

Clashing Imaginations: Student activism and the Macedonian Question¹

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Abstract: This paper investigates the processes and spaces that led and influenced high-school students to protest during 2018-2019 against the resolution of the Macedonian Question instead of going to their schools. It is stressed that nationalist-sentiment, that defines such mobilizations, is a result of *clashing imaginations* towards a past which has been incorporated into two distinct national-histories. Processes of active but also *banal* nationalism nourish a *historical consciousness* into one's ontology, including prejudices about the "other" and preconceived notions about the national-ownership over Macedonia and its cultural heritage. This consciousness introduces from early ages on, a sense of duty and obligation to act, mobilize, and sacrifice oneself when the nation and the integrity of its history are endangered. For the protesting students, as this article will illustrate through conversations with them, the resolution of the Macedonian Question was perceived as such a threat. It is stressed that once a nation claims ownership over the national-history of another nation, the latter's ontology is put into jeopardy. Instinctual feelings of insecurity and fear arise and right-wing mobilizations follow. Spaces such as the school, church, and sports, this paper reveals, are governed nationalistic narratives, ethnocentrism, and homogeneity of opinions. As such, they actively influence and radicalize students. In this direction, conspiracy theories thrive in the aforementioned spaces which provide a resolution to and externalization of primary emotions that seek satiation and relief.

The Macedonian Question dominated Greece's and North Macedonia's foreign policy concerns for almost three decades. The restart of the negotiations between the two countries in 2018 and

their climax with the resolution of the conflict enshrined in the Prespa agreement³ a year later, thrust what seemed to be unsolvable, once again in the limelight. More importantly, it transformed what had become a mundane issue into a resounding one for the peoples of the two countries, who expressed hopes for, but also concerns about the agreement, manifested on demonstrations and political crises.

The immanency of the Prespa agreement renewed scholarly interest in the Macedonian Question as well (see Armakolas and Petkovski 2019; Bieber 2018; Iraklidis 2018b; Karavas 2018; Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019; Sfetas 2018) predominantly regarding *political opportunities*. Those lines of inquiry have significant merit, yet, there is also a dire need to address the social ramifications that emerge from the ways in which society responds towards significant political events. At this point let's look at the figures captured with the photograph presented above.⁴ The student riding a horse and his classmates that follow him participate in a student-demonstration in Thessaloniki as part of larger demonstration cycles against the Prespa Agreement during 2018-2019. Besides protests, hundreds of school lock-downs were indicative of the student outrage towards an international agreement that meant to give an end to the long-standing dispute. In this light, the central question of this paper exhibits the causes that led students to reject such an agreement, protest and create their own movement.⁵

Furthermore, the main questions that this article pose, engage with the symbolic significance of the hero figure on the horse in nationalist and historiographic discourse. In that, I wish to highlight the extent to which the Macedonian Emperor and antiquity overall, pervade the every-day life of a Greek-teenager in the 21st century. I ask, how does the politicization of history nourish nationalist-sentiment? Which are the spaces that cultivate a sentimental affection towards the past and a negative attitude towards the "other"? In that I wish to gauge the democratic qualities of those spaces and shine light on the features that create a favorable ground for student movements with pronounced far-right⁶ character to emerge. By engaging with these questions, deeper predicaments concerning the ways in which nationalism operates in a given society are unraveled.

To proceed to the central argument of this thesis, it is vital to note that this paper adopts a constructivist point of view towards the nation. Nationalism, in this light, is the ideological force by which nations are *imagined* (Anderson 2006) *invented* (Gellner 1965, 168) and established in a divided world of nations. All nations generate negative stereotypes of the "other" by producing "exceptional" theories and images about their selves. Often, as Fragkiadaki and Dragona (1997, 104; my translation) note, nations *imagine* the characteristics of other nations simply as a negative inverted image of their *imagined* positive characteristics. Amongst those "positive" characteristics, *national history* plays a central role. National histories are comprised by *national-memories* (Avdela 1997, 14), as a set of shared memories, informed by a selected and often romanticized understanding of the past. It is often upon this common understanding of belonging that nations will distinguish themselves within the international community. A moral obligation to defend (in this case protest) and sometimes sacrifice oneself for the nation if needed (Billig 1995, 20) is an obligation national members often share. Such a moment, as this paper argues, institutes the contestation of those *national-memories*. This duty towards history is a product, as I will further demonstrate, of a cultivated *historical consciousness* from early ages on. The conservation of history, its integrity and the monopoly over it, is not only morally binding. There is also an existential aspect to it: if a nation ceases to imagine itself, more so, if it ceases to imagine itself to be unique (Billig 2017, 316), it ceases to exist.

As all nations imagine themselves to be unique and monopolize certain qualities in the articulation of national self-awareness, it becomes disconcerting and conflictual when the "other" lies claims on the same unique qualities. In this regard, the "uniqueness" or "exceptionality" that sought to distinguish the Greek nation from others has been based primarily on a *imagined* his-

torical continuity to antiquity. Greece's small neighboring nation, by adopting the geographical determination "Macedonia", encompassed under its name the country's various ethnic groups, avoiding nationalistic cleavages in a fragile and diverse environment (Armenakis et al. 1996, 219), neutralizing at the same time the Bulgarian and Serbian nationalistic antagonism over the population's national orientation (Banac 1988, 327). It is with the incorporation of Alexander the Great into North Macedonian national-historiography and the transformation of the name's connotation, from geographical into an ethnic term linked to antiquity, that the Macedonian Question became and constitutes a product of *clashing imaginations*. The loss of the monopoly towards Alexander the Great and its glorious Empire, led parts of Greek society, and as this article demonstrates, the youngest parts of it, to right-wing mobilizations. In addition to the *historical consciousness* referred to above, key in mobilizing the Greek youth as this article argues are a) preconceived historical notions about the Macedonian Question consolidated through education, media, and a *nationalist epistemology*, a concept I will elaborate further on, b) intuitive and instinctive emotions of fear, insecurity, and disillusionment with the political elite, c) the absence of diverging voices within the student's every-day social-environments, and d) conspiracy theories which in times of crises spread and gain popularity.

In the following section, I will illuminate the methodology deployed in this article emphasizing the importance in engaging with social movements, their individuals and especially the youngest parts of society, all in relation to their social environments. The second section explores what history means to the young students, how it informs their self-awareness and how the emotional attachment to a romanticized version of history leads to protest participation. Furthermore, it engages at a first level with emotions that derive from a sentimental attachment towards antiquity and history in general, nourished through processes of *banal* and *hot* nationalism from early ages on. The third section looks into spaces, such as sports and the church, through which nationalism operates and penetrates the student's minds. The following part probes into the ways students imagine their futures, underlining the centrality of conspiracy theories in informing those outlooks. This section moreover investigates the fundamentals that make those theories compelling but also essential in explaining current political situations and satiating emotions. Finally, the last section looks at the school and its socio-political importance. It reveals a stark deficit of pluralism of opinions, constituting it a space fertile for student radicalization, prone to conspiracy theories and far-right ideologies.

Methodology

To examine the problematized moments as well as their precursors, one has first to underline the importance of looking at social movements in general and the youth in specific. According to Escobar (1992, 408), due to the interlinkage of economic, social and political matters, that unfold within social movements, "questions about daily life, democracy, the state, and the redefinition of political practice and development are closely interrelated." As such, "[...] social movements might be a particularly suitable arena in which to explore these interrelations". Since right-wing movements have been dismissed as irrational by social-scientists in the past and were not incorporated into the definition of social-movements and research on collective action in general, this article stresses that right-wing movements are "politics by other means" with a rationality of their own (Klandermans and Meyer 2006, 6) providing significant theoretical input on issues regarding identity, politics, and socio-economics.

This paper also underlines the importance of taking the individual participants as the analytical unit. By looking at a movement from above, one could assume that social movements are homogenous, cohesive entities with common motivators, influencers, points of departure and

goals. However, studies have shown that the character or specific turn of movements, against initial directions espoused by leading activist figures, are likely to also be influenced at grassroots level (Salman and Willem 2010). Thus, the dynamics between above and below are not always single-directional. In this light, guidance to a movement can also be experienced from below with people's motivations being diverse and dissimilar from the leader's convictions and objectives (Salman and Willem 2010, 253).

In this direction, the hopes, motives, feelings, and ambitions of participants cannot be fully comprehended by extracting a generalized message out of manifestos, slogans, banners, or leader's speeches as sole units of analysis. Through the engagement with individuals on the ground, deeper elements regarding the processes that lead to mobilization are unraveled. By doing so, the multi-layered influencers such as school, family, church, media, politics, that affect the individual, as well as the emotions and feelings that finally motivate or de-motivate participation, are investigated.

This article looks at the movement that emerged from and was led by the youngest parts of society, being, secondary and high-school students that left their schools to demonstrate and dominate public space and discourse for months. The observable passion in the protests manifested on student activism sparked my interest in understanding how nationalism operates specifically at those ages. I believe that by looking into the ways students reflect on, and feel about a national political event, such as the name dispute, its evolution, and finally its resolution, a unique insight into new aspects of nationalism can be unveiled. The students' reaction in the form of protests and student lock-downs is not coincidental. According to Lipset (1968, 10), it is students as part of our society that are "more responsive to political trends, to changes in mood, to opportunities for action than almost any other group in the population, except possibly intellectuals". When social discontent is stimulated, Lipset argues, student groups may become mobilizers of the overall public opinion behind the ideologies and the causes that contributed to social unrest. I believe that the movement exhibited in this paper provides such a case. Inasmuch adults were involved in protest, students were as well. Likewise, student protests faded shortly after mass protests seized and the ratification of the Prespa agreement seemed inevitable in both countries, especially after both parliaments passed all necessary legislative preconditions. The turn and dynamic that the youth asserted to the protests, however, as well as the relevant questions that emerge through the very fact that students got to the streets instead of their classes, cannot be overseen.

Under this light, the following analysis is based on data derived from interviews with high-school students in Katerini, coupled with existing literature and media-clippings. The interest group of the interviews consisted of students holding all possible attitudes towards the Prespa agreement. Owing to personal choice and individual interest in the Macedonian Question or because of lock-downs and discourses within or outside the school milieu, the events during 2018-2019 inevitably affected all students in smaller or more significant ways. I aimed at engaging with students belonging to all categories, unfortunately, I could not find any students that were in favor or neutral towards the Prespa agreement.

In total, 12 students participated (5 female and 7 male) aged from 14 to 17 years, during December 2018 and February 2019.⁷ Questions and themes that informed the discussions touched upon the prospects and the possible future outcomes of the Prespa agreement, the feelings and emotions emerging in light of the recent political events, their interaction concerning the Macedonian Question with influential figures in spaces of sports, the school and church, as well as the relevance of history and the role of Alexander the Great in today's political events and their stake in defining Greek national-identity. As the reader will observe, the following conversations did not explore issues regarding history from a historical point of view. This paper sought to understand what history overall means to students and how they deal with their national pasts and not compare the student's history knowledge with that of an historian. In a nutshell, I wished to investigate how the politicization of history informs one's national self-awareness, nourishes

nationalist-sentiments, and ultimately leads students to the streets if their national history is contested by another nation.

History as precursor to the movement

This section exhibits how history functions as paramount factor in defining one's ontology from young age. It reveals how the Macedonian Question, with the proclamation of *national*-memories by the "other", jeopardizes not only the Greek monopoly over Alexander the Great and its legacy, but also the student's very ontology. *Banal* and *hot* nationalism have established in the Greek psyche a deeply seated emotional attachment to the name Macedonia and its legacy. Consequently, when this legacy is contested, overwhelming feelings of insecurity, injustice and fear emerge, overshadowing any political or historical argument. In this vein, the student's exit to the streets seemed inevitable given the centrality of Macedonia in defining "who they are".

I begin this conversation by reviewing the student's primary motivational background in acting against the Prespa agreement. All students interviewed were categorically against the agreement with 9 out of 12 having participated both in school lockdowns and demonstrations. Their explanations of their outlook predominantly focused on history, the reading of which portrayed history to be a value and a moral compass rather than a scientific subject. In this direction, students said they felt deprived and stolen from the name and its history. Giannis (17) who at that time was planning to study history for his undergraduate explained: "I'll tell you why the majority disagrees with the term Macedonia. It is because we feel that they steal the uniqueness of the name".

Here, the "uniqueness" and thus the monopoly over the ancient Macedonian heritage is identified by Giannis as the main quarrel of the conflict. When this monopoly is contested, one has to react. In this vein, Eva, fourteen years old, stated: "[W]e tried to act because we feel and believe we are Macedonians and we can't just see what is happening and just leave it like that". Giannis, after laying out numerous arguments in opposition to the agreement by citing historical sources, drawing upon political explanations too, emphasized the hierarchical lead of emotions over politics and historical quarrels themselves: "Look, the whole story is clearly about what we feel. It has to do with our emotions. It is not a mere political issue".

In his words we can see how emotions stirred by the recent political outcome are paramount in forming one's opinions and affecting actions. The conflict itself, considered in Greek political discourse as a *national issue*,⁸ encompasses questions regarding national identity, the answers to which, presented in the form of an international agreement might disrupt understandings of one's ontology. Nationalist sentiment in this light rises when the "sense of ontological security is put in jeopardy [...]" (Giddens 1985, 218). Social discontent and mobilization thus can become the result of these circumstances with individuals investing "great emotional energy in the symbols of nationhood" (Giddens 1985, 218). Furthermore, this issue has a moral component to it that should not be overlooked. The moral values ascribed to *national issues* create an obligation to act and uphold symbols of nationhood that inform one's ontology and self-awareness. Those moral values "are not merely beliefs like other beliefs but distinguished by their intense emotional charge" (Scheff 2006). This obligation, I argue, emerges out of Greece's tradition to commemorate "national heroes" through practices of *hot* nationalism, meaning conscious acts such as national parades, as well as *banal nationalism* (Billig 1995), through a constant but unconscious visual and audible encountering of the heroic dead in form of monuments, cenotaphs, and anthems.

Let's stay at this moment a little further with the concept of *banal nationalism*. The main thorn in the Macedonian Question has been the name difference as both sides claim their monopoly. Here, I should also introduce the importance of the *politics of naming*. In this direction, Liakos

(2008, 230) writes:

the creation of the new state, as we know, does not only mean the reorganization of the map or collective memory, according to the scheme on which the state founded its ideology; it also means the creation of a historical consciousness out of living memories or forgotten histories and the allocation of their marks to space.

National-ownership over Macedonia, for example, is reaffirmed in space by statues and monuments of Alexander the Great or symbols such as the Vergina Sun imprinted on trash-bins, manholes-covers, driving-licenses. It is also allocated through the process of naming and more importantly *renaming* of space – toponyms (Liakos 2008, 232–36). The act of naming, according to (Bourdieu 1991, 236), is a fundamental expression of political power: “to name something means to bring it into existence”. Besides bringing it into existence, it ascribes collective memories and historical consciousness to space as stressed before. The privilege of naming is a powerful practice as it ascribes ownership and thus monopoly to the subject while the act itself, often, such as in the Greek context, constitutes additionally a social practice (Agnew 2006). A state of unease is triggered by the fear of losing the proclaimed monopoly and exclusivity over the baptized child. To safeguard the monopoly, ownership over what has been baptized is to be re-affirmed visually and audibly in public spaces through practices of *hot* nationalism (national parades, ceremonies) as well as in *banal* and thus unconscious ways constant encountering of national symbols. In combination with *banal nationalism*, the official political rhetoric is a factor that has to be taken into account as well when looking at elements shaping public opinion. This dire need for exclusivity over the Macedonian label has been reiterated on popular slogans such as “Macedonia is one and it’s Greek”. Furthermore, politicians and intellectuals have ascribed emotional weight to the name too by calling it “our soul”.⁹ Therefore, it is apprehensible that a compromise on somewhat that constitutes the “soul”, led vast parts of Greek society to feel betrayed, especially when ownership has been established in conscious and unconscious ways for decades. It is in this vein that all interviewed students considered the agreement to be treasonous.

In my eyes, the instinctive and intuitive element that was reflected throughout the discussions on protest participation is a product of the above reasoning. The fact that the Greek government agreed upon recognizing the neighboring country as Macedonia (with the addition of “North” before it) was for students incomprehensible and deeply disturbing, leading to acts of protest before acquiring relevant information regarding the specific terms of the agreement. On the question of whether Giannis and his peers started informing themselves about the conflict after the demonstrations began, or if they were aware of the Macedonian Question and its quarrels before the recent political events, he stressed:

Some are learning now. The majority knows already. For example, when we hear a foreigner call the “Skopjans” Macedonians, you are troubled, and you don’t like it at all. It hurts when you hear a foreigner call Macedonians the “Skopjans”. We hear it, and we get angry; how can you say it? The Greeks from a small age, we know.

Giannis here is stressing that Greeks begin acquiring a *common knowledge* at an early age. I define this knowledge as *historical consciousness* which has two components. First, it encompasses the understanding of being related to a shared national past, holding common memories. In other words, it constitutes a feeling of being connected to the national historical and cultural heritage with a common appreciation of its value and significance. Secondly, the *historical consciousness* is cultivated and reproduced by acts of constant remembering, commemoration, respect, and if needed, if the national-memories are challenged; acts of reaction. Students internalized this very obligation towards the nation, with the “duty to protest as Greeks and as students and live up to [their] ancestors” reiterated on multiple occasions in their lives. To further reflect on Giannis’

quote and the inheritance of that consciousness, by underlining the parameters of age and history of it, let us draw upon Liakos's (2008) brilliant parallel to Giorgos Seferis' poem *Mythistorima*:

I awoke with this marble head in my hands
 it exhausts my elbows
 and I do not know where to put it down.
 It was falling into the dream
 as I was coming out of the dream.
 So, our life became one, and it will be very difficult for it to separate again.

The poem illustrates the embedment of a *historical consciousness* from a very young age; since the moment one "awakes". The marble head symbolizes the inheritance of ancient historical and cultural heritage which Greeks are indefinitely bound to (very difficult to separate again). One is doomed by it, in that it is heavy - sacred; it exhausts the elbows. Dreaming in the poem, to draw upon Hamilakis (2007, 166), becomes a way of relating to history with the abolition of temporal distance and the embodied encounter with the dead ancestors. In my eyes, Giannis reflects on that heritage that young students learned to *live* with, but also to commemorate and respect; at the dozens of national parades and national celebrations at schools.

To further explore the role of history in recent mobilizations, I will reflect on students' tendency to explain the present situation in terms of antiquity to which continuity is often proclaimed and celebrated. *Hellenism*, for Greeks, is predominantly read as an element uninterrupted and continuous from antiquity to present with the Macedonian Empire part of this continuum. The notion of thousands of years of continuous *national* history was most initially expressed by early-nationalist Constantine Paparrigopoulos in his book *History of the Greek Nation (1860-1874)*. The book, which is considered a key influence of Greek essentialist nationalism, aimed at refuting theories that question this lineal continuity (Mouzelis 2007, 131-32). At the same moment, he portrayed Greece as "the cause of the revival of civilization in modern Europe" and as such presented *Hellenism* as *Weltanschauung*. In this direction, the ways the interviewed students perceived Hellenism and themselves as part of it today, manifested striking similarities with the aforementioned understanding.

This observation, however, comes to no surprise. Essentialists notions such as these have been produced and reproduced in schools for decades through the deployment and nationalization of music (Christopoulos 2008, 113-15), history (Avdela 1997), geography and language (Liakos 2008). Avdela (1997, 45) for example notes that history functions not as historical knowledge but rather as patriotic and political education. Politics play a central part in this direction. Greece's archeologist *par excellence*, Manolis Andronikos, encouraged and instrumentalized by the political leadership in the 70s, "played a protagonist role in the drama that would re-enact the symbolic, material incorporation of Macedonia and northern Greece into the national imagination and psyche" (Hamilakis 2007, 164). Having excavated one of the most important archaeological sites, claimed to be the tomb of Phillip II, he assumed the role of "national shaman" (Hamilakis 2007, 145). For Hamilakis, the archeologist went to the underworld of the dead and arose with the direly needed "'weapons' for the defense of Greek Macedonia against the threats by those who question its Greek identity". The correlation between history and politics becomes clear. This need to defend and protect against those threats was central in discussions with the students:

Another timeless value is the value of historic truth and historic past which we have to respect. It is not that we are afraid that tomorrow we will be called "Skopjan" and won't be Greek, but we are troubled by the twist of historical truth.

From Evangelos' (17) quote, it becomes evident that history is not merely understood as a scientific discipline or a subject in school as part of the curricula. Rather, the "historic truth"

and the “historic past” that he refers to, are perceived as timeless *national* values that must never be infringed upon. For Greek students, history was the dominant quality that informed national-awareness and national identity. In this light, for Alexis (14) being Greek is “[K]nowing his history, knowing who he is, what his ancestors did, knowing what happened in the past”. Similarly for Maria: “It’s [...] important to know the history and to honor the heroes. That’s how we, Greeks, have it; we are honoring them. That is I think what we all have as Greeks”. Liakos (2008, 205) in this light writes that “for Greeks to feel as national subjects means to internalize their relationship with ancient Greece”. This internalization as stressed above, takes place from early on and nourishes a *historic consciousness* which urges the national subject to act when this internalized relationship with antiquity is put into question. As such, this section of this paper demonstrated how a internalization of *Hellenism* through *banal* but also active - political ways define to many extents the student’s self-awareness constituting a reaction towards notions that question the student’s relation with antiquity almost inevitable.

Spaces of influence: Sports and Religion

Leaving history aside, this section will probe into the ways spaces of sports and religion nourish romanticized notions about the past and at the same time, cultivate the sentimental affection to it. It reveals how judo can become a ground on which feelings towards the demonized “other” are externalized and how the Orthodox church is mobilizing students to protest and take action. When discussing and defining national identity, some students referred to the triptic “fatherland, religion, family”, an ideological system deriving from Greece’s far-right and illiberal conservative political tradition termed as *ethnikofrosíni*.¹⁰ During discussions around it, Alexis referred to sports through which he became familiar with those values. It is common knowledge that sport has social and political significance. Sports can become a vehicle for nationalistic contestations and the reproduction of national *imaginings* (Calhoun 2017, 21). For example, Koch (2013) argues that sports provide an important tool for authoritarian regimes to perpetuate their role as it objectifies the support to a nation while detaching it from the system of unequal power relations implemented by the ruling regime.

Besides football pitches that can become spaces on which ownership over history is proclaimed and celebrated, indicative are numerous chants in Greek stadiums claiming monopoly over Macedonia, political beliefs can be instilled and propagated through every-day sports engagement too. Alexis said he grew up with values that led him to participate in the movement. Those values he said are “fatherland, religion, family”, “these are the three things we all Greeks have. When they try to take away one of it; we should not remain calm” he added. I asked when and how he started identifying with these three values:

This (triptych), we also learn it from sports. Like in the (sports) club I am part of, it has as logo the symbol of Vergina-Macedonia. What the “fatherland-religion-family” has to do ... Someone can be an atheist. That is very subjective. But fatherland and family is what we have from the moment we were born to the moment we die.

Eva, Iris and Alexis, all of them fourteen years old, are part of the judo sports club named “Alexander the Great”. The three of them travel together internationally participating in judo tournaments. They told me that the competitions against North Macedonia and Turkey create different emotions than with other competing countries. Eva said that “when you see a ‘Skopjan’, you feel . . . you have hatred towards him. Because you see what is happening and you react towards it.” Iris felt angry, especially when competing with athletes from North Macedonia. Greek students, on the contrary, did not perceive a similar attitude from the other side since

Macedonian athletes were rather “indifferent”. However Turkish athletes were not indifferent at all according to Iris. Competitions against Turkish athletes, Alexis added, “are one of the biggest derbies in the championship . . . Because as in the past they enslaved us, we want to take revenge somehow. That is why”. With athletes from Turkey or North Macedonia, the demonized “other” is visualized often for the first time for the young students with negative prejudices, creating a more competitive stance. Having Alexander the Great as the name of the sports club, the Vergina Sun as the logo of it, and the anger derived from the nations’ prejudices towards the athletes from neighboring countries, the *marble head* is not only constantly present in sport competitions, it provides moral boost in competitions against the “other”.

Coming back to the triptych, let us exhibit the role of religion in the recent uprisings against the agreement. For example, Olga stressed that “that those who support it more, and all this campaign and protests people do, are closer to the church, closer to god, to the fatherland”. In this direction, it is worth noting that all participating students identified as Orthodox with some practicing religion more actively by attending service on Sundays and bible-school at a private religious organization GEXA (Parents Association Christian Education). The reference of the organization is not coincidental. It’s youth magazine *Towards Victory* features various articles concerning *national topics*, propagating national myths, normalizing and glorifying war, and celebrating in this context the Greekness of Macedonia.¹¹ How does the organization have an impact on the students, however? Manolis (17) told me that he acquires information about the dispute through their magazines as well as informative lectures about the Macedonian Question.¹²

When it comes about religious institutions interfering in politics, shaping public opinion on *national issues*, or even consolidating understandings of national identity, the Greek Orthodox Church is an actor to look at. At this point I shall bring the relationship between the Greek state and the church into the context it was evoked during the interviews. One of the most prominent national myths, that of Orthodox clerics teaching at the so-called *Kryfa Scholiá* (Secret Schools) serves as a foundation for this relationship. The myth illustrated on the renowned painting of Nikolaos Gyzis and the song *Feggaráki mou Lampró* (my glowing tiny moon / light my way / to go to school), featured priests conserving Greek language and national-consciousness in hidden schools during the Ottoman Empire. By that, the church is believed to have set the foundation for the resurrection of the nation¹³ in the 19th century becoming “the foremost driver of nationalism by promoting the interest of the state” (Livianos 2004, 138).

The opinions among the Greek students about the relationship between religion and the church on the one hand, and national identity and the state on the other, varied. Giannis, when explaining what the characteristics of contemporary Greeks are, said: “We give a big emphasis on the Orthodox religion”. When I asked what the role of religion indeed is, he said that “if there wasn’t Orthodoxy, there wouldn’t be a Greek state. The church secured Greek – ancient Greek education at the secret schools because Turks didn’t allow the Greeks to be educated”. Although the myth has been scrapped from the school curricula since the late 70s, it is still taught in schools by teachers who remain unfazed by its interdisciplinary scientific debunking (Stathis 2005, 226). As such, it comes to no surprise that those myths prevail in society nourishing a negative attitude towards the Turkish.

At this point, I wish to look into the role of the church and its clerics in the Macedonian Question. Both often assume, besides their religious roles, roles of national and political leadership. When I discussed the role of religion in the context of secret schools with Manolis, he revealed that priests during Sunday services often deliver political speeches about the Macedonian Question:

Now we live in a democratic environment, and the church was very important back then, it was an integral part. Now those things are freer. Thus, many priests do national sermons but not secretly. [...] Yet there is censorship, to be honest but they (priests) do not care. Every Sunday, they do a national sermons and that is cool for

them.

Eftychis' (16) following quote reflects the picture that Olga previously drew, that of a seemingly homogenous audience echoing conservative values and participating in demonstrations. As Eftychis asserts: “[P]riests and people who generally go to church are against the deal and believe in the notion of Hellenism. Meaning, to be a patriot. Thus, whoever goes to church has the same ideas”. In his words, the audience holds homogenous opinions. The “patriotic” ideas that he alludes to I stress are not only introduced to the church from the outside but also cultivated within it. Its audience is conditioned to embody patriotic sentiment. As Giannis told me, during the protests against the Prespa agreement buses were arranged by local churches for demonstrators to commute between the demonstrations and their hometown. The church thus not only preached nationalist sentiments but also logistically facilitated nationalist agitation. By that, it transcended its religious and spiritual character and behaved as a political actor by mobilizing its audience against the resolution of the Macedonian Question.

This section revealed how nationalism operates in sports in *banal* but also active ways. In the first case, we saw how a continuous relationship towards the antiquity is re-iterated through the allocation of ancient symbols and names to judo clubs for example, while in active ways, preconceived hostile notions about the “other” are externalized in the arenas. This section also exhibited religion and its twofold relevancy for contemporary students. First, the notion that the Greek Orthodox Church undertook a key role in “conserving” Greek identity during the Ottoman Empire resonated with many students which portrayed the Church as an institution of national importance. The church moreover continued to play a pivotal role in engaging in political issues concerning *national topics* today. A fact that students predominantly felt positive about. Secondly, religion constitutes for some, an element that informs Greek national identity. As such, it becomes an element to be upheld and respected. Along with the “historical truth” that was feared to be twisted or stolen, religion and the religious demographics seemed for Giannis to be at stake as well. His quote will introduce us to the next section:

There is another attempt to transform Greece into an Islamic country since there has been an influx of one-million illegal migrants and refugees. That is no coincidence. They all come to Greece and sit. Obviously, they want to occupy our islands; they want to alter the Greek population. In general, Greeks fought Islam. It is thus very hard to feel Greek and to be a Muslim at the same time since Greek history is inextricably linked with Christianity. Christianity played a crucial role as it kept us strong while we were oppressed by the Turkish or any other occupant [...] Most patriots are significantly fanatic Orthodox. The official religion in Greece is Orthodoxy. In other countries, religion is the prevailing. In Greece, it is the official with 98% of the population identifying as Christian Orthodox. In Germany, for example, there is a prevailing religion [...] Here we are against it. “Orthodoxy or Death” was the slogan once. Imagine how important they had Orthodoxy, the Greeks, and they still do. They consider it something sacred. We believe this is our faith, not a religion.

Conspiracy theories and the post-Prespa agreement future

In this section, I probe into how students imagine their future. I trace how those *imaginings* are deeply influenced by a culture of conspiracy theories. Those I stress are endemic to Greek political discourse. Successively, I argue that students are drawn to conspiracy theories as they provide satiation to primary emotions of insecurity, fear and anger. It is important to start with defining conspiracy theories as “an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations

of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role” (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, 213). Under this light, “adherents to conspiracy theories usually see themselves in direct opposition to the powers who are orchestrating the ploy” (Davey and Ebner 2019, 6). To bring conspiracy theories into the context of this article, it is key to mention that if not conspiracies per se, accusations that denote conspiracy theories were produced by Greece’s established political parties. The center-left party Movement for Change (KINAL) accused the government of “secretive diplomacy”. The right-wing party Nea Dimokratia, in the same vein claimed that the government struck a secret deal with the European creditors to sign the Prespa agreement in exchange for the withdrawal of planned pension-cuts. In this direction again, the Communist Party (KKE) stressed that agreement was orchestrated by NATO, favoring US imperialist interests, and thus rejected it. Hence, the political establishment factored into the tendency that was observed in the discussions with students, namely, to explain the Prespa agreement through the prism of conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theories are not new to foreign policy debates in Greece, nor unique to the Macedonian Question. On the contrary. Iraklidis (2001, 23) locates “demonic conspiracy theories” within the very understanding of Greece’s position in the international community. He stresses that those theories which present hidden existential-threats against the nation are central to Greece’s national self-image. These perceptions are often propagated by part of the scholarly community producing what Iraklidis coins as *epistemological nationalism*. According to him, this type of knowledge is made of ethnocentric theories that victimize and sub-ordinate the “self” while demonizing the “hostile” and “barbaric other”. By that, inevitably, a sense of a common enemy (politicians - traitors, USA - NATO, Muslims - Zionists), as well as a sense of bondage and solidarity amongst conspiracy theories adherents is created, based on their “positive” common features (nationalists, patriots, Macedonian, white, Christian) (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, 213).

The idea that secretive plans might lead to a demographic “alteration” or loss of national territory and / or identity were prominent amongst the participants. Let us be reminded of Gianni’s words “There is another attempt to transform Greece into an Islamic country” and “they want to alter us”. These notions have to be brought into the international context as they depict striking similarities with narratives propagated by the recent trending “Great Replacement Theory”. A theory that suggests Muslim communities are deployed by “progressive politicians, the media and globalists” which are “working concertedly, actively and purposively to destroy native Europeans and their culture(s)” (Davey and Ebner 2019, 12–13). In this context, it seemed that Giannis resonated with the underlying definition of this theory claiming that such a plan was indeed behind the Prespa agreement. He explained: “[I]t is an international plan to eliminate all nations; it is the so-called globalization. It aims at eliminating borders and that is very present in the Balkans because it is comprised of countries with a lot of traditions, people are very bound with their history, their ideas, and their values”.

What is revealing by looking into the broader picture of these understandings as well as more moderate theories put forward, such as that “Skopjans” will “gain access to the Aegean” since “they have tried it with the Bulgarians, and now they do it with the most hidden method”, is the fact that those plans seem to target Greece in specific. This observation, drawing upon Iraklidis’ view on conspiracies and Greece’s self-awareness, resonates with the notion that Greece holds a victimized self-perception. Portraying Greece as a victim overall, or as the absolute loser of the Prespa agreement in specific, has been a central narrative and students drew upon this notion to justify their reaction. These notions are accompanied by a great sense of fear. Eftychis’ for example said that Greece “loses the name” and that “most times, history has shown us, if you give the name, it may be that later, in 30 years, for example, they may contest the land... they will say ‘Macedonia is ours’ and they might try to get into Greece”.

Macedonian cultural organizations, counting hundreds in Greece, played a pivotal role in

mainstreaming the aforementioned theories through demonstrations, informational events, and speeches. Evangelos indeed referred to these organizations as a vehicle through which they participated in demonstrations in Thessaloniki and Athens. The student protests themselves were supported and to some degree advised by a member of a Macedonian cultural organization in Katerini. They were told what is “good to do”, in terms of activism, and “what is not” according to Manolis.

As stressed before, student’s outlook towards the Agreement was predominantly informed by emotions, often in the absence of a learning process about the specifics of the agreement, especially before participating in activism. In that I ask, are the demonstrations and the informative lectures in the context of the uprisings and demonstrations the main or even only source of information that students are exposed too? Evangelos revealed that:

We learned a lot from the protests and the speeches and it was a good occasion to learn about the historical aspects of this topic and to come into interaction with the national aspect of our personality in a sense to what stance someone should hold in the end towards his nation, his country. It was a good occasion.

Further attention has to be directed towards the spaces and the individuals that produce and mainstream information on the Macedonian Question. If speakers are seen as scientific or unbiased, the content of the speeches is likewise understood as reliable and scientific by the audience. Manolis underlined the credibility of the speakers he listened to saying that “scientists speak at the protests”. Similarly, Evangelos mentioned that those “are people who are experts, who have looked at it . . . lawyers”. All those speakers, due to their education and occupation, are perceived a priori –reliable sources. It is thus not only that a very ideologically influenced and politically driven perception about the Macedonian Question is the main and sometimes the only source that students are exposed to in various spaces; it is that the leading figures and individuals participating in them assume an expertized image camouflaging ideologically driven information within a scholarly and technical terminology.

What is vital to reiterate is the sequence of steps that followed, leading to the consolidation of negative outlooks towards the agreement, sometimes protest participation, and sometimes adherence to conspiracy theories. The first step, as it became evident previously, is in many cases informed by a variety of emotions. Kostis emphasized the intuitive but also emotional aspect as the foremost motivator to participate in activism but also to get involved in processes of informing oneself to support what the intuitive emotions dictated:

You understand that this is an injustice. You want to defend your country, but how? You don’t have arguments. So, you need to get informed. You understand . . . you know that this is unjust, that the deal is a betrayal or that it is wrong, but you have to acquire further knowledge to support your opinion.

Kostis underscored that the sense of betrayal and injustice led him to acquire relevant information about the quarrels of the Macedonian Question. His statement reaffirms the positionality of emotions in the sequence. Feelings of injustice and betrayal originated first and successively, those emotions urged for relief and explanation. It is at this point in which conspiracy theories come to play as they satiate the urges for emotional relief and validation, offering suitable explanations to the events that create those feelings in the first place (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, 213). Often, the “expertized” image of lecturers and speakers additionally provide with the necessary credibility to their arguments which students adopt in their quest for explanation.

The school as a site for radicalization and silencing of diverging voices

This section looks at the school and gauges the democratic deficits it manifests. It argues that Greek schools do not provide space for diverging opinions on topics such as the Macedonia Question. As such, students holding different outlooks towards the agreement are silenced by peer-pressure and extremist practices. As a result, prevailing notions informed by conspiracy theories and a sort of *epistemological nationalism* create *information enclaves* in the absence of diverging voices. It is argued that the reproduction of the above types of information within schools but also on a broader level with the help of the media, radicalize the youngest parts of society and pushes them to politics out of the ordinary and to the extremes.

As participants told me, teachers were predominantly reluctant in taking a stance regarding the cause for the uprisings and categorically disapproved of the means of protest chosen by the students such as lock-downs and demonstrations during school hours. What is striking is that voices from students favoring or being neutral towards the agreement were absent in schools according to the participants. I asked Maria and Olga why they think that is:

They are afraid. Afraid of being called traitors and things. That's it. They shut their mouths because we live in a contemporary Babel. We don't talk with each other; we don't hear the opinion of the others. What the majority of the population thinks prevails.

Subsequently, I asked Olga whether she thinks some students might be in favor of the deal. She responded saying: "Hmm . . . Even if there are, they won't say it because it will be criticized by the others since the majority of the students claim that this (mobilization) has to be done; the others won't speak up by themselves".

For Manolis, even if there are any students supporting the agreement, they must be "sons of leftists", alluding to a stigmatization of people with different opinions. In light of the absenting diverging voices, it is important to note that all students in Greece were inevitably affected by the events as the schools they attended underwent a lock-down at least once in 2018. This led some students such as the sisters Eleni (16) and Marina (15) holding a negative stance towards the student-movement disapproving nevertheless at the same time the Prespa agreement as well. Iris also asserted that other students were against the lock-downs but always in agreement with the cause of the movement. According to Alexis, the students who were against the lock-downs were "just lazy". However, Iris revealed that some students that opposed the lock-downs were called-out to participate "if they were real Macedonians" and by that were called on to prove their "Macedonianness".

Many students distanced themselves from peer-pressure practices by emphasizing the democratic character of the demonstrations and the fact that many decisions in schools were drawn after voting procedures. In this direction, others felt the need to underscore that they do not affiliate with a specific political party, especially Golden Dawn whose influence on schools had alluded to by governing politicians. For Manolis, though, it was not surprising that some students openly supported the neo-Nazi criminal organization, exactly like others supported other political parties.

Olga told me her best friend was a supporter of Golden Dawn. She said she doesn't think that her friend is a fascist though but stressed that a lot of students are indeed influenced by Golden Dawn. I asked her if she saw or heard something that troubled her, or she disagreed with during the heated protesting period. She told me that she saw a swastika-flag in school. In that, I asked if there were any reactions towards the flag by students or teachers that might have seen the flag too. Olga said she didn't think teachers saw the flag. But what is significant in my eyes is what

she narrated about her classmates: “The ones that see it and actually disagree with it won’t talk about it because they will be criticized. They’ll be like ‘why are you talking now? They are taking our country and you are bothered by the swastika?’”

Many images that evoke far-right sentiments made it into public-eye such as graffiti on school walls in Xanthi,¹⁴ or the Golden Dawn symbol with the slogan *Ellás Ellínon* (Greece for Greeks) on a banner hanging at a school-gate in Crete back in 2015. In my eyes, those images, however, did not enjoy the necessary attention in mainstream media, surfacing mostly on social media and critiqued by only part of Greece’s political representation. Meanwhile, other symbols remained well hidden within the school, such as the swastika flag that Olga referred to. Besides the proliferation of these symbols in schools and student protests, Alexis told me another reason why politicians, mostly from the governing party, affiliated the student movement with Golden Dawn. It was because some slogans chanted at the student demonstrations denoted to far-right ideas. Beyond the more “moderate” slogans, such as “Firmly following the traits of (war-hero) Melas” and the anthem Famous Macedonia, protesters also shouted “rogues, traitors, politicians” a slogan commonly used by Golden Dawn. Another one that Eva referred to: “Skopjan, you will never become Greek” has been appropriated over the past decades by the Greek far-right against Albanian immigrants and Greeks with Albanian roots.

The neo-Nazi symbols and slogans, including the presence of Golden Dawn in the Greek parliament from 2012 to 2019, are neither *banal* nor normalized in Greek political consciousness. Yet, they require further attention. During the interviews, many students expressed feelings of disillusionment with the political establishment and with that in mind, they distanced themselves from any party affiliation. On the other hand, however, the same feeling led to, if not affiliation, a neutral attitude towards the far-right. “Golden Dawn represents the average patriot,” Giannis said, “. . . we do not consider Golden Dawn great, but in comparison to others in the parliament today, the Greeks will vote for Golden Dawn as a reaction. We are tired of the ‘men in ties’ who promise many things and in general sell cheap-nationalism” he concluded. In this vein, the approximation of the far-right due to the disillusionment with the political establishment is what Hardin (2002) calls an *exit* from normal politics with a *shift* towards what is considered by ordinary politics as extremist or fanatic.

I believe the fundamental underlying basis for this *shift* to take place lies in the decades-long normalization of far-right ideology and its symbols. Such moments unquestionably constituted the nationalist-crescendo of 1991-1993, marked by protests regarding the Macedonian issue, as well as the Greek financial crisis with a so-called *inter-European orientalism* pouring oil on the growing fire of nationalist sentiment (Liakos and Kouki 2015, 57). Nationalist sentiment in this direction was recently (2018-2019) revitalized in the Macedonian Question on which this *shift* has again been manifested on. What is key in *shifts* or processes of radicalization are the *information enclaves* previously referred to. After the *exit* from ordinary politics, the individual, often motivated by intuitive emotional states, enters a space that provides an alternative to the ordinary politics. Those spaces assume a role of specific purpose, such as a central square hosting a demonstration, a judo sports club, a church during a nationalistic sermon, or a classroom in which students discuss ways to react and mobilize. Those spaces create *enclaves of information* that reinforce and reproduce beliefs within their boundaries through the exclusion of alternative voices.

This article claims that preconceived notions about the conflict reflected in phrases such as: “You understand that this is an injustice, you want to defend your country, but how? You don’t have arguments”, and the emotional attachment to the *marble head* held in the hands of the student from young age: “The Greeks from a small age, we know”, “the whole story is clearly about what we feel, it has to do with our emotions”, rely on theories propagated and mainstreamed within enclaves that provide explanations and relief to the primary emotions. As discussed earlier, those explanations are comprised of conspiracy theories, elevated by scholarly, and, I would add,

the religious language of *nationalistic epistemology* (Iraklidis 2001).

What is key is that the beliefs propagated by right and far-right politicians, religious leaders, and nationalist scholars, are reinforced within the enclave due to its often-isolated state and almost watertight status. We should be reminded of what Eftychis and Olga told me about the church and the protests: “whoever goes to church has the same ideas”, “those who support it [...] all this campaign and protests that the people do, are closer to the church, closer to god”. In addition to this, a seemingly majoritarian and homogenous in terms of opinions student entity, dominates the space for dialogue and renders alternative voices mute, more so, when the debated subject touches upon national and thus sensitive issues. Let us be reminded of what Olga told me about the swastika in the school: “The ones that see it and actually disagree won’t talk about it because they will be criticized”, or what Maria said about proponents of the agreement: “I think that they are afraid. Afraid of being called traitors and things”.

An unquestionable responsibility in shaping public opinion in that direction lies with the media. In regards to the Macedonian Question for example, Karavas (2018) argues that nationalist intellectual discourse has been mainstreamed by Greek media creating an environment of a “moral panic”. In the same direction, Greek media portrayed the Prespa agreement in 2019 as predominantly damaging for Greece’s national-interests (Armakolas and Petkovski 2019, 5). Today’s online media and social media platforms used by a vast majority of the youth should not be overlooked. Social media’s algorithms provide content on the user’s feed that will enhance engagement and by that drive revenue. The content that is presented to the user is often driven by violence, hate speech, and conspiracy theories as those maximize engagement. Social media provide another type of *information enclave* as users often only see content that promotes and further radicalizes their views (Wu 2019). To bring this debate into the context of nationalism itself, Lim claims that the very relationship between the user and the algorithms create algorithm enclaves that produce multiple forms of tribal nationalism (Lim 2017). A recent study furthermore demonstrated the immanency of online platforms in mainstreaming theories that have led to deadly attacks in recent years, such as the “Great Replacement Theory” (Lim 2017), a theory briefly touched upon in this paper. Yet, the affinity between social media, radicalization, electoral outcomes and nationalist violence must be investigated further.

In spite of the pivotal role of politicians and intellectuals in normalizing a negative stance towards the “other” and a romanticized idea about the “self”, one must underscore that the educational system provided with a fertile ground for those ideas to be inculcated to young students for two main reasons. First, the Greek school constitutes a deeply ethnocentric space (Daskalakis 2014; Faas 2011; Stratoudaki 2005), often xenophobic towards the “Balkan other” (Tamisoglou 2013) with the subject of history, for example, silencing Greece’s uncomfortable past, glorifying and normalizing wars (Daskalakis 2014; Markou 2018). Hence, negative and sometimes aggressive attitudes towards the “other” and “exceptional” imaginations about the “self” are institutionally nourished to students from an early age. Secondly, as this research reveals, the school manifests an important deficit in giving space for diverging voices due to peer-pressure and fear for violence and exclusion.

To conclude, two additional layers of interest are ascribed to the school for social scientists. First, the school happens to be the very space that can engage students in methodological processes which can enable them to counter disinformation and contain emerging extremism in the first place. Here, further research needs to be done on how Greek schools promote a singular and solely Christian type of national identity and how subjects of religion, history, as well as sports and music are taught in schools today. The second layer of interest lies with the school as a micrography of society (Daskalakis 2014, 13). If indeed the school is a micrography today, without a democratization and transformation of it in terms of ethnocentric and nationalistic outlooks, the school constitutes at the same time a micrography of a future society. The recent right-wing

mobilizations manifested in the light of the Prespa agreement coupled with the extreme-right voting behavior of first-time voters¹⁵ might be illustrating the political direction Greek society is *shifting* to.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the crucial elements regarding one's self-awareness that render the Macedonian Question a cause worthy of *exiting* the classrooms and *entering* the streets. The emotional attachment to symbols of nationhood and the ingrained sense of a duty towards history and its heroes were dominant during the discussions with students. Both those features this paper stressed construct a *historical consciousness* that is nourished and re-produced in *banal* but also institutionalized ways on varying spheres of society (school, sports, church). More concretely, as nations consolidate their self-awareness in juxtaposition to the "other" by imbuing it with positive characteristics, Greeks internalize antiquity from a young age. Hence, the very quest over "who will get Alexander" that to many extents defines the Macedonian Question today, denotes a state of unprecedented unease that is triggered when one's defining the ontological element (history) is ultimately contested by their neighbor's national *imagination*. In this light, this paper argued that the Macedonian Question could be understood as a *clash of imaginations* about pasts and their symbols concurrently incorporated into Greek and North Macedonian national histories. The emotions of anger, fear, betrayal, and insecurity triggered by this *clash* preceded not only any political or historical argument against the agreement but also processes of learning and being informed about the Macedonian Question in general. This observation informs the argument which positions history, and more concretely antiquity, deeply seated in the Greek psyche.

The decades-long normalization of a far-right ideology by ordinary politics play a significant role in creating favorable conditions for a societal *shift* from the ordinary towards the extreme to manifest itself. Polarizing media and a changing socio-economic environment (globalization, increased immigration, financial-crisis) exacerbate feelings of insecurity and disillusionment with the political establishment, presenting emerging far-right political forces as worthy alternatives.

Furthermore, this paper made clear how the school, marked by glaring ethnocentrism and nationalism, manifests great deficiencies in providing space for alternative voices. Amongst schools, spaces of sports and religion in which students find themselves in and are influenced by, are often governed by the homogeneity of opinions creating *information enclaves* prone to far-right ideologies. As such, they function as hubs for the spread of conspiracy theories and far-right ideologies that appear to provide answers to primary and instinctive emotions. As a result, collective action and activism are fostered on the one hand, marginalization, exclusion, and silencing on the other.

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Notes

¹This article is based on the authors’ Master Thesis *From the classrooms to the streets: students and the Macedonian Question*, Berlin: Humboldt University of Berlin, October 2019, which also incorporates interviews taken with students in North Macedonia. I would hereby like to thank Tamer Söyler for his vital comments on this text. Many thanks are due to all participating students for their generous time-investment. I would also like to thank Captain Giannis Nikolakopoulos for providing leave time during my military-service for this matter.

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³In a nutshell, with the Prespa agreement, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was renamed “North Macedonia” for domestic and international usage. Both parties acknowledged that they have no territorial claims towards their counterparts. Addressing identity issues central to the Question, the parties acknowledged that the reference to the term Macedonia in regard to North Macedonia refers to different historical contexts and cultural heritage than that of ancient Macedonia and ancient Greece. The citizens of North Macedonia will be addressed as “Macedonian” and their language “Macedonian” as part of the southern Slavic languages. Finally, both parties underlined the need for peace in southeastern Europe, by announcing a defense cooperation, the will for good neighborliness and by that committed to strengthening their bilateral relationship.

⁴Photo by Konstantinos Tsakalidis, Thessaloniki, 29th of November 2019.

⁵The protests were far from a localized and isolated phenomenon. Their significance, aside from the fact that they were led by and comprised of students, lies with the geographical spread of the demonstrations, substantial participation rates, duration, and means of activism deployed (lock-downs of schools), resulting in a movement rather than consecutive protests. It shall be noted that dozens of massive protests attended and organized by adults took place during 2018-2019 around the country as well.

⁶If the traditional-right refers to the fluid ways in which actors deploy time-specific national discourses of conventional conservative values such as an emphasis on a nation-bound religion, family, and tradition, as part of their political ideology, the extreme-right goes “beyond the limits of the normative procedures which define the democratic political process” (Klandermans and Meyer 2006, 7). Thus, the extreme-right capitalizes on the aforementioned right-wing values imbuing its ideology with ideas such as ethnocentrism and hyper-nationalism, xenophobia and racism, anti-parliamentarism and militarism. Right-wing mobilizations are approached in this thesis as social movements with a rationality of their own and common political and / or cultural goal(s) against, or in favor of the current political status. In this sense, the protesting student in this specific context is an individual who participates in or affiliates with the cause of a demonstration that encompasses a right-wing ideological system.

⁷Due to the fact that all participants were under 18 years old, a consent form along with a description of this research was handed to their parents / legal guardians to be signed before any interview took place. The interviews were audiotaped, the consent towards which none hesitated to provide. It was emphasized that I would treat the information provided in the interviews in an anonymous way, transcribed and quoted pseudonymized. Some students were approached through an existing network accessible to me, as I am semi-native to Katerini, Greece, with the support of friends and family. I approached other students at the protests on November 13th, 2018, which through a snowballing technique led to further participants. All interviews took place in Greek, as such, quotes are my own translation.

⁸Iraklidis (2018a) distinguishes six main national topics/issues that are dominating national discourse regarding Greece’s foreign policy. The dominant three are comprised of the Cypriot-issue, between Athens, Nicosia, and Ankara; the Macedonian question between Athens and Skopje, and the Aegean-issue as a conflict between Athens and Ankara. Less dominant is the Issue of Northern-Epirus, between Athens and Sofia; the issue of Muslim minorities in Thrace, between Athens and Ankara and the Pontiac issue, often described as “genocide of the Pontiacs”, likewise between Athens and Ankara.

⁹An illustration of this emotional attachment are the images of Konstantinos Karamanlis, former Prime Minister of Greece, stating back in 1992 in tears how Macedonia is singular and only Greek. This is a powerful indication of the ways in which the assumption of a singular and Greek Macedonia has been nourished in Greek consciousness. Furthermore, I was reminded in a conversation with Manolis of the historical statement of 1993, and later protest-slogan, of former Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou stating “Our name is our Soul”.

¹⁰For an analytic overview of the slogan’s history origin and history, see: Gazi 2014.

¹¹Besides an issue of the magazine featuring on its cover-page a military jet flying over the White Tower in Thessaloniki, and a dozen other issues featuring portraits of revolutionary “national heroes” and battle scene paintings, the issue 824 of October 2018, featured Pavlos Melas and the Vergina Sun with an inscription stating “Macedonia is Greek”, (<https://www.osotir.org/2018/10/01/pros-ti-niki-oktovrios-2018-tevchos-824/>), accessed 12.05.2019.

¹²One of the lectures for example claimed to give “Answers to the misinformation on the name of Skopje”. See Christian Student Action, (<https://xfd.gr/anakoinoseis/αθ-ήνα-ανακοινώσεις/απαντήσεις-στην-παραπληροφόρηση-για/>), accessed 24.07.2019.

¹³On the nascency, construction, political deployment and deconstruction of the myth, see: Aggelou 1997; Patrinelis 2005; Politis 2000; Stathis 2005.

¹⁴Some of the slogans painted on the walls included phrases such as “People, Military, Nationalism”, “Punches and Kicks to the Turcophile teachers”, “Macedonia Greek Land”, as well as “We will be back and the land will tremble: Blood, Glory, Golden Dawn”, plenty of which were followed by the neo-Nazi Celtic cross. See “Ναζιστικά συνθήματα και σύμβολα στους τοίχους σε σχολείο της Ξάνθης” [Neo-Nazi slogans and symbols on school-walls in Xanthi], Dailythess, (<https://www.dailythess.gr/nazistika-synthimata-kai-symvola-stoys-toichoys-se-scholeio-tis-xanthis/>), accessed 24.05.2019.

¹⁵It shall be noted that 17 and 18-year-old students in Greece voted in four different ballots in 2019. The voting behavior, besides a significant amount of abstentions, reflected in its majority right to extreme-right tendencies as 13.3% of the first-time voters, aged 17-24, voted for Golden Dawn in the 2019 European Elections. See: “Πως ψήφισαν οι νέοι: [How the youth voted]” (<https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1480235/exit-poll-euroekloges-2019-pos-psifisan-oi-neoi>), accessed 29.05.2019

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