

BALKAN NATIONALISM(S)
AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Dimitris Stamatopoulos (Editor)

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RENAMING THE BALKAN MAP: THE CHANGE OF TOPONYMS IN GREEK MACEDONIA (1909-1928)

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From the early efforts for administrative organization in the years of King Otto's reign to the establishment of the "Committee for the study of the toponyms of Greece" in 1909 and the final resolution of the "problem" in the 1920s, important changes took place in the orientation and pace of change regarding the issue of toponyms. Toponyms were considered proof of the historic evolution of the Greek territory and their treatment acquired the features of a political issue since the creation of the Greek Kingdom. However, the need to consolidate the territory and population of the "New Countries" in the beginning of the twentieth century sparked the definitive resolution of the toponyms issue. This trajectory illustrates the priorities of the Greek policy and the problematic developed around the necessity of a new toponymic chart which would showcase "the unity of Hellenism in time and place."

The newly-founded kingdom's interest in the "Re-establishment of the old names of Greece" dates from 1833, when the Bavarian Regency selected "well-sounding" names from the ancient and Byzantine geography for the multicommunal municipalities created, in an effort to link the new Greek state with ancient Greece and to break with the Ottoman past.¹ In particular, in the organization of local self-administration, a selective renaming of Administrations, Subdivisions and the capitals of Municipalities was effected.² In this

This text is largely based on a prior published article in the journal *Τα Ιστορικά (Historics)*, issue 52 (6/2010), entitled «Καινούργια Ονόματα – Καινούργιος Χάρτης: οι μετονομασίες των οικισμών της Ελλάδας, 1909-1928» ("New names – New Map: the renaming of settlements in Greece, 1909-1928"), p. 3-26.

¹ In June 1834, an anonymous reader of the newspaper *Σωτήρ (Savior)* in Nafplio, sent a letter to the newspaper to congratulate the "worthy work of the Regency" for the regeneration of Greece, relating this regeneration with the replacement of barbaric and cacophonous toponyms with Greek ones from the "glorious antiquity." See Newspaper *Σωτήρ (Savior)*, Issue No. 45, Nafplio, June 21st 1834.

² Sporadic name changes were made throughout the nineteenth century. The following were gleaned indicatively: Zitouni to Lamia, Salona to Amfissa, Vostitsa to Aigion, Ntropolisita to Tripoli, and Vrachori (Braum-Chor) to Agrinion. With a Royal Decree on 11/9/1843, Otto set up a

way, the toponyms of the newly-founded kingdom were changed, at least on an institutional level, without specific organization and systematic justification.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the issue of toponyms was linked to the administrative organization of the state and the reaffirmation of its national features. Although it would be exaggerated to speak of an extended public discussion concerning the maintenance or the change of toponyms, it was in this period that the general framework which shaped the ensuing treatment of the matter was formed. Its main element consisted of gradually modifying toponyms from "mere geographical terms into political slogans" around the time of the development of Balkan nationalism and the formation of frontier lines in the Balkan Peninsula. The incorporation of Epirus and Macedonia after 1913 and Thrace, after 1919-1920 into the Greek state, and the Asia Minor Catastrophe with the subsequent population exchange constituted the "national time which defined national territory."³

In fact, roughly one century after its establishment, the Greek state was compelled to regulate a pending matter created during the Middle Ages by the "streams of savage and barbaric ethnicities" within "its national territory."⁴ The year 1909 marked the beginning of the systematization of national policy in relation to the question of toponyms. In June 1909, the Royal Decree "on the establishment of the Committee for studying the toponyms of Greece and verifying their historical background" was published. The Committee under formation would give opinions for the change of "foreign" or "cacophonous" names which were devoid of historical value as well as of toponyms which had been renamed after the foundation of the Greek state but which, in the meantime, had been found to be inappropriate. In accordance with the introductory report, a uniform system would be applied for selecting new names, the main element of which would be a systematic scientific study. The Minister of the Interior, N. D. Levidis, considered the setting up of the Committee and the change of toponyms to be imperative since "foreign elements" which had been introduced into toponyms had displaced "older Greek names." "Foreign" toponyms were thus connected to "national disasters and humiliations."

committee composed by G. Ainiana, K. Asopio, A. Ragavi and I. Nikolaidi Levadea, with the goal of finding, verifying, and approving toponyms that would derive, not only from ancient geography, but also from great men of the "old and modern History." See Nikos A. Veis, «Πρώτες κρατικές φροντίδες για τα τοπωνυμικά της χώρας μας», ("First state provisions for the toponyms of our country"), *Φιλόλογική Πρωτοχρονιά (Literary New Year's Day)*, Athens, 1952, p. 111-112. Moreover, in 1884 a committee was formed to name the streets of the city of Athens. This committee was created with the objective that "the names of the streets of the capital city of Hellenism will refer to glorious historical acts and to the great men of the nation," Benaki Museum, Archive of N.G. Politis, folder 3.5.

³ Pantelis E. Lekkas, *Το παιχνίδι με τον χρόνο. Εθνικισμός και Νεοτεχνικότητα (The game against time: Nationalism and Modernity)*, Athens 2001, p. 219.

⁴ Athanasios Stageiritis, *Ηπειρωτικά ήτοι Ιστορία και Γεωγραφία της Ηπείρου Παλαιά και Νέα (Ipeirotika: the History and Geography of Epirus, Old and New)*, Vienna 1819, p. 318.

As a consequence, their replacement appeared to be “complementary to the liberation and the suppression of any trace of former national mishaps.” “Barbaric” toponyms had a “damaging educational impact” on the population as they “tended to shrink and diminish its spirit”; mainly, however, they provided “a false suspicion of the ethnic composition of the population of those villages,” the “foreign names of which could be understood as indicating a foreign provenance.”⁵

These directives were reflected in the composition of the Committee, which was appointed in late May 1909. Under the presidency of N. G. Politis, the work of finding “fine-sounding and beautiful” names, was undertaken by prominent university professors, among them Sp. Lampros (historian), G. Chatzidakis (linguist), Gr. Vernardakis (philologist), Chr. Tsountas (archaeologist), and P. Kavvadias (archaeologist), antiquity curators, scholars, like D. Gr. Kampouroglou and K. Papamichalopoulos, as well as top officials of the administration who had undertaken census and cartographic responsibilities.⁶ The Royal Decree stated the total problem and its solution in accordance with the prevailing perception: “cacophonous” and “foreign” toponyms had to be replaced with “good-sounding Greek ones” so that the inhabitants could get used to them and use them in order to stop allegations about the ethnic composition of the population. Thus, together with “barbaric” toponyms, the years of Turkish occupation would pass into oblivion and the Greek Kingdom would be protected from “outside threats.” In conclusion, the aim was none other than the hellenisation of the map and the invigoration of the national spirit.

Despite its ambitious proclamations, the Committee of 1909 did not demonstrate substantial work during the first years of its service. Its chairman admitted that “the work of the Committee consisted of fruitless studies and recommendations for name changes that were never executed.”⁷ Moreover, the administrative reform of 1912 essentially marginalized the Committee, since the matter of renaming was transferred to local Community and Municipi-

⁵ *Government Gazette*, Issue. 125, June 8th 1909.

⁶ *Government Gazette*, Issue. 125, June 8th 1909. The Royal Decree stipulated the details for the function of the Committee. The Ministry of Interior chose the Chairman and the Secretary and the possibility of meetings at the seats of local subcommittees was provided. These, however, were, most probably, never established. The other members of the Committee were: Ar. Vampas, department head of the Ministry of Interior, Klon. Stefanos, director of the Anthropological Museum, G. Sotiriadis, Antiquity Curator, M. Chrysochoos, cartographer, K. N. Rados (secretary), professor of Naval History, G. Chomatianos (secretary) director of the Census Service. The composition of the 1909 Committee changed due to the death of some of its members (Klon. Stefanos, Spyridon Lampros, Nikolaos Politis) and the resignation of others (Gr. Vernardakis, D. Gr. Kampouroglous). The new members appointed were: Ad. Adamantios, Simos Menardos, Socratis Kougeas, University professors, Stilpon Kyriakidis, director of Folklore Archive, and K. Amanatos and I. Vogiatzidis, editors of the Historical Lexicon of Greek Language published by the Academy of Athens.

⁷ N. G. Politis, *Γνωμοδοτήσεις περί μετονομασίας συνοικισμών και κοινοτήτων* (*Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities*), Athens, 1920, p. 8.

pal Councils. Specifically, in 1912, before the first Balkan War started, Law ΔNZ “on the establishment of Municipalities and Communities” brought fundamental changes in the municipal organization of the country, as well as the toponymic map.⁸ The administrative reform of 1912 dismantled the Municipalities which had been set up after 1833, turning them into Communities and allowing the emergence of a colorful *mosaic* of “bizarre” toponyms on the surface of the administrative map.⁹

One of the first duties of the new Municipal and Community Authorities was the selection of new names. The response from Municipal and Community Councils was impressive; the “barbaric or little-known” names of villages were replaced by other better-known and “at least ancient.”¹⁰ The Chairman of the Committee strongly opposed this development, stressing the inadequacy of the local Authorities in relation to their scientific resources, as well as the inevitable parochial conflicts concerning archaic names.¹¹ Under this pressure, and most probably due to multiple problems caused by the new procedure, the Ministry of Interior amended Law ΔNZ in order to ensure that the Committee would supervise all renaming proceedings.¹²

The elimination of multicomunal municipalities brought back to the surface the issue of “foreign and cacophonous names,” yet while the Committee had already been formed, the legislator didn’t assign the selection of the

⁸ According to the new Law, only the capital cities of counties and cities with a population of more than ten thousand residents would constitute “Municipalities,” a development which meant that smaller cities, towns, villages and settlements would constitute “Communities.” See *Official Gazette of the Government of the Greek Kingdom*, Issue. 58, 14 February 1912.

⁹ Leonidas F. Kallivretakis, «Ιστορική έρευνα των οικισμών της Ελλάδας, ερευνητικά ζητούμενα και προβλήματα των πηγών» (“Historical research on Greek settlements, research objectives and problems with bibliographical sources”) in *Πληθυσμοί και οικισμοί του ελληνικού χώρου, ιστορικά μελέτηματα*, (*Populations and settlements of the Greek territory, historical essays*), Athens, 2003, p. 24.

¹⁰ The Law provided Councils with the power of deciding on, not only the act of renaming, but also the new name of the Municipality or Community, while, according to article 8, if 2/3 of the members agreed on the name, the decision would be considered final. It could only be amended after an appeal to the Prefect. N. G. Politis, «Τοπωνυμικά» (“Toponymics”), *Λαογραφία (Folklore)*, volume D (1912-1913), p. 572, and N.G. Politis, *Γνωμοδοτήσεις περί μετονομασίας συνοικισμών και κοινοτήτων (Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities)*, Athens, 1920, p. 10.

¹¹ N. G. Politis, «Τοπωνυμικά» (“Toponymics”), *Λαογραφία (Folklore)*, volume D (1912-1913), p. 573, and N.G. Politis, *Γνωμοδοτήσεις περί μετονομασίας συνοικισμών και κοινοτήτων (Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities)*, Athens, 1920, p. 10.

¹² According to Law 641 of 1915, the article 8 of Law ΔNZ was amended. As a result, the Community Council was obliged to submit its decision regarding the naming of the Community to the Ministry and notify the Committee, regardless of whether the decision was unanimous or not. The name would change only if the Committee advised in favor of the change. Moreover, even the name changes that had already been made would be reconsidered, and if the Committee expressed an objection, the change would be revoked. *Official Gazette of the Government of the Greek Kingdom*, Issue. 67, February 14, 1915.

new names to it. Even after the amendment of Law ΔΝΖ, the role of the Committee was mostly confirmatory. The actions of the Committee during the 1910s are difficult to determine, since there is only minimal published documentation and the unpublished material remains inaccessible. Essentially, the only source available for this era is Nikolaos Politis's document *Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities*, in which the decisions of the Committee concerning renaming requests by Communities are published. This document reveals the slow pace at which the Committee operated, since each decision was based on thorough research and on the desire to find a new toponym that would originate in matching the ancient with the modern geography; a desire that proved to be inapplicable.¹³

In essence, the Committee had a strictly advisory role and judged, sometimes negatively, the proposals of the Municipal and Community Authorities. The main criteria for the approval of a proposal were its "Greekness" and its "historicity," so that the new names would be "fine-sounding," "Greek," and as "uncommon" as possible. The concept of "euphony," in the context of that particular era, embodied everything that was considered nationally beneficial, and rejected as "cacophonous" anything that might reference opposing or divergent ethnic and linguistic traditions.¹⁴ In spite of the Committee being set up and functioning, the change of toponyms remained in the margins of domestic political life, connected, as it was, mainly with a tendency to return to and search for the ancient Greek culture on a literary level. It did not constitute a political question which had to be confronted immediately.

The change of the frontier line of the Greek state, following the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, signaled the expansion of Greek administrative institutions into the "New Countries" in accordance with the legal and administrative framework of the times.¹⁵ In 1917, Law No 1051 approved institutionally

¹³ Indicative of the research that the members of the Committee conducted is the letter of Stilpon Kyriakidis to Nikolaos Politis on April 19, 1920. Benaki Museum, Archive of N.G. Politis, folder 8.4 Correspondence/ Greeks K (b).

¹⁴ For the purpose of providing an example, we present some of the Committee's proposals/consultations regarding name changes: *Domvraini*: the Committee supported that it should not be renamed because it had been established in the history of the Nation since Karaiskakis put the Turks under siege for several days during the winter of 1826. *Granitsa*: according to the Committee, the need for renaming was undeniable because the toponym was both common and Slavic. *Kapraina*: the request of the Community Council to replace the name of the village with that of the ancient city of Chaironia, which rested in the same location, was approved since "grammatical reasons could never justify the retaining of the intruding name instead of the ancient and glorious one of Chaironia." See N. G. Politis, *Γνωμοδοτήσεις περί μετονομασίας συνοικισμών και κοινοτήτων (Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities)*, Athens 1920, p. 21-23.

¹⁵ Law ΔΡΛΔ of February 1913 constituted the first effort to organize the administrative system of the "New Countries." Crete, Macedonia, Aegean islands, and Epirus formed the General Administrations, while Samos along with Ikaria, formed one Administration. Every district of the General Administrations was divided in Municipalities and Sub-Divisions, according to the Turkish administrative system. See *Official Gazette of the Government of the Greek Kingdom*, Issue.

the procedure of name-giving already in force in the rest of the kingdom.¹⁶ In Macedonia and Epirus, the communities with a "foreign" or "bad-sounding" name were the overwhelming majority and the need to rename them was considered imperative. Various bodies and institutions were mobilized, pressing the central government for an immediate solution to the problem. The response of the Ministry of the Interior was not commensurate. From 1915 to 1920, the Committee approved 120 name changes, only one of which concerned Macedonia, while none concerned Thrace.¹⁷

In 1919, the Committee issued a circular, stressing the need to speed up the whole process, as the foreign names of settlements "contaminate and mar the face of our beautiful country" and allow for disadvantageous ethnological conclusions. Conclusions, indeed, which could be used mainly to the detriment of the *Greekness* of the part of Macedonia included in the Greek state. In 1919, it had become obvious to the Committee that the ancient Greek map which had been attempted to be reconstituted in the nineteenth century through the name-giving to municipalities, could not be made to match the contemporary network of settlements. On the other hand, the toponyms of the Middle Ages did not testify only to the Byzantine magnificence but also to the Slavic, Albanian, and Turkish tribes which had settled in these lands. Fallmerayer's theories were based on a reading of that map. The circular of 1919 demonstrates the determination for the creation of a new toponymic map which would be more "neo-Greek." During the next few years, the ensuing political changes would militate in favor of this decision, speeding up the process of renaming. Essentially, the Committee had failed: since its establishment in 1909 and until 1920, there had been effected about 200 changes of toponyms, a number too small considering the size of the "problem," which becomes even smaller compared to the totality of toponymic changes which took place from 1926 to 1928, changing radically the toponymic map of the country.

41, Athens, March 2nd 1913, and Michail G. Choulariakis, *Γεωγραφική, Διοικητική και Πληθυσμιακή Εξέλιξις της Ελλάδος, 1821-1972 (Geographic, Administrative and Population Development in Greece), 1821-1972*, volume C, Athens, 1975, p. 77. With Law 293 of 1914 the force of the laws "regarding the constitution of Municipalities and Communities" was extended to the "New Countries," while, during the same year, Law 524 clarified some collateral issues. This was followed by a series of Laws and Decrees that complemented and amended previous regulations. See *Official Gazette of the Government of the Greek Kingdom*, Issue. 278, Athens, September 30th 1914, and Issue. 404, Athens, December 31st 1914.

¹⁶ Every Community and Municipality would be given the name of the settlement or the town it belonged to, unless there was more than one settlement, in which case it would be given the name of the settlement where the local government was seated. If there was an ancient name, that name would be selected. If replacing a toponym was deemed necessary, the existing procedure for submitting an application to the Committee for renaming a toponym would have to be followed. See N. D. Lianopoulos, *Διοικητική Νομοθεσία (Administrative Legislation)*, volume A, Athens 1925, p. 571.

¹⁷ N. G. Politis, *Γνωμοδοτήσεις περί μετονομασίας συνοικισμών και κοινοτήτων (Consultations regarding the renaming of settlements and communities)*, Athens 1920, p. 163-167.

The annexation of Eastern and Western Thrace into the Greek Kingdom in 1919 signaled the actual transition of the name-changing process from the level of scientific study to that of urgent political decision. The toponymic change in Thrace did not follow the lines set by the Committee's instructions, although at first there was an attempt to abide by them, through the setting up of a special three-member Committee. In 1922, the Ministry of the Interior proceeded overnight to the radical change of toponyms as "it was not an arbitrary alteration, but a restoration of historical accuracy in the toponyms of this country." As a result, 1,442 towns and villages out of a total of 1,556 were renamed.¹⁸ More specifically: Eastern and Western Thrace consisted of six prefectures, 28 administrative subdivisions, and 1,556 towns and villages out of which only 114 villages maintained their names just before the Asia Minor Catastrophe.¹⁹

Gradually, different concepts concerning the ways and pace of toponym changing, as well as the basic purposes which should be served by them, were developing. The fluid situation in Macedonia and Thrace was combined with a period of crisis in the internal political life, which was fed by long-standing military entanglement. These new territories were still disputed by neighboring countries, while their foreign-speaking populations constituted another factor of destabilization. The change of toponyms, at least regarding the settlement network, appeared as the fastest and more effective solution in order to Hellenize the map on an administrative level at first. The need to complete the process as quickly as possible was obvious, yet not always attainable. The important thing here is that the whole process was not connected to the Committee any longer. Political decisions had bypassed the literary pursuits of its members.

"National" reasons prevailed in order to uproot within a minimal time frame, the existing toponyms, along with the populations; as a result, in Macedonia for example, ninety per cent of the settlements changed denomination. The intensification of the phenomenon was accompanied by a change in procedure. The legislative Decree of September 17, 1926, provided an institutional underpinning to the whole process. Under the responsibility of the local prefect, subcommittees consisting of professors, antiquity curators and administrative employees were constituted with opinion-giving authority.²⁰ They would draw up catalogues of name changes and would support their proposals

¹⁸ K. Geragas, *Αναμνήσεις εκ Θράκης, 1920-1922 (Recollections from Thrace, 1920-1922)*, Athens 1926, p. 134.

¹⁹ General Administration of Thrace, Interior Division, Πίναξ των πόλεων και των χωριών της Θράκης, εμφανιών τα παλαιά και νέα ονόματα και τον πληθυσμόν αυτών κατά την τελευταίαν απογραφήν (*Table of Thrace towns and villages depicting their old and new names and their population during the last Census*), Andrianoupoli 1922.

²⁰ N. D. Lianopoulos, *Διοικητική Νομοθεσία (Administrative Legislation)*, volume B, Athens 1928, p. 406-409, and Michael G. Chouliarakis, *Γεωγραφική, Διοικητική και Πληθυσμιακή Εξέλιξις της Ελλάδος, 1821-1972 (Geographic, Administrative and Population Development in Greece, 1821-1972)*, volume C, Athens, 1975, p. 256.

for the adoption of a new name. The Committee would amend these proposals and would send them to the Ministry, where a final approval would mean the change of the relevant seal and signaling of the corresponding settlement. The compliance of the community members to the changed name was compulsory; any use of the old name was prohibited, while the imposition of a fine was also provided for.²¹

Although time-consuming at first glance, the whole process actually took a mere fifteen days to complete.²² The hurried nature of the name changes can be also seen in the usual practice of translating “foreign-like toponyms” or in the corruption of existing names towards a more Greek-like version.²³ The following examples are indicative of how toponyms were renamed in inland Macedonia:

Gerakartsi → *Gerakareio*
G(k)oumentza → *Goumenitsa*
Liparinovo → *Liparon*
Mantalevo → *Mandalon*
Gioupevon → *Gypsochorion*
Mantar → *Manitari*
Kolovon → *Kalyva*.

It is evident that the development and outcome of the renaming process was not in the spirit of the initial intentions of the 1909 Committee. Empirical evidence proves the extent of the phenomenon: between 1926 and 1928, 2,479 name changes took place in the whole of the Greek state, most of which in Macedonia. To get an idea of the number of toponym changes that took place during this period, it is worth noting that in the entire country 4,075 name changes took place from 1913 to 1961; that means that more than half of them took place between 1926 and 1928.²⁴ Greek Macedonia was the centre of this activity. In the Prefecture of Drama, 201 name changes were

²¹ For the penalties imposed on residents who didn't “comply with new legislative measures,” see Tasos Kostopoulos, *Απαγορευμένη Γλώσσα (The forbidden language)*, Athens 2000, p. 146-147.

²² N. D. Lianopoulos, *Διοικητική Νομοθεσία (Administrative Legislation)*, volume B, Athens 1928, p. 406-409.

²³ Sp. Asdrachas's remark on this phenomenon is of particular interest. Referring to the paraphrasing or translation of foreign toponyms in Greek, he points out that these toponyms, take on new meanings and are misinterpreted: “misinterpretations and mistaken etymologies that derive from a standard intellectual demand, the meaning of names, while the historicity of names is an absent witness.” See: Spyros Asdrachas, «Λέξεις και Ήθη» (“Words and Morals”), *Ιστορικά Απεικασματα (Historical Images)*, Athens 1995, p. 139-140.

²⁴ All the numbers presented here were acquired by processing the database of the Department of Neohellenic Research (DNR) of the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF): “Name Changes of Settlements in Greece,” Scientific Supervisors: Dimitris Dimitropoulos – Leonidas Kallivretakis. The database is accessible online at <http://pandektis.ekt.gr/dspace/handle/123456789/38101>.

recorded in the period between 1926 and 1928, 110 in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, and 213 in the Prefecture of Kilkis.

More specifically, the quantitative study of publications on the census of 1913 and on the census of 1940 has demonstrated that in Macedonia the settlements appearing to have changed their toponyms reached a number of 1,409, and 84 were renamed more than once. The ratio is different if we take into account the fact that in 1940 a great number of villages which appeared in the *Enumeration of the inhabitants of the new provinces of Greece of the year 1913* (Publication of the Ministry of National Economy-Department of Statistics) had been destroyed or deserted. In 1940, 1,457 settlements out of 1,996 included in the 1913 publication were inhabited, i.e. 72.9 per cent of the settlements. Among these 1,457 settlements, 1,277 had been renamed at least once. As a consequence, the percentage of renamed and inhabited settlements in 1940 was close to 87.6 per cent.²⁵ However, renaming did not take place only in Macedonia and Thrace; the political decision for the change of the toponymic map touched the totality of the Greek territory.²⁶

Another fact that should be taken into account in the case of Macedonia is the abandoned or destroyed settlements. These settlements were mostly villages with a small, Turkish-speaking population (*machalades*), which were deserted after the departure of their Turkish residents, or the Bulgarian villages that were destroyed during the 1913-1918 period. The Carnegie report, for example, described the events following the Bulgarian defeat at the battle of Kilkis in June 1913, where, both the town and the 39 "Bulgarian villages" in the district were destroyed by the Greek army.²⁷

The part of the population of refugees which settled in Macedonia and Thrace favored the Hellenization of the toponyms of these regions. Indeed, the refugees were in favor of a radical reformation of the name map of Macedonia. As political supporters of the Venizelos party, the refugees welcomed the new names with relief, particularly when they projected their old homelands to the new country. The local "foreign-speaking population," however, considered these changes as a hostile move on the part of the central administration. The "linguistic integration" had to include toponyms. As a consequence, the renaming process of toponyms in Macedonia and Thrace can only

²⁵ See: Eleni Kyramargiou, *Οι μετονομασίες των οικισμών της Μακεδονίας, 1913-1940: ένας πίνακας* (*The Renaming of Settlements in Greek Macedonia, 1913-1940: a table*), dissertation, University of the Aegean, Mitilini 2003, p. 15.

²⁶ The decision for a final solution to the toponymic problem even influenced areas that had been part of the Greek state for more than a century. See Database of DNR/NHRF "Name Changes of Settlements in Greece."

²⁷ Spyros Karavas, «Περί κοινότητας ελληνικής εν Κιλκίς, 1901», ("Regarding the Greek Community in Kilkis, 1901"), *Αρχαιοτάξιο* (*Archeiotaxio*), volume 4 (2002), p. 3, and Tasos Kostopoulos, *Πόλεμος και Εθνοκάθαρση, Η ξεχασμένη πλευρά μιας δεκαετούς εθνικής εξόρμησης 1912-1922* (*War and Ethnic Cleansing: The forgotten side of a ten-year national campaign., 1912-1922*), Athens 2007, p. 50-52.

be viewed in combination with the care to linguistically Hellenize their populations.²⁸

The "operation" of renaming continued during the Metaxas dictatorship as well as in the post-war period. However, it never acquired the dimensions of 1926-1928, since the greatest part of settlements had been changed "on time." In parallel, after 1940, one can observe the phenomenon of renaming the already renamed settlements for reasons of "good sound and beauty" on the basis of the linguistic sentiment of the Greek language.²⁹ For example Gkimpovo, or Gkimnovo, north of Naousa, was renamed Lefkogeia in 1929, changed to New Strantzia in 1940, and has been established as Rodakinia since 1954. Gkropino (Gropino) would be renamed to Tropino, which was then renamed Valtoleivado during the 1940 Census, only to cast off that renaming in favor of the name Dafni twenty years later.

In 1929, the new map of Greece was ready: 2,479 villages had a different name which "sounded nice and was Greek." During the years of national integration, renaming had been a priority of a Greek state trying to homogenize and define its territory by eradicating the traces of the presence of population groups which constituted a disharmony in the historic-geographic continuum of the uniform Greek national state. The change in the map was accompanied by the completion of the exchange of populations, which meant that, in the greatest part of the inhabited territory, Greek speaking population was now prevalent. Through these two complementary processes, the sovereignty of the Greek state in Macedonia and Thrace was solidified. Toponyms changed in a fragmentary and hasty way, without, more often than not, exhaustive historic and linguistic study, under the pressure of the territorial acquisitions of the twentieth century, when the "Principle of Nationalities" was considered to find full justification on the diplomatic level. The whole effort constituted an inevitable nation-building process in the context of the homogenization and integration of the new regions within the national state.

The name changes embodied the various "moments" of the actual strategies of national integration. When, in 1909, the Royal Decree "on the establishment of the Committee for studying the toponyms of Greece and verifying their historical background" was published, the aim was to reconstitute the Ancient and Byzantine geography, to link the past with the present and to create a new toponymic map which would be "good-sounding, euphonic and Greek," where every toponym would be unique. The Committee had the authority to realize this task. Twenty years later, the toponym change had

²⁸ M. Triantafyllidis, *Η γλώσσα μας στα σχολεία της Μακεδονίας (Our language in Macedonian schools)*, Athens 1916 and T. Kostopoulos, *Η απαγορευμένη γλώσσα (The forbidden language)*, Athens 2000, p. 23-45.

²⁹ Regarding the relation and symbolism of language and toponyms, see Pantelis Lekkas, *Το παιχνίδι με τον χρόνο, Εθνικισμός και Νεοστερικότητα (The game against time, Nationalism and Modernity)*, Athens 2001, p. 239-244.

been accomplished. However, the 43 villages renamed Daphne, the 26 renamed Kallithea, the 19 renamed Aghios Nikolaos and the 15 renamed Aghia Paraskevi,³⁰ demonstrate a radical change in the original plan. This re-orientation was connected to the political decision for an immediate Hellenization of toponyms, and was accompanied by the conviction that even an "improper" Greek name was preferable to an existing Turkish or Slavic one. One way or the other, even when the occasional Committees were lucky enough to "discover" an ancient toponym in order to Hellenize the "foreign sounding" one, history was abused and historicity was destroyed. Because, quite simply, most of the times, the new toponym was neither related geographically to the ancient one, nor was it necessarily a "continuation" of the ancient one.

For the vast majority of the political and scholarly world of the twentieth century who supported the dominant narrative regarding the historic continuity and self-identity of the Greek territory and its inhabitants, the toponymic issue was interpreted either as a mere accident suffered by the area during its century-long historic trajectory—without any repercussions whatsoever on its racial character—or, in the "felicitous" case of the continuation or restoration of the Greek name, as proof of the *Greekness* of the area and its people -despite all their vicissitudes. Therefore, in all its linguistic forms, the toponymic issue went hand in hand with Greek nationalism, and it was used accordingly in order to serve the same purpose. It reflected the choices and the contradictions of the "national question."

³⁰ DNR/NHRF database of name changes: "Name Changes of Settlements in Greece,"