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Introduction

The fluctuating political status quo of Eastern Europe, following the gradual collapse of Yugoslavia, stemming from the uncertainty that sprung from Tito’s death, led to the independence of the union states that comprised the Socialist Federal Republic. One of the successor states, the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence in 1991, and entered the United Nations in 1993 as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following a naming dispute with Greece, in order to avoid any association with the Greek Macedonia. Regardless, the issue remains since the Republic of Macedonia claims to have a historic connection to Ancient Macedonia, an also significant part of Greek heritage. The Kingdom of Ancient Macedonia territorially involves parts of Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Albania, while its largest part belongs to Greece, as this was settled after the Balkan Wars. The UN has unsuccessfully stepped in to mediate the negotiations, while the dispute revolves around the political spectrum serving inter-political and intra-political interests for both sides. The issue has since evolved into a succession of alternative name suggestions putting an emphasis on the legalities of the matter instead of analyzing it deeper from a sociological perspective. The aim of this paper is not to suggest a solution to the dispute, nor to dictate which side is historically or politically correct. On the contrary, this analysis argues that the Macedonian naming dispute is an issue of identity crisis that follows Macedonia from its independence and as such, it should instead be assessed sociologically by examining Macedonian identity controversies from the Yugoslavian era, juxtaposed with national identity issues that followed the dissolution of the former Socialist Republic. The results of this analysis will be compared to those of Bosnia – a socially and demographically similar case study – in order to discover identical patterns to serve a wider theoretical approach on nationalism and ethnic identity, to stress the interplay of the two in affecting national identity within territorially confined spaces.
The Yugoslavian National Identity

To address such issues we need to investigate chronologically some facts that were integral in understanding the Yugoslavian national identity, to argue that ethnic plurality in Macedonia is a microcosm and a direct derivative of an issue that was apparent in the entire region. Multiculturalism and religious pluralism were evident in the communist regime prior to 1987, but was mainly characterised by ethnic and religious tolerance, cooperation and coexistence, under the umbrella of constitutional and institutional efficiency, embellished by a propagated notion of unity and comradeship. Amplified by a robust, self-reliant economic system, ethnic tolerance was achievable in a prosperous society\(^1\).

"Tolerance is fostered when groups are pursuing common goals, when they are of roughly equal status, and when the interaction has wide institutional support."\(^2\)

Arguably, designing a functional state for four decades, consisting of heterogeneous cultures can mainly be attributed to Tito’s ability in creating a cohesive Slav identity based on an autonomous political manifesto that promoted intergroup interaction. This approach agrees with Smith’s argument that a national identity can be achieved either by political, or cultural unity incorporated with the concept of territoriality\(^3\).

Consequently, this concept of brotherhood among heterogeneous societies proved highly beneficial for the stability of the country. Thus, from a theoretical scope, the socio-political landscape of Yugoslavia during the years of Tito cannot be held accountable for the dissolution of the country, as ethnic heterogeneity is not necessarily responsible for threatening the national identity and causing identity fragmentation. On the contrary, expanding on Smith’s syllogism regarding the role of politics on ethnically diverse societies, political enclaves are capable of stimulating ethnic intolerance and cause a national schism thus, arguing that heterogeneity may become a two-edged sword when coalesced with the political apparatuses of a society. In fact, this pattern was employed in order to prey upon the ethnic landscape of Yugoslavia in the final years of its existence. Political

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\(^1\) Charles Ingrao, and Thomas Emmert, eds., *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholar’s Initiative*, (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2009), 392.


disagreements due to political interests among regional elites led to a form of cannibalism among former groups that once shared a mutual national identity. Nationalism was orchestrated in order to gradually replace the socialist notions, which were dominant at the time. The heterogeneous society of Yugoslavia was mobilised to alienate the Slav identity by manipulating ethnic groups through the use of media propaganda, causing severe fragmentations in the unity of the population, which led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia into several successor states with severe identity issues.

Creating the Macedonian National Identity

Insofar, the ethnic plurality in the socio-political environment of Yugoslavia has been examined on a macro-level of analysis and its association with the shifting political apparatuses in the region has been highlighted. Similarly, the Macedonian demographics in the late Yugoslavian era and after its independence in 1991, stress a severity of multiculturalism in the country. The Albanian population is considered an ethnic minority in Macedonia, constituting however 25 percent, while Turks, Roma and others make up for relatively large numbers of the general population. The impact of the Kosovo-Serbian war on Macedonia added to the complexity of the issue. The population transfers found hundreds of thousands of Albanians fleeing from Kosovo to Macedonia, which altered the ethnic and cultural balances in the country, interfering with the already incoherent national identity of Macedonia. Albanians now claim to comprise over 40 percent of the population while holding 29 from the 120 parliamentary seats and demand a partner-nation status, which would provide them with more authority and executive power in Macedonia.

Consequently, the post-communist ethnogenesis of Macedonia could not have materialised considering the ethnic cleavages and the lack of a cohesive cultural identity. Gellner’s rhetoric argues that nationalism does not require the existence of a nation. On the contrary, nationalism invents a sense of homogeneity where that is absent. In other words, nationalism creates the idea of ‘ethnos’ and a national identity, regardless the ethnic dynamics within a culturally contested territory. During the process of restructuring the nation state, it is integral to develop symbols of national identity, such as language,

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religion and memory. In the case of Macedonia, these three constituents are disturbingly fragile, as a result of the ethnic divide where the root of the Macedonian identity crisis becomes more apparent\textsuperscript{6}. For most of the Yugoslav successor states, creating a new national identity required abolishing the socialist principles of their former state in order to form a new national agenda. However, this sudden change of national identity had acute repercussions on all levels of society, not only in Macedonia, but also across other successor states:

“Before we were 'Yugoslavs' and therefore never really identified with Serbs at all. At this point, when we are forced to take a Serbian nationality as our own, we see that there is nothing, nothing at all that can attract feminists to accept it as their own national identity. (...) So for those of us who are not Serbians yet, who are not Yugoslavs anymore and feel the lot of women's rights with the fall of Communism, there is a lot of identity work to be done.”\textsuperscript{7}

In Greek, the word μνήμη (= memory) linguistically lends its capacity to the

word μνημείο (= monument), connoting the integral role of monuments in augmenting memories related to historical context. According to Jezernik, monuments dedicated to specific events or individuals with significant historical importance, provide a sense of national memory, fundamental to the identity and ideals of the society\textsuperscript{8}. Borrowing elements from George Orwell, Vosnjak argues that history and politics are highly interconnected, since “the fate of history is to be exploited by politics.”\textsuperscript{9}

Thus, Vosnjak’s theory stresses the role of national memory into defining political agendas. Interestingly, in the case of Macedonia, the socialist Yugoslav past has been completely erased. The nationalist attempt in forming a new national identity, detached from Slav influence is culturally evident across Skopje and the majority of national monuments, roads and buildings of symbolic national significance are dedicated to the new Macedonian national identity. In other words, within almost a decade from the country’s independence, statues of Alexander the Great and Phillip of Macedon have emerged throughout the country, while the Skopje airport has also been renamed to Alexander the Great, in order to demonstrate a historical kinship to Ancient Macedonians.

\textsuperscript{8} Hudson and Bowman, After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States, 182.
\textsuperscript{9} Hudson and Bowman, After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States, 191.
Moreover, the official Macedonian language was accepted during the early years of Yugoslavia and bears much similarity to Bulgarian - another issue of controversy with their neighbours who claim that Macedonian is merely Bulgarian dialect\textsuperscript{10}. Nevertheless, Ethnic Albanians whose numbers have risen dramatically in the country communicate mainly in Albanian and they’re essentially Muslim, while Macedonians are predominantly Christian Orthodox. However, Macedonian prejudice towards Albanians is evident on all levels of interaction. The nationalistic notions cultivated and sustained by both ethnic groups messes with the national homogeneity and the national identity of the country. As a result, violence, discrimination and a disregard for Albanian rights have pushed the two ethnic groups to the limits, while the language divide augments the situation and does not support intergroup interaction:

“We have a Macedonian family as a neighbour that we have lived next door to for twenty years, like one home together. The father of the family said to my mother, ‘is it possible we have lived together for twenty years, and we still don’t know a word of Albanian? And you have lived here and know Macedonian perfectly’. My mother replied, ‘it is a wish. If you wish to learn it, you will. And if you don’t want to learn it, twenty years is not such a long time.’”\textsuperscript{11}

The communication gap is also evident in the educational system of Macedonia. Children from each ethnicity are being taught separately, despite being allowed to attend the same schools since the majority of Albanians refuse to learn Macedonian and vice versa\textsuperscript{12}. At this juncture, it is imperative to mention that prior its independence, Macedonia belonged to a federation of states that was firmly secular as the socialist political agenda dictates. The interethnic dispute between Muslim Albanians and Orthodox Macedonians is based on secular ideologies that do not abide by religious indoctrination, thus the absence of a robust religious identity from the country’s modern history would suggest that grievances between Albanians and Macedonians should not be a result of religious differences. However, Smith adds another perspective to this approach. He merges religion with the national identity in an apotheosis of nationalism. The concept of belonging and protecting the ethnos, is glorified as a new form of religion whose only


\textsuperscript{12} Poulton, \textit{Who Are the Macedonians}, 116.
doctrine reflects harmoniously the general ideals and goals of the nation:

“Nationalism dispenses with any mediating referent, be it totem or deity; its deity is the nation itself. The emotions it unleashes are those of the community directed to itself, self-consciously extolling itself. The virtues it celebrates are exclusively and solely those of the “national self”, and the crimes it condemns are those that threaten to disrupt that self. By means of the ceremonies, customs and symbols every member of a community participates in the life, emotions and virtues of that community and through them, re-dedicates him or herself to its destiny.”13

Consequently, following Smith’s reasoning Macedonians and Albanians defend what they perceive as their national identity and sense of belonging through nationalistic ideals, demonstrated essentially through cultural devices such as language, education and religion. Reasonably, the constant dispute amongst the two ethnic groups metastasises to other levels of the society and usually takes a political nature. For instance, the Albanian community unanimously boycotted the 1991 Macedonian independence referendum, while in 2001 clashes between Macedonians and Albanian secessionists ended in Albanian defeat and drew negative international attention to Macedonia14.

“Relations between the ethnic Macedonian majority and the ethnic Albanian community were deteriorating, that the climate in the country was one of widespread pessimism, that dialogue and interaction between the two communities were virtually non-existent, that fears and a lack of trust dominated the attitudes of both sides.”15

**Bosnia and Macedonia: Nationalistic Narratives, and Identity Crisis**

Thus far, the paper focused on the Macedonian heterogeneity and assessed the ethnic dynamics between Macedonians and Albanians, to argue that the country’s post-Yugoslavian history follows a similar path towards a national stalemate. The identity crisis of the country is highlighted through the nationalistic narratives that the two groups project through political enclaves, which become particularly evident in the cultural instruments of the two sides. Having touched upon the issue of Yugoslavia in order to prove that identity issues precede those of the successor states

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15 Hudson and Bowman, *After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States*, 78.
and evolved exponentially due to the lack of intergroup communication, an asymmetrical comparison between Macedonia and Bosnia will be drawn following the dissolution of the socialist federation. The comparison is likely to demonstrate a lot of differences on a practical level, but it is expected to produce several similarities on a theoretical level, in a nationalistic context that failed to bridge ethnic cleavages and establish a cohesive national identity. The Bosniak issue differentiates itself from the linguistic barrier witnessed in the case of Macedonia, which would suggest that interethnic communication should be easier to establish, since Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats – the three major ethnic groups in the country – speak very similar languages. However, in this case interethnic dispute revolves mainly around religious grounds between Bosniak Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats. Similar to the Macedonian example, religious grievances are mobilised through the sphere of political propaganda in order to support nationalistic sentiments and promote the interests of regional ethnic political elites, at the expense of the other ethnic groups.

“The problem with the Bosnian case was that nationalist elites kept proving in the past that they were not really interested or were not capable of creating a workable solution. The only new political players that have managed to impose themselves onto the political scene have to come through the nationalist structures because otherwise they lack credibility and legitimacy. It seems that collective identification has passed the point of no return when it comes to the introduction of redirecting historical processes towards the strengthening of a political and national Bosnian and Herzegovinian identity.”

At this juncture, it can argued that the nationalist political agenda manifests itself through cultural norms, which lead to an infinite cycle of intolerance towards the ethnic ‘other’ and this is seen as the only possible solution that will not jeopardise the goals of the nation. In this scenario, the nation is not territorially defined. It is perceived as a deification of the ethnic group’s national identity. Its boundaries start and end with the goals and ideals of the community. This may only lead to a territorial isolation of each side, or the gradual disintegration of the state since the notion of a national identity, differs for each group. In both cases of Macedonia and Bosnia this argument becomes essentially evident. The ethnic minorities that suffer from majoritarian oppression are politically attached to the nations they belong to and detached from the nations they

16 Hudson and Bowman, After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States, 126.
are territorially bound to. Thus, the secessionist movements of Albanians in Macedonia and the political bridges of Serbs and Croats towards their own states create incohesive identity narratives. The abolishment of ethnic tolerance and interethnic communication is therefore also apparent institutionally since in order to protect their ethnic interests, the groups form separate bureaucratic units to deal with the community’s institutional challenges, thus the country lacks a central administrative body that represents a unified Bosnian and Herzegovinian society.  

“Paradoxically, this pronounced identification of Bosniaks with the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina repels the Serbs and Croats from the idea of a Bosnian and Herzegovinian state as their own and directs them even more towards the nation states of the Serbs and Croats, respectively. Neighbouring nation states thus become transmogrified into matrix states in the nationalist psyche,”  

Conclusion  

The foregoing theoretical analysis has produced interesting results that justify a national identity crisis in Macedonia and analogous diverse societies. This crisis is conspicuous when we identify the lack of intergroup communication due to nationalistic ideologies. Ethnic and religious pluralism are orchestrated to support the interests of secular political enclaves through cultural communication instruments. As a result, Blalock’s and Blau’s argument on the advantages of ethnic heterogeneity have a negative impact that leads to a conglomeration of cultural, institutional and communicational anomalies that imminently affect the national identity of the state and alienate the homogeneity of its population. Institutional separatism among ethnic groups often leads to internal and external policies that do not reflect the interests of both sides, as often witnessed with the discrimination of Albanians who consistently boycott Macedonian foreign interest, which also becomes obvious in the Macedonian naming dispute. Consequently, it is clear through the theory of deductive logic that - regardless whether the Macedonian claims are historically solid and legitimate - the cultural, social and political evidence arrayed and assessed in this study, demonstrate that the Macedonian naming dispute is primarily caused by national identity issues deriving from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the country’s ethnic heterogeneity through a manipulation  

17 Hudson and Bowman, After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States, 122.  
18 Hudson and Bowman, After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics within the Successor States, 123.
of nationalist sentiments to serve political elites. This identity crisis was also witnessed in most of the successor states, many of which have turned against each other due to the ethnic cleavages that followed after Tito’s death, mainly attributed to the lack of interethnic communication, which had severe ramifications institutionally, socially and politically.
Bibliography


