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From Peasants into Urbanites, from Village into Nation: Ottoman Monastir in the Early Twentieth Century

1. A City of Notables?

Very much like the rest of Macedonia,¹ the city of Monastir (or Vitolia, now Bitola in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) has a disputed history. The origin of the dispute is the ethnic identity and composition of its nineteenth-century Christian population. What were they and how many of a kind? Perhaps the best (and certainly the most amusing) analysis of this controversial issue was published in a First World War military newspaper, *The Monastir Monitor and Messenger of Macedonia*,² in September 1916, shortly after the end of the city's nine-month-long Bulgarian occupation. It took the form of three successive groups of statements:

Group A: Positive statements

Half the population of Monastir consists of Macedonians.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Bulgarians.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Greeks.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Roumanians.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Koutzo-Vlachs.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Turks.

Half the population of Monastir consists of Albanians.

About a quarter of the population of Monastir consists of Jews.

The town contains a large number of Gypsies.

Group B: Negative statements

There are practically no Macedonians in Monastir.

There are practically no Bulgarians in Monastir.

There are practically no Greeks in Monastir.
 There are practically no Roumanians in Monastir.
 There are practically no Koutzo-Vlachs in Monastir.
 There are practically no Turks in Monastir.
 There are practically no Albanians in Monastir.
 There are very few Gypsies in Monastir.

Group C: Elucidatory statements

Macedonians are simply Bulgarians.
 Macedonians are wholly distinct from Bulgarians.
 Koutzo-Vlachs are simply Roumanians.
 Koutzo-Vlachs are wholly distinct from Roumanians.
 Every Greek in now a Roumanian.
 Every Roumanian was during the enemy's occupation of
 Monastir a Greek.
 The local Turk is simply an Albanian.
 The local Albanian is simply a Turk.

In the late 1990s approaches to the same question are unlikely to be less contradictory and less humorous,³ but still the quest for a reasonable interpretation of the city's complicated demography is not entirely hopeless. In fact this article will discuss how the process and timing of urbanization, as well as the consequent social cleavages related to the cultural division of labour, affected the local politics of nationalism in this provincial town. The study draws heavily on three small notebooks with family expenses, which belonged to a wealthy Monastir merchant, Michail Katsouyanni.⁴ They comprise some 7000 hand-written entries and cover day by day the period from September 1897 until October 1911. Since they include all kinds of data (business contracts, payments, names, services, prices, and commodities), they offer extremely useful and indeed rare insights into the labour market and reliable evidence to evaluate the living conditions of both rich and poor. All the available numerical data were computerized and classified into multiple categories (rents, taxes, salaries, services, debts, names, etc.) and sub-categories (food, clothing, maintenance, household, tuition, entertainment, etc.). Then they were reclassified and processed accordingly to answer specific questions. Needless to say, the accuracy of some statistics was affected by Katsouyannis' tendency occasionally to give an aggregate price for two entirely different objects (e.g. four

piastres for tomatoes and a brush). Special attention was also paid to distinguishing between the dozens of insufficiently identified individuals, who parade through the notebooks.

The rich men, the local elite, are not the major concern of this study, although they dominated the economic and social life of Monastir until the Balkan Wars, and its history ever after. When Mary Adelaide Walker, the sister of an Anglican missionary, visited the town in 1860, she wrote: 'Among the Christian populace of the Vallaks [Vlachs] rank the highest for commercial enterprise, industry and intelligence.' Walker also mentioned the Bulgarians who had 'but few commercial establishments' and to the Christian Albanians 'also a thriving community' but not heavily involved in commerce.⁵ Indeed most Vlachs, i.e. the speakers of a vulgar medieval form of Latin, were newcomers both to Monastir and to the nearby towns of northern Macedonia. They had settled there less than a century before, after the first destruction of Moschopolis (now Albanian Voskopolje) and of other flourishing Vlach towns in the area of Mount Grammos in 1769.⁶ Little is known about this population movement but there is no doubt that these Vlachs brought with them, if not capital, certainly abundant experience in many crafts, a steady preference for Greek education, thriftiness, the spirit of entrepreneurship, and valuable connections in Central European markets.⁷ What they still lacked in the mid-nineteenth century — if we are to rely on the same English observer — was fully compatible European manners and a delicate taste in food. These shortcomings, however, did not prevent the Monastir Vlachs, or their brethren in other Balkan towns, from dominating and in fact shaping the upper social strata of many Balkan nation-states which came into being during the nineteenth century.

Vlach superiority 'in wealth and intelligence' is a standard comment in every account of life in Monastir by any nineteenth- or twentieth-century traveller.⁸ In 1905 the British Consul claimed that, although in about 70 per cent of the houses the spoken language was Vlach, 'a very large majority' of them had received 'their instruction entirely in the Greek language and have come to regard themselves almost as belonging to that nationality'.⁹ His successor was more sceptical: 'That they as a race should feel any Romanian or Greek patriotism, or any patriotism in a large sense, seems improbable to those who know them, though some of their young men have lately joined Greek

bands.' On the other hand, he added, 'the Roumanian propaganda is being carried on here chiefly by turncoat adventurers'.¹⁰ But, although their presence was more easily felt, Vlachs were not on their own in Monastir. Walker met Bulgarians as well, like Dimko Radev, an illiterate merchant who had earned a fortune from tax-farming. Other travellers mention 'few Slavs',¹¹ among whom pro-Greek sentiment was already declining by the 1880s.¹² By 1889 there were probably 8,000–9,000 Bulgarians compared with 12,000 Vlachs¹³ in a town 42,000 strong; and in the early twentieth century 10,000 compared with 14,000 Vlachs out of a total of 60,000.¹⁴ The figures are far from accurate, but the fact is that the more Slavs opted for urban life the stronger Greek nationalism grew among the Vlachs.

2. The Macedonian Economy at the Turn of the Century

All students of Balkan history are aware that periodic emigration was a traditional practice in the highlands of Macedonia and Albania; in fact it was the only way to sustain the balance of payments. Though sound evidence, such as statistics, is hard to find, it is clear that in the early twentieth century preserving this balance was no longer an easy task for the peasantry. The reasons were many. From 1897 until 1910 (with the exception of 1904) a series of below-average harvests reduced their income, while the long-expected commercialization of the crops was far from successful. The 1902 earthquake inflicted a serious blow and the 1903 Bulgarian-instigated uprising against Ottoman authority was even more damaging; quite a few villages in the vicinity of Monastir were reduced to ashes and many more suffered considerable destruction by the Ottoman army and helpful irregulars restoring order in the traditional way, by massacre. The implementation of the tax-reform scheme which followed under European pressure and supervision, aiming to appease agricultural unrest, failed to produce any tangible or permanent results, except for adding new expenses to the budget. Paying off European-operated railway tariffs caused additional burdens.¹⁵ Thus, an investment which had been expected to improve farmers' lives in fact necessitated the intensive taxation of their income.¹⁶

Under the circumstances, there were not many products for the

railways to transport to the ports of Macedonia, but there were many more to channel into the hinterland. Products such as sugar, coffee, beer, petroleum, domestic wares, furniture, bedsteads, glassware, and various other 'luxuries', perhaps unknown or even useless but nevertheless attractive to both peasants and urbanites, were now becoming available all year round in shops and indispensable for households. In fact the very existence of shops, in the place of the annual markets and weekly *bazaars*, was an innovation related to the more flexible credit system, the establishment of bank branch offices, and the railway transportation which permitted regular renewal of the stock. All this was good news for those who had cash to spend and a powerful incentive for those who had been self-sufficient for ages to find alternative or additional employment.¹⁷

It could be argued that these were not exceptional problems for Macedonia or for any other of the Porte's provinces. Bad crops or intensified taxation, even army brutalities, were not novelties in the twentieth century, and for the peasants there was never enough cash to spend. What made the case exceptional, however, was increasing insecurity. Shortly after the ill-fated rising of 1903, Greek bands also moved in to safeguard, conquer, reverse, or restore what was then thought to be the peasants' expression of national preference, namely to ensure their allegiance to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which Exarchic armed bands had successfully challenged.¹⁸ The pressure exerted by both Greeks and Bulgarians on Slav peasant communities — the apple of discord for the two nations — was considerable, the methods implemented invariably violent, but the actual guarantees for protection limited only to promises.¹⁹ The list of the martyrs was extremely long, but even longer was the catalogue of emigrants leaving the region in increasing numbers, especially from western and north-western Macedonia, i.e. the prefecture of Monastir.²⁰ The impact of this mass exodus on the local economy and society has already been discussed elsewhere.²¹ In short, the peasants escaped bankruptcy and remittances kept the market going extremely well. Moreover, a new class of returned emigrants emerged, men relatively well off, with enough cash to buy land at any price and start businesses in towns, and ready to fill the gap left by the declining numbers of Muslim landlords.

3. Peasants in the Monastir Labour Market

Emigration abroad, outside the Balkans, was the most direct and rapid route to social elevation and financial salvation for bold young men at the turn of the century; but it was neither the only nor necessarily the most popular option. Seasonal and eventually permanent urbanization was the other choice, perhaps less remunerative in the short run, but certainly much more traditional. Todorov has produced interesting evidence about Macedonian emigrants to some Bulgarian towns in the mid-nineteenth century: they were relatively numerous, Muslims and Christians, mostly masons, bakers, and brewers, Slavs, but also Christian Albanians.²² Similar information about immigrants and itinerant labourers in Macedonian towns, especially Thessaloniki, is abundant.²³ In fact, local peasant urbanization was much more substantial than emigration within or outside the Sultan's domains. All the available evidence testifies that the Christian proportion of the urban population rose significantly in many Macedonian towns, like Stip, Veles, Skopje, and Kumanovo, during the nineteenth century.²⁴

The same was true for Monastir. In order to explain how the demographic gap between Vlachs and Bulgarians was bridged during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is reasonable to argue that immigrants settling here must have been mostly (but not exclusively) Slavs from the nearby villages. Victor Berard, a geographer, visited Monastir on a market-day and mingled with a crowd of kilt-wearing, heavily armed Albanians, 'filthy and short' Slav peasants, and long-bearded Turks proceeding in an endless line.²⁵ Walker had mixed with the same crowd thirty years before and had been impressed by women who used to bring 'their goods for sale in two large goat's-hair sacks hung before and behind with a strap over the shoulder so as to leave the hands free for spinning or knitting'.²⁶ Such peasants would probably leave the town before sunset, but many others had more permanent occupations of which so far we know little owing to lack of sources. A study of the everyday expenses of the Katsouyanni family sheds helpful light on their lives.

Inside the household a variety of women offered their skilled or unskilled services: one permanent maid (for a family ranging from four to seven individuals), a laundress hired once or twice per month, dressmakers, and various others to spin and twist the

wool, weave carpets and bedsheets, knit underwear and socks, embroider pillow-cases, do the ironing, or offer whatever assistance was needed in everyday life, and also comfort and other special services in times of grief and illness. Men worked for the Katsouyannis as artisans or hired itinerant labourers: they maintained the water pumps in the mansion, cleaned the wells and the fireplaces, prepared the stoves for winter, plated the kitchen utensils with tin, sharpened the knives, cut firewood, and dug the garden. Many more worked as masons and joiners, frequently employed to repair damage, prepare endless house extensions, whitewash, and, even more often, restore the family's growing number of shops and warehouses. Petty trade in food supplies was also a considerable option for peasants in a society which no longer practised stock-breeding (not even hens), had abandoned agriculture and even gardening, and possessed no landed property except urban sites. Numerous bakers, butchers, grocers, tavern-keepers, milkmen, tailors, and shoemakers are mentioned by name in Katsouyanni's notebooks, and many more greengrocers, fishermen, and porters (probably itinerant peasant pedlars) anonymously.

Unlike Bulgarian Black Sea towns, where such professionals might well have been foreigners from distant lands, in Monastir they all came from Slav, Albanian, and Vlach villages and small towns in the vicinity, that is to say not more than twenty-five miles away. Indeed Katsouyanni's maids were either Slavs or Vlachs, but Jewish women are also mentioned occasionally as doing the laundry, Turkish women (*hanumisses*) employed as weavers, and Gypsy women (*gyftisses*) as workers, probably cleaners. His male contractors, employees, and food suppliers were a multilingual crowd. They were first-generation immigrants, if one can judge from their surnames. In contrast to local merchants, lawyers, teachers, doctors, and other established professionals, workmen and petty traders are referred to in the notebooks either with their father's name (Stefos [son of] Naoum) or in terms of their calling (Riste [the] mason, *not* with a capital 'm') or their place of origin (Nalis Morihovalis, i.e. from Morihovo). Their chances of becoming 'somebody' without a shop or a firm of some standing were slim, unless they decided to take the way of a rebel and become notorious for their 'national' enterprises.

To classify these peasants in terms of their national prefer-

ences, provided they had made a firm choice, is an impossible task for the historian, just as it was for the authorities of those times. The adjective 'Bulgarian', mentioned only once among thousands of daily entries (to specify a milkman), was never used as a surname. The words 'Turk' and 'Othomanis' (Osmanli) appear once each to denote a butcher and a female weaver respectively. The words 'Hellene' (Greek), 'Romios', 'Romanian', 'Vlach', 'Albanian', 'Serb', 'Macedonian' are not to be found in Katsouyanni's notebooks, nor any religious specifications, like Exarchic, Schismatic, Catholic, etc., with the notable exception of the words 'Jew' and 'Gypsy', which appear several times. Apparently both groups were easily identified at first sight from their language, complexion, dress, and occupation. Such criteria were of no use in the case of the Slav sub-groups or national parties. Archival sources indicate that Slavs frequenting the Monastir labour or trade market could be either pro-Greek or pro-Bulgarian. On the basis of appearance or language alone, no one could tell the difference. But sources also attest — at least indirectly — that the Exarchic pro-Bulgarian pool, from which the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO, better known as the Bulgarian Committee or simply the *Komitet* — in Greek *Komitato*) drew its reserves, was larger or at least more active and eager.²⁷

The question of whether IMRO had more followers among urbanized peasants or whether such peasants were IMRO partisans *par excellence* will be discussed later on; at this point it is more interesting to note the correlation between origin and calling. A document argues that 'Bulgarians' in Monastir had the 'monopoly' on some professions, like butchers and milkmen, and to these one could easily add gardeners and fishermen.²⁸ This was quite natural in a pre-industrial milieu, where the urban markets depended entirely on agriculture.²⁹ Such people drew their profit from their ability regularly to forward meat, vegetables, fish, or milk from their (as a rule Slav-speaking) villages in the vicinity to their clients in town without employing any middle-men. However, forwarding commodities on a daily or weekly basis from the interior to the market could not be done without ensuring a relative degree of security. The same was true for other categories, like lumberjacks, sawyers and charcoal burners, who spent part of the year working unprotected in the woods. In a period (1897–1903) when IMRO was growing and spreading

steadily in the region, it was only to be expected that it would attract such young, daring workmen and petty retailers to its ranks. After all, the Committee was an indispensable (and compulsory) mechanism of protection and, hopefully, social elevation.

4. Living in the Suburbs

Simic has maintained that the constant exchange and communication between the urban and rural sectors in nineteenth-century Serbia created a cultural continuity between village and city.³⁰ This was quite natural since a significant proportion of the urban population (20 per cent in 1863 in the town of Arandjelovac) were first-generation immigrants, single males living on their own and returning home regularly.³¹ This cultural continuum was evident even in larger agglomerations like nineteenth-century Athens³² and certainly in Monastir as well. Charles Eliot wrote that the suburbs of Monastir were full of 'little wooden houses occupied by peasants who thought they could better their condition by leaving their villages and taking to the humbler forms of trade'.³³ The *Daily Mail* correspondent also described refugees from the 1903 uprising living miserably in the fields and on the slopes close to the town's Muslim cemetery.³⁴ Indeed there is abundant evidence that Slav peasants gathered exclusively on the periphery of Monastir. One of their quarters was called Yeni, 'new', and it was near the countryside; another was the *Bair mahale*, i.e. 'the countryside quarter'; a third was called Dragor, apparently situated on the banks of the river of the same name. Additional evidence shows that Slav peasants were also present close to the horse-market, to the vegetable and fruit market, and other places *outside* the city centre. In the same places, at the entrances to the city, various inns and filthy cheap hotels, highly unpopular with European travellers, offered shelter and food to peasants who were still moving between city and countryside.³⁵

To analyse the living conditions in these humble quarters additional evidence is needed about salaries, wages, and food prices. Katsouyanni's notebooks are again indispensable for this. Housemaids were paid according to annual contracts, which fixed their monthly salary but occasionally included unpaid services in the first year. Between 1897 and 1911 such monthly

earnings varied between 15 and 20 piastres regardless of origin, inflation, or even years of service.³⁶ Maids could raise extra money if they offered additional services, such as weaving or knitting. All the other females employed by Katsouyanni throughout the period received a wage of 5 piastres, be they Jewish, Gypsy, Vlach, or Slav, cleaners or laundresses; it was an amount comparable with the wages paid to women in the filatures and the Thessaloniki tobacco factories of the time.³⁷ Apparently, owing to the shortage of manpower caused by intensive transatlantic emigration, men's wages did change over time, especially after 1904. At the turn of the century the wage of a construction day-labourer was 5 piastres and of a skilled workman (*mastoras*) 12; in 1911 it was 12 and 20 piastres respectively. The payment for chopping a cartload of wood increased from 2–2.5 to 3–3.5 piastres. There is no evidence that religion or language influenced payments.

The next question is whether wages could actually catch up with the rapidly rising food prices. In 1906, with 5 piastres a labourer could buy more than an *oka* (2.83 lb.) of flour, an *oka* of beans, twenty drams of sheep butter, and half an *oka* of rice, a total of some 9,500 calories. This was sufficient to feed a family of five or six, or even more slightly undernourished members, especially if the quantity of flour was increased at the expense of butter and rice; provided, of course, that such families did not have any more expenses in their miserable suburban huts. In 1911 the same quantities of food cost 9.5 piastres while the average daily wage was 12: a difference of 2.5 piastres, i.e. a whole *oka* of flour, was considerable. In both cases it is evident that extreme poverty was inescapable, but it would be impossible to substantiate that life in such working-class neighbourhoods was actually worse than in any village, especially if the insecurity is also taken into account.³⁸ In any case it is clear that the extra income realized by a reluctantly hired daughter, or even the benefit of receiving free meals daily as part of the wage or monthly salary, was extremely important for any family to make ends meet. Such an improvement amply demonstrates the extent and impact of male emigration, but it is rather deceptive vis-à-vis the standard of living of poor families supposedly surviving on bread and beans; for such families did exist. The typical unskilled labourer was unlikely to be married, and even if he was it is very doubtful whether his family would have joined him in Monastir.

Not only could a single man fed by his daily employers manage on 5 piastres a day, but he could easily save as well.

Other aspects of social life in the suburbs are unknown. One can guess, by reading between the lines of consular documents describing national clashes, that these peasant youngsters used to meet in small taverns, greengrocers', inns, and coffee houses and engage in 'politics', as Eliot wrote, meaning, in present-day terms, in national affairs.³⁹ It is doubtful whether they had any particular social relations with the local Bulgarians, i.e. the oldest nucleus of Exarchists, already seriously engaged in trade — at least not before serious fighting started in town. In fact it has been argued, though not convincingly, that this social separation, to the extent that it existed, made newcomers more responsive to Macedonian independence than to Bulgarian annexation.⁴⁰ Though such a cleavage may have played a role in the development of Macedonian nationalism in more recent years — most likely when Vlach notables sought refuge in Greece in the inter-war period — no Bulgarian, Greek, or other European source testifies to a visible distinction within the Exarchic community in the early twentieth century.

5. Conquering the Market

In Turkey a *mahale* was not only an administrative entity in a town, it was a social network. Its members were bound by endogamy, common origin,⁴¹ and solidarity, which was sometimes stronger than religious affiliation.⁴² Such was the case of the Muslim neighbours of a prominent Christian family, Modis, well-known Greek activists. Despite being Turks, their neighbours volunteered to hide the wounded Greek brigands sheltered by Modis, in case the latter's house was searched by the authorities, just to save their friends from embarrassment, arrest, and punishment.⁴³ However, in the early twentieth century, four generations after the arrival of the Vlachs in Monastir, and after fifty years of rapid urbanization, thirty years of schism between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Church, and a few decades of intensive Romanian propaganda, neighbourhoods were no longer entirely homogeneous in terms of religion, language, or other affiliation. When a member of the family of

Radev, a high-ranking diplomat in Sofia, returned to Monastir to sell his family house, the Exarchists rejoiced. The mansion was the perfect building to house the Bulgarian high school; moreover it offered a useful foothold, being in the middle of the Vlach quarter. The price was fixed at 500 pounds but the Greek consul postponed the auction until Vlachs were ready to bid 1,000 pounds.⁴⁴

Spotting important Bulgarians like Radev was perfectly easy. But by the turn of the century his house was no longer the only establishment in the town centre belonging to Slavs. A report submitted by a leading Vlach merchant to the Greek consulate mentions that after the establishment of railways, petty-traders from the nearby towns of Prilep, Tikves, and Exi-Sou (now Xyno Nero) had settled in Monastir and started businesses in every commercial sector. According to this report the infiltration of such traders was part of a malicious master plan designed by IMRO to challenge Vlach (i.e. Greek) economic supremacy. The most dangerous competitors were the merchants from Prilep, ardent Bulgarians as the British said,⁴⁵ self-sufficient, frugal, audacious, ready to offer unlimited credit, with commercial connections in Thessaloniki, men who could easily rely on the preference not only of their fellow Bulgarians but of certain Vlachs as well. According to the same report, Slav-speaking bakers, grocers, butchers, and various other newcomers who had started businesses in every quarter were nothing more than Bulgarian spies and instruments of the Committee.⁴⁶

Further out in the suburbs Bulgarian action was much more brisk. In July 1903, on the eve of the long-expected Bulgarian-sponsored anti-Turkish uprising, the Monastir suburbs were rumoured to be real fortresses with numerous caches stuffed with guns and ammunition, where both men and women practised the use of rifles. Fear made such preparation look exorbitant, but the fact is that the British consul himself had witnessed army uniforms being carried around and had even noticed the Bulgarian insignia on them.⁴⁷ Conscripts who were obliged by the Committee to leave the town for the mountains wore such uniforms. The most numerous among these 'recruits', whose willingness to take the way of the bandit is strongly doubted by Greek archival sources, were butchers and their apprentices; no fewer than eighty of them had left Monastir by mid-July 1903.⁴⁸

Strategically, the uprising that broke out on the feast of the

Prophet Elijah in 1903 (better known as the 'Ilinden uprising') was a failure. Unlike what had happened in Crete in 1896–7, European intervention in Macedonia was not followed by autonomy as Sofia had hoped. It generated a literature which publicized the Bulgarian case for Macedonian autonomy throughout Europe, but it was shelved after the defeat of Bulgaria in the Great War. In the long run it created a valuable national myth treasured by two Balkan nations, though for different reasons.⁴⁹ In the short term it not only caused chaos and disaster but most significantly it alarmed the Greeks and brought them back into the struggle for Macedonia. Monastir, lying at the border of what was considered as the sphere of Greek influence, was extremely important for a successful come-back. IMRO was well aware of this fact and persistently tried to keep the villagers away from Greek influence: it discouraged people from patronizing Vlach traders and attacked those who did not obey. Several Patriarchist grocers, greengrocers, butchers, and innkeepers in the suburbs saw their clientele shrinking. Some decided to become Exarchist to keep their share of the market and secure their supplies. Others were murdered for having failed to comply with the Committee's directives.⁵⁰

IMRO did not stop at the periphery of the town. Murderous attacks against Vlach merchants and professionals had started even before Ilinden, but multiplied during 1904. Greeks were soon to retaliate, and this blood feud escalated into an urban war that was primarily of symbolic importance since the targets were not necessarily involved in the Committee's deeds. Everybody who was somebody was a potential victim: doctors, high-school teachers, priests, consular personnel, emigration agents, and merchants were easy prey in an attempt to intimidate and retaliate. Among them was the very brother of Katsouyanni, Matthew, 'a merchant of some standing and . . . universally respected as a quiet and inoffensive citizen who took no part in religious or political controversy'.⁵¹ A European observer, struck by this vendetta, wrote:

Murder is so commonplace that it arouses no shoulder. In the night there is the little bark of a pistol, a shriek, a clatter of feet. Hello! Somebody killed! That is all . . . In the cafes plots are hatched. A man whispers in your ear. Last night two Bulgarians were stabbed to death. Hush! They deserved it. Had not the Bulgarians put poison into the communion wine at the Greek Church?⁵²

Who was to take revenge for these murders? According to Greek sources the executioners employed by IMRO were

. . . young working boys, who looked like the most peaceful and most industrious in the world, with no record, no provocative action; they had been trained for long with much care and attention, and felt behind them every single moment and hour the systematic and relentless power of their organization.⁵³

The Vlach upper class, *de facto* 'men of law, family, . . . each one devoted to his peaceful deeds',⁵⁴ was not self-sufficient in such hit-men. They had to approach the so-called 'guild of the *barbati*', meaning all the bullies in the town, youngsters well known for their 'love of fighting and thirst for wine'. Such young men, if necessary, were trained in Greece, and provided with a basic salary plus a bonus after successful attacks.⁵⁵

However, any interpretation of the clash in Monastir as a tug-of-war between unemployed urbanized peasant youths entirely misses the point. Although executioners were indeed aggressive and adventurous youngsters with a peasant background, the real backbone of the two Committees were middle-class men of trade. Leaving aside all the eminent citizens of Monastir who were shot just to terrorize, the remaining targets on both sides were grocers, innkeepers, tobacconists, barbers, gardeners, tailors, milkmen, butchers, blacksmiths, timber-traders, and suchlike. In other words, the Committee's network of executioners included people of moderate standing, not necessarily wealthy but definitely with drive and determination to excel and rise socially. In most cases they did not commit the murders themselves; they simply pulled the strings. Indeed this class of people was indispensable to control, manipulate, encourage, instruct, and inform young recruits and various peasants with whom they had daily transactions in the suburbs. Their stores were considered more appropriate for 'national work' than the consulates or the churches because they were less impressive, less formal, more human, and easily accessible to agricultural suppliers and buyers. Regardless of their motives when they started business in Monastir, in most cases such men would inevitably become IMRO revolutionaries: both their social and political aspirations put them in its ranks against Ottoman authority and also against the local Hellenized Vlach bourgeoisie.

To neutralize IMRO the Greek Committee set a dual plan: to drive Exarchist merchants out of the market and then to penetrate

the Bulgarian quarters. In pursuit of this plan Vlachs, who owned most of the shops, were expected to expel their Exarchist tenants and also to boycott their businesses. Moreover, ideas were put forward to finance Greeks, either from the Greek kingdom or from Epirus, or, alternatively, Vlach Patriarchists from the nearby towns to enable them to start businesses in Monastir and replace Exarchist butchers and bakers. The best-case scenario, as a Vlach merchant, Spyros Doumas, put it, was to create, under the auspices of the Greek Committee, a vertical Greek trust ranging from industrialists and wholesale merchants, to transporters, shopkeepers, and consumers. Doumas believed that since the laws of the free market were no longer active, such means were fully justified. Indeed, this plan would enable the leading merchants to overcome Bulgarian competition without reducing their prices or expanding their credit.

Archival sources and memoirs testify that all these measures were implemented, sometimes with enthusiasm, not only in Monastir but in other urban centres as well. Various anecdotes have been recorded in Monastir concerning Cretan butchers trying to handle their non-Greek-speaking clients, Greek bullies stationed in small taverns in Bulgarian quarters and successfully challenging IMRO supporters, and the Greek Committee trying, by force and intimidation, to impose this general embargo. Yet such plans had little chance of success. Though memories of the unexpected extent of social mobilization within the Vlach community are very vivid, very much like the legends of clandestine IMRO operations, in fact it is doubtful whether merchants enjoyed the luxury of being able to select their clients, or day-labourers to choose their employers, according to their national preferences; even when such preferences had been established and were known to the public.

6. Conclusions

Monastir was a town with a strong urban retail character related to the Hellenized Vlach clans, who had settled there in the late eighteenth century and impressed every traveller with their 'industry and intelligence'. During the nineteenth century, urbanization of the Slav peasantry progressed and accelerated rapidly in the 1890s. Peasants who had traditionally migrated to distant

places within the Balkans or even to the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire to make ends meet now experienced additional economic pressure and need for cash: crops failed, structural impediments of maladministration could not be removed, taxes rose, consumerism was steadily gaining ground, and, last but not least, violent nationalism had become an inseparable part of everyday life. Under the circumstances, young male peasants fled in increasing numbers to America and even more often to the neighbouring urban centres.

Monastir, being an administrative centre and after 1895 a railway terminus, attracted two kinds of immigrants from its hinterland. The first were young peasants, men and women, mostly without families, who were willing to reside temporarily away from their homes in appalling living conditions, take advantage of the town's expansion and the Vlachs' bourgeois habits, work for low wages and earn extra cash as unskilled employees and day-labourers of every kind or by pursuing various occupations (even petty trade in agricultural products) which required minimal training and no capital or expensive equipment; the second were tradesmen of moderate standing from neighbouring semi-urban centres or well-to-do peasants (supposedly returned emigrants from abroad) with sufficient capital (or credit) to establish and run small shops. In both cases successful urbanization related to the ongoing national clashes between Greek and Bulgarian bands. The free movement of peasants and products from the villages, mountains, lakes, or stockyards to the market could not be achieved without the protection of armed bands. Business in the various districts of Monastir, especially in the suburbs crowded with Slav peasants, also seems to have been influenced by national preferences. On the other hand, when Vlach merchants sensed the presence of, and, most importantly, the increasing competition from the new ambitious urbanites in every sector of trade, they formed, under the auspices of the Greek consulate, a secret organization to protect their lives, and launched a boycott against the newcomers to safeguard their own businesses.

The argument sustained in this article is that such confrontations between the older Vlach merchants and the new Slav traders of peasant origin deepened the cleavage between the two social groups and influenced their national preferences, although they lived in a society in which ethnic affiliation was almost meaning-

less and multilingualism the rule.⁵⁶ Nationalism was manipulated conveniently by all the classes concerned in order to justify the violent resolution of a sharp economic and social confrontation. Yet, at the same time, nationalists exploited the rising social tensions in order to swell their ranks with men who wanted to defend or change their social status. To achieve their goals shop-keepers and other traders who supported IMRO had to co-operate with labourers and other workers who lived between town and countryside and had to rely on the Committee's support. These peasants were used as executioners in the urban centres and it is perhaps ironic that in most cases the murders they committed in the streets of Monastir avenged the killing of prominent Bulgarians who had not necessarily been active in the national struggles. In a way it looks as if retaliation, co-operation, boycotts, and conspiracy developed feelings of belonging within the few notable Bulgarian families of Monastir, the rising petite bourgeoisie with a peasant background, the graduates of the Bulgarian schools, the daring peasant urban fighters, and their next-of-kin in the villages. The same could be claimed for the Greek national party of Monastir and Macedonia in general. To defend themselves Vlach professionals, teachers, and capitalists were obliged to co-operate with officials and chieftains from Greece, even with members of the local lower social strata, be they Slavs or not. They also had to set their ties with their peasant clients against the rules of the market. Although this 'national' alliance was related to transactions and payments, still it was not entirely an economic deal. It was based, at least symbolically, on the common decision to reject allegiance to the Bulgarian Independent Church and accept the ideal of Greek education.

IMRO and its Greek counterpart, the *Makedonikon Komitaton* (Macedonian Committee), in a way were like two 'imagined communities' which had, rather vaguely but most conveniently, nationalized all kinds of social cleavages and individual aspirations. Urbanization (and emigration) in the era of nationalism had broken a tradition which was characterized by loyalty to church, family, clan, and village; secret organizations offered numerous young men living outside their clans and away from their villages an alternative point of reference and support. Yet the idea of a nation was a long way off. The traditional cultural division of labour kept Slavs in the fields and Vlachs in the

markets. For urban peasants to adopt nationalism as a means to accelerate their successful integration into the labour and commodity market was not an entirely meaningless option. It even saved them from the embarrassment of accepting their inferior social status. For Vlach merchants in Monastir, Greekness was a deeply rooted aspect of their higher social status. It was equally incompatible with Slav nationalism or with any kind of brotherhood with the peasants that would endanger their social (and financial) position. National committees could indeed sponsor the penetration of peasants into urban society according to national interests, support the growth of a Bulgarian urban class or of a Greek labouring class; they could even persuade peasants to prefer only specific shops or forge willy-nilly national commercial networks. But still such artificial alliances and sympathies based on mutual economic interests could neither entirely substitute for the apparent absence of ethnic solidarity, nor neutralize the market laws forever. Urbanization in Monastir (and in many other Macedonian urban centres) brought Slav peasants and Vlach merchants close; in some cases familiarity justified the nationalist concern for a common ethnic identity beyond any cultural or linguistic barriers, but mostly it simply brought contempt.

Notes

This study draws heavily on a book in the press by the same author with the title *On the Banks of Hydragora: Family, Economy and Urban Society in Monastir, 1897–1911* (in Greek). Research abroad for this project was considerably facilitated by a generous grant from the Hellenic Foundation in London during the summer of 1996.

1. In this article the term is used to denote the geographical region known as Macedonia in the late Ottoman period, i.e. the *vilayets* (prefectures) of Thessaloniki, Monastir, and Kossova. This region is far more extensive than the ancient Macedonian kingdom, the present Greek Macedonia, or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

2. Series 1, No. 1, July 1917, edited by A. Dugont.

3. See, for example, the article by Milena Mahon, 'The Macedonian Question in Bulgaria', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 4/3 (1998), 389–407, which focuses on the opposing Macedonian Slav and Bulgarian views in the 1990s.

4. They are now in the possession of his granddaughter Mrs Lola Katsouyanni-Deliyanni (Thessaloniki, Greece).

5. Mary Adelaide Walker, *Through Macedonia to the Albanian Lakes* (London 1864), 137–9.

6. The mountainous border district between Greek western Macedonia and Albania.

7. Although there is important and extensive literature in Greek about Vlach ventures in the Balkans and Central Europe, still the best-known reference work for their activities and social role is Traian Stoianovich's 'The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 20 (1960), 234–313. See also the paper by Basil C. Gounaris and Asteris I. Koukoudis, 'Apo tin Pindo sti Rodopi: Anazitondas tis engatastaseis kai tin taftotita ton Vlachon' (From Pindos to Rodopi: In Search of Vlach Settlements and Identity), *Istor*, Vol. 10 (1998), 1–47, where the whole issue of Vlach origin is being reassessed on a socio-economic basis.

8. Arbern G. Hulme-Beaman, *Twenty Years in the Near East* (London 1898), 140. Hulme-Beaman was the correspondent of the *Standard* in 1889.

9. Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 195/2208, Young to O'Connor, Monastir, 29 October 1905, f. 286.

10. FO 195/2263, Monahan to O'Connor, Monastir, 27 February 1907, ff. 224–5.

11. Muir G. Mackenzie and A.P. Irby, *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey in Europe* (London 1867), 73.

12. Valentine Chirol, 'Twixt Greek and Turk; or: Jottings during a Journey through Thessaly, Macedonia and Epirus in the Autumn of 1880 (Edinburgh 1881), 70.

13. Hulme-Beaman, op. cit., 140.

14. John Foster Fraser, *Pictures from the Balkans* (London 1906), 206.

15. On the Monastir line, where the guarantee had been fixed at 14,300 francs/km, receipts were less than 10,000 from 1897 until 1906, and only four times (1908, 1910–12) did they exceed the amount guaranteed.

16. Basil C. Gounaris, *Steam over Macedonia: Socio-economic Change and the Railway Factor* (Boulder 1993), 74–130; Michael Palairret, *The Balkan Economies, c.1800–1914: Evolution without Development* (Cambridge 1997), 342–6.

17. Gounaris, *Steam over Macedonia*, 172–90.

18. 'Exarchy' was the term used for the Bulgarian Independent (Schismatic) Church, which was established in 1870 and separated from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1872. 'Exarchist' is used in this article as a synonymous with 'Bulgarian'.

19. See Dimitris Livanios, 'Conquering the Souls: Nationalism and Greek Guerilla Warfare in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904–1908', *Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 23 (1999), 195–221.

20. In 1906 some 7,000 men emigrated to the USA from the Monastir *vilayet* alone. The total number from all three *vilayets* by 1912 was probably between 50,000 and 75,000 men.

21. Basil C. Gounaris, 'Emigration from Macedonia in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 7 (1989), 133–53.

22. Nikolai Todorov, *I Valkaniki Poli* (The Balkan City), trans. into Greek by Efi Avdela and Yeorgia Papayeorgiou (Athens 1986), Vol. 2, 504–13.

23. Vasilis Dimitriadis, *I Thessaloniki tis parakmis: I elliniki koinotita tis Thessalonikis kata ti dekaetia tou 1830 me vasi ena othomaniko katasticho apografis tou plithismou* (Thessaloniki in Decline: The Greek Community of Thessaloniki in the 1830s on the Basis of an Ottoman Census Register) (Irakleio 1997), 137–52.

24. This is based on Konstantinos Skondras's unpublished MA thesis (Uni-

versity of Thessaloniki) on demography and education in northern Macedonia (18th century–1870), which is a detailed review of all the available literature.

25. V. Berard, *Tourkia kai Ellinismos* (Turkey and Hellenism), trans. into Greek by M. Lykoudis (Athens 1987), 174.

26. Walker, *op. cit.*, 144–5.

27. Six young men strongly influenced by Bulgarian revolutionary ideology and socialism founded IMRO in Thessaloniki in 1893. In spite of brief overtures to Serbs, Greeks, and chiefly to Vlach pastoralists, and occasional disputes with Sofia, IMRO remained *the* political organization of the Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia. See Stephen Fischer-Galati, 'The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization: Its Significance', in 'Wars of National Liberation', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (1973), 454–72; K. Pandev, 'Le Mouvement de Libération de la Macédoine et de la Région d'Andrinople du Congrès de Salonique 1896 jusqu'en 1899', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, Vol. 1 (1983), 41–57; Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Revolutionary Movements, 1893–1903* (London 1988).

28. Greek Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter GFMA), F. 1906 AAK/A, Xydakis to Skouzes, Monastir, 14 June 1906, No 410.

29. Paul Bairoch, 'Urbanization and Economy in Pre-Industrial Societies: The Findings of Two Decades of Research', *Journal of European Economic History*, Vol. 18 (1989), 239–90.

30. Andrei Simic, *The Peasant Urbanites: A Study of Rural–Urban Mobility in Serbia* (New York and London 1973).

31. Joel M. Halpern, 'Town and Countryside in Serbia in Nineteenth Century Social and Household Structure as Reflected in the Census of 1863', in Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge 1972), 401–27.

32. Paul Sant Cassia and Constantina Bada, *The Making of the Modern Greek Family: Marriage and Education in Nineteenth Century Athens* (Cambridge 1992), 235–6.

33. Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe* (London 1908), 323.

34. Reginald Wyon, *The Balkans from Within* (London 1904), 80.

35. Evidence has been drawn from GFMA, F. 1905, Consulate in Monastir, Levidis to Skouzes, 26 February 1905, No. 203, 23 March 1905, No. 309, 28 March 1905, No. 318; and F. 1906 AAK/A, Xydakis to Skouzes, Monastir, 25 February 1906, No. 138; Chalkiopoulos to Skouzes, Monastir, 27 April 1906, No. 256. See also FO 195/2156, Biliotti to O'Connor, Thessaloniki, 9 April 1903, f. 363.

36. The Turkish lira at that time varied from 107.5 to 109 piastres.

37. Gounaris, *Steam over Macedonia*, 267.

38. See Carter Vaughn Findley, 'Economic Bases of Revolution and Repression in the Late Ottoman Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 28 (1986), 81–106.

39. The confusion of 'politics' and 'national affairs' or, in other words, of political preferences and national loyalties became an integral and important part of the social life in all parts of Macedonia ever after. This 'equation' still comes in handy in various political debates in Bulgaria, FYROM, and Greece.

40. Roger Portal, *The Slavs*, trans. into English by Patrick Evans (London 1969), 383.

41. The inhabitants of the Arnaut *mahale* in Monastir originated from one or two Albanian-speaking Christian villages near Korytza (present Albanian Korçë); see Yeorgios Ch. Modis, *Makedonikos Agon kai Makedones archigoi* (Macedonian Struggle and Macedonian Chieftains) (Thessaloniki 1950), 23.

42. Peter Bendict, 'Aspects of the Domestic Cycle in a Turkish Provincial Town', in J.G. Peristiany, ed., *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Cambridge 1976), 219–41.

43. Modis, op. cit., 8.

44. GFMA, F. 1902 AAK/Z-H, Kouzes-Pezas to Skouzes, Monastir, 15 December 1902, No. 725; Modis, op. cit., 18.

45. FO 195/2156, Biliotti to O'Conor, Thessaloniki, 7 May 1903, f. 536.

46. GFMA, F. 1905 Monastir Consulate, Spyros Doumas's report, 31 January 1905.

47. FO 195/2156, Biliotti to O'Conor, Thessaloniki, 9 April 1903, f. 363.

48. GFMA, F. 1903 AAK/E, Kypraios to Rallis, Monastir, 18 July 1903, No. 542.

49. The best analysis is by Keith S. Brown, 'Of Meanings and Memories: The National Imagination in Macedonia' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Chicago 1995).

50. See, for example, GFMA F. 1905 Monastir Consulate, Levidis to Skouzes, 14 February 1905 No. 170; F. 1906 AAK/A 1906, Xydakis to Skouzes, Monastir, 25 February 1906, No. 138.

51. FO 195/2208, Young to O'Conor, Monastir, 2 November 1905, ff. 289–90.

52. Fraser, op. cit., 206.

53. Modis, op. cit., 221.

54. Tilemachos M. Katsouyannis, *Peri ton Vlachon ton ellinikon choron* (On the Vlachs of the Greek Lands), (Thessaloniki 1966), Vol. 2, 61.

55. Modis, op. cit., 220.

56. For the lack of ethnic identity in early twentieth-century Macedonia, see Basil C. Gounaris, 'Social Cleavages and National "Awakening" in Ottoman Macedonia', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 29/4 (1995), 409–26, and Anastasia N. Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood, 1870–1990* (Chicago and London 1997), 133–7.

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