

The Australian dimension of the Macedonian Question *

Michael Jeffreys

In the inner-western suburbs of Sydney where I live, there are many pieces of Greek real estate. One large building is occupied by the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales, the unsuccessful rival to the Greek Orthodox Archbishopric of Australia in a fifty-year battle for the central position in Sydney Greek life. The Archbishopric itself has four substantial churches in the area. There is an old cinema taken over by the Mytilenians and a sports complex which after dark belongs to the Arcadians. Sydney Olympic Soccer Club is down by

* This paper is a personal reaction to the Macedonian problem based on twenty years of teaching Greek in Sydney and some knowledge of the problem's Balkan dimension. Thoughts from a similar starting-point but drawing Australian conclusions for an Australian audience may be found in my article "Macedonia is Australian", *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 3 (1995) 83-96. I have found it interesting that many parameters of the issue look different from the Australian and Balkan viewpoints, and that the differences do not seem to be widely appreciated. I have had little need to take sides in the contested aspects of either situation: I have tried to give an uncontroversial narrative (as against the terminology used, which is made explicit since it cannot avoid controversy). Such a piece, in my view, should not be heavily noted. A few references are given to three books dealing with the Macedonian problem in Australia from three different viewpoints, so that those who require more information may find it:

Hill: Peter M. Hill, *The Macedonians in Australia* (Carlisle, Western Australia: Hesperia Press 1989).

Tamis: Anastasios M. Tamis, *The immigration and settlement of Macedonian Greeks in Australia* (Bundoora, Victoria: La Trobe University Press 1994).

Danforth: Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic nationalism in a transnational world* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1995).

Cook's River. Close to us is a large hall behind a pub bought by the Pontians to mark unity between their rival clubs, sometimes little used when unity has broken down. The leftward-leaning Cypriots own an impressive building built by the now downgraded Newtown Jets Rugby League Club. The other Cypriot club is down in town, but they cannot develop the building as it has become an icon of the struggle for Aboriginal recognition, because of a meeting held there before any Cypriot connections. In another direction is the Alexander the Great Macedonian club and near the main railway line the Panmacedonian club, a small office building marking the unity of the Sydney Greek-Macedonian clubs and showcasing the Greek side of the Macedonian struggle.

These buildings are only a part of the Greek real estate in Sydney. Together with the rest, they house a more intense public life than that of Australians in general or other minority Australian communities. Putting the churches to one side, the leaders of the clubs spend their time improving and enlarging their premises, providing a pleasant environment for eating and drinking, celebrations of local and national festivals, both Greek (or Cypriot) and Australian, and cultural and charitable events. There are some 60,000 first-generation Greek migrants in Sydney who like to discuss the world with others who share the same local background from Greece. Some Australian-educated professionals of the next generation are taking over club leadership, others are turning their backs on such organisations and joining the wider Australian community.¹

The clubs are very politicised: they are good at attracting visits from national and local politicians from the general community, for Greek-Australians are supposed to vote more as a block on some issues than other minorities. Many clubs' internal political life too is fiercely competitive, with contested elections and accusations of vote-rigging, all reported in Sydney's three Greek newspapers. However the fiercest

¹ The best general book on Australian-Greek society is A. Kapardis and A. Tamis (edd.), *Afstraliotes Hellenes: Greeks in Australia* (Melbourne: River Seine Press 1988). On the clubs, see Gillian Bottomley, *After the Odyssey: A study of Greek Australians* (University of Queensland Press 1979), pp. 52-76.

competition arises between clubs from the same region – resulting from splits, on political, geographical and/or personal grounds. Attempts to heal the splits by overarching federations sometimes simply add one more competing club.

Greek-Australian public life can be a complex minefield for new consular representatives or academic visitors, as the possibilities for giving offence are wide. Only the Greek national issues, the εθνικά θέματα, can unite all the groups. In fact in recent years an impressive degree of Greek unity has developed in Sydney, under the auspices of a body known as the Greek Council, the Ελληνικό Συμβούλιο, run by the leaders of the clubs and brotherhoods under the guidance of a group of second-generation professionals. There are few Turkish migrants in Sydney, and they keep a low political profile. The local opposition targeted by the Greek Council is therefore the so-called Σκοπιανοί. To meet them, we have to go rather further than our previous geographical survey, to the suburb of Rockdale, where they are so numerous that the municipality is officially twinned with Bitola in FYROM. There, one may find other Macedonian organisations with Slavic names. I have never visited them, because at the moment when my professional interest was strongly aroused, around 1990, the philhellenic credentials of all Australian academics were being put on the line by the Greek community, as possibly subversive influences over their children. A visit to a Slav-Macedonian club would have needed explanation and lost me credibility.

Mention of credibility reminds me to make explicit the terminology to be used in this paper. The observant will already have noticed that I call the new, predominantly Slavic state FYROM, and that I use "Macedonian" without qualification for local Greeks, but not for Slavs. On the other hand, I distanced myself with the phrase "so-called" from use of the intransigent word Σκοπιανοί. The language I will use is based on Greek academic discourse, including the term "Slav-Macedonian", which is now the official Australian name for those who identify with FYROM. The language of FYROM I will call the language of FYROM: despite Greek objections, it seems clear that in international academic discourse on languages and dialects, especially in a Slavonic framework, FYROM has a language.

The purpose of this paper is to explain that the Macedonian crisis has taken a different shape, chronologically and socially at least, in Australia from that in the Balkans. Australian experience is likely to be replicated in Canada and parts of the United States, but my knowledge of those cases is at second hand. The Australian form of the crisis may also need different treatment from the Balkan manifestation, and may be harder to solve.

In spite of the number of Slav-Macedonians in Rockdale, the total in Sydney is much smaller than the number of Greeks. In the state of New South Wales, the greatest concentration of Slav-Macedonians is in the steelmaking port of Wollongong, as far south of Sydney as Cambridge is from London. Wollongong is unique in Australia as the only city where there are more Slav-Macedonians than Greeks, reversing the regular balance of numbers in this conflict. Another major city where the two clash is Perth, on the other side of the continent, where the issue began in Australia – at a time when the dynamics were different, as we shall see. But Perth, despite its early beginning, did not have mass settlement from the Balkans in the late fifties and sixties as occurred in the Eastern States, and so the crisis did not develop the same intensity there. The major city of confrontation between the two sides is Melbourne.

Melbourne has the largest Australian concentrations both of Greeks and Slav-Macedonians. With some 180,000 persons of Greek descent in a city of three million, Greek influence is strong and obvious, in several major shopping centres, in professional life, particularly medicine, law and accountancy, in education, the media and soccer. Those of Slav-Macedonian background are far fewer, difficult to estimate but certainly under 40,000.² Other Australians know them mainly through soccer. They are geographically divided in Melbourne, reflecting the geographical division of their origins. The first to arrive were those originally from the Greek side of the border, many of whom had been involved with the losing army in the Greek Civil War.

² These numbers, like all statistics on Australian minorities, should be treated with great caution. They are an individual estimate based on reading much of the literature. On the range of estimates of numbers of Slav-Macedonians in Australia see Danforth, pp. 88-9, 205-7.

Many had lost sympathy with the Greek government, which itself – they claim – was not trying to retain their loyalty but to harass and punish them. This group arrived, often after some time in communist Eastern Europe, early, on average, among post-war Balkan migrants to Australia, usually in the early 1950s. They largely settled in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Migrants from north of the Greek border, from the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, generally came later, in the late 1960s, and they settled more in Melbourne's western suburbs.³

To show the difference between Australian and Balkan dimensions of the problem, I will begin with two eventful days and their reception in different newspapers.⁴ The first is 27 November 1988 in Sydney. President Sartzetakis of Greece was invited to a reception by the Premier of New South Wales in a central hotel. I had guests for lunch and went to an evening reception, so I missed the event. Sartzetakis had spent the previous week in Melbourne, where we had seen him on multi-cultural television making passionate declarations, with tears in his eyes, on the Greekness of Macedonia. But in Sydney he was ambushed by Slav-Macedonians. Many of that community in Sydney, reinforced by several busloads from Wollongong and Melbourne, pelted the official party, including the President and the Premier, with fruit and some stones, as they walked the few yards from the kerb into the hotel. One person was hospitalised.

The Greek-Australian press expressed outrage in banner headlines, wondering how such events could happen without strong reaction from official Greece and official Australia. The Australian press was confused, reflecting political and police embarrassment, but also public annoyance that a Balkan quarrel was again flaring up in Australia. It is interesting to note that the English-language newspapers assumed in their readers a little knowledge of the background of the quarrel, referring

³ Hill, pp. 10-34; Tamis, pp. 116-31.

⁴ I will not document newspaper reports to the two events in detail. Those interested will find interesting material (in issues up to a week following the dates given) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age* (Melbourne) and the *Australian*, and in the Sydney Greek newspapers *Εθνικός Κήρυκας* and *Ο Κόσμος*. Representative Greek reactions may be read in *Αντί* and *Ταχυδρόμος*.

without comment to different claims about Alexander the Great. I have not examined the Athens daily press for that week, but I have read the periodical press. The week saw a great revelation in the Koskotas affair, which dominated the headlines. It is interesting that more column inches are spent on the President's tears in Melbourne, with some sarcasm, than on the fruit thrown in Sydney. There was as late as 1988 in Greece no journalistic discourse of protest against Slav-Macedonian actions into which this event could easily slip.

The second date is better-known, 14 February 1992, the day of the huge demonstration in Thessaloniki which brought home to Greek politicians how far they lagged behind public opinion on Macedonia. All Greek periodicals, especially on the left, express surprise and concern over the strength of feeling shown. At the other end of the world, the reaction of the Sydney Greek press is predictable. At last, it says, the obvious has struck home. Leaders of Greek-Macedonian clubs, who had often asked Athens for help over the crisis, and had received the reply, "What crisis?", felt vindicated by the new turn of events. After allowing the other side to make the running for decades in propaganda over the history and name of Macedonia, the papers continued, the Greek government now had to make up lost time. Even a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggests that Athens had been blind to its own national interest. You will not need to be told that the Macedonian issue has dominated Greek politics for most of the nineties, redefining relations with Europe and causing a serious split in conservative politics.

Press reports on these two days suggest a curious reversal of what one might expect. Greece, a protagonist in a significant international crisis, plainly came to understand its importance only at the beginning of 1992. The Greek press had little idea of its severity at the end of 1988. In that year, however, twelve thousand miles away, several coaches full of Slav-Macedonian Australians were driving the six hundred miles from Melbourne to Sydney to join in a few seconds of confrontation with President Sartzetakis. They and their Greek-Australian targets knew well what struggle was being fought. Even some of the general Australian public were expected by their press to have a reasonable insight into events. How had this passion arisen on the geographical periphery of the problem, while its Balkan

centre remained calm? I have a historical reconstruction to offer on the Australian side of the comparison.

The history of the Macedonian problem in Australia is competently narrated from the Slavic viewpoint in Peter Hill's popularising *The Macedonians in Australia*. Tasos Tamis's *The immigration and settlement of Macedonian Greeks in Australia* has more academic pretensions and is longer, containing much useful material in a somewhat undigested form. In fact the events differ little from the two viewpoints, despite variation in technical terms, motivations and judgements. A final item of bibliography is Loring Danforth's *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic nationalism in a transnational world*. Danforth deals with the international problem from its European end: but for destructive pressures at a personal level he uses two visits he made to Melbourne. Danforth combines careful anthropological theory, much of it illuminating, with unexpectedly partisan writing, showing what can only be described as pro-Slavic prejudice. This leads him, for example, to include emotional detail almost exclusively from the Slavic viewpoint. He is one of several academics I know who support the Slavic side as the underdog, powerless against the might of the Greek propaganda machine. The picture of Greece as a powerful international bully is one I still find it hard to recognise – but in an era of Eastern European poverty, fragmentation and impotence, it is an image that cannot be ignored.

Before the Second World War, most migrants coming to Australia from the Southern Balkans were from islands – more than half from the three small islands of Ithaki, Kythera and Kastellorizo. There were few migrants from Greek Macedonia and the FYROM area. Subsequent research has revealed a few moments of hostility between supporters of Greece and Bulgaria, in terms of the antagonism shown in the first decades of this century. Closer analysis still has found some cases in the thirties of a change in support on the Slavic side, especially in Perth, from Bulgaria to a future independent Macedonia. Changes of names are a useful index of national identification. For example, a person might arrive in Australia with the Greek-imposed name Petropoulos but use the name Petroff (apparently a more

Bulgarian spelling than Petrov), and then change his name officially to the more Slav-Macedonian Petrovski.⁵

But the most significant period of the development of the quarrel was from the mid-forties to the mid-fifties. This was of course the moment at which Tito established the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, turning what was primarily an academic discourse of Macedonian separateness into a broad basis for national identification. I am sure this was the most significant cause of increased polarisation in Australia. But other factors must be borne in mind:

- During the war, Bulgarian troops were the occupying power in much of Northern Greece. Their insensitivity tended to disappoint previous supporters and make them seek another identification.

- Several villages in Greek Macedonia with migrants in Australia were badly treated or even destroyed by one side or another in the Greek Civil War. This terrible news from home had serious effects on loyalties, varying according to circumstances.

- Among the earliest post-war migrants to Australia from the Southern Balkans were many politicised by Civil War experiences. Most had been on the side of the leftists, and the majority of these had the FYROM language as their first. Their stories formed much of the material on the issue put in the public domain on the Slavic side before the explosion of the early nineties. Their biographies vary: some fought from the start for an independent Macedonia, following the then policy of the Greek Communist Party. Others, especially those whose first language was Greek, joined the leftists as the result of their political orientation, with no thought of a change in Greece's borders. Whatever the original motives, supporters of the left-wing struggle from the area of Macedonia – or at least many prominent cases in Australia – ended up with an obsession against the Greek state. They often claim that their attitude results from mistreatment by the Greek army, and tell atrocity stories, which it is not in my power to check. Most of them fled during or after the war across Greece's northern border, and from

⁵ Danforth, pp. 160-3.

there (if they had relatives in Australia) applied for migration there in the early fifties.⁶

- There were a few supporters of the Greek government army whose lives in Northern Greece were made uncomfortable by the events of the war, leading to migration to Australia. I have no idea how many: I happen to know two personally. For these, of course, the very idea of an independent Macedonia was a betrayal of what they and the Greek nation had fought for.

When these groups arrived in Australia they joined previous Macedonian clubs, where, as stated before, Greek vs. Bulgarian antagonisms were being replaced by Greek vs. Slav-Macedonian tension. The new arrivals brought these lines of division to the centre of Greek-Australian life. But it would be a mistake to assume that the problem immediately took on the Athens vs. Skopje orientation we might predict from subsequent events. One virtue of Danforth's book is that he analyses the pressures at work now on the sense of identification of Australian migrants from Florina, and comes up with a picture of mind-bending complexity.⁷ If one extends the geographical focus beyond Florina and also tries to examine developments of these pressures over time, the complexity increases still further.

Probably the main axes of division were the following:

- Political left and right, the main fault-line of the Greek Civil War.

- The old Greek vs. Bulgarian antagonism and a new Bulgarian vs. Slav-Macedonian split as well as the Greek vs. Slav-Macedonian division which would predominate.

- Greek language versus Slavic language, largely fought out over the language of liturgy in disputed churches and of the minutes of disputed organisations. This division did not mirror Greek vs. Slav-Macedonian conflict over ethnic identification, for many Slavic-speakers identified with Greece and a few Greek-speakers rediscovered an allegiance to a Slavic background.

- Geographical origin: townspeople were more likely to favour Greece, those from mountain villages were more likely to support an independent Macedonian state.

⁶ Tamis, pp. 177-90.

⁷ Danforth, pp. 212-47.

- Original provenance: descendants of earlier inhabitants of the area, even if Greek-speaking, might respond to appeals in the name of Macedonian solidarity. Descendants of "foreigners", Pontian refugees or officials from the south, had no interest in Macedonian identity.

- Religious background: those whose local churches had followed the patriarch of Constantinople were more likely to have Greek sympathies, while a Slavic orientation was often connected with the Exarchate, the independent Bulgarian church founded in 1870.

- Finally one may mention complexities connected with the state of Yugoslavia: some diplomats tried to divert to Belgrade loyalties generated by Skopje, while Stalin's split with Tito in 1948 had caused confusion in many Communist circles.

All these complexities also existed, of course, in the post-war Balkans, but suppressed beneath the conformist pressures of post-Civil War Greece and Communist Yugoslavia. On both sides of the border all the resources of the modern state were being used to create homogenous citizen bodies each with a single language and set of national traditions. Furthermore, the border was a version of the Iron Curtain, which seemed set immovably for ever. The streams of material from Skopje designed to inculcate a Macedonian nationality were a considerable threat to Greece. But in the Cold War period there was a natural tendency to regard them as communist games played beyond the Iron Curtain and therefore not significant. There was some truth in this view: much post-war Yugoslav propaganda was designed to prevent its southern republic from slipping towards Bulgaria. There was not much official contact across the Greek-Yugoslav frontier, and what there was was generally polite, with no real engagement.

In Australia, however, there was no question of a border. The material of Slav-Macedonian nationalism disseminated from Skopje inspired those living in the same streets, often even in the same families as Greek migrants, whom it deeply shocked. The politicised post-war migrants also played a large role both in setting up and in fracturing the structures of Australian-Greek public life, which would later welcome the mass migration of the later fifties and sixties.

What is more, the process of acculturation into an Australian identity did not operate in the same way as in Greece or Yugoslavia. From the beginning the content was entirely dissimilar, with British historical and geographical focuses, and the nationalist pressure less, loosely based as it was on distant British patterns. But as time went on Australia began to undergo a conversion from a British colony with old-fashioned traditions to a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, which was finally proclaimed in the early seventies. Then, if you were not of English descent, it became important to have another, non-Australian homeland and identity. Money became available from Canberra for the cultivation of your other tradition – its language, folklore and whatever else you thought important. Greek-Australians, for example, were encouraged to maintain pride in their Greekness and foster it: the university department where I work has benefited greatly from this policy. But in terms of this paper, multiculturalism increased the pressures on migrants from the Macedonian area. First, it was necessary to enrol oneself under one of several mutually exclusive banners, particularly when invited to multicultural day at the children's school. Second, the banner labelled "Greece" or "Macedonia" was placed in a kind of competition with other banners: "Italy", "China", "Lebanon", "Ireland", and earnest teachers expected a full national tradition. I suspect that many urgent requests for information must have been sent from Melbourne to Skopje for this reason. Danforth wonders at one point why children of migrants from Florina could not simply become Australians: one answer is that non-English Australian migrants increasingly need another nationality to satisfy all the demands of *Australian* society.

I began this paper with a picture of Greek public life in Sydney, concentrating on real estate and inter-club rivalry, particularly when several clubs claim to represent the same part of the Greek world. I invite you to imagine the impact of the Macedonian crisis of the last fifty years on clubs and brotherhoods from Macedonia.⁸ At first it was just one more reason for fragmentation, like those which have threatened to

⁸ A narrative of the bewildering developments in Macedonian clubs in Melbourne is given by Tamis, pp. 131-72.

divide most local clubs from time to time. Strains appeared within them, they split, attempts were made at recombination and so forth. Gradually, however causes for division connected with the Macedonian issue predominated over all others and became the major structural basis for fragmentation, affecting all Northern Greeks and Pontians too.

Among the results are: violence in churches and on club premises; divisions in families, especially at baptisms, weddings and other rites of passage; disputes over buildings which might lead to lawsuits, sometimes appealed to higher courts, regardless of expense or sense; endless arguments over language (in liturgy or in meetings), identity and the ownership of symbols and tradition, conducted by mutually unintelligible rules. Again, the Athens-Skopje axis was not the only division, for the best known lawsuit was between some Slav-Macedonians originally from Greece and the Bulgarian church, to which they had made over their church building to remove it from Greek control.⁹ Other Australians watched these activities in disbelief: but the only high-profile influence outside Greek and Slavic circles was on soccer: for years crowd violence made it hard to hold games in Melbourne between Preston Macedonia (the Slavic team) and Heidelberg Alexander (the Greek Macedonians) or South Melbourne Hellas, the Greek side. Two non-Melbourne Greek teams in the national league also became involved. There was often as much tension and disturbance in these fixtures as in those between local Serbian and Croatian clubs.

In the eighties, there were signs that the conflict was dying down, perhaps out of sheer exhaustion. A few heroic individuals still managed to keep alive village brotherhoods spanning the Greek-Slavic divisions. Generally, however, extremists on both sides kept to their own organisations and rarely met. This relative stability was the status quo when tension rose in Europe in the late eighties and became a full-blown international crisis in the early nineties with the collapse of Yugoslavia. This has turned the wary hostility of the rival clubs into active propaganda crusades on behalf of their respective national causes.

⁹ Tamis, pp. 276-83.

I hope I have convinced you that the crisis has had a different form in Australia from that on the northern Greek borders. The last thing I wish to discuss is the differences between the two cases with regard to possible solutions. In Europe, I have a sense that common interest and the pressures of neighbours and allies is imposing a general solution at a political level without solving all the questions of detail. A compromise name will be found for FYROM, ever firmer declarations will be made against changing borders, provocative symbols will be outlawed, as has already happened with the old FYROM flag, but there will be left an area of disagreement, mainly historical issues, where the two sides will beg to differ. The peoples of Greece and FYROM will glare at each other a little across the border, while getting on with the business of raising their respective standards of living. If this occurs, will it solve the Macedonian problem in Australia?

I think not. The Australian quarrel is more about identity than political power, and a political compromise will leave the identity issue unresolved. Many Greeks in Australia have been told for fifty years by Slavic neighbours that Alexander the Great was not a Greek but a Macedonian, and have claimed in return with equal force that he was Greek. Others from Greek Macedonia have seen with dismay maps on all sorts of garments and publications from Slavic sources that place their old homes in a Greater Macedonia, not in Greece. Above all, there is the issue of the name: clubs of Macedonians identifying with Greece have been repeatedly told that they have no right to use the name Macedonia without adopting a non-Greek identity. These issues are of an importance which cannot be sidestepped. Each of them is seen in terms permitting only black and white solutions, Greek or Macedonian. Many leaders on both sides, even those with little education, have learned a lot of history, and can argue with subtlety about Macedonia's ancient borders or nineteenth-century demographics. But the questions to be answered are always simple – are they Greeks or Macedonians? Is it possible to be both? Once they have chosen an identity, do they have the right to link it with the ancient Macedonian world-conquerors? Over such issues, the upcoming political compromise will be of little help.

The root of the problem is an important need of the Slav-Macedonians. Those who were equally alienated from Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria had no satisfactory identity. Tito, when he popularised the label "Macedonia", was playing cynical politics, but he was also filling an important vacuum which needed filling, particularly for migrants in this category outside Yugoslavia. In Australia, Tito has been splendidly successful. The Slav-Macedonian identity is one of the best-maintained of all the elements of Australian multiculturalism. As a culture which has had to make its way against constant hostility, it is inextricably linked, in its Australian form at least, with a series of arguments for its own existence. It has been said that to argue a Macedonian issue with a half-educated Slav-Macedonian resembles arguing a religious point with a Jehovah's Witness. It is hard even to exploit what could be a strong argument for Greek-Australians – that their opponents use two different historical scenarios to explain their own existence. A majority would agree with the FYROM President Gligorov, that their identity is Slavic, arriving in the Balkans in the sixth century AD. However there is a minority, vocal at least in Australia, who claim that the population of the area of Macedonia has been stable since antiquity – that it was first partly hellenised by the Greeks, then turned Slavic by the Slavs, subsequently affected by other conquerors and migrants, like the Albanians, and is only now standing up for what it really is – Macedonian. The results of this line of argument are very positive for FYROM: Alexander and FYROM's large Albanian minority are both included in the identity. Yet when the weaknesses in this argument are exposed, some take refuge in the alternative Slavic view, and deny any contradiction. The need for an identity is strong enough to justify in practice an almost explicit arrangement and rearrangement of history.

The Greek Council in Sydney is fighting back by giving its own people similarly detailed arguments on the issue. In the Greek school system of Sydney, classes on Alexander the Great are now primarily designed to demonstrate how Greek he was. I would concentrate, if I were involved, on Alexander's role in spreading mainstream Greek culture around the world, rather than a hypothetically different Macedonian culture, with the result that is hard to use him as an anti-Greek symbol. Instead,

Greek voices seem to be responding directly to Slavic questioning of Alexander's descent and language, accepting their opponents' choice of ideological battleground.

No rules of debate between the two sides have been established to give any chance of progress. The history of the two languages, the key to identification, is so different. A Greek reading a transcription of a Linear B tablet nearly 4,000 years old can say "This is us! These people are Greeks like us!" Critics may be found to ask whether this is a meaningful statement, but there is no-one to claim Linear B for another modern identity. By rules which seem natural to most Greeks (and certainly to me), some modern Greek ethnic identification is possible with these and any subsequent Greek speakers. By contrast, the President of FYROM on a visit to Bulgaria finds it controversial to claim even his own speaking voice for his country's language, against the counter-claim of Bulgarian. This Greek advantage in historical depth is so overwhelming that it is of little use in the propaganda war with FYROM. It drives the argument on to other levels and permits unexpected jumps of logic. The most annoying of these I have met in Australia is the assumption that any doubt cast on the Greek case can be used to validate the Slavic alternative. Somehow, if the Greekness of the northern part of Philip and Alexander's Macedonia can be questioned in the fourth century BC, this establishes a connection between the Macedonian name and Slavic migrants who entered the area a thousand years later.

FYROM is recognised as a sovereign state around the world, and, like all other states, needs a past. It is surely dangerous, as well as unfair, to set the rules of popular ownership of the past in such a way that it can acquire no traditions earlier than the twentieth century. The only long-term solution, in my view, must be a relaxation of the absoluteness of national traditions – the recognition of shades of grey beside the black and white of which I have complained more than once in this paper. I should like to dream of a day when a national museum in Skopje will have an exhibit on the story of the battle of Kossovo, in which FYROM will share as an adjunct to Serbia, and a room devoted to Tsar Samuel, whom they will share as a second to Bulgaria. I am not sure what will be in the Albanian gallery. The next room will contain one or two of the smaller finds from Vergina, with

grateful thanks to the Greek government for their generous loan. This will be in recognition of FYROM's close geographical connection to Ancient Macedonia, which makes her link to Alexander closer than that of any state but Greece. After all, Slavic speech has been heard in the Macedonian area as long as English has been heard in England. The identity of FYROM will be as a predominately Slavic state with special links to neighbouring nations, especially to its south, and a subordinate but significant share in several traditions.

The Macedonian crisis may be dealt with in Europe by a political compromise: but only a real solution to the problem of the FYROM identity will significantly alleviate the crisis in Australia. The use of the past to construct an identity is usually employed for the ends of divisive nationalism: it is time to appropriate it to heal and unite rather than to divide. Unfortunately, I cannot at present write any convincing scenario to lead to this desired end from the present polarised positions.

University of Sydney