Alexander the Greek?
– An essay on Greek identity and the reconstruction of the past to fit the present.

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**Abstract**


**Key words**

Macedonia  
Greece  
Identity  
Antiquity  
Discourse
Forewords

I would like to thank my good friends Arvid and Jan for keeping up my spirits as I slaved away in attempting to finish this study. Towards the end it often felt like I wouldn’t be able to finish the study, but they kept the hope up. Thanks of course to Branka for being a very generous and wise supervisor.
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"I declare
That later on,
Even in an age unlike our own,
Someone will remember who we are"
- Sappho (2009 s 87)

Sappho’s declaration that she and her peers will be remembered far from her time gives an interesting opening into this study. She was an ancient Greek poet who wrote, among many things, of love, marriage and beauty. While she is no doubt right, she and the ancient Greeks are remembered, the interesting part is how they are remembered. History can be used to ground an identity, claim territory or as a reference in political speeches, the writing of history is inherently political. In this study the remembering and construction of the past is examined through the lenses of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, as seen through the current dispute over the “Macedonia”. Territorial disputes with arguments from the far past is nothing new, (re)interpretations of history to fit a national narrative and create a collective memory can be found across both identity and geography. In the case of this dispute, the ancient Greeks and the memory which both sides construct of them serve as a basis for many of the arguments raised on either side, it’s a debate from the present, held through the past.

Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the ongoing debate about the name “Macedonia” and through it investigate how the past is used to justify a collective ownership to a specific name based on historical ethno-cultural aspects.

- How does the two discourses on the name dispute appear from both the Greek and the Macedonian perspective? Which arguments can be seen from the discourses and what potential problems do they raise against a permanent solution?
- How does the construction of ancient Greece, as done by the Greek side of the name debate, compare to the construction of ancient Greece which arises from ancient literature?
Theory, method and empirical material

Theory

The theoretical basis of this study comes from Hobsbawm (1983, p 1-14) and Andersson (2006, p 1-8), whom provide similar theories which can beneficially be complemented by each other. Both theories work on the assumption that nations are socially-constructed to fit social and material factors, national symbolism is imagined or invented to be the specific property of the nation, becoming essentially an identification card for whom belongs. For Hobsbawm the book *Invented traditions* is used, in which he argues that traditions which might seem culturally unavoidable and intrinsically linked has the basis in something invented. No tradition has simply existed across time, but has its origin in something pragmatic, which in modern times were appropriated and changed to fit the present situation and create a justification for current processes (Hobsbawm 1983, p 1-14,111). Trevor-Roper, a writer of a chapter in *The invention of Tradition*, exemplifies by looking the Highland tradition. Trevor-Roper argues that Highland tradition was appropriated and reconstructed to provide a cultural framework for protesting the union with England. Early Scottish history was rewritten to separate them from their Irish roots and instead construct them as successors to ancient people of the region. New Highland traditions were invented to reinforce this view, which were presented as culturally distinct with its roots in the far-off past, rather having originally come from the Irish highlanders (Trevor-Roper 1983, 15-41). As for a modern example, the current debate in Sweden about church bells can be looked at. Their roots are from a before watches when they were necessary to signal Church services but has today taken on a symbolic value as a nationalist issue to rally behind, placing church bells as inherently culturally different to adhan, the Muslim praying call.

As for Anderson the book *Imagined communities* serve as a basis, in which Benedict expands the perspective to the actual community inventing the traditions. He argues that a nation, as it’s created acquire meaning through constructing itself as a natural conclusion of history, as the destiny of the community, rather than from chance. The community imagines the nation as a concept existing before its political realization, making its prehistory a buildup to the nation (Andersson 2006, p 10). By imagining the nation in this fashion and constructing a cultural nation before the political, the imagined community gives itself a sort blessing from history, strengthened by usage of symbolism in reference to this past (Andersson 2006, p 187). Anderson argues that this is especially true for nations without a direct pre-national State preceding it, as such nations might need to look far in the past to find a united history to rally behind. Which he says leads to the imagining of a nation “awakening”, a nation which has been asleep, but through an awakening found its destiny as a nation with a united community (Anderson 2006, p 195). The creation of maps
showing the historical sizes of the pre-national States which the community had imagined as their own could also serve as a base for territorial claim, or a way to legitimize expansion of territory as it was being made (Andersson 2006, p 174).

Hobsbawm concurs generally with this view, mentioning that the creation of new traditions as an appropriation of traditions from before the creation the modern nation-state can serve to mobilize a diverse community of people around a common idea and isolate adversaries against the nation (Hobsbawm, p 270-271). The nation and its tradition then is imagined, tradition is invented to create the nation as a historical successor to pre-national history. Tradition is the reimagining of history to fit the present and justify the nation as a political entity, allowing the nation to separate itself from the rest of the world as the political realization of a culture and history unique to one people.

Methodological perspective and analytical approach

social constructionism

Social constructionism is prevalent in both the theory and the method of this study. At its core it's about being critical of the knowledge produced by us, questioning the notion that objective information can be derived from subjective observation. Meaning there's a specific set of values and experiences clouding the lenses of any observer. More concretely however, social constructionism questions the categories which people are placed in, arguing that they, rather than being natural, have been constructed for specific aims and then continued to be reconstructed. For example, in this study national symbolism and history construction is traced to show its root in political aspirations or attempts at creating unity against a ‘other’. So, there is not a set natural meaning of these symbols, their meaning is socially constructed towards values produced in the social group (Burr 2015, p 1-30).

discourse analysis

For this study a discourse analysis is used, a method which can be used in many various ways. Essentially however a discourse analysis means examining how a social or political concept/phenomenon is portrayed by various actors in specific contexts. There are many various ways of producing a discourse analysis, as various scholars have created their own version of working with discourses. However, a discourse analysis is generally based on a social constructionist perspective, where language and concepts are viewed as constructed by society, meaning they aren’t natural, but rather constructed from political, social and power-based factors (Winther Jorgensen and Philips 2000, p 8-9). In this study the discursive method called discursive psychology is used, which means examining the relation between discourses produced by individuals or groups and their broader
implications on societal structures and practices (Winther Jorgensen and Philips 2000, p 12-13, 97-112).

The cognitive approach applied for this study is called social identity theory, in which conflict between groups are stressed to have their roots in the context of social and historical processes. When individuals are characterized as part of a group they represent a social identity rather than a personal, meaning they identify themselves with characteristics and collective ideas of what it means to belong to this group. The social identity then shapes the individuals inside the group, which leads to conflict between groups because of the tendency of individuals to prioritize their own group over others (Winther Jorgensen and Philips 2000, p 102). The discourses produced do not showcase an objective idea for how the world works, rather they showcase the subjective view of the world created by the speech of those inside the discursive group (Winther Jorgensen and Philips 2000, p 104). In the study that means examining the discourse produced by the Greek and Macedonian side of the name dispute respectively, by looking at arguments raised from various sources from both sides. More concretely those raised by government institutions, politicians, political parties and protesting citizens. The discourses are placed in relation to the historic developments of Greek identity and history, as well as a third discourse on the ancient Greek world in relation to a Greek nation, to problematize the what is shown in the modern Greek discourse.

**Empirical basis**

*Modern material*

The empirical data collected for the debate in the modern perspective is taken from the several sources, for example the website of government institutions, such as the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Tourism, in both Greece and Republic of Macedonia. To expand the discourses and showcase them as reproduced by the larger groups of “Greeks” and “Macedonians”, statements on the name dispute made by politicians, parties and citizens on both sides are included. These are collected mainly from international papers considered “Newspapers of Record”, meaning they have a history of attempting to report events un-controversially and an international reputation of being a reputable paper.

*Ancient material*

The empirical data for ancient history, thought and discourse is taken from a variety of sources, focusing on primary sources from ancient authors. These references, to suit the study, are mainly in relation to ancient Greek identity, what it means to be Greek and who isn’t a Greek. The potential problems of trying to create a cohesive perspective from old scant references will be dealt with dynamically throughout the analysis, rather than problematized at a central point. This is because the various individual circumstances of
the different ancient authors need to be known in order to understand the texts or orations quoted from them. A Greek author writing that Macedonians were barbarians might be proof enough for some that Greeks thought Macedonians were non-Greek but looking at the character of the author might make it different. If for example he was an Athenian statesman and the leading opposition to the Macedonian king, which was the case with Demosthenes who made such remarks. As such his political motivations makes his words loaded in the sense that it showcases the political nature of the discourse, rather than the ancient Greek authoritative view.

**Ethical concerns**

The four points on proper research ethics regarding research in humanities and social sciences are the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and ethical use of research requirement. (Vetenskapsrådet, s 7, 9, 12, 14). This study does not collect any information to require consent or confidentiality or have any active participants. All the material comes from either ancient Greek authors or quotes from newspapers, as such the study follows the points. There are however limitations of the empirical material, the English sources gives only a limited possibility to understand the deeper workings of the issue, but the study focuses on the dispute as an international debate, with less focus on internal politics, so it does not undermine the validity of the study.

**Background and previous research**

**Historical background**

The history of the debate over the name “Macedonia” is a complicated one. It’s a debate about cultural and national identity and ownership of associated symbolism and history. To properly understand the modern debate, it is important to have sufficient historical context for both the nation of Greece and of Republic of Macedonia. Starting with ancient history, in 489BCE several independent Greek city-states collectively defeated the second Persian invasion\(^1\), amongst them cities such as Athens, Sparta, Platea and Corinth. Greece wasn’t a unified nation at this point, but a collection of city-states with unique constitutions, political desires and city-based identity on top of the Greek identity existing at the time. Following this invasion, the ambition of both Athens and Sparta grew until war broke out, which lasted for many years and eventually came to involve all the cities of Greece and the Kingdom of Macedon as well as outside powers such as Persia\(^2\) and Thrace\(^3\)

\(^1\) Led by King Xerxes
\(^2\) Ancient empire in Asia of significant size.
\(^3\) A region north of Greece.
After years of strife between the city-states which severely weakened their power, the kingdom of Macedon under Philip II conquered them and established him as hegemon over Greece in 337 BCE.

Following the death of Philip II one year later, his son Alexander inherited the throne. Alexander then lead a famous campaign against Persia, conquering Persia, Egypt and territory spanning into India before dying in 323 BCE. After his death the empire was divided between his generals and fell to ruin and Greece became a region of several warring cities and regions of various size and power (Arrian 2014;). The wars between Alexander’s successor and other Greek states continued until 146 BCE when the Greek alliance called the Achaean league was defeated by the Romans in the battle of Corinth, resulting in Roman dominion over Greece and Macedonia. Roman dominion over Greece and Macedonia lasted through the divide of the roman empire, when it was split in two halves, east and west. Both Greece and Macedonia became regions of the East-Roman empire in the divide and remained so until the fall of Constantinople, 1453, when the Ottoman empire absorbed both Greece and Macedonia (Boardman et al 1991;).

Greece remained under the Ottoman empire until 1821 when a war for independence broke out, resulting in the independence of a Greek nation in 1830. Macedonia continued to be a region of the Ottoman empire throughout the 19th century, one half directly, the other half through the Ottoman satellite state of Bulgaria. At the start of the 20th century, the years 1912-1913, the Balkan wars broke out. In which what is now Greek Macedonia was conquered by Greece, whereas what is now the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was conquered by Serbia. Following the world wars Macedonia became its own republic inside The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while Greece fell into internal strife eventually leading to a coup d’etat in 1967 and the establishment of a military dictatorship, which lasted until 1974, when the dictatorship was deposed and replaced with a democracy (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2010, p 15-27).

In 1991 Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia with the name Republic of Macedonia. This event marks the start of the modern name dispute and Greek concern over the name was first expressed, most notably 100,000 people protested in Athens in

4 Macedonia is derived from Macedon.
5 A name for a ruler, often used for the rulers of Greek leagues.
6 The capital of East-Rome, the Byzantine empire.
7 A satellite state is a semi-independent state ruled by another state, Bulgaria however was unofficially independent.
1992, saying things such as “Macedonia is Greek!” Following this, in 1993, the UN recognized the Republic of Macedonia, but did so with the provisional prefix “Former Yugoslav” added to its name. Greece affected an embargo against Republic of Macedonia in 1994 because of grievances, but it was lifted in 1995 after both nations signed the Interim Accord, which among other things ensured the territorial integrity of both nations (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2010, p 177-183). Between the years 1995-2017 several talks were held between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia to resolve the dispute; however, no solutions were found in any of these talks. Notably in this period is that the Republic of Macedonia received a non-invitation to NATO in 2008 on the behest of Greece, because of the inability to find a solution (NATO 2008, paragraph 20). In 2014 the EU parliament voted for the Republic of Macedonia to be allowed to start their talks about accession into the EU, it was noted that they’d first have to solve the name dispute however (Pajaziti 2014). Bringing us into the current dispute, as it is of yet unresolved.

Previous research

Governments in conflict, ‘Macedonia question’

A study from 1997 by Triandafyllidou et al serves as the scientific backbone of this paper. The study in question examines the debate over the name “Macedonia” as it appeared in 1997, with a focus on how a name or concept with cultural connotations can be claimed as the property of a specific ethno-cultural group, in this case, Greeks (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 1.1 - 1.3). The United Nations officially recognized Macedonia as a free independent state in 1993, however it was recognized under the name FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Furthermore, they were prevented from using their flag, which harkened back to the empire of Alexander the Great. The reason these measures were taken was to appease the Greek government whom were making wide complaints and effected an embargo against FYROM in 1994. After the embargo the Greek government were very adamant in not conceding on any point, whether it be the name “Macedonia” itself or relevant symbols. Due to the strong popular reaction in Greece against FYROM, Triandafyllidou et al argues that any such concessions on the part of Greece was very likely to put the authority of the government at risk (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.10).

As for the reasons of these complaints, it must first be noted that the area generally considered to be ‘Ancient Macedonia’ today stands divided between Greece and FYROM. The part of Macedon belonging to Greece was claimed by them to be wholly Greek. They

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8 Also known as ‘Alexander III’
9 Before the conquests of Philip II, father of Alexander The Great
associated the region with the ancient dynasty and the accomplishments of Alexander the Great, which was one reason the Greeks used to justify the cultural heritage of the ancient Macedonians as belonging to them, rather than FYROM whom they labelled “Republic Of Skopje” (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 2.2 & 3.1). Similar reasoning is seen by the Greek government when it comes to the flag which FYROM originally choose, portraying a Vergina sun, an emblem used in ancient Macedon, often associated with Alexander the Great, as such the Greek government opposed the flag leading to Macedonia adapting another flag. (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 3.4). The government of FYROM however claimed that all inhabitants of what was once ancient Macedon has equal claims to the cultural heritage of Alexander the Great and ancient Macedon. Furthermore, they motivated this by the claim that Alexander and the ancient Macedonians weren’t Greeks, Bulgarians or Slavs by the modern definition of the words, and therefore belong to all inhabitants of what is now ancient Macedonia (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 3.2). Officially the argument was put to rest in 1995 on the intervention of the United States, whom pressured both nations into reaching a deal. Which lead to (as earlier stated) Macedonia adapting the name FYROM and the Vergina sun was removed from the flag. However, Triandafyllidou et al notes that the question was by no means solved and that negotiations were still coming up with further alternatives, still the government of both sides showed fear of accepting solutions, so as to not provoke the national position in respective nation (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.11). Which meant that while the immediate conflict was dealt with, neither side was given a solution meant to last.

**Constructing a ‘Greek identity’ through the past**

Triandafyllidou et al notes that since independence from the Ottoman empire 1829-30, ancient Greece and its symbolism has had a prominent role in the construction of Greek identity in Greece. They argue that Greek identity in its construction has created a straight line between antiquity and modernity, making modern Greeks the cultural and ethnic descendants of ancient Greeks. To this end there has been a continuous reconstruction of the past in Greek identity, reshaping events and history so that it appears to affect one cultural and ethnically homogenous people that has survived since antiquity. Through the rule of states such as Rome, the Byzantines\(^1\) and the Ottoman empire\(^2\).

By reconstructing Classical Greece as the exclusive property of modern Greeks, Greek identity could clearly separate itself from its Slavic neighbours. Triandafyllidou et al puts

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\(^{1}\) The Byzantines were the East-Roman Empire, ruled from Constantinople.

\(^{2}\) The political predecessor of modern day Turkey, conquered the Byzantines and their empire.
the concept of nation in relation to Greek identity and argues from this perspective that “nation”, or ethos, is constructed as a community of people sharing both ethnic and cultural attributes. With this definition a nation can still exist without possessing a state or an independent government, making it in line with Greek identity, which is constructed as having existed in Greece throughout a variety of foreign rulers (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.1 - 4.2). What can be seen in such a identity-construction is that ethnic custom, religion and language becomes national values and any critique attempting to nuance or problematize Greek identity, by for example questioning how Greek Alexander The Great really was, becomes a threat to the nation itself because it challenges the ethnic and cultural basis with which Greek identity traces its history (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.3).

The ‘Macedonia question’ as a national political issue in Greece

Between the years 1991-1993, after FYROM declaration of independance, but before recognition by UN, the conservative Greek government adopted a nationalist mindset in relation to the issue. Public debates and workshops was held by the government, as well as a new initiative to encourage tourism in Greek Macedonia, in which English slogans such as “The spirit of Alexander the Great is universal but his homeland Macedonia has been Greek for the past 3,000 years” was used. The Greek government at the time had a shaky majority of only one seat, as such Triandafyllidou et al argues that these actions were populist nationalist propaganda meant to bolster the parties appeal to voters (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.7). The issue did not fail to bolster a response by the Greek community, both in the national populace and in Greek communities of other countries. In 1992 around one million Greeks assembled in a rally in Athens to support what they saw as the Greek right to the Macedonian heritage, followed in later months by further rallies. While the Greek government may have organized actions to encourage the populace to speak out on the issue, the rallies themselves were largely informal and spontaneous, as it seems many Greeks already considered it important (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 4.8). In the summer of 1993, the conservative government seemingly eased up their stance and showed willingness to reach a solution. This change lead to a breakaway party being formed out of the conservative party, who continued to push a hardline position against FYROM going into the election of 1993. Both this party and the socialists heavily utilized the national sentiment regarding the issue to bolster support, the leader of the breakaway party, Mr. Samara, argued that any compromise made to FYROM was a betrayal of national interests.

12 Politiki Anixi
**Rewriting the past to fit the present, flexible identity**

Triandafyllidou et al describes the Balkans as a region with a deep history of shifting ethnic demographics and boundaries as well as a diverse mix of various cultural groups throughout the area. Both FYROM and Greek Macedonia was absorbed by the Ottoman empire in the 15th century. Greece became independent 1831 while FYROM continued to be controlled by the Ottoman empire until the Balkan wars of 1911-1913 in which it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbia. Then, in the aftermath of world war two, the region became a republic of the Socialist Federal republic of Yugoslavia and remained so until its declaration of independence in 1991 (Triandafyllidou 1997, p 3.3). During the same wars Greece conquered from Bulgaria what is now the modern territory of Greek Macedonia. Triandafyllidou et al notes that conflict over the territory and its symbolism had started already in the 19th century, but between Greece and Bulgaria.

**Previous research in summary**

In summary the research of Triandafyllidou et al shows a conflict which has not only been politicized internally in Greece but has also developed towards political ends in foreign relations. Greek identity was not constructed to legitimize the practises of an existing State, but rather to legitimize the potential creation of a new Greek State, in opposition to the Ottoman rule. As such Greek identity latched onto antiquity, which made the Greeks unique and different to their Slavic and Turkish neighbors and gave them a united history as a people.

Triandafyllidou et al notes that this also meant that the history, culture and symbolism of ancient Greece became national values, values which when critiqued or appropriated threatened the nation itself. This is because the nation formed around the idea of being Greeks, related to the ancient Greeks. When in this case another people tried to claim heritage to Alexander the Great and Macedon, Greek identity itself became questioned by the implication that ancient Greece wasn’t the national property of Greece, but rather a heritage shared by people of other States too.

Since the nation was formed on the assumption that the people of Greece all shared an exclusive heritage from the ancient Greeks, the nation itself appears as a doubtful construction in that apparently anyone can use and identify with something supposed to be unique to the nation and its people. Furthermore identifying Alexander The Great and ancient Macedon as Greek gave Greece a claim to the historic territory of Macedon, which

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13 Officially a vassal state of the Ottoman empire, unofficially independent and self-governed.
was used in the Balkan wars to conquer Greek Macedonia from Bulgaria. This conquest, as well as ownership of Greek Macedonia in general, was then problematized by the existence of a Macedonian State, further implying that the past history Greeks used to create their unique identity, didn’t belong to them exclusively. Which is the case the Macedonians themselves make by claiming that the ancient Greeks are too far in the past for any people to make a claim of being the exclusive successor people to them. In short, the exclusive claim Greeks make on ancient Greece has allowed them to justify the existence of Greece as a nation, its people as unique in the Balkans and given them territorial claims to act on for the benefit of national expansion. As for the internal politizations mentioned previously, Triandafyllidou notes that the name dispute became an important issue in the Greek election of 1993. In which the ruling conservative government suggested a laxer policy in regard to the dispute, whereas the socialist party and a nationalistic breakaway party both advocated a policy of no compromise. The socialists won the election and and made good on their promise of a harsher policy, demonstrating the very political nature which Triandafyllidou et al sees as the main contributors to the debate. They also note that the Greek concept of ‘nation’ is closely related to ethnicity, as seen by their word for nation, ethnos. The creation of a Greek State is then also the creation of a Greek ethnicity, which is challenged when people constructed as “others” or “them” adapt the cultural symbolism associated with the Greek State and Greek ethnicity.

In short; Culture, ethnicity and symbolism are reshaped and reconstructed in accordance with the aim of the Greek nation, dynamically changing to fit the political goals of Greece, which in themselves serve as a populistic issue a party can rally around to draw attention from other domestic issues. Going into the analysis it is very important to keep this in mind, as that means an understanding of the political situation in Greece will be very important to understand Greek identity and its relation to the past. The past becomes a tool to shape the present. Which sums up the understanding of the debate by Triandafyllidou et al in 1997. To attempt to fill the knowledge gap between 1997-2018 as well as give a updated understanding of the debate, following chapters look at the modern discourses and puts them into the perspective of the past which they reconstruct. Starting with an ancient discourse on the modern nation.

**Analysis**

**Part I: Ancient Greek Nation?**

*Scholarly concerns regarding antiquity in the dispute*

In 2009 a long list of scholars from around the world sent a letter to Obama, in it the scholars argued, with references to ancient sources, that FYROM had no right to Alexander
the Great or other ancient Macedonian symbolism. Instead they argued that this right belonged to the Greeks, as they considered Alexander Greek and not Macedonian, the implication then being that modern Greeks have an exclusive right to Greek antiquity. The letter actively calls for Obama to take this in mind and attempt to solve the dispute. The question of Alexander’s Greekness, as interesting as it is, is not necessarily the relevant argument to make in the question of ownership of ancient Greek history. As has been shown earlier, the modern Greek identity has not been a continuous construction since antiquity but was propped up and connected to ancient Greece as a way to imagine a community with an historic unity and an oppressed nation to be realized as sovereign state. The imagining of the ancient Greeks as a united community which can be appropriated for a continuation of this community in modern times is therefore of much greater interest. Which is what is investigated in this part.

**Homerica literature in identity**

Looking first at the Greek historian Thucydides, the following quote can be found in his book *The history of the Peloponnesian War*:

> The best evidence of this is given by Homer; for, though his time was much later even than the Trojan war, he nowhere uses this name of all, or indeed of any of them except the followers of Achilles of Phthiotis, who were in fact the first Hellenes, but designates them in his poems as Danaans and Argives and Achaeans. And he has not used the term Barbarians, either, for the reason, as it seems to me, that the Hellenes on their part had not yet been separated off so as to acquire one common name by way of contrast

(Thucydides 1956, p 7).

The collective name for ancient Greeks Thucydides and other writers use, hellenes, is noted by him to not be present in the works of Homer. Instead he uses geographical markers referencing the region or city which the character came from. The word barbarian is also absent, which Thucydides notes to be because barbarian in his time exists as a contrast to Hellenes, so because the term “Hellenes” did not exist, neither did “barbarians”. The importance of Homer in the ancient Greek world should not be understated, Herodotus for example notes that Homer and his contemporary poet Hesiod were the first to write poems about the gods and attribute to them characteristics and occupations (Herodotus, p 119). For further evidence of Homer's importance, one need only to look at ancient playwrights and philosophers, Aristotle for example uses references to Homer and his characters from the Iliad and the Odyssey to make his points in several of his works, as shown from his book *The Art of Rhetoric*:
It is metaphor, therefore, that above all produces this effect; for when Homer "
calls old age stubble, he teaches and informs us through the genus; for both have
lost their bloom (Aristotle 1926, p 397)

The effect Aristotle is talking about is pleasant easy learning, which he feels is best
produced by metaphor, which he argues through reference to Homer. Similar reference to
Homer is used by Aristotle when explaining his theories in *Metaphysics* (Aristotle 1983 p
49), *Ethics* (Aristotle 1999, s 46) and many other of his works. Plato references Homer and
other poets quite consistently as well, calling Homer “the first teacher and leader of all
these fine tragic things.” about stories of the gods in his book *The Republic* (Plato 1991, p
277).

As for the Greek playwrights many of the today surviving plays deals with characters or
themes from Homer, for example *The Oresteia trilogy* by Aeschylus which starts with King
Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks in Homer, coming home to Argos from the Trojan war
(Aeschylus 1996;). in ancient Greek discourse Homer then serves as one of the uniting
aspects of Greek belief as well as providing, through his stories of the Trojan War, a
collective action for Greeks to see themselves united against a common enemy in.
Thucydides again, reinforces this by calling it the first collective action of Hellenes and says
that any identification as Greek which arose in cities came after this, as the speech of
Greeks became more understandable between the cities (Thucydides 1956, p 7-9.).

**Greek contrast to barbarians and speech**

Speech is then another aspect which Thucydides points out as being important for the
identification of Hellenes, or Greeks. Through Greek authors, speech or language is also a
way in which Greeks can be separated from non-Greeks. As seen through the following
quote from the *Oresteia Trilogy* by Aeschylus:

> I wot- Unless like swallows she doth use
> Some strange barbarian tongue from oversea -
> My words must speak persuasion to her soul.
> (Aeschylus 1996, p 38).

The quote appears in the play when Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, attempts to speak
with the Trojan Cassandra. Through this quote ancient Greek discourse is expanded by
connecting unknown language or speech to barbarians, as these languages are compared
with the chittering of swallows. As earlier noted, ancient Greek discourse established barbarian as a contrast to the Greeks, in fact the word derives from barbaros which simply meant “non-Greek”. Which is how Herodotus uses the word in his book *The histories*, where the word foremost appear as a contrast to Greeks, as seen through this quote:

Croesus, son of Alyattes, by birth a Lydian, was lord of all the nations to the west of the river Halys. This stream, which separates Syria from Paphlagonia, runs with a course from south to north, and finally falls into the Euxine. So far as our knowledge goes, he was the first of the barbarians who had dealings with the Greeks, forcing some of them to become his tributaries, and entering into alliance with others. (Herodotus 2003, p 3).

Here Croesus is said to have been the first barbarian to have had dealings with the Greeks, so being a Lydian becomes synonymous with being a barbarian in the discourse. From only these examples then, the definition of a ancient Greek may appear to be rather uncomplicated, however it can be problematized by further ancient authors. As is seen here by the Greek orator Demosthenes:

“(…) though he is not only no Greek, nor related to the Greeks, but not even a barbarian from any place that can be named with honor, but a pestilent knave from Macedonia, whence it was never yet possible to buy a decent slave.”

(Demosthenes 1930, paragraph 30).

This quote requires further backstory to properly understand, as it showcases a political aspect of the ancient Greek discourse on identity, which will be important to understand. The man referred to here is Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, whom have been mentioned at many points as a source of contention between Greece and FYROM in the modern dispute. Here he is strictly referred to as a non-Greek and a barbarian, yet not a barbarian from a place Demosthenes associates with honor, but from Macedonia, which is then constructed in the discourse as a place without honor, a place where not even a decent slave can be purchased. It must however be explained that Demosthenes said this in the context of a political speech as a statesman in Athens, at a time when Athens as a city had its sovereignty threatened by Philip II and his Kingdom of Macedon.

His true, native barbarism and hatred of religion drive him on by force and betray the fact that he treats his present rights as if they were not his own—as indeed they are not. (Demosthenes 1939, paragraph 150).
To further stress the political side of the discourse the above quote, again by Demosthenes, may be looked at. It’s from yet another speech, but this time it’s in a prosecution against a fellow Athenian, Midias. Midias is described as having a “native barbarism”, despite being an Athenian citizen just as Demosthenes himself. In the discourse barbarian then also becomes political rhetoric, as Demosthenes used it in the case of both Philip II and Midias, whom both were political enemies of him in context.

While more quotes and ancient authors could be added to expand the discourse on the subjects dealt with, it would only serve to further show what has already been stated. Which is that the Greek community loosely identified themselves with each other, language or ability to converse was important, just like religion and a common mythological and historical framework. However, these all appear somewhat loose and they do not showcase any conception of a nation or wholly united people, at best what is showcased is a community with some qualities in common through a history of interaction. As such it is prudent to move on and look at sovereignty in the discourse, to determine whether or not the discourse showcases any signs of what could be a broader Greek nation.

Demosthenes referred to Philip II as a barbarian in the context of the sovereignty of Athens being challenged, similar sentiments can be seen in the Peloponnesian war as told by Thucydides, a war which saw Sparta and Athens battle for military hegemony in the Greek world, eventually engaging most Greek States as well as many others.

“And as to the money we need to accomplish all this, we shall provide it by contributions; or strange were it, if their allies should never fail to pay tribute to ensure their own slavery” (Thucydides 1956, p 203)

The quote comes from a speech (as told by Thucydides) delivered by representatives of Corinth, a Greek allied city of Sparta, to Sparta and its other allies. The Corinthians recommends building a fleet to challenge the Athenians, which shall be done by contributions, rather than by tribute, which is constructed as synonymous to slavery (Thucydides 1956, p 197-203). In the discourse then any city which pays tribute as a subject to Athens is constructed as unfree, as slaves, whereas the mutual contribution to a war effort as sovereign and equal city-states is constructed as the ideal. In the discourse then, the importance of freedom between city-states is stressed as important. This can be seen consequently throughout the whole book The Peloponnesian war By Thucydides, where conceived attempts by either Sparta or Athens to rule the Greek community is shunned, but freeing City-States from tribute and forceful influence from either Athens or Sparta is not (Thucydides 1956;). Of course, there is a political element in this as well, as for example Sparta had a vested interest in lowering the influence of Athens in other City-States, just as Athens had the same towards Sparta. In The Politics Aristotle mentions in
passing that if the Hellenic race, the Greeks, could be formed into one State, they would rule the world. However, this is mentioned in a discussion on the preferred character of a citizen in a optimal State, in which the non-Greeks living in the colder climates of Europe is said to have a generally good spirit, but lack intelligence. Asians, who live in the warmer climates, are said to be the opposite; intelligent, but generally lacking in spirit. The Greeks on the other hand, are constructed as living in the perfect climate, not too warm or cold, which to Aristotle means they have the perfect moderation of intelligence and spirit (Aristotle, s 161-162). As such his reference to a potential united Hellas, a Greek state, becomes mainly a geographical argument for the unique character Aristotle perceives Greeks to have. Through the history books of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, no Greek state is ever achieved, or constructed as a political goal of a City-State, rather the way which City-States are constructed to acquire power in Hellas is through establishment of puppet-states or one-way tributary relations. The type of rule sought after by Greek States in this time is rather constructed as a type of soft-power, where the political goals of a City-State is to establish a hegemony of military power towards the other City-States, making it expedient for these to follow their rule (Herodotus 2003;), (Thucydides 2017;), (Xenophon 1979;).

In modern Greek discourse since the conquest of then Bulgarian Macedonia, Philip II and Alexander the Great are constructed as national symbols and uniters of the Greek world. However, as the Greek-Roman historians Plutarch (1967;) and Arrian (2014) shows in their history of Philip II and Alexander, they both met with significant resistance by the Greek City-States they conquered and many either attempted or successfully carried out a revolt following the death of Alexander the Great. As such the ancient Greek discourse can’t be said to meaningfully represent any future aspiration for a Greek nation, the ancient Greek world as it has been constructed in the discourse is rather to be seen as a community sharing some religious, cultural and historical qualifiers, but still stressing the sovereignty of the individual City-State.

Part II: The reconstruction of history and Greek discourse

Reconstructing the ancient Macedonians, Greek discourse in development

As is stressed by Triandafyllidou et al, Greek identity has very much been shaped by reference to the antiquity, both in the dispute as it was contemporary to Triandafyllidou et al and how it was first constructed in the 19th century. The political nature has also been stressed by them, pointing out that the adaption of a Greek identity as a successor to ancient Greek identity gave claim on territory and a united culture for Greeks to share in, creating a clear “us” and “them” between Greece and its neighbors. The first point is
demonstrated by Zervas through his study of history textbooks used in Greece between the years 1834-1913, where throughout the years ancient Greece is continuously given much more space than both byzantine, post-byzantine and modern Greece. Despite that modern Greek history got further and further representation in textbooks as the 19th century went on, ancient Greece continued to get more representation than all other eras of Greek history, being clearly established as the most important part of the Greek historical narrative in the 19th century (Zervas, p 176-190).

Zervas study of these textbook can also serve to demonstrate the political nature of the dispute and its relation to Greek identity; as a clear change in discourse regarding ancient Macedonians can be seen, a change which parallels Greek political goals. In early 19th century this discourse was generally one of portraying the ancient Greeks and ancient Macedonians as different, constructing Philip II as a conqueror threatening the Greek world, while his political enemy, Demosthenes\textsuperscript{14} from Athens, was constructed as a guardian of democracy and the Greek world. Later 19th century discourse from Greek textbooks took on a very different nature, Philip II, Alexander and ancient Macedonia was portrayed as inherently Greek whereas Demosthenes was vilified for a conceived lack of political foresight and opposition to what was now constructed as Greek unification, rather than a foreign conquest. On top of this Zervas also notes a change in the discourse on Bulgarians, whom had little space in early 19th century textbooks, but got more space parallel to the discourse on ancient Macedonians changing. The portrayal of Bulgarians is noted by Zervas to be generally negative, constructing them as a primitive and barbaric contrast to the civilized ancient Greeks ruled by reason (Zervas p 189-190).

These changes can be mirrored directly with Greek interest in the region of Macedonia, specifically what is now Greek Macedonia, which was ruled by the de-facto independent but de-jure Ottoman satellite Bulgaria. It can then be directly seen that the past was reconstructed to fit the present political goals: The Greek political aspiration was Macedonia, so the past was reconstructed to include Macedonians as ancient Greeks, the potential adversary was Bulgaria, so Bulgarians were reconstructed as historical enemies of Greeks.

**The Greek discourse framing Foreign policy and tourism**

With the previous chapter in mind, it is expedient to start examining the dispute as it appears today, making historical callbacks and analyzing both the modern and the

\textsuperscript{14} Orator from Athens, very influential politician in the time of Philip II and Alexander.
historical debate dynamically as they appear to correlate. The current concerns raised by
the Greek government in relation to the issue can be seen in the following quote from the
website of the Greek ministry of foreign affairs:

“The issue of the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is not just a
dispute over historical facts or symbols. It concerns the conduct of a UN member
state, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which contravenes the
fundamental principles of international law and order; specifically, respect for
good neighbourly relations, sovereignty and territorial integrity.”
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018, paragraph 1).

In the quote the Greek government states that the dispute is not merely an issue of
ownership of history, but one about territorial integrity and good conduct as a fellow
neighboring nation, which is claimed to be the most important principle of international
law. The discourse constructed by the Greek government implies that FYROM is acting
against international procedure by their use of the name ‘Macedonia’, which in this context
is said to mean opposing good relations between both nations and disregarding the
territorial integrity of Greece, which in the context of international law means, in some
manner or other, encouraging secessionist movements or border changes in a separate
sovereign nation. The mere usage of the name Macedonia by FYROM is then constructed
as an act of destabilization in Greek Macedonia.

The dispute shows aspects of the theories raised by both Anderson and Hobsbawm;
Anderson argues with his concept of ‘Imagined Communities’ that the nation is a modern
construction which shapes itself after political and economic gain for the imagined
community (Andersson 2006, p 1-37, 83-112). As can be seen in how Greek identity came
to be reimagined to include ancient Macedonians, making Macedonia a cultural property
of the imagined community, the Greek nation. Which legitimized and continuous to
legitimize Greek Macedonia as a part of the Greek nation and its people. With this theory
however, the attempt by FYROM to imagine their own community as the successor to the
ancient Macedonians challenges the Greek nation as a singular united community with its
own exclusive history and furthermore implies that Greek conquest and subsequent
ownership of Greek Macedonia is based on a faulty premise; that Greek identity is alone in
their status as successors to the ancient Greeks, which in their construction of identity
includes the ancient Macedonians.

Önsoy, in his study about the emergence of Greek nationalism, reinforces this idea by
noting that ancient Greece as a base for Greek identity can be tied to enlightenment
philosophy, where ancient Greeks were often upheld as the originators of reason and freedom of choice by enlightenment philosophers. Which he argues resulted in that foreign travelers to Greece in the 18th century saw the region and its people as the occupied inheritors of ancient Greece, in contrast to the rest of eastern Europe which was generally portrayed as regressive and backwards (Önsoy 2005, p 60-69). Önsoy mentions among others Lord Byron, Victor Hugo and Goethe, whom in various ways helped reinforce the idea of a Greek nation. Lord Byron famously fought and died in the Greek war for independence and included themes of ancient Greece in some of his poems. (Önsoy 2005, p 63-64). As such it can be seen that the Greek imagined community had outside influences, as foreign interest in the idea of a Greek nation then helped perpetuate the idea of the very nation.

Hobsbawm's theory is, as mentioned in the section about the theoretical framework, very similar to Anderson in that they both share a view of the nation as a political construction, something invented or imagined for specific purposes. Which, rather than being applied to the nation or community at large, can be applied to the traditions and social practices associated with the imagined community. Which can be applied, together with Anderson, on the following quote from the website of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the section about the Greek policy in the dispute.

“By using symbols – including the Vergina Sun and other symbols that are part of Greece’s historical and cultural heritage – the use of which is prohibited under article 7.2 of the Interim Accord. Other instances of this violation include the renaming Skopje’s airport ‘Alexander the Great’, the raising of statues of Alexander the Great and Philip II, and naming the section of Corridor X that passes through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ‘Alexander the Macedonian’, construction of the ‘Porta Macedonia’ arch, the surface of which bears carved reliefs depicting scenes from ancient Greek history and the Vergina Sun, as well as express reference to “Aegean Macedonia”, raising of monuments in Katlanovo and Tetovo adorned with the Vergina Sun, raising of monuments in Gevgelija, in the municipality of Gazi Baba, Skopje, with depictions of the Vergina Sun and maps of ‘Great Macedonia’.”

(Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018, paragraph 18).

The quote is one item from a list of transgressions the Greek Government perceive FYROM to have done, in relation to the Interim Accord, the agreement regarding conduct in the dispute, signed by both Greece and FYROM in 1995 (United Nations 1995;). Specifically, the Greek government claims that FYROM has broken article 7.2 of the Accord by using the Vergina Sun and the likeness of ancient Greek and ancient Macedonian personas as
well as other references to ancient Greece in architecture, art and the naming of roads and buildings. Lastly the portrayal of maps in monuments portraying Greek Macedonia and FYROM Macedonia as united is claimed as a transgression of the Accord as well. Before breaking down the implications made in this quote and how it fits itself into the Greek discourse, it is of value to look at the article from the Accord referenced by the Greek government.

“Upon entry into force of this Interim Accord, the Party of the Second Part shall cease to use in any way the symbol in all its forms displayed on its national flag prior to such entry into force.”

(United nations 1995, p 6).

By looking at the article in question, it seems it only explicitly forbids the use of the Vergina sun, Philip II, Alexander The Great and other ancient Greek symbols do not appear to be regulated at all. The Greek discourse painting FYROM as the instigators of conflict and breakers of international law is then strengthened further by the claim, through several examples, that FYROM breaks the accord. While the Vergina Sun is clearly regulated in the article referenced, other ancient- Greek and Macedonian symbolism is not. The Greek discourse is then expanded through a reconstruction of the Accord, one where any usage of ancient Greek and Macedonian symbolism means breaking a diplomatic agreement and actively working against neighborly relations.

Applying Hobsbawm, he says that the national flag, emblem and anthem are symbols with which a nation can project its identity. Furthermore, they represent the history and culture of a nation, they’re a sign of club membership, exclusive to the citizens of the nation (Hobsbawm 1983, s 111). This perspective on national symbols can be seen in the Greek discourse through the implications of the quote. The Vergina Sun, Alexander The Great and the other mentioned symbols are constructed as the sole property of Greece, establishing them as markers for Greek identity and the nation. In Greek discourse the usage of the Vergina Sun and other such symbols by FYROM then becomes an adaption of history, history which the Greeks, as has been shown earlier, has consequently constructed as exclusive to them. As markers for identity and the nation, any usage by a perceived “other” or “non-Greek” becomes a threat towards the legitimacy of both of these.

As for the maps mentioned, “Aegean Macedonia” and “Greater Macedonia”, both represent the ancient kingdom of Macedon, however the existence of small groups in favor of a united Macedonia throughout history gives the discourse another layer. Both maps are problematic in the Greek discourse because of their association with ancient Greece, however the mere depiction of a United Macedonia as a part of FYROM history potentially
becomes a claim on Greek Macedonia. As has been mentioned earlier, Greek identity changed to accommodate for territorial claims on Bulgarian Macedonia in the 19th century, making ancient Macedonian history their own, which in turn allowed for them to make the conquest of Greek Macedonia an issue of reconquest. While Greek discourse does not express specific concerns about war or conquest, their problems with FYROM usage of these maps does strengthen the construction of them as opposers of good neighborly conduct and active destabilizers in Greek Macedonia, through what is constructed as encouragement of secessionist movements.

A perspective which can be applied is tourism, according to the Bank of Greece the region of Central Macedonia was the most visited in 2017 between January and September and amounted to 1,677 million euros in travel receipts, making it the fourth most lucrative region in visits for Greece (Bank of Greece 2018;). According to statistics by OECD tourism represented 6.4% of the national GVA as well as every tenth job in Greece (OECD 2018, p 180). Tourism then makes up a significant part of the Greek economy, strengthening the Greek discourse as political and economic, as demonstrated by the following quote from the the website of the Greek governmental tourist department GNTO\textsuperscript{15} in a section called “Explore Macedonia”:

“The fertile macedonian land has played an active part throughout the history of Greek civilisation. Historic monuments known across the world as well as magnificent religious structures compose the cultural heritage of Macedonia. Locals are proud and hospitable people who have cherished and honoured this precious heritage in their everyday lives, through traditions that have stood the test of time for more than a thousand years and the creation of a special gastronomic style...”

(GNTO 2017, paragraph 3).

In the very first line of the quote, the geographical lands of Macedonia is directly tied to the history of Greek civilization, constructing the land itself as an integral part of the Greek identity. The historic heritage of the region is constructed as a part of the everyday life of the locals through traditions which is claimed to have survived for more than a thousand years, presumably through the rule of several States. So, the Greek discourse draws a direct line between Greeks and the far-away past, reinforcing Macedonia as inherently Greek in the Greek discourse. Lastly the exclusive ownership of the Macedonian cultural heritage which the Greek discourse constructs becomes a reason for foreigners to visit and strengthen the Greek economy. In this way what was first constructed as an ‘other’ in Greek identity has now become a unique inclusion in it. The Macedonia dispute is then

\textsuperscript{15}Greek National Tourism Organization.
further one of branding, ancient Greek heritage is specifically stressed in Greek marketing, so the existence of another Macedonia becomes a threat to the tourist brand of “Macedonia”. Alexander and Philip II, as tied to the name Macedonia, becomes symbols in Greek tourist branding as well as symbols of Greek identity.

Part III: Current developments, populism in discourse

The modern debate, Greek and FYROM discourses

As has been shown, the Greek discourse stresses an exclusive Greek right for the name Macedonia and the symbolism associated with it, such as Alexander the Great, Philip II and the Vergina Sun. This year, 2018, both FYROM and Greece have agreed to attempt to find a permanent settlement to the dispute, specifically FYROM is hoping to solve the dispute before the EU meeting in June and the NATO summit in July. This is because Greece, as a member-state of both organizations, has the power to block FYROM from admission into both, which means Greece has political leverage over FYROM. In February 2018 it was announced by FYROM President Zaev that they’d be ready for a settlement in the dispute, putting forth four suggestions for a potential new name for the republic. Which translated into English were as follows:

- Republic of North Macedonia
- Republic of Upper Macedonia
- Republic of Vardar Macedonia
- Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)
  (Reuters 2018-2-27;)

Additionally, the same month, in February, President Zaev and the Government changed the name of Alexander the Great Airport to Skopje international and changed the name of the highway going into the capital of Skopje to Friendship Highway, instead of Alexander the Macedon. The usage of Alexander the Great as a national symbol has been previously shown to be one of the big grievances in the Greek discourse, as it was specifically addressed as a problem by the Greek Foreign Ministry.

The President and the government of FYROM then presents a discourse with an open mind to change and concession, the four suggestions directly address the problem of territorial integrity expressed in the Greek discourse by adding clear geographical markers to the name “Macedonia”, making it distinct from Greek Macedonia. President Zaev has suggested that any of these could be adapted internationally, but still advocates using “Republic of Macedonia” internally, which the Greek government has been opposed to, in
accordance with the Greek discourse, where any usage of Macedonia by itself is both a threat to territory and the Greek identity as exclusive inheritors to Alexander and the ancient Macedonians. The name used for FYROM in its constitution is “Republic of Macedonia”, so a change from this name internally would mean having to change the constitution, which the Greek government advocates. Changing the constitution of FYROM requires a significant process however, as demonstrated by article 131 of the constitution:

“The decisions to initiate a change in the Constitution is made by the Assembly by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Representatives.

The draft amendment of the Constitution is confirmed by the Assembly by a majority vote of the total number of Representatives and then submitted to public debate.

The decision to change the Constitution is made by the Assembly by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Representatives. The change in the Constitution is declared by the Assembly.”

(Rеспубlica of Macedonia 1995, article 131)

As outlined by the article, just the decision to open up the constitution for change requires a two-third majority vote by the Assembly, which is the sole parliament of FYROM. After this has been done and suggestions has been drafted, the changes must once again go through the Assembly and get a majority of the votes, which if it gets requires it to be published for public debate and scrutiny. After going through all of this the Assembly must vote on the changes a final time, for any changes to happen a two-third majority is again required. The Assembly of Fyrom has 120 seats, 69 are held by the Government coalition, 51 by the opposition. This means that any proposed change to the constitution requires 11 representatives from the opposition to support the change. The current stance, May 2018, of the opposition is expressed as follows:

“VMRO-DPNE will not support a change to the constitution with the goal to change the constitutional name,” (Reuters Staff, 2018-4-20).

The FYROM discourse is then filled with internal political strife, while the political will might exist from the Government to make concessions to Greece, the hardline stance adapted by the Greek government and discourse are possibly demanding more than can be achieved. In March 2018 the stance of President Zaev and the Government was met with a rally organized by the “We are Macedonia” movement, one protestor had the following to say on the issue:
“We are here because questions about the name, the identity, the constitution [and] language are issues over which we must adopt a (strong) position.” (Associated Press in Athens 2018-2-4;)

From this quote the protestors advocate a harder stance, it ties the name and the constitution together with language and identity. Both the opposition and the protestor oppose any change to the constitution, specifically the name Macedonia. The FYROM discourse then becomes a discourse of two stances, one in which the potential prospect of joining international communities such as NATO and EU promote a generally soft stance, agreeing to any concession demanded by Greece, another in direct opposition where any change to the constitution and the constitutional name is rejected. The “strong position” referred to by the protestor does not appear to only mean rejecting the Presidents suggestions however, as the protesters are also demanding that a UN resolution is made, giving FYROM official recognition under the name “Macedonia” in accordance with the constitution. The threat of populism cannot be understated then, the requirement of a public debate before any change to the constitution risks a politicization of the issue. Triandafyllidou et al noted this risk of politicization when examining the debate as it was in the 90s, a strong position in the dispute can not only attract those with nationalistic sentiments, but also push domestic issues to the side.

This risk of politicization in FYROM seemingly necessitates a will for some sort of compromise on the part of Greece, however such a move would be against the Greek discourse that has already been established. Furthermore, the issue risks politicization in Greece as well, as is evident by the following quote:

“We are trying to show the politicians ... that they must not give up the name ‘Macedonia’,” (Reuters in Skopje 2018-03-4)

The quote comes from a protester during a Greek rally in Athens February 2018, which was attended by over 100.000 Greeks. The quote calls for politicians to not “give up” Macedonia as a name, which becomes an implication that it’s currently their property to give away. The Greek discourse placing the name “Macedonia” as an exclusive cultural property of Greece is then strengthened. The Greek constitution outlines a period of four years between elections (The Constitution of Greece, article 53), which is coming up in October 2019, following the previous snap election in 2015 (BBC 2015-8-20, paragraph 1-7). The two populistic tendencies of both nations can then be potentially very damaging in terms of finding a long-term solution. The hardline position held by Greece risks affecting nothing, as it’s unclear whether President Zaev will be able to change the constitution with
the opposition against him. Any attempt to accommodate for this on the Greek side on the other hand becomes a substantial risk for the current Government going into the elections coming up. The potential of reaching yet another standstill lingers in the future.

Concluding remarks

Summary and conclusions

The reconstruction of history as seen in Greek discourse and identity stands at the center of the dispute, both historically in its conception and in the current situation. Before the existence of a Greek State in the Balkans, the Greek identity was imagined and constructed as a continuation of the ancient Greek identity. This construction was supported by international authoritative figures who romanticized the idea of the Greek people being the natural inheritors of ancient Greece, which allowed for Greeks to imagine themselves as an occupied “us” towards a “them”.

Ancient Greek discourse about a united Greek Nation showed little signs of any such conception, quite the opposite; the sovereignty of Greek City-States was shown as very important in the discourse. The discourse shows not a nation, but rather a loose community of City-States which shared some cultural, religious and historical elements giving them a Greek-Centric perspective when looking at people outside the Greek sphere. Since sovereignty was constructed as important, the conquests of Philip II and Alexander the Great was not in any meaningful way constructed as a unification in the discourse, but rather as a threat to sovereignty, leading to attempts both to resist and break-free, showing something very far from a united Greek nation. In conclusion the Greek discourse has shaped antiquity, not after the ancient Greeks, but after themselves. The ancient Greeks have been continuously reconstructed to fit into current political goals and national narrative, they have been imagined so as to give not only a base for Greek identity, but a reason for its existence. Which is why Philip II and Alexander, whom were met with much resistance in their own time, became nation-builders and icons in Greek discourse.

The reconstruction continued after Greek independence had been achieved, constructing the ancient Greeks to fit political goals, mainly redefining who were ancient Greeks, so that the territory associated with these could be imagined as the property of the modern Greek nation by historical and cultural right, as seen in the case of Greek Macedonia and the Bulgarians. The reconstruction took form again as FYROM became independent, the adaption of the name “Macedonia” by FYROM was constructed as an attempt to “steal” a history and symbolism which Greek discourse had constructed as their own exclusive property. The dispute continued without resolution from 1991 into the modern dispute, in 2018. The Macedonian discourse in the modern dispute showed a willingness for compromise in the renaming of the Alexander the Great Airport as well as the suggestion
of several names which could be added to distinguish FYROM from Greek Macedonia, this position is very much related to Macedonian aspirations to join NATO and EU, which the Greeks have the power to make or break. In Greek discourse the modern dispute has become a trial of sorts, the ownership of Macedonia, in terms of territory, history and culture has been constructed as exclusively Greek since long before the independence of FYROM, as such any compromise is a threat to the continuity of the State and the exclusive qualifiers which Greek discourse attributes to Greeks. A settlement to the dispute in favor of the Greeks would then mean a reaffirmation of the Greek State and history in Greek discourse. The word “Macedonia” has become a representation of membership into being Greek, as such a removal of the word from the constitution of FYROM would send both a national and international message, the Greeks own ancient Greek history as its inheritors.

Any potential solution is however problematized by nationalistic sentiment in both nations, a change to the constitution of FYROM requires a significant political process as well as majority support. The accommodating steps taken by FYROM has already shown nationalistic counter-sentiment in Macedonian discourse, as such it has the potential to remain unsolved as a problem for the political opposition in FYROM to rally behind, as the opposition in FYROM has already expressed grievances with any attempt to change the constitutional name. In Greek discourse the word “Macedonia” has shown to be a very loaded word, closely connected to Greek identity, as such compromise on the part of Greece risks promoting national sentiment in the country and lowering the legitimacy of the sitting government. With elections coming up in 2019 there’s the very real risk of a new government with a new foreign policy on the issue.

A permanent solution, which does not risk the reemergence of the dispute as nationalist sentiment grows in either country, does appear to need a redefinition of ancient Greek history in Greek national identity. The ancient Greek world was a sphere of sovereign City-States sharing some common cultural qualifiers through history and culture, yet still retaining a diverse and local identity themselves. Ancient Greek heritage need not be the exclusive property of one nation, it’s past was one of diversity in a loose cultural framework, why can’t its future be the same?

**Reflections**

For somebody just hearing about the dispute it might be easy to adapt a sceptic perspective, seemingly Macedonia is just a name and one name might seem as good as any other. However, as has been shown in the study, for the Greeks the name contains aspects of the very culture and history they see in themselves. Through a continuous construction of history since the independence of Greece, ancient Greeks has served as the cultural framework for the Greeks to find continuation and unity in, as well, through reconstruction of history, a way to create historic cause for political goals. While there can
be some optimism regarding the dispute because of the current talks to find a solution, the political resolution of the dispute does not necessarily mean a social resolution. The dispute has been shown to have populistic tendencies, tendencies which might be revived, even after a political resolution, to attract voters for a political party. As such it will be an issue worth studying further in the future, bringing in new perspectives and material as might be prudent.

These populistic tendencies which were implied through the study might be beneficially examined in several ways for the future, one way might be to create a discourse in both nations by looking at the official stances of several political parties. Such a study has the potential to uncover grievances, which while not directly related to the dispute, relates to the influence of populism in the political discourse of both nations. However, the official stance of parties might not properly provide these, as many things might be covered by rhetoric and political embellishment. To prevent this, it might be expedient to also examine the parties through interviews with its members and supporters, to get the more spontaneous opinions and perspectives produced when the answers hasn’t been written by a speech writer or curated by the party beforehand. Too much politicization of an issue always has the potential of making it a political minefield, rather than a goldmine, which might lead to several issues which are actually important being absent.

While previous attempts to solve the dispute might all have failed, a pattern of failures is not necessarily evidence of failures in the future too. As such it is impossible for me to know exactly how the dispute will take form going forward, however as ancient Greece has had a place in the consciousness of Greeks since their independence and its symbolism has been in the center of many of the arguments raised, it is not unreasonable to expect that it will be important going forward in the dispute too. Originally the idea for this study was for it to be an examination of collective memory, with a focus on how both the Greeks and the Macedonians remember and reproduce antiquity, however a more contemporary study with much more of a Greek perspective is as is evident what was decided upon. The reason for this was the problems which arises when looking for material about nations which has neither English or Swedish as their native language. For the Greek perspective this could be solved, because previous research already existed which examined Greek history construction, for the Macedonian however, it was unfortunately absent. The Macedonian perspective and their national identity to in relation to the dispute, is then something which is very open for further study, though it does require the resources for a translator on hand.

Another perspective which is mostly absent is the international community. The globalist world means problems in bilateral relations are rarely confined to just two nations, but
rather many conflicts might show competing interests from other nations affecting the problems. In terms of the dispute, Greece preventing the Republic of Macedonia to join NATO as well as the fact that EU won’t allow them ascension until the dispute has been settled gives a good starting point for such a study. In effect this appear to mean that the Republic of Macedonia will be diplomatically isolated from the western community until a settlement of the dispute. A future study might then examine it from such a perspective, keeping in mind nations and organizations with a vested interest in preventing the expansion of the EU and NATO sphere. A good starting point for this might be to look at the financial investments of outside influences in both nations and how the dispute is reconstructed and treated by other nations in the international community. The reason this perspective was mostly ignored is simply because the study required some boundaries to even be doable, too many perspectives might have meant that the study could not be done within the time-frame or the maximum size.

While this study included a tourist perspective in to some degree, it was not the focus and the perspective was generally allowed little space, for largely the same reason as the one stated above. However, the ancient ruins and geographical markers in both nations potentially make the economic gain from tourism an interesting issue. Websites, flyers and governmental projects could be discursively looked at to examine how antiquity is built up in both nations. For a broader perspective interviews with tourists and workers employed in the tourist sector in both nations could also be performed. As has been shown there’s a lot of areas open for study within the dispute. The obstacles in the way of a permanent solution must not however be viewed as unmovable, further studies has the potential of uncovering aspects of the issue not yet dealt with and provide a framework for a solution which does not risk rallying populist sentiment in opposition.

As for this study and the potential factors I have lifted for further research, I hereby ceremoniously pass the Olympic torch to other researchers in the hope that they can develop what has already been shown and find new unique ways at looking it. Every problem which brings groups farther apart and makes them adversaries is worth looking into. The creation of an “us” and a “them” in any issue has the potential of having real, damaging consequences, as the future might always hold unforeseen events and developments making the diplomatic and political climate harsher. The challenge to the EU integration project, both from within and out needs to be addressed by research of similar conflicts. Understanding the various conflicts between the variety of European nations may show which driving forces are behind them and help develop new integrative policies which can promote a shared history and identity, thereby meeting the looming challenge of fragmental populism and exclusive identity politics.
References


