Macedonia and Identity Politics After the Prespa Agreement

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Chapter 7

Seeing double: political polarization and identity politics in Macedonia, before and after the Prespa Agreement

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7   Seeing double

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Andrew Graan

> Every public sphere claims universality for itself, and battles marginal groups and subcultures in its effort to maintain dominance. It is through struggles of representation and claims of representativeness that these efforts for dominance are waged. These struggles are the substance of politics proper.
>
> (Rajagopal 2001, 148)

The puzzle of doubles

This chapter is an inquiry into political polarization as a social and cultural phenomenon. These days one need not look far in order to find signs of polarized politics. The 2010s have witnessed new social movements on both the Left and the Right. Expanded digital communications have spawned fears over "filter bubbles" and "disinformation campaigns" that perpetuate and prey on polarization. Partisan non-cooperation, whether through gridlock or boycott, wracks popular assemblies. The cascading successes of far-right political movements, exemplified by the likes of Trump, Brexit, Modi, Bolsonaro, Duatarte, and Orban, have been paralleled by reinvigorated progressive politics, for example: Occupy, Podemos, Syriza, Rojava, the 2019 Chilean protests, Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez. Polarizing and polarized politics, it seems, are a new normal.

This statement, at least, is quite true of the recent political history of what is now the Republic of North Macedonia, where over the last 15 years, competition between left and right political parties has transformed into entrenched social division.[1] In particular, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who led Macedonia from 2006 to 2016, proved to be an utterly polarizing figure. His brand of ethnic Macedonian nationalism and his strong-arm politics inspired adoration among supporters but deep antipathy among critics. So too did his signature policy, "Skopje 2014," a massive urban renovation project that transformed the country's once modernist capital into a landscape overflowing with newly constructed neoclassical monuments and buildings. Tellingly, the December 2016 parliamentary election in Macedonia resulted in a virtual dead heat between Gruevski's right

nationalist party, the VMRO-DPMNE, and its left center rival, the Social Democrats.[2]

The political polarization of the Gruevski years only continued when the Social Democrats took steps to form a government in 2017, with party leader Zoran Zaev pegged as Prime Minister. Initially, VMRO MPs and Macedonian president Gjorge Ivanov worked to obstruct the Social Democrats' efforts to convene a new ruling coalition. Infamously, when the Social Democrats exploited a constitutional loophole to form a new government on April 27, 2017, masked thugs burst into the parliamentary chamber and assaulted several MPs, including Zaev.[3] Fortunately, this possible coup d'état did not succeed, and a transfer of power occurred. Nonetheless, the attacks made terrifyingly evident the bristling political divisions within the Macedonian political scene.

When then on June 12, 2018, Zoran Zaev announced what would become his own signature policy—an agreement with Greece to end the countries' longstanding naming dispute—it was not surprising that reactions spanned from triumphant praise to vitriolic condemnation.[4] According to the treaty, called the Prespa Agreement after the location of its signing, Macedonia would change its name to North Macedonia in exchange for an end to the Greek obstruction of its EU and NATO accession and recognition of the Macedonian language and identity. Zaev and his supporters celebrated the Prespa Agreement as a diplomatic breakthrough that would at last deliver Macedonia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures as well as the stability and prosperity promised by EU and NATO accession. For critics, especially on the right, however, the Agreement was a "humiliating" (*poniživačko*) capitulation to the Greeks. As one slogan attacking the Prespa Agreement expressed it, "*Imeto e Identitetot*" (The Name is the Identity), and in changing the former, Zaev and his supporters were allegedly betraying the latter (see Figure 7.1).

In no doubt because of such strong reactions, and because of the weighty, national significance of the issues addressed, the Zaev government announced that they would hold a consultative referendum to assess popular support for the agreement. The referendum vote was scheduled for September 30, 2018 and was bound to showcase Macedonia's deep political rivalries.

In this chapter, I will look closely at the politics of polarization as they manifested in what is now North Macedonia in the period before and after the 2018 signing of the Prespa Agreement. I was in Macedonia over four months in 2018, from May 15 to September 15, conducting research on the Skopje 2014 urban renovation project and its discontents. Inevitably, then, I witnessed and discussed popular reactions to the agreement and also observed the organized movements that formed to campaign for and against the referendum.

My summer of 2018 was thus filled with recurrent displays of political polarization. In this context, I frequently found myself seeing double. There

Figure 7.1 A stenciled graffito of the anti-Prespa Agreement slogan, "The name is the identity"
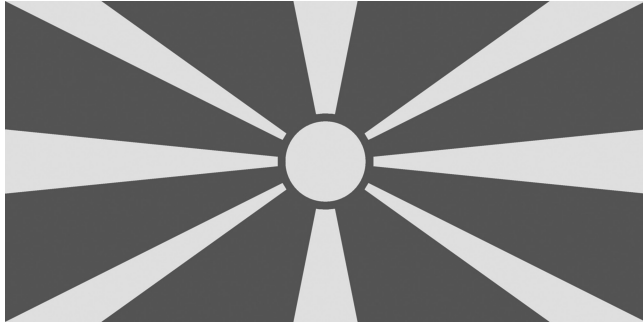
Source: Andrew Graan.

were the two names: Macedonia and North Macedonia. Two flags: the old "Star of Vergina" flag, which was used between 1992 and 1995, and the current, official flag featuring a yellow sun (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3).[5] Two architectures: the monumental revivalism of the Skopje 2014 project and the renewed celebration of Skopje's midcentury modernism (see Figures 7.4 and 7.5). Two stories of ethnogenesis: one rooted in the figure of Alexander
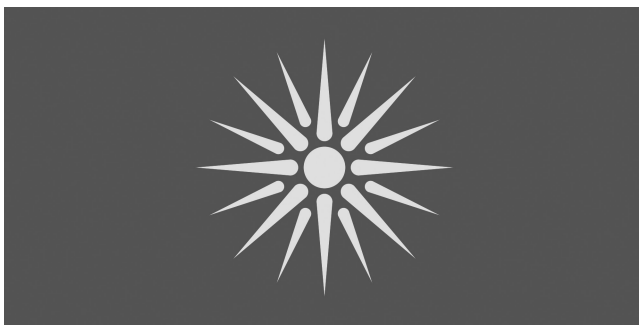
Figure 7.2 Macedonia's "Star of Vergina" flag, used from 1992 to 1995

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Macedonia_(1992–1995).svg.

Figure 7.3 The current flag of Macedonia

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_North_Macedonia.png.

Figure 7.4 A view of some of the neoclassical structures built as part of the Skopje 2014 project

Source: Andrew Graan.

the Great and antiquity, the other focused on the late 19th century "national awakening" and the revolutionary struggle against the Ottomans (see Vangeli 2011; Muhić and Takovski 2014). And two mediascapes: one that was sympathetic to the Prespa Agreement and organized by an aesthetics of neutral, balanced reporting, the other trafficking in bold, sensationalist stories that presupposed the Prespa Agreement as an act of national betrayal. It was as if Macedonia itself was doubled.

In paying attention to these doubled forms, I began to recognize how these combinations of symbols, discourses, images and narratives constituted a popular cultural reservoir from which representatives of right and left political persuasions drew in order to express mutually exclusive understandings of the Macedonian national identity. In Macedonia
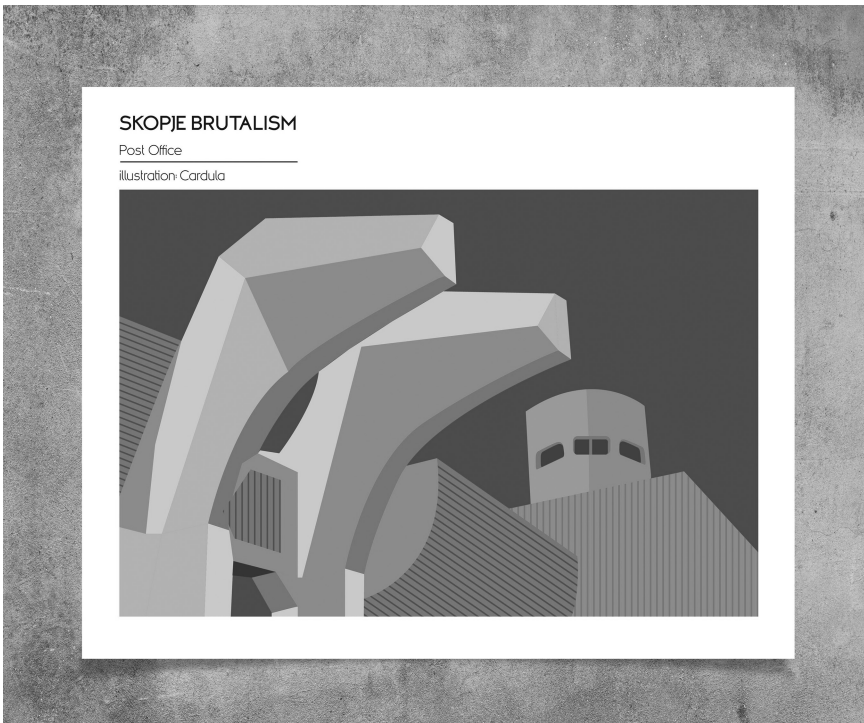
Figure 7.5 A poster by Zoran Cardula featuring the Skopje Post Office building, constructed in 1974. In the wake of the Skopje 2014 project, celebrations of Skopje's modernist architecture spiked both inside and outside of Macedonia

Source: Zoran Cardula.

and elsewhere, in recent times, political preference has increasingly been expressed as a primary aspect of identity. That is, rather than considering political preference as exterior to one's fundamental self, in contexts of political polarization, people often view and experience political preference as something that is inalienable, non-negotiable, and incompatible with opposing viewpoints. In this sense, polarization is identity related via political affiliation.

Especially in the wake of the 2016 Brexit vote and US presidential election, scholarly analyses of polarization have proliferated but tend to focus on populism as a resurgent political phenomenon (for example, Müller 2016; Brubaker 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In this chapter, however, I pursue a different line of analysis. Instead of attention to populism per se, I examine the role of public culture and its circulatory pathways in enabling and exacerbating political polarization as a relational and identarian practice. In focusing on public culture, understood here as mass-mediated visual, textual, and discursive artifacts, my approach is multimodal in nature.

I attend to history of the public sphere in Macedonia but I am also interested in how media discourse resonates with other visual and textual artifacts, precisely things like: flags, names, architecture, music, images, political slogans, public demonstrations and so on. In doing so, I contend that political polarization does not merely reflect underlying social differences in political ideology. Rather, polarized political identities, like national identity in general, are mediated by histories and practices of public culture that shape competing projects of national identification and circulate signs that articulate and differentiate these projects. In developing this contention, I engage Arvind Rajagopal's (2001) study of Hindu nationalism in India and his argument on the contribution of public culture and media ecology to Hindu nationalism's rapid political ascent in the 1990s. Ultimately, I argue that the variety of political polarization evident in contemporary North Macedonia constitutes a new form of identity politics, one based not on multiculturalist claims to identity difference—so-called "recognition struggles"—but on competing, monopoly claims over one and the same identity category— what I characterize as "representation struggles." In unraveling the "puzzle of doubles" present before and after the Prespa Agreement, I hope to bring the contours of this identity politics into relief.

Doubled identity: from recognition struggles to representation struggles

At first glance, the doubling of national symbols in Macedonia was subtle: two similar flags, two variant names, two intermeshed historical narratives. But, from my past research in Macedonia, it was clear to me that the two national imaginaries so demarcated expressed socially potent differences. One imaginary was revivalist and exclusivist in nature, at once celebrating the claimed historic grandeur of ethnic Macedonian identity and also promising to redeem it in the present. The other was progressive, if rooted in political liberalism. It portrayed Macedonia as firmly within European modernity and sought to protect it from revanchist and illiberal forces on the right.

Significantly, over the last several years, people in Macedonia not only marshaled these imaginaries, they also identified with them. On the right, proud Macedonians could don the mantle of 'patriots' (*patrioti*) while labeling rivals as 'traitors' (*predavnici*). On the left, concerned Macedonians decried the 'mad, insane' (*ludo*) and 'abnormal' (*nenormalno*) policies and actions of Gruevski and his supporters. They thereby aligned themselves with a model of how things ought to be under rational, normal conditions while portraying their opponents as beyond reason. Such an us-versus-them logic was pervasive (Muhić and Takovski 2014), casting political persuasion in terms of discrete and opposing identity categories.[6]

Indeed, during my visits to Macedonia during and after the Gruevski years, I recurrently encountered statements on the utter incompatibility

of Gruevski supporters and Gruevski critics. I also saw such social division manifest first hand. Many of my friendships in Macedonia were formed during my first research trips there in the early to mid-2000s. My summer-long research stay in 2018 therefore occasioned opportunities to catch up with old friends. During these meetings, I would often ask after mutual acquaintances from the past, only to hear that so-and-so was now a "*VMROvec*" (VMRO supporter) and no longer a friend. Other times, I would be warned by acquaintances that particular intellectuals or media personalities were "*VMRO*" and hence not to be trusted. On the right, similar aspersions attached to epithets such as "*Sorosidii*" (Sorosians) or "*Šarenite*" (The Colorful Ones, i.e., participants in the 2016 Colorful Revolution, here used dismissively). More deeply, I was told stories of how political disagreements had ruptured families. Political identity thus appeared as a "total social fact": it permeated and shaped Macedonia's social terrain.[7]

This aspect of political identity was elaborated on the popular Macedonian news satire show, *Fčerašni Novosti* (Yesterday's News). The first episode of the show's fourth season, which debuted in September 2018, just weeks before the referendum, included a mock reality TV show named *Mešan Brak* or "Mixed Marriage" (see Figure 7.6).[8]

Across the former Yugoslavia, the term *mešan brak* referred to marriages between spouses of different ethnicities. However, in the *Fčerašni Novosti* skit, the "mixed marriage" is between a man who supports the Prespa Agreement and Macedonia's entry in to the European Union and a woman who opposes the Agreement as an assault on Macedonian identity. As the

Figure 7.6 A still taken from the mock reality TV show "Mešan Brak," which was featured as a skit on the Macedonian comedy program, *Fčerasni Novosti*. The skit humorously depicts a Macedonian family "torn apart" by the referendum on the Prespa Agreement

Figure 7.7 A still taken from the mock reality TV show "Mešan Brak." The parents have divided their living room, and even the coffee table, to reflect their stances on the Prespa Agreement

skit humorously depicts, due to their differing political views, the couple literally divide their small apartment into two opposing sides, with a rope bisecting the living room and its coffee table (see Figure 7.7). In consequence, their adult but infantilized son was caught in the middle of a family "torn apart" (see Figure 7.8).

As the faux news anchors said in introducing the skit, this is a "reality show which perhaps some of you are living" (*realno šou koje možebi nekoji*

Figure 7.8 A still taken from the mock reality TV show "Mešan Brak." The family's adult son pleas for his parents to end their political feud

od vas i go živeat). Through its deft humor, the skit assimilated political preference to an older logic of identity difference, that is, one based on ethnicity. In essence, political affiliation was presented as an identity as fundamental as ethnic belonging.

Let us notice, however, the peculiarity of this form of identity politics. According to classic models (for example, Taylor 1994; Fraser 1997), identity politics is a late 20th century historical formation that is organized by a 'politics of recognition,' in which minority groups demand that aspects of their identity difference, whether it pertain to religion, cultural background, gender, sexuality, or language, be acknowledged and protected within a larger liberal polity. Classic identity politics are thus premised on the assertion of identity difference and consequent "recognition struggles" (Hobson 2003). For many scholars, then, this form of identity politics birthed multiculturalism and similar efforts, for better or worse, at including difference within liberal polities.[9] In contrast, the identity politics that manifested with political polarization in Macedonia was a different sort of historical formation. This identity politics manifested not in claims to difference from the larger polity. Rather, it was premised on competing, monopoly claims over one and same national identity, constituting a struggle over the authoritative representation of the nation.

In Macedonia, the older form of identity politics, predicated on assertions of identity difference, manifested most clearly in the political demands of the 1990s and 2000s that ethnic Albanian citizens of Macedonia made for greater inclusion and autonomy with a country that had been framed, constitutionally, as a homeland for the ethnic Macedonian people (Krasniqi 2011).[10] On the one hand, this particular, ex-Yugoslav expression of identity politics reflected how the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia institutionalized ethnic difference, recognizing distinct "nations," "nationalities" and "ethnic groups," and awarding particular rights and entitlements to members of each category (see Akan Ellis 2003). On the other hand, European and American intervention in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and 2000s popularized discourse and policy on multiculturalism that also informed the politics of ethnic Albanian identity claims in Macedonia.

In contrast to such an identity politics based on assertions of basic difference, identity politics in recent examples of political polarization often manifests in mutually exclusive claims to one and the same identity. Thus, in Macedonia, both Gruevski supporters and Gruevski critics claimed to articulate and represent something essentially Macedonian and something essential for Macedonia. In the place of recognition struggles, one encounters "struggles of representation and claims of representativeness" (Rajagopal 2001: 148).[11] In such cases, rival identity projects invoke distinct social imaginaries and marshal distinct symbols and discourses to elaborate distinct visions of an otherwise common national identity.

From bubbles to doubles: popular culture, mass media, and political polarization

Arguably, the identitarianization of political persuasion has emerged as a global phenomenon, with many examples around the world. But, how might we explain such political polarization and the particular kind of identity politics that it seems to support? What practices and what institutional forms mediate the production, performance, and self-understanding of rival, even antagonistic identity positions?

To answer this question, I turn to Arvind Rajagopal's (2001) ground-breaking book, *Politics After Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public.* In this study, Rajagopal examines how pop-ular culture and media technologies contributed to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, or BJP) in the 1990s. On one level, he argues that the liberalization and expansion of television in India resulted in new programming that inadvertently fueled Hindu nationalism in India. In particular, the BJP and allied groups were able to exploit the immense pop-ularity of a serialized, television version of the Ramayana to support and profit from a movement to destroy a mosque, the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, and to replace it with a temple to Ram. On a deeper level, Rajagopal argues that the new varieties of mass communication facilitated by television also transformed the imaginary of an integrated, national Indian public: "If with the relatively small audience for print, the normative fiction of a bourgeois public could be preserved in some sense, the fissured character of this public becomes undeniable with electronic media" (2001, 25). Rajagopal thus coins the term, "split public," to describe the "different languages of politics" that came to differently organize communication within a "bourgeois public" and a "Hindu nationalist public," respectively.

The consequences of such a split public should not be underestimated. As Benedict Anderson (1991) famously argued, the print capitalist circula-tion of mass media genres (for example, broadsheets, newspapers, novels) grounded the social imaginaries by which nationalist ideologies and hence national identity emerged as historical forms. Within anthropology, Debra Spitulnik (1996), working with ethnographic material from Zambia, sim-ilarly theorized how the social circulation of mass media talk—for exam-ple, turns of phrase popularized by national radio programs—mediated a sense of national identity and collective belonging. For these scholars, persons' orientation to a common field of discursive circulation as well as their uptake and recontextualization of media talk do not merely express underlying principles of social identity, rather they actively constitute social identities.

The "splitting" of a public, that is, the emergence of rival "languages of politics" manifested in texts artifacts and performances oriented to distinct "regimes of circulation" (Cody 2009), therefore affects a core institution of the nation form and undermines the "normative fiction" of a representative,

national public sphere.[12] Not only is the imaginary of the "mainstream" or the "national conversation" undone but new "split" publics mediate and produce a different sort of identity politics. A multiculturalist discourse on the need for minority recognition in distinction to the majoritarian mainstream is eclipsed by rival discourses on national essence. A religious conception of the nation confronts a secular one, as in Rajagopal's case. Or an ethno-nationalist conception of the nation confronts a cosmopolitan one, as in the Macedonian case.

It is thus in the dialectic between political economy and the communicative structures of the nation form that the identitarianization of political preference takes place. Tellingly, contemporary discourses on "filter bubbles," "echo chambers," and "media silos" reflect this point. As James Slotta (2019) argues, worries over filter bubbles and the like suggest a deeper anxiety over a fractured public sphere (cf. Mazzarella 2019). Slotta, however, treats "bubbles" not simply as empirical facts, but similar to the normative fiction of the national public, as social imaginaries that must be (re)produced. Working with material from the US, Slotta analyzes how particular news media genres, in which Donald Trump's public assertions would be subjected to fact-checking or annotation, indexed and perpetuated the imaginary of separate, politically divided bubbles. Talk of "media bubbles," and interpretive genres that presuppose them, thus mediate and even naturalize a sense of incompatible political communities.

Importantly, however, the communicative structures that foster political polarization do not simply forge an imaginary of separate "bubbles" or split publics; they also structure relationships between and across their distinct regimes of circulation. As Rajagopal contends, with split publics, "the salient question is of the terms of translation between them, in the reproduction of a structured set of misunderstandings" (2001, 25). In parallel to Slotta's argument on fact-checking and annotation genres in Trump's America, Rajagopal points to how the bourgeois press in India continually framed the BJP and the Ram Temple Movement as inexplicable problems to be solved, that is, as objects for interpretation rather than as subjects of news discourse. Such practices structure fissures, or misunderstandings, across the publics. In effect, participants in any one of the split publics would have to contend with a negative image of themselves (for example, as dangerous or irrational, as racist or unpatriotic) as the cost of engaging media from "the other side."

At the same time, newly differentiated publics can also ground new figures of collective action. As Rajagopal argued, with the Hindu nationalist public, "Ordinary citizens now perceived their actions as having implications for society at large, suggesting a new dimension to their perception, and a different quality to the power that they wielded" (2001, 31). The "reshaping" of national publics into split form is thus a dynamic, generative process and is reciprocally about self-making and alter-making. It recasts politics and identity. Indeed, it recasts political preference as an identity.

Antiquization and reshaping the Macedonian public

Rajagopal's approach emphasizes the role of public culture in shaping the social imaginaries that ground political movements and identity claims. This approach, I contend, can be useful in the attempt to understand the political polarization and identity politics that emerged in Macedonia in the 2010s. Again, the argument is that political polarization does not simply fuel "bubbles" but that structural transformations in public communication play an important role in shaping political polarization and struggles over representation. In what follows, I therefore analyze transformations in Macedonia's public culture throughout the 2000s and 2010s. To do so adequately, however, requires a note on Nikola Gruevski, the former leader of the right-nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party who served as Macedonia's Prime Minister from 2006 to 2016.

Beginning in 2008, Gruevski launched a series of initiatives that publicly claimed and celebrated Macedonia's ancient heritage, and especially the figure of Alexander the Great, as central to Macedonian national identity. Reproductions of antique sculptures were placed in the yard of the Government Building. The Skopje Airport was renamed "Alexander the Great" as was the country's major north-south highway. Telling also was the party platform published by the VMRO-DPMNE in 2007, titled, "Revival in 100 Steps" (*Prerodba vo 100 čekori*). The document diagnosed what it saw as the contaminating legacies of state socialism on the Macedonian mentality and set forth an agenda to (re)create "real human beings," construed as forward-looking, dynamic, and proud national subjects (see Dimova 2013, 117).

In short, the Gruevski government adopted a rather interventionist form of cultural and social policy, one hinged to a nationalist project of "revival" that focused on ethnic Macedonians to the exclusion of Macedonia's many other ethnic groups. Thus, the Gruevski government actively promoted Alexander and antiquity as sources of ethnic Macedonian national identity and national pride (Neofotistos 2012b). In addition, new policies of social reformation and regulation were implemented, from efforts to promote the Cyrillic alphabet, to restrictions of alcohol sales, to pronatalist social supports (see Crvenkovska Risteska 2018 for a critical analysis of VMRO pronatalist campaigns). The Greek government's veto of Macedonia's invitation to join NATO at the 2008 Bucharest Summit only emboldened the Gruevski government's assertions of Macedonia's antique heritage. Yet, even from early-on, critics labeled and lampooned Gruevski's policies as a bizarre form of "antiquization" (Vangeli 2011; Muhić and Takovski 2014)

In some sense, Gruevski's embrace of national revivalism in the mid-2000s constituted the first rumblings of an identarian formation of political preference in contemporary Macedonia. Significantly, this development manifested multi-modally through public culture, across statues, names, and social campaigns. The ensuing years saw this cultural and political

formation explode, in scale and in controversy. The effect was the introduction of a new, politicized aesthetics into Macedonia's public culture, which ultimately worked to reshape Macedonia's public sphere. So, how did this reshaping of the Macedonian public sphere take place?

Freedom Square and 28.03.09

First, the Gruevski government ramped up its efforts to transform Skopje's central district and thus to materialize the aesthetics of national revival across the city's built environment. In 2009, the government announced plans to build a church on Skopje's central Macedonia Square. Opposition to the church project quickly sprung up, however. Critics were disturbed by the plan to build a religious object on a public square, especially in the multi-faith context of Macedonia. There was also frustration over the lack of public consultation on the project and what would likely be the appropriation of public funds and property by the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, activists feared how the planned church would be detrimental to the spatial character of the square, which was arguably the most important civic gathering space in the city.

As the church plans progressed, so did opposition grow. On March 28, 2009 a group named Freedom Square (*Ploštad Sloboda*) organized a protest to demonstrate against the church. The protesters, however, were violently attacked by a group of counter-protestors who were allegedly bussed into Skopje to disrupt the protest (Vilic 2009; Janev 2011).

Especially with the benefit of retrospect, the March 28 protest and assaults can be seen as a pivotal moment in the articulation of a new identity politics premised on competitive representations of Macedonian national identity. Whereas Gruevski and his VMRO supporters actively promoted an ideology of national revivalism, one that was draped within a duel appropriation of antique history and Christianity, opposing groups stood up for a Macedonia understood to be secular, cosmopolitan and progressive. These two different Macedonias were not only contrasted in terms of prevailing values, but also in terms of aesthetics. One privileged a visual palette that featured the Christian and the (neo)classical. The other embraced and sought to defend a visual palette of Skopje modernism. Tellingly, many of the later showdowns between Gruevski supporters and opponents also came to be centered on architectural exemplars of the competing, newly politicized aesthetics.

Skopje 2014

If the VMRO antiquization policies had already proved divisive, and especially after March 28, 2009 alarming, for many in Macedonia, the next chapter of VMRO revivalism constituted a quantum leap in the level of controversy. On February 2, 2010, the mayors of Skopje and the Centar

municipality held a press conference to announce a major urban renovation project. Named "Skopje 2014," the project would add several public buildings and monuments to the city center and also replace the facades of several existing buildings. Insofar as all of the new objects would be in revivalist styles—chiefly neoclassical and baroque—the project would fundamentally transform the character of Skopje's built environment (see Koteska 2011). Accompanying the press conference was a two-minute long CGI "visualization" of Skopje in the year 2014.[13] The video moved object by object to depict the numerous structures to be included as part of the project. Most Macedonians were stunned. Including objects like a triumphal arch and a 30-meter high monument to Alexander the Great, the project seemed otherworldly and impossible in Skopje. But, by the summer of 2010, the new objects started to appear across the city center, often installed at night to affect a spectacular quality to their arrival. By 2014, not only had most of the structures envisioned in the 2010 video already been constructed, but the project had been expanded to include even more objects.

Justified as an effort to build a "European" capital that would attract tourists and investors, Skopje 2014 installed a particular narrative of Macedonian national identity on the capital city's built environment (Graan 2013).[14] Complementing the architectural embellishments to Skopje's landscape were mass media—television documentaries, talk shows, news programming, public service announcements, advertisements, posters and leaflets—that served to reproduce and reinforce the revivalist politics and aesthetics of the Gruevski government. The Skopje 2014 statues and buildings were thus linked, interdiscursively and multi-modally, to a broader range of public culture and media discourse that combined to articulate and symbolize the VMRO's political platform.

Indeed, it was generally acknowledged that the VMRO-DPMNE employed sophisticated political marketing strategies during its period of rule. As one media strategist in Macedonia told me in a 2018 conversation, it was the VMRO under Gruevski's leadership that brought advanced PR and marketing techniques to Macedonian politics. According to the strategist, the VMRO moved beyond elections-focused media campaigns toward an ongoing and sustained communications strategy. Strategists and party leaders decided on core issues and messages; talking points were prepared for media appearances; unscripted media appearances were minimized; relationships were cultivated with sympathetic journalists and broadcasters; and "hostile" journalists and broadcasters were shunned. Alliances between broadcasters and the party led to ancillary media (for example, talk shows and documentaries) that tended to flatter and support the VMRO's political narratives.[15] Through these means, the VMRO political apparatus infiltrated media publics in Macedonia to an unprecedented degree. In effect, the broader VMRO communications strategy, including the revivalist aesthetics of Skopje 2014, served to create a new, trans-modal "visual regime" (Rajagopal 2001), one that disrupted the "normative fiction" of an integrated national public sphere.

Significantly, Gruevski's policies did elicit tremendous support among many in Macedonia. In analogy to Rajagopal's argument on Hindu nationalism, the VMRO's projection of a glorious past grounded imaginaries of popular participation that were polarizing, seducing some and repelling others: "A new public language was emerging, more intimate to a section of the population and intimidating to the rest, that resonated with themes of collective empowerment, albeit in disquieting ways" (Rajagopal 2001, 31). Indeed, Gruevski would emphasize his policies as collective actions, employing the catchphrase, "We accomplished it" (*Toa go ostvarivme*) when dedicating new Skopje 2014 objects or describing policy implementation. Through such tactics, ethnic Macedonians were called on to join in the national celebration, to enjoy their version of history and their faith, and to stand up against naysayers. Indeed, defiance mixed with pleasurable consumption, as VMRO supporters were encouraged to delight in Skopje's new city center, but also, when need be, to confront protestors, such as Freedom Square, who argued for an alternative vision of Macedonia.

Despite, or perhaps, because of such support, Gruevski's social and cultural policies were very controversial and critics quickly mobilized in opposition. I will examine the public that emerged in opposition to Gruevski in detail in the next section. But it is worth noting here that several activist groups took to the streets to demonstrate against Skopje 2014 and its politicized aesthetics. In addition to Freedom Square, activist groups such as the Singing Skopjeans (*Raspeani Skopjani*), the First Archibrigade (*Prva Arhi-Brigada*) and Urban Artistic Action (*Urbano-umetička akcija*) produced happenings, discussions, and street art in efforts to pluralize, through spectacle and practice, the national discourse on Macedonia (Mattioli 2014). Furthermore, several news outlets and journalists emerged as outspoken critics of Gruevski, his government, and even of "Gruevism," portrayed as a mixture of craven strong-arm corruption and vainglorious, parochial kitsch (see Gelevski 2015). This emergent, alternative public sphere sought to maintain a space for political criticism and investigative journalism against the Gruevski government's growing infiltration of the Macedonian public sphere.

For, notoriously, the Gruevski government had begun to isolate and undermine journalists and news outlets that were considered to be overly critical of the party and the Prime Minister. Notably and most visibly, Velja Ramkovski, the owner of Macedonia's once largest and most popular independent television station, *A1*, was arrested and convicted on suspicious charges of tax evasion and money laundering.[16] Similarly, the arrest and imprisonment of journalist Tomislav Kežarovski provoked protest and was widely seen as an act of government intimidation directed at investigative journalists.[17] The government also practiced advertising favoritism, directing its large advertising budget toward friendly media to the detriment of critical media.[18]

More ominously, those journalists who continued to produce critical reports were often attacked as "traitors" or foreign agents by pro-government

media.[19] Especially notorious were several online, government-aligned news portals, such as *Kurir, Republika* and *Libertas*, which would regularly publish anonymous, "hit job" stories on government critics. Oftentimes, the attacks published on the online portals were then referenced in reports published on "more respectable" television and print media, building an intertextual chain of slander. Similarly, shock jocks like Milenko Nedelkovski and Dragan Pavlović Latas would verbally attack journalists and encourage audiences to do the same. Finally, as an editor at one independent news outlet told me in a 2018 interview, the Gruevski government would also marginalize critical media with silence, that is, the government would simply refuse to acknowledge or comment on critical reporting. Due to this multi-faceted crackdown on independent media, the Gruevski government was routinely criticized within and without Macedonia for its increasingly authoritarian and illiberal character.[20] The revelation of an illegal wiretapping operation, overseen by Gruevski's cousin who led the Macedonian secret police, and the leak of several of the taped phone conversations among VMRO political elites, seemed to confirm the extent of corruption and the abuse of power that prevailed during the Gruevski period.[21]

Furthermore, it is both fascinating and troubling to note that the VMRO attack on independent media also produced its own stark examples of doubling. For example, an online news portal named *NOVA TV* was founded in 2013 and featured critical reporting on the Gruevski government. However, in 2016, a pro-government portal was founded with the name, *TV NOVA* and with a suspiciously similar logo (see Figures 7.9 and 7.10). Likewise,

Figure 7.9 The logo for the independent news outlet, *Nova TV*

Figure 7.10 A billboard featuring the logo of *TV Nova,* a now defunct news outlet that was friendly to the Gruevski regime

Source: Andrew Graan.

a pro-Gruevski broadcasting venture named, *Radio Slobodna Makedonija* (Radio Free Macedonia) appropriated the name and visual identity of the longstanding, US-funded news source *Radio Slobodna Evropa* (Radio Free Europe), which had also emerged as a venue for critical journalism (see Figures 7.11 and 7.12). In parallel, a professional organization for journalists, led by notable Gruevski apologists, *Makedonska Asocijacija na Novinari* (The Macedonian Association of Journalists) was founded as an alternative to the much older, *Združenje na Novinarite na Makedonija* (The Association of Journalists in Macedonia). In these efforts to produce rival sources of information, one finds too the proliferation of doubles, that is, of uncanny resemblances that simultaneously index and obscure the political divisions that are their conditions.

In summary, the Gruevski government, through its transformation of Skopje's built environment, its aggressive public relations, and its attack

Figure 7.11 The logo of the VMRO friendly, Radio Free Macedonia

Figure 7.12 The logo of the US-funded, Radio Free Europe

on independent media, worked to reshape the Macedonian public sphere. In doing so, it undermined the normative fiction of an integrated national public. In its place, a split public emerged. One part was marked by a language and aesthetics of ethnic Macedonian nationalism and was controlled by the VMRO party apparatus. The other part, organized across embattled independent media outlets and social media, articulated a left liberal commitment to a "rational public sphere" to be performed through investigative journalism and open public debate. It is to this oppositional public that I now turn.

The contours of European Macedonia

Despite Gruevski's control over the government, the VMRO's colonization of public space and mass media in Macedonia did not go unchallenged. In word and deed, a varied collection of media outlets, activists, intellectuals, culture producers and citizen protestors articulated and performed a different sort of Macedonian public. This oppositional public valorized a vision of modernity premised on democracy, rational-critical discourse, and cosmopolitan belonging. Across this oppositional public, then, a vision of Macedonia recurrently manifested as being already modern and already

European. From this perspective, the Gruevski government, accused of both authoritarianism and kitsch, posed a threat to the Macedonian nation (Graan 2013). One can see this distinct, oppositional "language of politics" across several different fields of cultural production.

In regard to news media specifically, several journalists and media outlets bravely refused to relent to VMRO pressure and continued to publish critical news on the government, among them veteran news personalities like Borjan Jovanovski and Branko Geroski. Thus, even when VMRO pressure resulted in the closure of established news outlets, these professionals created new venues for critical journalism. Tellingly, however, much critical news migrated to online news portals rather than traditional media such as print, radio and television, in order to minimize the costs of production and distribution in order to withstand the government's practice of advertising favoritism. These and other internet portals acted not only as news sources but also as virtual salons in which authors—often using pseudonyms—published critical reactions to Gruevski's policies. Social media and online discussion groups served a similar function. The communication infrastructures of the internet and social media were thus crucial to creation of an oppositional public sphere, despite the Gruevski government's de facto control of most major Macedonian news broadcasters and in the face of ongoing VMRO efforts to undermine independent media.

Through their writings and public actions, critics of Gruevski and his policies invoked and performed a national imaginary that challenged the ethnonationalist premises of the VMRO public. However, like the VMRO public, this oppositional national imaginary emerged interdiscursively and multi-modally, across sites and artifacts of public culture. Several moments of political protest against the Gruevski government bring the symbolic dimensions of this imaginary into relief.

Mass protests and student plenums

For example, as the Skopje 2014 project accelerated, many valiant activists took up the pen and gathered in protest of Skopje 2014 and its monopoly claims on Macedonian identity. Consistent across these various actions were efforts to perform public discussion and rational deliberation, in explicit contrast to the Gruevski government's lack of transparency and public consultation. Thus, in the wake of the 2010 announcement of the Skopje 2014 project, numerous authors published opinion pieces, whether in critical news media or on social media forums, in which they offered arguments against the rationale and realization of Skopje 2014.[22] Groups like the First Archi-Brigade not only published criticisms of the project but also convened public meetings, with international participants, to discuss urban planning, in effect modeling ideal versions of a rational public sphere.[23]

As time went on, popular discontent over Gruevski's growing grip on politics resulted in several mass protests. In 2011, there were mass

protests against police violence, following revelations of 22-year-old Martin Neškovski's murder at police hands.[24] Mass protests broke out again in 2014, following the passage of a controversial law on education. In conjunction with the protests, university students, presumably inspired by nearby Bosnia, organized "plenums" to debate the state of higher education and civic politics in Macedonia.[25] Again in May 2015, following the revelations of the Gruevski government's illegal wiretapping scheme, mass protests erupted as citizens organized around the slogan, *#protestiram* (#IProtest). In effect, across such demonstrations, participants not only shook the Gruevski government's claims to national consensus, they also explicated and performed the metapragmatics that organized the oppositional public, one that celebrated "deliberation" and public participation, and that delighted in the ludic parody of Gruevski's perceived pretensions (see Takovski 2016).

I Heart GTC

Furthermore, in parallel to Skopje 2014, protestors also turned to architecture to ground and elaborate their vision of Macedonia. Indeed, two of the larger public actions protesting against the Gruevski regime were centered on the city's old and new architecture as emblematic of competing visions of the Macedonian nation. The first action, named "I HEART GTC" (*Go Sakam GTC*) and launched in 2013, was a series of public demonstrations against plans to replace the original façade of Skopje's central mall, the *Gradski Trgovski Centar* (or GTC), with a new neoclassical façade.[26] In their defense of the structure, they highlighted not only the building's architectural merits, as exemplary of Skopje modernism and as part of Kenzo Tange's post-earthquake plan for Skopje, but also how the building anchored a valued form of Skopje sociality, premised on openness, collective use and urbanity. Protestors thus defended the mall not only as a solitary structure but as an emblem of a quintessential Macedonian lifeworld in need of acknowledgement and protection.

The Colorful Revolution

In a complementary fashion, the 2016 Colorful Revolution (*Šarena Revolucija*) used architecture—specifically the Skopje 2014 structures—to illustrate and perform an oppositional political imaginary. The protest action stemmed from Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov's decision to pardon the senior VMRO-DPMNE officials who had been implicated in criminal activities in the leaked phone conversations revealed through the illegal wiretapping scandal. The act was interpreted by many as audacious, partisan impunity, and outraged Macedonian citizens flocked to the city center to express their discontent over the pardons and what was increasingly seen as the corrupt and autocratic rule of Gruevski. In the midst

of the protests, several young people began slinging balloons filled with paint against Skopje 2014 buildings and monuments. The splashes of paint that subsequently appeared across the city ultimately gave the Colorful Revolution its name.[27] For Gruevski critics, the paint splotches formed a potent symbol. The stylistic uniformity of Skopje 2014 structures had represented the centralizing and autocratic tendencies of the Gruevski regime. The act of "coloring" the Skopje 2014 objects was thus meant to counter government authoritarianism with pluralism, to defy the monochrome with the multichrome.[28]

Taking a step back, one can see how political polarization in Macedonia emerged through a "splitting," whereby a Macedonian language public sphere that was once imagined as integrated was seen to have fractured into a right-nationalist public that was premised on fidelity to the VMRO's nationalist politics and a left-liberal oppositional public that was premised on the performance of rational-critical discourse. This splitting did not simply reflect pre-existing polarization. Instead, diverging media publics worked to perpetuate polarization and to figure political commitments in terms of identity. In this light, the VMRO-friendly media's attacks on particular journalists, politicians, public intellectuals, news outlets, NGOs as "traitors" functioned to (re)produce the imaginary of split publics. So too did parodies of "Grujo" or "VMROvci" and arguments against the "mad" (*ludo*) and "abnormal" (*nenormalno*) character of politics and society during Gruevski's reign. From the perspective of the VMRO public, government critics could only be "traitors" endangering the nation. From the perspective of the oppositional public, VMRO supporters could only be fanatics or dupes in their allegiance to the autocratic Gruevski. The split publics thus worked to structure and perpetuate mutually exclusive visions of Macedonia and of the national identity. Indeed, the respective figures of the traitor and the lunatic indicated how the fracture of political language perpetuated forms of othering by which political identity was treated as a fundamental aspect of person.

Across their distinct imaginaries of public culture and public communication, both Gruevski supporters and their left-liberal critics thus advanced rival, mutually exclusive visions of what Macedonia could and should be. The VMRO public wed the discourse of ethnic Macedonian nationalism with a revivalist aesthetics that was materialized across Skopje's built environment, VMRO friendly news outlets, television commercials and documentary programming. In contrast, the oppositional public, despite government pressure and persecution, recurrently modeled and performed a commitment to deliberation and public participation that are often considered hallmarks of the idealized, rational-critical public sphere. Each side claimed to represent "Macedonia" and portrayed its rival as a threat to the national good. The reshaping of the Macedonian public sphere thus came to epitomize an identity politics structured by opposing sides claiming to represent one and the same national identity.

Prespa Agreement

Despite Gruevski's efforts to consolidate political power and to squelch opposition, after a string of political scandals and political crises, the VMRO-DPMNE ultimately lost power in April 2017 and the Social Democrats, led by Zoran Zaev formed a new government. This shift in power, however, did not end political polarization in Macedonia. On the contrary, it has brought even further expressions of an identity politics built on competing claims to represent the nation.

In particular, the 2018 Prespa Agreement again galvanized political divisions in Macedonia. Immediately after its signing on June 17, residents of Macedonia began discussing the agreement. Not surprisingly, the agreement was controversial. The name 'North Macedonia' did not have any historical traction inside Macedonia and thus even for those who supported the agreement, the name seemed alien. Furthermore, a name change like that of the Prespa Agreement was historically unprecedented. In the days following the agreement's signing, the most common adjective that I heard applied to it was, "humiliating" (*ponižuvačko*). It was clear that the name change would be a sacrifice. And, of course, there were many people who were outright opposed to the agreement and its proposed change of name to North Macedonia. Indeed, on June 18, there was a protest in front of the Macedonian Parliament building that resulted in confrontations between protestors and police.[29] Ultimately, however, many came to support the agreement, not because they liked the name "North Macedonia" but because they saw the agreement as a necessary step to improve the economic and political conditions in Macedonia and to vanquish the toxic legacy of Gruevski.

Given the strong reactions aroused by the Prespa Agreement, the Zaev government decided to submit the treaty to a consultative referendum, presumably to add popular legitimacy to the action. With the referendum vote set for September 30, 2018, politicking on the Prespa Agreement thus came to be organized through advocacy on each side of the referendum. Much could be written about the various efforts to mobilize supporters for and against the referendum as well as the shifting public discussion on the referendum issue. But, before too long, there seemed to be clear signals that a slight majority of the population favored the agreement and the prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration. Presumably because of this, a group of anti-agreement forces joined together under the slogan, "#*bojkotiram*" (#IBoycott), and urged people to forego participation in the referendum poll. Macedonian law requires that at least 50% of the electorate participate in a referendum for the final vote to be valid. The strategy of boycotting the referendum, one with a long history in Macedonia, thus acknowledges that the boycotting side would be unlikely to win in a straight vote. Hence, the attempt to invalidate and delegitimize the referendum through legal technicality. One might also note how the #bojkotiram slogan mimics the earlier #protestiram slogan used by Gruevski critics: again, a play of doubles (see Figures 7.13 and 7.14).

Figure 7.13 A sticker featuring the #protestiram slogan, which was used in protests against Gruevski in 2015 and 2016

Source: Andrew Graan.

Figure 7.14 A banner featuring the #bojkotiram slogan, which was used to protest the 2018 Prespa Agreement

Source: Andrew Graan.

During the summer of 2018, both the Zaev government and the #bojkoti-ram movement rolled out their campaign strategies on the referendum. Across public rallies, talk show appearances, public debates, billboards, posters, stickers and graffiti, the two sides sought to energize supporters (see Figures 7.15 and 7.16). The result was increasingly polarized reactions to the Prespa Agreement and further expressions of an identity politics predicated on rival claims to represent Macedonia.

This was no more visible than on the 8th of September, Macedonia's Independence Day, when both pro- and anti-referendum rallies were held in Skopje. The #bojkotiram movement planned an afternoon gathering in Skopje's City Park that would be followed by a march to the Macedonian Parliament Building where a political rally would be held. The Zaev government had planned their own rally in the yard of the Government

Figure 7.15 A 2018 billboard promoting a referendum vote for the Prespa Agreement. The sign declares, "The EU will help us to build the rule of law"

Source: Andrew Graan.

Figure 7.16 A 2018 poster decrying the Prespa Agreement. It states, "Who gave you the right to negotiate about my name and identity? #Our Name is Macedonia"

Source: Andrew Graan.

Building, featuring a speech by the Prime Minister and then a performance of Macedonian jazz-pop classics (*šlageri*) with accompaniment by the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra. In their form and content, these two rallies exemplified the dual (and dueling) national imaginaries around which Macedonian politics had come to be organized.

On one side, the pro-referendum rally, hosted by the Prime Minister at the Government Building, broadcasted a nostalgia for the modern. I arrived at the rally about an hour before Zaev was scheduled to speak and was quickly struck by the 1960s soundtrack and a video montage featuring old black-and-white images of a postwar, pre-1963-earthquake Skopje that was projected on a large screen as a prelude to the main events (see Figure 7.17).

In the montage, sleek cars and buses drove through the city center and the city's modernist buildings appeared new and filled with promise. Through

Figure 7.17 The early phase of the pro-referendum rally held in the yard of the Government Building. In the background, videos of 1950s Skopje are projected against a screen

Source: Andrew Graan.

such subtle devices, the event recalled a bygone but valued modernity, anchored in the relative prosperity of the postwar period, and the commodities and fashion that indexed an upwardly mobile life. The event's aesthetics thus served symbolically to align the present of the Prespa Agreement (and the focus on EU and NATO accession) with nostalgic images of past prosperity and undeniable modernity. Significantly too, this nostalgic portrayal of Skopje also recalled the city without the character-transforming changes of Skopje 2014. The implicit argument on the referendum was clear: the Prespa Agreement would at last fulfill the promise of the past. And the grammar of the argument—the songs, the images and their architectural references, the nostalgia, the national symbols—was both patently cosmopolitan and unmistakably Macedonian.

The #bojkotiram rally also advanced an argument on the referendum, but through a different symbolic dialect of Macedonian, so to speak. After spending time at the Government Rally, I began to walk over to Parliament Building, via Macedonia Square, to similarly examine the #bojkotiram event. En route, I chanced upon a remarkable procession. Several individuals, wearing black #bojkotiram t-shirts, unfurled a humongous Macedonian

Figure 7.18 The flag procession that was part of the September 8th #bojkotiram rally. Here the flag bearers shake an unfurled "Star of Vergina" flag before the statue of Alexander the Great

Source: Andrew Graan.

flag before the towering statue of Alexander the Great, which was constructed as the centerpiece of the Skopje 2014 project. Significantly, the flag was the "old" one with the Star of Vergina. The flag-bearers then proceeded to shake the flag before the statue, as if saluting the "ancestor" represented in the sculpture (see Figure 7.18). They then walked, holding the flag suspended above the ground, from the square toward the Parliament Building.

As the men waited before Skopje's new triumphal arch—also a Skopje 2014 addition—I joined the #bojkotiram rally, which was just starting about 100 meters away. Actress Arna Šijak, who had made dubious claims to having been injured during the June 18th demonstration, served as event emcee. She opened the gathering, talking about the "humiliating" agreement and the necessity of a "*Se Makedonski sobir*"—an all-Macedonian gathering. Cries of "*Makedonija sekogaš, Severna nikogaš!*" (Macedonia forever, North never!) filled the crowd. In conjunction with these opening remarks, the flag-bearers carried the suspended flag underneath the triumphal arch and again shook it. They then carried the flag to the center of the rally, before the stage, which looked onto a street that runs in front of the Parliament. The men then shook the flag a third and final time before

the stage and amid the group of people assembled for the rally. As the flag-bearers carefully folded up the flag, a costumed music group began to perform Macedonian folk music.

The #bojkotiram rally thus crafted a quite different depiction of Macedonia compared to the pro-referendum event. The flag procession was quasi-religious in its performance. The flag-bearers resembled pilgrims and the Vergina flag appeared as some holy object to be sacralized before the new statue to Alexander and the triumphal arch. Šijak's calls for a "Pan-Macedonian gathering" recalled the 19th century congresses of intellectuals who led anti-imperial, national movements across Europe. The folk song, played with traditional instruments and in "folk" dress, further broadcast an image of a time-worn and therefore timeless Macedonian ethnos, one that was sacred and thus which should not be profaned. As with its rival rally, this event put forth an argument on Macedonian identity that was distinctly Macedonian.

These two rallies, both so thoroughly Macedonian yet so extraordinarily different, confirmed my own sense of discrete imaginaries through which people on each side of the political faction depicted their ideal image of Macedonia. I was amid a landscape of doubles: two flags, two soundtracks, even two Skopjes—one distinctly modern, the other sacred and eternal. Of #bojkotiram and #protestiram. Of two historical narratives. Two medias. Two identities. Two names. A political order premised on ideological difference was manifested in terms of competing claims to represent Macedonian national identity.

Conclusion

As I have shown here, competing struggles to assert the representativeness of rival publics has defined recent politics in North Macedonia. The Macedonian case exemplifies a deeper restructuring of political identity that is occurring in many world contexts. In so many cases, political polarization is not simply about fractious politics and parliamentary or congressional gridlock. Rather, political polarization can constitute a new sort of identity politics, one based on competition over the nation, with focus not on the recognition of difference but on monopoly over representation. And with this politics, whether witnessed with the opposing Leave and Remain camps of Brexit or Red State/Blue State dichotomy of the US, political persuasion is increasingly construed as an inalienably identity.

The intervention of this essay has been to argue that this variety of identity politics emerges through public culture and the (re)shaping of public spheres. Social theorists (for example, Anderson 1991; Spitulnik 1996; Warner 2002) have long argued that the circulation of public culture mediates articulations of identity. Of course, any public sphere is constituted by participation norms that privilege some and exclude others. Nonetheless, in many cases, to echo Rajagopal, the normative fiction of a unified public

sphere was reproduced despite constitutive exclusions. Indeed, Michael Warner's (2002) famous formulation of publics and counterpublics echoes this circumstance. Whereas publics operate within unmarked normative structures, counterpublics carve out discursive spaces predicated on marked forms of identity difference. This is the terrain of recognition struggles and an identity politics organized through assertions of identity difference.

The identity politics that I have sought to describe here similarly emerges though the circulation of public culture. However, the organization of the public sphere is different. Instead of majoritarian publics countered by minoritarian ones, one finds a split public, that is, rival efforts to represent and claim representativeness over the nation. As Rajagopal argued in the Indian case, "the diverse and contradictory constituents of a language-divided public worked themselves out against the shared backdrop of a single (but diversely) imagined national culture…" (2001, 17). Such a reshaping of the public sphere transforms the way that political claims are made. Thus, in Macedonia, political demands to recognize and protect ethnic difference were displaced by claims to defend "normality" against "madness," or the "nation" against "traitors." Parallel claims can be found in other contexts of political polarization, from discourses of the "real America" in the US to the emergence of political parties such as the "True Finns" in Finland. In these cases, representation struggles engulf recognition struggles.

During the recent history of what is now North Macedonia, these struggles have taken place through an array of media, including state-sponsored projects of urban renovation and public relations but also through protests, memes, critical media, and mass demonstrations. Through these struggles emerged two rival visions of Macedonia, articulated through overlapping but distinct symbolic repertoires. It remains to be seen how these representation struggles will be resolved. At present, however, they have come to structure North Macedonia's polarized politics. Furthermore, such representation struggles define a polarized politics of identity in many other contexts as well. Thus, if not all political cleavages or national contexts can be understood in terms of political preference as an identarian formation, representation struggles and their form of identity politics are nonetheless a remarkable feature of the present political moment. My hope is that this essay serves as a preliminary step toward their critical analysis.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1 The Republic of Macedonia officially changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia on February 12, 2019. The time period discussed in this chapter precedes the country's renaming. For accuracy, then, in this chapter I use the name "Macedonia" to refer to the country that, after February 12, 2019, is now officially named North Macedonia. In addition, my use of Macedonia conforms to disciplinary convention whereby anthropologists use groups' preferred terms of self-designation.

2 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonia's Knife-Edge Election Ends In Uncertainty," *Balkan Insight.* December 12, 2016. https://balkaninsight .com/2016/12/12/macedonia-s-tie-election-ends-in-uncertainty-12-12-2016/

3 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonia Shaken by Violence in Parliament," *Balkan Insight.* April 28, 2017. https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/28/ macedonia-calms-down-after-parliament-violence-04-27-2017/

4 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonia Deal Draws Praise Abroad, Anger at Home," *Balkan Insight.* June 13, 2018. https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/13/ macedonia-name-deal-internationally-praised-criticised-at-home-06-13-2018/

5 The Greek government placed a trade embargo on Macedonia between February 1994 and October 1995, to disastrous effect in Macedonia. Macedonia abandoned the "Star of Vergina" flag as a concession to Greece in the interim accord that ended the embargo. Nevertheless, the Star of Vergina flag has been used popularly, if unofficially, in Macedonia following the interim accord. Oftentimes, but not always, personal use of the Vergina flag was taken as an assertion of Macedonian national identity contra Greek denials.

6 See Friedman 2017 for a fascinating analysis of us versus them markers (*naš* and *niven*) in the wiretapped phone recordings that made public as part of the "Bombs" Scandal that revealed an illegal government surveillance program during the Gruevski period. As Friedman demonstrates, elite members of the VMRO party often combined references to "them," their political enemies, with vulgarities that indicated engrained hostility and vitriol. Moreover, his analysis also showed how VMRO elites often used the term "ours" to denigrate persons understood as the party subordinates or lackeys.

7 While it falls outside of the scope of this chapter, it is worth mentioning that one's political identity was also often essential for access to economic opportunities and resources. Party-based patronage systems served to reward party loyalists. One result of this was a prevalent discourse in Macedonia on the *partiska knishka* (party membership card) as the sine qua non of employment.

8 The entire episode can be viewed on YouTube at https://youtu.be/ H1LYa2UlV2U

9 For critical analyses of multiculturalism, see Povinelli (2002), Markell (2003), Hankins (2014), Simpson (2014), and Hartikainen (2019).

10 For an analysis of how ethnic Macedonian-Albanian identity politics played out in everyday situations, see Neofotistos (2004, 2010, 2012a).

11 One might further argue that contemporary political polarization, and its struggles over representation, has displaced or engulfed recognition struggles in many world contexts. In what is now North Macedonia, intensified political polarization among the ethnic Macedonian majority has in many ways obscured the identity demands made by ethnic Albanian political leaders in

the country. For example, the activist coalitions that emerged in opposition to Nikola Gruevski often celebrated the multi-ethnic character of political protest against Gruevski but typically stopped short of engaging ethnic Albanian concerns over discrimination. Similarly, one might recall the 2016 critique that members of the Black Lives Matter movement leveled against Bernie Sanders, US presidential candidate and self-proclaimed "democratic socialist," for his failure to address racism in his political platform.

12 See Landes (1988), Fraser (1992), and Warner (2002) for complementary arguments on how the bourgeois public sphere's purported universality was belied by identity-based privileges and exclusions.

13 The complete video, titled "The Visualization of the Center of the City of Skopje (2014)" is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/iybmt-iLysU

14 Interestingly, as Atanas Vangeli (2011) argues, the national celebration of Alexander and Macedonia's ancient roots is relatively recent, developing in the 1980s to counter Bulgarian claims on Macedonian national identity.

15 Examples of media programs that complemented VMRO messaging include Marina Dojčinovska's show *Macedonium* (see Neofotistos 2012b) and Milenko Nedelkovki's eponymous show, among many others.

16 See Sase Dimovski, "Velija Ramkovski—Shady Tycoon Or Media Hero?," *Balkan Insight*. December 2, 2010. https://balkaninsight.com/2010/12/0V2/velija-ramkovski-shady-tycoon-or-media-hero/

17 See, BIRN, "Macedonia Jails Journalist Tomislav Kezarovski," *Balkan Insight*. October 21, 2013. https://balkaninsight.com/2013/10/21/macedonia-jails-journalist-tomislav-kezarovski/

18 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonia Halts Controversial Ad Campaigns", *Balkan Insight*. July 2, 2015. https://balkaninsight.com/2015/07/02/macedonia-temporary-halts-govt-ads/, and Владо Апостолов, "Грујовизијата"чинела 26 милиони евра**,** 25 ноември 2019, *Призма*, https://prizma.mk/grujovizijata-chinela-26-milioni-evra/

19 See Svetla Dimitrova, "Macedonia: analyst caught in political crossfire over Freedom House report," Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa. September 7, 2014. https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/North-Macedonia/Macedonia-analyst-caught-in-political-crossfire-over-Freedom-House-report-154079

20 For example, Brunwasser, Matthew. 2011. "Concerns Grow About Authoritarianism in Macedonia." *New York Times*, October 13. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/world/europe/concerns-grow-about-authoritarianism-in-macedonia.html

21 https://truthmeter.mk/the-wiretapping-records-the-opposition-broadcasted-audio-video-transcripts/

22 See the collections, Gelevski (2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

23 See http://prvaarhibrigada.blogspot.com/2011/01/imagine-city-lectures-and-panel.html

24 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonians Protest Over 'Fatal Police Beating,'" *Balkan Insight*. June 7, 2011. https://balkaninsight.com/2011/06/07/macedonians-protest-after-police-murders-youngster/

25 Erwan Fouéré, "Macedonian Student's Plenum—A Cry for Respect." *Balkan Insight*. December 15, 2014. https://balkaninsight.com/2014/12/15/macedonian-student-s-plenum-a-cry-for-respect/

26 The movement website is available at: http://gosakamgtc.blogspot.com.

27 For an overview of the protests, see: Deana Kjuka, "Macedonia's 'Colorful Revolution' A Palette of Public Anger." Radio Free Europe. April 22, 2016. https://www.rferl.org/a/macedonia-colorful-revolution-a-palette-of-public-anger/27691237.html

28 See Kristina Ozimec, "Осми ден од „шарената македонска револуција." *Deutsche Welle.* April 19, 2016. https://www.dw.com/mk/осми-ден-од-шарената-македонска-револуција/a-19199808?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss
29 See Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "In Pictures: Macedonia 'Name' Protest Turns Violent." *Balkan Insight*. June 18, 2018. https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/18/in-pictures-macedonia-name-protest-turns-violent-06-18-2018/

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