covering with white colour the country's name was in Eurobasket 2009, in which, at the beginning of the match, the Greek national broadcaster was not covering the abbreviation 'MKD', but after a while, it was decided to blur it with white colour.

This method of parallel names was standard practice so as not to accuse the broadcaster, news organisation or interpreter of transmitting or saying something anti-national. That's why self-censorship was also employed. Besides, the parallel names were supposed to ensure that the contagious term, 'Macedonia' would not be disseminated in Greek society (Tsitselikis, 2016).

4.2. Hate, mob attacks and threats

Moreover, in the MND, the spread of hate and fear towards those who were promoting a solution with North Macedonia was also accompanied by mob attacks. One major event was the beating up of Yiannis Boutaris, the then-mayor of Thessaloniki (19 May 2018). Boutaris had spoken openly against the nationalistic narratives for sensitive political issues such as the MND (Erickson, 2018; Iefimerida.gr, 2018; Strickland, 2018). During the trial, photos revealed that the mob attackers had taken part in demonstrations to protect the Greekness of Macedonia. Besides this, the mobsters called him a 'traitor' during the attack (Koukoumakas, 2018). At the end of 2018, Boutaris' apartment was attacked by unknown activists who sprayed with red colour the apartment's door and wrote in the entrance of the building, again with red colour and in capital letters, the word 'traitor' (ΙΙΠΟΔΟΤΗΣ in Greek) (Protothema.gr, 2018).

Furthermore, in the attack against Boutaris, Panagiotis Psomiadis, a popular political figure and a prominent former politician of ND, a few minutes before the attack seemed to call for action against Boutaris by naming him 'cholera' and 'political traveli' (slang word for travesti) due to his support for solving the MND (Athensvoice.gr, 2018; Newsbeez.com, 2018; Youtube.com, 2018). Therefore, Psomiadis went on trial for his actions, facing charges of 'exhortation to commit a misdemeanour' (Ekathimerini.com, 2019a). At this point, it should be mentioned that Psomiadis is one of the politicians who has been systematically using the MND to gain electoral power, as 'Macedonia is Greece and Greece is Macedonia' (Karyotakis, 2023; Kourti, 2011; Youtube.com, 2012).

The term ‘traitor’ was commonly used for those supporting the deal with North Macedonia. For instance, the Greek Foreign Minister responsible for the negotiations and the ‘Prespes Agreement’, Nikos Kotzias, was sued for high treason, because ‘the native, indigenous, true Macedons are forced to take recourse to justice to seek protection from the historically ignorant and potentially dangerous surrendering of our name to the neighbouring state of Slav-Albanians’ (Ekathimerini.com, 2018). In addition, after the immediate support of the agreement by the new government, which was firmly against it before winning the national elections, on the 17 July 2019 on Twitter, Nikos Kotzias, asked ND for an apology due to the extreme threats against him:

I am glad that ND started to like the Prespes Agreement. But because they called me a traitor, received 1100 letters + hundreds of threatening phone calls, bullets, and all kinds of ammunition, including anti-aircraft ammunition, and bags full of blood, may I ask if there is any apology left?

Except for the case of Nikos Kotzias, other Members of the Greek Parliament of the government that backed the ‘Prespes Agreement’ faced extreme reactions from a small number of individuals who threatened them or their families. One such example was the attack against the house of Betty Skoufa in Katerini, in which the mobsters even tried to set fire to the house. As a result, the police arrested six individuals for that incident, two of whom were underage (Ekathimerini.com, 2019b; Fotopoulos, 2019).

Another similar incident was the attack against Theodora Tzakri’s house in Giannitsa. During this attack, petrol bombs set fire to the house’s balcony and threatened the life of Tzakri’s family, including her young child who was inside the house (Ethnos.gr, 2019; Keptalkinggreece.com, 2019).

Moreover, during the ratification of the ‘Prespes Agreement’, there were even wanted posters on public spaces against politicians backing the agreement (Liberal.gr, 2019; The National Herald, 2019) alongside graffiti and sprayed threats against the non-nationalists (Figure 1).

4.3. Altering and distorting the facts for electoral power

The Greek state was also active throughout these years in protecting the name Macedonia. That’s why it is not a surprise that the new Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis (2019-present), appointed himself the head of all the state news media organisations (Tsimitakis, 2019) and, thus, the government started from the first day of his governance to hide its support towards the Agreement. According to Mitsotakis, he was against the Agreement:

... not only because that is the will of the vast majority of the Greek people, but also because it is a bad agreement that instead of solving old problems in the wider Balkan region may spark new ones. That is our position, and it is non-negotiable. (In.gr, 2019)

Some of the most profound cases were the removal and alteration of statements by the Greek News Agency. The first prominent case was the removal of the last paragraph of the press release of the discussion with Theresa May. In the Greek version of the press release provided by the Greek News Agency, there was no reference to the issue with North Macedonia. Probably because in this paragraph, Mitsotakis was declaring his support towards the Agreement: ‘On wider regional issues, the Prime Minister said that she believed the Prespes Agreement with North Macedonia was an important step forward and welcomed Prime Minister Mitsotakis’s commitment to honour its implementation’ (Tvxs.gr, 2019).

An almost identical action took place at the end of September 2020, when the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, visited Greece. The initial joint statement in English from the US and Greece on Greece’s Foreign Ministry’s website characterised the ‘Prespes Agreement’ as



Figure 1. Threats about Macedonia.

Note: Two relevant phrases are among the sprayed messages on the wall: 'Macedonia Greek Territory' and 'Hang the Anarchists'.

Source: Minos-Athanasios Karyotakis.

a 'historic' accord. A few hours, though, after its release, the adjective 'historic' was erased. The joint statement was not published in Greek in its initial version (Michalopoulos, 2020; Tanea.gr, 2020).

In addition, there was an alteration of the statements made by the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, at the 23rd Economist Government Roundtable (16 – 17 July 2019, Athens), in which he seemed to praise the 'Prespes Agreement'. Meanwhile, prominent members of New Democracy, such as Antonis Samaras at the 13th Conference of ND (1 December 2019), kept talking about an existential threat against Greece. According to him, the agreement has 'created frictions between states that did not exist before ... This is not a stabilisation policy in the region, but a destabilisation policy'.

At this point, it should be mentioned that the MND seemed to be of great importance for both of the main parties in the 2019 national elections, as both of their leaders Kyriakos Mitsotakis (ND) and Alexis Tsipras (Syriza), came to Thessaloniki to give their last address to their voters before the national elections of 7 July 2019.

4.4. Criminalising different opinions

The Greek state had also created several scientific organisations and institutes such as 'the Society for Macedonian Studies' that are still active. One of their main goals was to support the narrative about the Greekness of Macedonia with scientific facts (Baltiotis, 2016). However, the most extreme method that was used for policing the name Macedonia was the trials and convictions that were putting restrictions on the freedom of expression, silencing even the different scientific points of view. The silencing of the different points of view was intensified during the 1990s due to the nationalistic fever for the protection of the Macedonian name. The turmoil about the Greekness of Macedonia was so out of control that the majority of Greeks, the state and the church were hunting down those who were expressing non-favourable opinions for the nationalistic narratives of the country. This strict policing agenda was, in a way, the same for all the issues that were labelled as 'national issues' by the Greek state. However, policing was becoming extreme in cases related to the MND. For example, a juridical decision criminalised the use of the term 'Republic of Macedonia' for referring to North Macedonia (Petsini & Christopoulos,

2016). Meanwhile, the state, through the then Foreign Minister Antonis Samaras, was providing further support to the oppression of the freedom of expression by justifying even controversial actions of many young Greeks who, according to him, went out to the streets to demonstrate passionately their love towards the nation (Papadatos-Anagnostopoulos, 2016).

According to the news coverage of that time, the media were promoting the non-solution to the name dispute and were preserving the dominant nationalistic Greek narrative that treated the MND as a crucial issue, in which the Greeks had to support the idea that Macedonia could only be Greek (Demertzis et al., 1999). Similar accusations for the media coverage throughout the incidents related to the 'Prespes Agreement' were made by the then-government that realised the agreement (Syriza's Account 2012–2019, 2020).

The aforementioned strict policing agenda during the 1990s, due to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the sudden appearance of the MND, was turned into a witch-hunt against left-wing groups and anti-nationalist organisations. Many members of these groups and organisations were arrested, went on trial and condemned for spreading fake news, while in fact, they were hanging posters and distributing leaflets promoting the idea that the neighbouring country's citizens and those of Greece are not enemies. This extreme behaviour could be an outcome of the Greek dictatorship and the relevant law that was condemning and promoting even the lynching of the public opinions that were considered dangerous for 'national issues' (Baltisiotis, 2016; Bournazos, 2016). Some Greek news outlets kept referring to these cases, for example, one titled 'The Silence Was Broken' was published in the Greek weekly national newspaper 'The Season' (Η Εποχή) on the 11 February 2018.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although there is a broad consensus about the name Macedonia, Greece's exclusive claim to the name is built on shaky ground, requiring concerted ideological efforts (i.e., censoring) to maintain the MND as a vital issue. Throughout the years, the Greek state employed a plethora of methods to police the Greekness of Macedonia and to keep alive the notion of the threat to Greece by the neighbouring country of North Macedonia. However, this is not a surprise, as the spread of the national narratives on a broad national spectrum can be successful and maintained through the selective depiction of historical and unreal facts that can disseminate distorted meanings (Eco, 1976).

This method can construct a common consciousness amongst the population, leading to the acceptance of myths, symbols (names) and stories that shape the national identity. Keeping these seductive nationalistic narratives alive results in the growth and strength of the shared national identity (Baycroft, 2005) and the establishment of a singular name to refer to a place that maintains the status quo for those who hold societal power (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2016; Short & Dubots, 2022).

These findings reveal practices that are common in other territorial name disputes around the world, and they have not been identified before. The warring sides put enormous effort into using different names to refer to the same territory and restrict those voices that challenge this version of reality. This conflicting version of reality imposed by the territorial name can be employed in the political competition for electoral gains and to distract the public from the more urgent problems causing social disorder.

The MND is a similar case as the Greek state even decided to protect the Greekness of Macedonia with extreme acts against individuals, such as the criminalisation of opinions and mob attacks. The main goal was to maintain and, in a way, fabricate a threat derived from North Macedonia. That is one of the reasons why, in the Greek discourse, there was never a 'Macedonian problem' but only a 'Skopjan issue' (Christopoulos & Karpouzilos, 2018).

The use of alternative names to describe Greece's neighbouring country contributed to keeping this version of reality (the 'Skopjan issue') alive, in which the other side was to be blamed for trying to steal the Macedonian identity. The symbolic power of these territorial name disputes and their association with the nationalistic narratives of nation-states can become a powerful resource for political competition (Smith, 2010). Taking into consideration these facts, it is not a surprise that the 'Prespes Agreement', which was supposed to be a solution to MND, even resulted in mobilising underage individuals, leading them to extreme actions against those that were in favour of the agreement (Ekathimerini.com, 2019b; Fotopoulos, 2019). Consequently, the current case study reveals that, thorough state policing passed down from one generation to the next, strong national instincts associated with the use of a territorial name could possibly be maintained.

The MND seems to be a useful communication tool in political competition, providing power to those politicians who oppose solving the issue with North Macedonia. It seems that the symbolic power and the threat that the Macedonian name includes are so important that the new Greek government has employed censorship, speech acts and other facts to keep this threatening and dogmatic version of reality alive despite implementing and praising the 'Prespes Agreement'.

In the MND, as an example of territorial name disputes, there is a game of truth from different actors who try to further empower themselves and shape the truth. Language defines the way people think by providing specific and limited interpretations of the world. Through identity politics and the securitisation process, territorial name disputes, such as the MND, turn the soft factor of identity into a powerful tool (hard factor), resulting in a shared meaning of the Macedonian name that also includes the meaning of the existential threat. The communication of this shared meaning that can be perceived as a threat against the Greek identity tends to gain enormous symbolic power and mobilise individuals in a territorial dispute that does not primarily focus on spatial claims. An existential threat might be connected with public panic, which has been shown to affect the control of a territory (Cayli, 2020).

The result is that a territorial name's symbolic power is also associated with non-existent or distorted facts and a certain interpretation of the sign leading to the empowerment of a specific version of reality (Eco, 1976). Therefore, politicians use it to attract more votes by supporting the dominant narrative in favour of the name's (Macedonia's) monopoly. Finally, territorial name disputes, such as the MND, could be used to increase the citizens' hate and mobilise them against certain individuals, to alter or distort facts, to threaten political opponents and to criminalise different opinions.

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