

Anarchy in Macedonia

Life under the Ottomans, 1878-1912

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“Macedonia is a field of illusions where nothing is entirely real.”

Maurice Gandolphe, 1904

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*For my mom, whose love for Macedonia is pure and simple; and for my dad,
whose dedication to the Macedonian Cause is infinite.*

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Introduction

The Ottoman (Turkish)¹ Empire reigned over Macedonia from the late 14th century until the final months of 1912. The entire history of Ottoman rule was unfavorable to the Macedonians: their conquerors were ruthless and oppressive. But the period of the Macedonian national resurgence, assuming a recognizable and meaningful form beginning in the 1870s, was extraordinarily burdensome and grueling. These last four decades of Turkish rule in Macedonia can likely be categorized as the bloodiest and most chaotic years of Macedonia's existence. Unfortunately for the Macedonians, even after the Turks were evicted as their landlords and executioners, the ideals of liberty, justice, dignity and equality remained distant and inaccessible.

The Berlin Congress of July 1878 reversed the short-lived Treaty of San Stefano's decision to attach Macedonia to Bulgaria, a decision inked only a few months prior. The European Powers factored heavily in shaping the outcomes of these treaties. The Russians, who had just defeated the Ottoman Empire in a sanguinary war, sought to free and unite most of the remaining European parcels of Ottoman territory in order to cement a political and economic foothold in the Balkans. Additionally, Russia maintained "that only complete autonomy would provide sufficient protection for the Christians in the Balkans."² But the other European Powers, especially England and Austria-Hungary, were apprehensive about the escalating Russian dominance in the region and thus initiated the Berlin Congress to place a check on Russia's influence. England even "sent a fleet to the Aegean [and] ordered troops from India" as a means of intimidating Russia and expressing its disdain for the Treaty of San Stefano.³ Further, the Austro-Hungarian Empire lambasted Russia for signing a treaty that violated an agreement those two powers had finalized in 1876, which stated that any territories freed from the Ottoman Empire would be partitioned between the two, consequently preventing the formation of a large and powerful Balkan country.⁴ Hence, Russia reluctantly accepted an invitation to the Congress of Berlin, upset that it alone had defeated the Ottoman Empire by sacrificing thousands of men and millions of dollars.⁵ 'Why should the other Powers have a say in determining and negotiating borders and reforms when they idly remained neutral,' asked the Russians. Nevertheless, with Germany acting as a mediator, the Berlin Congress commenced and destined Macedonia to remain under Ottoman control,

with some stipulations requiring the Ottomans to implement social and political reforms to better the lot of the suffering Macedonians.

However, rather than guaranteeing the desperately needed metamorphosis outlined by the Powers, the Turkish authorities entrenched themselves in their corrupt and unjust system of governance. This backwardness was, in a great part, due to the suspension of the Ottoman Constitution in 1878⁶ and "a cunning system of decentralization" where even "the use of the word Macedonia was forbidden."⁷ From that point onward, Macedonians agitated several rebellions contesting this oppression and maltreatment inflicted onto them by local and district officials, only for each revolt to be crushed and followed by greater Ottoman repressive measures and deeper physical, mental and spiritual agony. These final decades of Ottoman misrule and corruption in Macedonia were comparatively worse than any time period before, as Sultan Abdul Hamid II⁸ struggled to hold together a decomposing empire while reinstating and encouraging a more ferocious form of Islamic ideology that had been relaxed prior to his ascent to the throne. On the latter point, some have suggested Abdul Hamid II's only notable successes throughout his reign were limited to stimulating Muslim fanaticism and asserting his Khalifial pretensions.⁹ He did not simply encourage fanatical Islam amongst his inferiors in government and his Muslim subjects; rather, he ordained himself "the head of all Muhamedan believers."¹⁰

Thus, as Valentine Chirol noted in 1880, the problems were abundant and not superficial. Through wars and taxes, Turkey had drained Macedonia of money and able-bodied men. In the court system, even the worst criminals could buy justice at a negotiable price. Greedy officials at all levels cooperated with brigands to fill their pockets; the brigands, for their part, won the sympathy and support of their village brethren while submerging nearby villages in constant fear and inescapable poverty. Moreover, the government was too unjust, inept and apathetic to quell the indifferences and crimes of rival communities. Chirol predicted that this evil would "go on growing apace until the final catastrophe." He further remarked that all signs suggested this catastrophe was nearing.¹¹

His forecast for Macedonia was unquestionably pessimistic, if not broadly apocalyptic; but it proved to be regrettably accurate. Certainly, he was not alone in his prophecy of doom and destruction for Macedonia, as most visitors to that miserable land rarely issued a positive assessment of its conditions. To predict disaster for Macedonia,

therefore, was not difficult – any observer would relay to the uninformed that the devil was itching to establish residency in Macedonia. But the situation's urgency, as well as its relevance to European political and economic affairs, was not emphasized by most writers until the beginning of the 20th century. This is not ascribable to any fault of travelers to Macedonia. Social and economic ills were pandemic, and many wars and revolutions had been raging intermittently in both hemispheres. To some, the Macedonian affairs were just another episode of the dramas unfolding around the globe; and for others, they were an opportunity to experience adventure and mystery in a corner of Europe forgotten to most except as the home of Alexander the Great.

However, given this context, perhaps Chirol and others who knew that Macedonia would explode into a firestorm could not have expected the catastrophe to be as lengthy and as destructive as it indeed became. The grey clouds gathering over Macedonia throughout the latter half of the 19th century swelled into storm clouds that hovered over the Macedonians for seventy years, frequently and sporadically unleashing twisters that roamed through the land and precipitated ruination and annihilation. For those seven decades, Macedonia became the most dangerous, tragic and contested land in Europe. The physical and economic devastation was part of the tangible, observable and calculable costs suffered by most peoples in similar situations, but which are healed through the passing of time; the social, psychological and spiritual erosion of the Macedonian people and nation, however, was a venomous perversion that has penetrated and slithered itself into the Macedonian psyche through today. Briefer wars in Europe during this time period cost nations more physical death and destruction, to be sure. But Macedonia was not just a contest for land and resources; it was a contest for minds and souls.

The Macedonians' journey to remedy these injustices began not because of their desire to unite with Bulgaria to form a great Balkan Power, as would have been the case if the Treaty of San Stefano was implemented. Rather, the Macedonians sought to recapture the freedom and peace that they thought they had been granted. However, the end of Turkish rule in Macedonia fomented a more chaotic and desperate scene as Macedonia's Balkan neighbors vied to dominate her and quell her quest for social justice and national unification. This essay illustrates the weight of Balkan intolerance and injustice against the Macedonians specifically under the Ottoman Empire, from 1878 through 1912. It does

not detail the Macedonian liberation movement's courageous efforts to overcome the attempts to dissolve their struggle, which were executed by policies of extermination, intimidation and assimilation; and it does not delve into the injustices committed against the Macedonians after Macedonia's division in 1912. What this essay seeks to accomplish is to recapture the conditions of this time period in order to give a better understanding as to why a Macedonian national liberation movement was both desirable and necessary. These last years of Ottoman rule in Macedonia can only be described as a special kind of hell; and the misery and anguish the Macedonians endured in that hell should never be forgotten.

I.

The Burden of Taxes

The Sultan instituted oppressive economic policies in Macedonia, which were executed by his cronies, that triggered stinging social and psychological torments throughout the land. On one hand, sustained exposure to the Macedonian's financial position during the Ottoman reign might have cured a visitor's sporadic grumbling and irritability over his tax obligations back home. On the other hand, the more persistent and fanatical libertarian would have become equipped with an inexhaustible arsenal specifically designed to combat government interference in wealth creation. The former would argue that decentralization encourages anarchy; the latter would counter that centralization is the pathway to an oppressive dictatorship. The Macedonian peasant of the late 19th and early 20th century, however, would have deemed a society without anarchy or tyranny an impossibility; and further, in all likelihood, he would have erupted into a torrent of immutable laughter at the suggestion that the two cannot exist concurrently. After swigging some brandy, he would retreat to his meatless flock of sheep or his burdensome crop of hay all the while pitying and cursing the man who dared journey to Macedonia selling the notion that 'peace' and 'order' constituted legitimate words in any culture's lexicon.

Under the Ottoman Empire, taxes in Macedonia were not merely an impediment to rampant consumerism and excessive indulgences; rather, taxation was a prolonged disembowelment where the peasant's home was his dungeon and the fields his gallows. The Macedonian was nothing but a coin in the Sultan's purse. As a matter of fact, taxes in Macedonia were so exorbitant, and tax-collection was so torturous, that the common Macedonian could not dissociate cruelty from taxation. A group of Macedonian peasants in the Prespa region were bewildered when an Englishwoman relayed to them that even the English paid taxes¹² and that their money was partly reinvested into infrastructure and programs that brought to society some measure of security and progress. That a government existed to serve the people rather than vice versa was a concept as foreign to Macedonia as the Englishwoman. The Macedonian knew only that his toil fueled his Turkish master's lavish

and effortless existence: the Turks had remained Macedonians' conquerors for five centuries and taxation was the embodiment of that unwavering domination.

Of course, an American observer would ardently remind the Englishwoman, as well as patriotically tutor the Macedonian, that taxation without representation was a grievance worth the blood of thousands. While the Englishwoman might have rolled her eyes, the Macedonian would have responded, quite casually, that one had to be considered human in order to be represented. The black slave was ridiculed as three-fifths of a person in the United States' Constitution; meanwhile, the Macedonian Christian was but a disgraceful *giaour* to the Turk, an infidel and a nonbeliever, unworthy of even the scraps left for wild and rabid dogs.

That Christian peasants were at all tolerated and allowed to live was solely to propagate labor for the autocrats. Had the Ottoman Empire ever consisted of a sustainable Muslim population that exceeded the Christian population, the Christians' relevance would have wilted and conquest would have surely evolved into extermination. Religion, thus, was essential "in building up the Turkish system of ascendancy." Cultivation of the land was in its entirety left to the Christian serf while the Turkish landlord invested no resources into agriculture except the seeds. The Turkish ruling class became "sterile and unproductive" contributing "nothing whatever to the work of the country" while living "entirely by the forced toil of a subject population."¹³ "The economic life of the Christian villages" was an area of Turkish misrule where oppression became "a positive physical evil, enfeebling and crushing the social organism."¹⁴

Numerous and extensive taxes existed to supply the Ottoman authorities with a constant flow of money and goods. In order to maintain this stream of capital from serf to lord, everything that could be taxed was taxed. George F. Abbot, writing in 1903, summarized this malevolent practice of harrowing economic suppression:

On the whole, the Macedonian is perhaps the most heavily taxed of any peasant in the world...In short, he pays a tax on everything he buys, on everything he sells, on everything he imports, on everything he exports, on everything he carries, on everything he weighs, on everything he possesses, and on many things which he does not possess.¹⁵

Abbot did not overstate the Macedonian's compulsory tax commitments. Before he could labor, and before he could walk or talk, and even before he could consume solid foods, the Macedonian boy was "obliged to pay a tax for immunity from military service."¹⁶ This tax was unavoidable. It sprang from an Ottoman law that forbade Christians from possessing and using weapons, which prevented them from enlisting in the Sultan's army. Most Macedonians were Christians – and they had been so for a millennium (even though many pagan elements and rituals predominated their worship) – and by remaining Christians they had elected punishment. Moreover, the funds required to sustain the imperial forces (whose objectives were to both defend the Sultan's vast resources and to quell any restive subjects) begged for a source, and the insidious overlords could not have possibly contrived a more sardonic source than that of the very populace they occasionally and sporadically massacred.

Legally, minors who had not yet reached military age were exempt from the military service immunity tax. Additionally, elderly, deceased and absent (those who had temporarily or permanently relocated) males were under no legal obligation to pay this tax.¹⁷ However, under the Ottoman Empire, reality did not conform to legality; it harbored in the greedy, corrupt and wicked concoctions of local and regional officials and administrators. The Turkish authorities were so entrenched in a system of exploitation – and the Turkish courts lacked any valuableness for Macedonians – that, in most cases, boys as young as three months,¹⁸ along with half of the recent burials at the village cemetery, were paying tribute to the Ottoman war coffers, in addition to the contributions of the legally obliged males. A child's parents or a deceased's relatives had no option but to succumb to this policy and muster the necessary payment.

The method for determining this tax was fairly straightforward. In Ottoman Macedonia, the bratty administrators refrained from engaging with as many undeserving peasants as possible. Instead, generally, every year a village representative would gather the villagers' dues and pass the sack up the chain of corruption. Thus, each Christian village (in Macedonia, most villages were either entirely Christian or entirely Muslim; mixed villages were uncommon, and those that were mixed had been divided into separate quarters for the two camps) was presented a bill for the military service immunity tax based on population statistics. A village simply owed 5,000 *piastres* for every 180 males. The number 180 was not an arbitrary number: 1 out of every 180

Muslims at any given time was serving in the military and it cost the Empire 5,000 *piastres* to support one soldier during the year. Thus, the Ottomans determined that every 180 Christian males would contribute the 5,000 *piastres* to support one of the Sultan's henchmen.¹⁹

That was the custom before the Ilinden Uprising in August of 1903, when the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) rose up against the Empire. After the failed insurrection, and despite suggested reforms by the European Powers, unfair taxation and exploitation continued – children and the dead were still figured into the demanded tribute. More overwhelming, however, was a change to the policy calculating the military service immunity tax. As mentioned, before the new law a village paid 5,000 *piastres* for every 180 male inhabitants; after, to the detriment of the peasants' financial wellbeing, a village owed 5,000 *piastres* for every 100 males. If the military service immunity tax was cumbersome before the insurrection, then nearly doubling the tax proved virtually unmanageable. It served as an indirect punishment for the Uprising and left the peasants with no options to even partially recover from the war and Turkish retributions after the Uprising.²⁰

Still, the peasants protested against this injurious tax policy and its effects in a variety of ways. The safest legal mechanism available to them after the failed uprising was through written pleas of reason and mercy. In Buf, a village near Lerin, the peasants wrote to Hilmi Pasha, who was the President of the Financial Commission in 1906 (and who also had several different roles throughout his Ottoman career), objecting to the unfair and unwieldy taxation. Their first gripe was, not surprisingly, the military service immunity tax:

Our village numbers 243 houses, with a population of 2,258 inhabitants, 1,193 of which are men and 1,065 women. Of the men 25 have taken their departure for good; there remain, therefore, 1,168 male inhabitants for whom the village is obliged, according to the most recent law, to pay the tax for exemption from military service at the rate of 5,000 piastres for every 100 men – that is to say, [11.68] times 5,000, making in all 58,400 piastres. Now the local authority sends us a maybata (decree) fixing the total of the tax at 65,850 piastres, a figure which greatly exceeds that established and exacted by the law.²¹

To Buf's peasants, it was not clear how the extra imposed sums were calculated. Even if the authorities had included the men who had

emigrated into their calculations, they still invoiced Buf an extra 5,000 *piastres*. But putting aside the unreasonable over-assessment, before the change in tax calculations the peasants were only legally required to pay 32,444 piastres for 1,168 of male residents. After, however, they legally owed 80% more than the previous year!

These taxes were a continuous burden for the Macedonians during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire's decay. Throughout the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was constantly engaged in military operations and the Sultan was straining to raise the funds necessary to sustain an army. The revenue stolen from the peasants through the military service exemption tax was certainly the lifeline of military, but the Sultan never seemed to have enough money to nourish the military (whether or not the capital accumulated was funneled to its intended purpose is a different matter). Shortly before the Ilinden Uprising, which had been anticipated by the Turks, the authorities ramped up their collection efforts on all taxes. One visitor to Macedonia wrote about his observations on this issue:

When I was in Monastir [Bitola] in the spring of 1903, the army contractors had struck, and the municipality was obliged to find rations for the troops. Meantime the tax-collectors were doing their best to replenish the war chest. Taxes which are due in quarterly installments were being gathered in advance. It was early summer, and the peasant, whose corn-bin had long been empty, had exhausted his credit. I talked with the headman of one little village where the gendarmes had suddenly swooped down to demand four quarters' dues in one lump sum. Eight peasants in this hamlet had nothing to pay, and asked for leave to go into the market to sell their lambs. Leave was refused, and the peasants were severely beaten.²²

Immediately after the Ilinden Uprising began, while the rebels were still battling with soldiers and the soldiers were plundering and razing villages, the Sultan issued a new tax to support the war. Everyone over the age of eighteen was subject to an additional tax depending on their financial status. For example, the Sultan demanded 80 cents from the poorest peasant and 800 dollars from each of the richest landowners and merchants.²³ This was a load flung not only onto the backs of the Macedonians, but on all peoples, suggesting that the Sultan was desperate to prevent his empire's degeneration.

Yet, due to the military service immunity tax, the Macedonian Christians escaped military service's many devastating ramifications that their Muslim neighbors in Macedonia could not avoid. In the countryside where most Christian peasants lived, even though the agricultural situation was relatively meager compared to the situation in other European nations (due to the Sultan's minimal investment into society, resulting in the proliferation of primitive agricultural methods and techniques, as well as due to an abusive economic system that discouraged agricultural productivity), Macedonia's Christians were in a much better position to toil the fields than Macedonia's Muslims. Throughout the 19th century the Turks engaged in warfare with a myriad of nations and peoples. In that century the Ottoman Empire entrenched themselves in no less than forty military campaigns, both large-scale wars and the suppression of smaller-scale rebellions.

Whether or not the Ottomans prevailed had little effect on the health of the Muslim peasant population. For example, in only two wars between Turkey and Russia, the Turks lost somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 soldiers due to either combat or disease; and in the Greek War of Independence they lost 20,000 soldiers. The innumerable dead soldiers from these combined military endeavors – along with the equally large number of permanently mutilated and disabled men – depleted the Muslim population of their agricultural laborers. While the Christians had to pay a tax for not being able to serve – or rather, to perish – in the army, this mandatory option was not available to their Muslim neighbors, who were summoned to conscript when wars commenced. Food production for Macedonia's Muslims, thus, rested almost entirely on women, children and the elderly, who were not able to maintain the very physical and tedious work in addition to their normal duties.²⁴ Thus, while military service immunity taxation may have been cumbersome and impoverishing for Macedonians, it had the unintended effect of keeping the Macedonian population relatively stable.

Still, because the vast majority of the Macedonians' tax contributions went to either finance the army or line the pockets of greedy and corrupt officials (responsible and just bureaucrats were rare), the Ottomans imposed additional taxes to pay for infrastructure and other societal needs. Macedonia's last four decades under Ottoman dominion were marked with spurts of European diplomatic intervention that aimed to reform the Turkish government and economy. But the Europeans lacked the resolve to hold the Sultan accountable, and tax abuses

persisted even with European threats. Between 1890 and 1892, “a tax of sixteen *piastres* [was] levied on tax payers in some places for road building,” but the money never went for its intended purpose. “The road between upper Djumaya and the Razlog district,” for example, had “long been talked of, but nothing [had] yet been done to open this needed thoroughfare.” All those villages, thus, had to transport all imports and exports on packsaddles.²⁵ Another additional tax implemented at the European Powers’ insistence in 1906 was one assigned to villages in order to support the building of police stations. This burden amounted to 6% of a peasant’s income, and many of the police stations were not constructed.²⁶ The consequences the Turks suffered amounted to European scolding and diplomatic maneuvering; yet, none of this significantly frightened the Sultan into implementing substantial changes to the Ottoman system of governance. Thus, while there were many failures with applying European reforms in Ottoman Macedonia, perhaps the most noteworthy was that the Turkish authorities were not derailed from continuing their corrupt business of purloining the Macedonians’ taxes. Instead of reinvesting the original taxes into infrastructure and society, they furnished additional taxes on top of those, which were also stolen and rarely directed toward their intended purposes.

The most burdensome tax in Ottoman Macedonia, however, was probably the *tithe*, also known as the ten-percent tax. The government would demand one-tenth of a peasant’s produce as a payment for tax, which on the surface seemed fair and manageable for the peasant (ignoring the Macedonians’ other tax loads and general Ottoman corruption). But this tax’s burden did not originate in the language of the law but rather in the greedy and corrupt souls of the various and several tax collectors. In particular, the assessment process for determining how much tax one owed was subjective and whimsical. For example, when the peasants were readying to harvest corn, the tax-gatherer would ride into the fields on his horse and without dismounting or employing any sort of knowable methodology, he would briefly scan the rows and estimate how much corn resided in a peasant’s crop. Because the tax rate was 10%, if he determined that there were 50 loads of corn, then he would demand 5 loads as payment. Usually, however, the tax-collector grossly overestimated the total produce and a peasant who owed 5 loads would actually only gather a total of 8 or 9 loads from his field. Thus, the arbitrarily assigned tax destined a Macedonian peasant to owe the government more than half

of what he grew.²⁷ “It must not be supposed that the tax-collector takes the trouble to weigh the grain or to measure it,” wrote one author. “He marches into the granary, glances hastily round, and writes down the first estimate which occurs to him.”²⁸

As another example, in Mavrovo, a village southwest of Tetovo, in addition to incorrectly estimating the amount of produce a peasant would produce, the tax-collector would appraise hay or corn at three times its actual value at the market. In many cases, this meant that the tax-collector would take around 40% of the actual value of the crop,²⁹ because it was impossible for the peasant to sell his product at the price the tax-collector evaluated it. One author highlighted this unfairness:

[T]here is no justification for the exaction of a portion of the harvest before the tax-gatherer or the peasant can tell what its value will be, and the resumption of the old practice is contrary to the scheme of reforms demanded by the Powers and guaranteed by the Turkish government.³⁰

This practice of overestimating produce and taxing a peasant on more capital than he produced was not a seldom occurrence: it arose as a habit and evolved into a tradition that became increasingly detrimental as the Ottoman Empire waned and sank into stagnation.

The taxes mentioned above were emphatically the most damaging to the Macedonian’s well-being. However, it was the accumulation of these and all the other minor taxes that plunged them into an abyss. In their letter to Hilmi Pasha, the village of Buf’s peasants highlighted many of these pestering financial afflictions. The village had to pay 1,080 *piastres* to support the construction of a hospital in nearby Lerin and 1,400 *piastres* for repairing military posts in the region. The peasants also had pay a traditional tax on livestock – such as 5 *piastres* per head of goat and sheep – plus a fresh tax on other livestock, which included horses, mules, cows, donkeys and pigs. The horses, mules and cows were taxed at 10 *piastres* per head; while pigs and donkeys were taxed at 13 and 3 *piastres* per head, respectively. Buildings (homes and businesses) were also taxed, forcing the village to pay nearly 10,000 *piastres* for all structures in their village, and they even had “to pay it two or three times for different buildings, constructed at different times on the same foundations.” Finally, Buf’s millers had to pay more money in licensing fees than the millers’ gained in profit.³¹

Buf was not a distinctive example of the Ottoman Empire’s boundless taxation madness. Peasants in every Macedonian village

were confronted with an abhorrent number of taxes. They had to pay taxes for education, which they did not even receive from Turkey; if they wanted their children to attend school, then they had to pay the Bulgarian or Greek Churches that had infiltrated Macedonia and established schools there. The peasants also had to pay for roads, bridges and other infrastructure that were never constructed.³² This trend of taxing peasants and not returning any benefit to them was the backbone of the Ottoman economic system.

But these taxes came in a variety of forms and not all were measured in their direct financial benefit to the Sultan. In 1903, Reverend Dr. Malcolm MacColl of London gave a sermon outlining the misery that Macedonians faced under the Ottoman economic system. He described, with incredible disdain, one particular devastating tax that wrecked the peasant's soul and honor more than it did his wallet:

[T]he most cruel of all...is the tax called Gazaldik [*sic*], ironically meaning the hospitality tax. Every Christian householder throughout Turkey is bound to give three days' gratuitous hospitality to every Mussulman official or Government traveler who asks for it...When the shades of night fall they order the men out of the house and have their women at their mercy.³³

Generally, the headman and wealthier peasants of each village were more often subjected to the Gazdalik tax because they were capable of providing more comfort and hospitality than their poorer peasant brethren.³⁴

Another writer talked about a tax similar to the Gazdalik tax in the sense that it did not demand money from the peasants but instead mandated that peasants offer their services whenever their superiors necessitated it. This tax was so commonplace and entrenched in Ottoman culture that one author referred to it as a custom:

There is an old custom, by which, in certain circumstances, Christians give their collective services to their masters, the Mussulman Beys, without payment. One of these Beys, Beid-ul-Lah by name, who resides at Kastoria, and is a wealthy landowner at Stensko (a Patriarchist village 25 kilometers west of Kastoria), was in need of fuel, and ordered his agent Ibrahim to have some wood cut and carried to Kastoria by the inhabitants of Stensko. In accordance with the feudal customs of the country, Ibrahim requisitioned the services of one man from each house in the

village, and, after gathering them all together with their loads, accompanied them to Kastoria[.]³⁵

Hence, taxation in Macedonia was more about servitude than it was about maintaining a functioning government.

However, taxation was not the only avenue for enslaving Macedonians. Most Macedonians could not own land and the estates in Macedonia were generally ruled by a Muslim autocrat with “extensive authority over his peasants.” While a peasant did indeed own his home, he still had to pay this autocrat one-third of the produce of his yearly crops.³⁶ In addition, depending on where villages were situated, the frequent and dreadful hostility of bandits and brigands plagued the Macedonians. The crimes of these bands of criminals are examined in detail later, but a village often had to unwillingly pay tributes to certain brigands for protection from other brigands, causing the peasants an additional financial hardship for which justice was inaccessible. For example, the village of Mavrovo in 1908 (which consisted of 140 houses) paid tributes to seven different Albanian chiefs to avoid being attacked, pillaged and murdered by them. Each of these tributes ranged from six to twenty liras.³⁷

Thus, the Macedonian was left with very little to subsist on. Two writers broke down the average Macedonian peasants’ financial situation in the year immediately after the Ilinden Uprising:

It is estimated that the average peasant household can produce only about \$125 per annum. Of this amount \$17.50 is paid to the tax collector and \$7.50 to the resident brigand whose nominal function is to protect the village from other brigands, as will be shown later; \$50 go to the landlord, while the peasant has to support his family the entire year for the small sum of \$50.³⁸

While these numbers varied depending on a peasant’s situation, the bottom line was that the Macedonians’ financial situation doomed their existence to one of a struggle to survive.

In addition to all these taxes and tributes the peasants were commanded to furnish, tax-gathering in most Macedonian districts was irregular, haphazard and without warning. If payments were not made on the spot, the peasants faced torture, harassment and imprisonment. An observation of this in 1901 in the village of Nigrita serves as a commonplace scenario. The villagers were gathering grapes in the vineyards when a rumor spread that the tax-gatherer would be arriving:

All joy vanished at once, and a dark shadow seemed to have fallen over the place. The Kodja-Bashi (headman) summoned the council of notables, and they set about drawing up the list of taxes and assigning to each individual his rightful share...No sooner had the council of elders concluded its labors than the tax-gatherers arrived, with a strong force of gendarmerie. Those of the inhabitants who were unable to get the money ready at the notice given had to suffer for their remissness. The prisons were crammed with such ill-fated mortals, while the narrow streets of the village rang with the cries of others dragged hither to the accompaniment of blows and the cracking of the whip. The cattle of some, the mules of others, were seized and confiscated. Those who had neither cattle or mules were mercilessly robbed of their household goods and chattels.³⁹

These mechanisms of economic oppression – those both officially and unofficially sanctioned – perpetuated a cycle of persistent poverty and debt among the Macedonians. In one village, the inhabitants were in debt to various tax gatherers to the amount of 2,000 *pounds* and the arbitrarily determined interest rate was set at 40%. Men were forced to leave their homes and venture to foreign lands for years at a time simply to pay off debts accumulated due to this severe taxation and limitless interest rate spikes. Here is the testimony of one Macedonian:

Three years ago I left here to work in Belgrade as a baker, for I was in debt to the tax-gatherer for 2 ½ pounds. I came back a year ago and went to the tax gatherer with the money I had brought back from Serbia – seven pounds. But the man demanded 7 ½ pounds in discharge of his debt. So behold! With all my two years' labor I am still in debt.⁴⁰

Of course, Macedonians were not content with this ridiculous taxation system and were as creative in skirting taxes as the authorities were careless in assigning them. Being that the peasants were, in part, taxed on how much food they produced, the peasants would reduce how much food they officially produced by, for example, concealing the total amount of wheat inbetween harvesting and thrashing. The IMRO actually encouraged Macedonians to conceal produce in this manner.⁴¹ The more stubborn peasants would cut down the fruit trees in their own

orchards in order to avoid paying taxes on them.⁴² One witness furnished this description of Macedonians' resistance:

Not long since, in one district, hundreds of apricot trees, on the dried fruit of which the people largely subsist during winter, were cut down by the peasants themselves in order to avoid the annual tax levied upon them. Vineyards near the capital even have been rooted up for the same reason.⁴³

Regardless, the problems of taxation could not be avoided – the Macedonians were taxed an astronomical amount and the burden was too great to endure for many. One man from northwest Macedonia explained the ridiculousness and lawlessness of tax-determination: “Even in peace they rob us! Last time my field was sown with maize the tax-gatherers reckoned two kilos as twelve. They took toll of us at that rate, and we had scarcely any corn left.”⁴⁴ Another woman in the Prespa region reported on the miserable effects of taxation after the Ilinden Uprising:

One woman, who came in sobbing, said she had offered her children to the tax-gatherers for they were all she possessed. Another, old and blind, said the soldiers had taken all her oats in the autumn for their horses, and now she was to pay tax for them.⁴⁵

The villagers of Buf, like most Macedonians, were greatly strained by this burden and thus requested reduction in some of their taxes and suspension of others. They warned of the consequences if not:

The total of the various impositions which we have to meet comes to between 150,000 and 200,000 piastres a year. That burden is so heavy for a village like ours, which was, a year ago, burned to the ground and destroyed, that it is beginning to crush us. Every new year finds us face to face with new deficits and brings us new debts. Many villagers have emigrated for this and continue to emigrate to far-off countries; the day is not far distant when we too shall be forced to do likewise, if the Imperial Government does not deign to take timely measures to lighten this burden. This tax on live-stock weighs so heavily on us that we shall soon be obliged to give up our principal means of existence – cattle-breeding.⁴⁶

Of course, these requests were not granted. Many of Buf's villagers – along with many Macedonians from other villages – ended up in the United States and Canada as a result.

Suffice to say, the tax burden was great and the life of the Macedonians was marked by relentless poverty and debt. Men left home, some permanently resettling alone and some sneaking out their families; children remained malnourished for months and years; and people were taxed on everything they owned and did not own, on everything they did and did not do. This taxation policy did not arise from any Macedonian misdeeds or wrongdoings, except for refusing to transform themselves into Muslims. Neither were the Macedonians demanding power and excess wealth. Better economic conditions and less financial abuse would have solved many problems; and, as demonstrated in the next section, a credible and fair justice system would have probably kept the Macedonians from rebelling. The Macedonians did not ask for much more than modest relief from excessive taxation and exploitation, of which their annual income – which is small – they kept only two-fifths.

Brailsford described the Macedonians' desires and ambitions:

It is true that they have no money, but on the other hand they have no artificial wants. Their material life is in all essentials that which their ancestors led a thousand years ago. From the civilized world they ask only Russian petroleum, the cheapest of German cutlery, English sewing cotton and coarse calico, cigarette papers from France, Austrian sugar, and coffee from Asia. All else the village makes for itself. The staple food is bread made from a mixture of wheat with rye or maize – the flour coarsely ground by water-power by the local millers. Meat the peasant seldom touches, except on the greater feast days, nor does he make much use of milk foods. His favourite relishes are red peppers, garlic, onions, and haricot beans, and with the aid of these he is content to subsist on a monotonous diet of bread. It is the cheapest food which one could well imagine.

For clothing, both men and women rely on the magnificent homespun cloth, made from the wool of their own sheep, carded, spun, and woven with primitive wooden instruments made in the village itself. A costume will last for half a lifetime, and in some districts the women's garment are embroidered with singular taste and skill from traditional designs. Each village has its own

unvarying fashion, and there is little room for diversity either in quality or kind. Every detail of life is regulated by customs which have probably varied only in minutiae since the first Slavs settled Macedonia. Generation after generation the women sew their garments in the same pattern; the potter kneads his clay at the wheel into the same graceful shapes, and the gipsy smith hammers to the same spades, the same bridles, the same pruning hooks and sickles. For feast days there is a crude red wine, for daily use a white brandy (raki, mastic, or ouso), made from the skins and twigs of the grapes. Each Sunday the young folk gather round the same tree in the centre of the village and dance the same dreary and monotonous step in one long file to the same tuneless music of the flute, and the same unvarying rhythm of the drum...

It is a simple life, laborious and limited, but not without its homely joys and its rude luxuries. It asks nothing from the outer world. It is untroubled by the march of artifice and progress. It might be happy in its simple materialism were it not for the incessant menace of violence and fraud.⁴⁷

The Macedonians were content with a simple life and that lifestyle, absent Turkish abuse and harassment, was all that they desired. They were a people with no grand designs for extraordinary wealth or material possessions. They were content with their modest houses, small fields, the sanctity of their family's honor, and the safety of their loved ones. When these necessities became unattainable, they attempted to obtain the justice they deserved. This pursuit of justice, however, was not favorably accepted by the Turks and the Macedonians' conditions only worsened. These circumstances combined to create a notorious Macedonian liberation movement – admired and respected worldwide – that festered for several years under Ottoman rule and served as an example of organization and resistance for Macedonians throughout the first half of the 20th century.

II.

Systems of Injustice and Corruption

Justice did not exist in Ottoman Macedonia – it was a preposterous ideal that most Macedonians understood to be unfeasible until the IMRO began injecting optimism and resolution into the populace. For the Macedonians, the venerable adage ‘might equals right’ was the only impression of justice shaping their lives. Within legal avenues (such as the court system), as well as in everyday common interactions with their masters and fellow subjects, the justice model was based on power and revenge. Further, as with the shameful taxation policies, Ottoman justice was soaked in corruption and abuse. On one hand, the Turkish public departments that existed in Macedonia were inadequate and incapable of restraining abuses. The concept of checks and balances was rather foreign and rarely implemented, and the Sultan ensured that only those loyal to him first and foremost occupied significant governmental positions. On the other hand, the domineering Muslims considered themselves owners of the Christian chattel. The fanatical attachment to Islamic teachings indulged the Muslims into treating Christians as subhuman enemies.⁴⁸

Within the Ottoman government, there dwelt two conflicting systems of law that contributed to the Macedonians’ untenable situation. The most significant, as mentioned, was Islam’s “Sacred Law...known as the ‘Shere’,” or Sharia Law. To Ottoman Muslims, the Koran was not simply a holy text to instruct them in matters of morality and spirituality. Rather, it was “the supreme guide in all matters, legal as well as religious.” The second legal system was “framed for use in the Civil and Commercial codes” and was an adaptation of the Napoleonic Code. It was called the ‘Kanun’ and aspired to incorporate legal precedent in decision-making. However, the two systems were hardly exclusive of each other and the Islamic courts tended to be the medium for most matters.⁴⁹ Even in the non-Islamic court system, local customs and traditions outweighed legal precedent.⁵⁰ The Kanun did supplement or compliment Sharia law, but it mostly allowed the Sultan to fully “exercise his authority.” It divided the Empire into a “two-tiered hierarchy” with a “tax-exempt ruling class” called *askeri*, and the tax-paying lower class called the *raya*.⁵¹ It was no coincidence, however, that

the ruling class was essentially Muslim and the lower class was largely Christian.

That the Islamic laws predominated was necessary to keep the Macedonians a subjugated, oppressed and impoverished people. The main torment in the Islamic court system stemmed from a law that excluded a Christian's testimony from court proceedings.⁵² A Moslem could commit an untold number of crimes without the prospect of punishment so long as only Christians were witnesses to the crimes, irrespective of how many Christians had witnessed the crimes. As one writer asserted, "100 or 1000 witnesses who may be Christian subjects of the Sultan may see a woman ill-used, carried off by force into the house of a Turk, or slain...and they cannot prove the crime because...their evidence is not available against a Mussulman."⁵³ The only "breath of justice" available to a Macedonian was to bribe the court administrators.⁵⁴ Yet, the typical Macedonian was too poor to ever offer a bribe. As Brailsford stated: "There are no courts to which he can appeal, for he cannot afford to bribe; and no Turkish judge would ever dare to decide in favour of a Christian peasant against a Moslem landlord."⁵⁵

Even when attempts to disentangle Islamic law from the Turkish governing system were made by the few progressive and respectable Turkish notables, obstacles presented themselves at every corner. Edwin Pears wrote about this in 1905:

It is true that Turkish rulers have formally decreed, notably in a great charter called the Hatt-i-Humayun, that this injustice should cease; but in practice it continues, and no Sultan has been sufficiently powerful to override the religious prejudice of the Muslim population of the opposition of Muslim judges who believe themselves to be administering a law of Divine origin.⁵⁶

The effects of the Sultan imposing Islamic ideology on the population and in government created a vicious cycle in which the Muslim population desired nothing more but to extinguish the existence of any remaining freedoms or rights for the non-believers. The authorities knew that religious domination was a valuable weapon for exacting money and goods from the Christian population; the Muslim populace, however, had been uncontrollably energized to feel nothing except unreserved disdain for the Macedonian Christians.

The result, then, was that the Macedonians had no means of redress for any crime or wrong committed against them. In one instance, a

merchant in Skopje ordered a pair of boots from a Turkish bootmaker. When he tried the boots on they were too small for his feet. The merchant, thinking that a Christian buyer had the right to return a Muslim product, approached the Turkish bootmaker, who was sitting cross-legged in front of his shop at the bazaar, and complained to him about the wrong size. The Turk, angered that an infidel would rebuke his product in such a manner, picked up an axe and bashed in the merchant's head until he lay dead on the stone path. The administration – fearing that a lackadaisical approach to pursuing justice would arouse the European observers' suspicions – arrested two Christians for the murder and permitted the Turkish killer to roam the Skopje streets as a free man.⁵⁷

These types of instances where a Turk committed egregious crimes against a Macedonian and suffered no consequences formed the rule rather than the exception to Ottoman justice. In another example, a Turk named Hamidaah in a village near Veles asked to borrow a Macedonian's horse. The twenty-five-year-old Macedonian replied that he was busy utilizing the horse for work and would allow the Turk to borrow it once he finished his task. Hamidaah became enraged that a lowly Christian would deny a Turk his right to anything a Macedonian owned whenever he demanded it. Thus, Hamidaah killed the young man with one blow to the head and continued to live his life freely: there were no reprimands from the justice system.⁵⁸ In another livestock incident, a Macedonian's cow had strayed into the field of a Turk. The Turk, without hesitation, strapped the Macedonian to a tree "and put five bullets through his body." Again, the Turk faced no penalty for his brutality.⁵⁹ Similarly, in the village of Savek, near Demir Hissar, a gang of Turks murdered two Macedonians on the road to Serres. All those arrested for the murder were the relatives and friends of the murdered men.⁶⁰

Of course, it was not just Turkish Muslims that evaded consequences for repulsive offenses against the Macedonians. Every Moslem had the sponsorship of the Islamic legal system to act as he pleased toward the Christians. This was especially true for the Albanian Muslim population that lived in western Macedonia and in Albania (also a part of the Ottoman Empire at the time). In a village near Kumanovo, a Macedonian was murdered by Albanians while tending to his cattle. He was the fifth Macedonian to have been murdered by Albanians during that year. In all instances the cattle had disappeared and were assumed to have been stolen by the Albanian murderers. However, the

authorities only arrested Macedonians for the murders and refrained from pursuing the Albanians. Despite evidence to the contrary and the population statistics of that village (the Albanians significantly outnumbered the Macedonians), Albanians avoided punishment and the Macedonians faced long sentences for acts in which they had no involvement.⁶¹ In Ottoman Macedonia, it was virtually impossible for a Moslem to be held responsible for even the worst crimes against Christians. Because a crime had obviously been committed, somebody had to be punished. As a consequence, Macedonians not only had to fear that the Turks would harm or kill them, they had to fear being held responsible for crimes they undoubtedly did not commit.

This custom would not have been able to persist as long as it did – rather, Ottoman rule over Macedonia would not have been able to endure as long as it did – without the aid of another law regulating Christians but not Muslims. The Ottomans banned Christians from arming themselves with “either a dagger or a pistol.”⁶² This law’s intent was palpable: an armed Christian populace could defend itself against intolerance and injustice, which would prevent the Ottomans from dominating the Macedonians; therefore, any action or decree that could minimize this risk was embraced. This law was rigorously enforced, and the constant intrusions of Turkish authorities into the houses of Macedonians during their hunts for weapons – whether or not any credible evidence existed suggesting that the Christian in question possessed arms – made it very difficult for Christians to arm themselves. While some Macedonians did own weapons and hid them in a variety of sites (especially as the IMRO grew in the late 1890s and early 1900s), weapons proved to be virtually useless throughout the ordinary course of their day. To be seen with a weapon in public would mean instant arrest and possible death, while the use of a weapon would have probably made one an outlaw.

There were some exceptions to this rule. On the rare occasion, especially after the Europeans insisted on reforms in Ottoman Macedonia, a Christian was allowed to become a police officer and would therefore be issued a gun. Yet, this opportunity made available to a Macedonian was indeed perilous. The idea that a Christian would police Muslims was not accepted by Muslim society. In one Macedonian town, the authorities allowed a Macedonian to be an officer and issued him a gun. Some local Turks immediately began protesting the issuance of the gun to a Christian, as well as to making a Christian a police officer. One Turk attacked and assaulted the Macedonian officer, and more

Turks joined the original attacker. As a warning to scare off the gang of mischiefs assailing him, the Christian shot his rifle into the air. His warning succeeded in scattering off the Turks; however, he was accused of attacking peaceful Muslims and the government handed him a three-month prison sentence.⁶³

Other times, arming certain Christian groups protected the economic and political interests of the empire. Around 1880, in the Vlach town of Kosana in southwest Macedonia, the Ottoman government did not fear intrigues or disturbances by the Vlachs of this town, and they distributed arms amongst them and the surrounding villages to fight off brigands that had been accosting this town and surrounding villages.⁶⁴ Vlach settlements tended to be wealthier than Macedonian settlements and the Turks wanted to protect the financial surplus that the Vlachs brought to the Empire.

Still, for Macedonians who managed to receive legal permission to carry weapons, life rarely became easier. As an example, some young Macedonians from a village near the Aegean coast asked the Ottoman authorities for permission to go quail hunting. The authorities granted permission to these peaceful and middle-class peasants to hunt with rifles. While they were hunting in the forest, Turkish soldiers approached them, beat them and took their guns. This depravity ensued despite the Macedonians producing a permit to carry guns. The Turks, not wanting to be accused of abusing their power, found a scapegoat to punish the innocent hunters. Previous to their encounter with the Macedonians, they had stumbled upon a corpse in the woods several miles away from where the youth were hunting. Even though the dead body's holes were caused by a bullet belonging to a much larger variety than could be used in the guns within the Macedonians' possession, the young peasants were sent to prison.⁶⁵

In this way, the Turkish authorities used the Macedonians' Christian religion to keep them subject and indefensible. Yet, when it came to the practice of religion, Christianity was not explicitly outlawed: Macedonians were allowed to call themselves Christian. Most notably, they could attend church and practice their religion. However, many religious freedoms and rights we enjoy today, and that others enjoyed throughout Europe at that time, were unconceivable under the Ottoman Empire. "It is a crime for a Mussulman...to become a Christian," wrote Alexander Hidden, "and it is a capital crime for a Christian to convert him. It is a crime also for a Christian to dissuade a fellow Christian from becoming a Mussulman. The Christian subjects of the Sultan are not

allowed to build any new places of worship.”⁶⁶ The Ottomans did not ban Christianity, but they discriminated against Christians so severely that they hoped conversion to Islam would follow.

The permission of Christianity meant that most Macedonians remained Christians. However, some Macedonian villages and most Albanians of Macedonia did convert to Islam. As one commentator noted, if a Christian “were to embrace Islam...he would not achieve the rights of liberty, but he would achieve at once the rights to life, honor and property...he would achieve at once the right to kill, burn and plunder.”⁶⁷ Therefore, for both those with sincere and insincere motives, incentive to become a Muslim was not lacking, and there was even more disincentive to remaining a Christian.

Becoming a Muslim bestowed upon an individual powers, titles and rights - such as land ownership and government positions - that remaining a Christian could not provide (along with other rights and protections, such as gun ownership and immunity from rotting in prison for committing crimes against Christians). Thus, many Albanians in northwest Macedonia used this to their advantage to overrun Macedonian villages and lands. Brailsford wrote:

I visited one village (Treska), only two hours' ride from Uskub, which was a populous Christian community fifty years ago, where the peasants owned their own land. About the time when we were “putting our money on the wrong horse” in the Crimea, some enterprising Albanians swooped down on the place, massacred one-half of the population, settled in their cottages, and annexed the lands of the survivors. The men of the present generation hew wood and draw water for the son of the brigand of the fifties, who is not a notable magnate. He allows them one-half of the proceeds of their labour on the lands that were their fathers'. The peasants are serfs without leisure, security, or rights.⁶⁸

In a Kumanovo village, the Albanians had done something similar in summer of 1905:

A party of some eight Albanians entered the village of Vintsa, Kaza of Koumanova, and fired on the villagers, who were making merry in a public place. Eight men and one woman were killed, three men and one girl wounded. There appears to have been no provocation. The villagers state that the reason for the attack was their refusal to work for nothing on certain farms, the owners of which had

formerly enjoyed their services gratuitously. They say that among the assailants were the stewards of two of those proprietors.⁶⁹

Therefore, most Albanians – who were originally Christians before the Turks swept over Macedonia – took advantage of their new religion to make inroads on Macedonian territory and resources. For many Macedonians, these newly converted Muslims were a scourge worse than the Turks.

But for the vast majority of Macedonians, converting to Islam was neither desirable nor acceptable – at any cost. To the contrary, most Macedonians resisted Islamization to their last breath. They especially went to great lengths to prevent their daughters from being whisked away by Turks, converted to Islam and placed in *harems* (separate quarters in houses for Muslim women and female servants). “There is a land of tears,” wrote one commentator, “and that is Macedonia, where a woman’s beauty is a woman’s curse, and where wide crosses are branded upon the fair foreheads of thousands of Christians.”⁷⁰ The Turks were keen on possessing young, pretty Christian girls and no family was safe from a Muslim’s perverted reach. The clever Macedonians, however, discovered that the sign of the cross disgusted the Muslims and would greatly reduce the odds of a Turk kidnapping their girls and forcing them to live as Muslims in Turkish *harems*.⁷¹ The Macedonian girls themselves considered these symbols of crosses “a distinction rather than persecution” or disfigurement.⁷² The Turks, on the other hand, looked at girls with these crosses on their foreheads as tainted.

This was all done for the honor, dignity and safety of the female. Many Macedonian men died protecting their sisters, daughters and wives from the Turks. But usually these efforts were to no avail:

No Christian woman in Macedonia can be protected from the passion of the Turkish soldiers and officials, and the thresholds of thousands of homes are slippery with the blood of husbands and fathers who have died defending the honor of their wives and daughters.⁷³

One visitor traveling through Macedonia witnessed the aftermath of this firsthand. A Macedonian peasant had hidden his wife from passing Turkish soldiers as they marched through the village, because she was an exceptionally beautiful woman and he feared they would attempt to confiscate and convert her, or at least molest and rape her. The woman

escaped harm thanks to her husband's suspicions, but her husband and their baby suffered another fate:

[S]topping for a drink of water at a roadside cabin, he saw evidence of a recent disturbance, and, as no one responded to his knock at the door, he entered. Seated upon a rude bench was a wild-eyed woman holding to her breast the body of a young babe, whose head had been crushed by a cruel blow, and whose face was stained with fresh blood. Upon the floor in the corner of the room was the mutilated body of a young peasant, the face hacked by scimitars until it was beyond recognition, while the abdomen had been ripped up until the bowels protruded.⁷⁴

Macedonians were virtually defenseless in resisting Turkish attempts on their lives, especially because it was fruitless to organize an armed resistance and the courts offered them no redress. Thus, for many Macedonian girls and young women, the prospect of being kidnapped by a Turk, converted to Islam and married off was a persistent fear. In a village near Veles, one young lady, whose husband had been exiled to Asia, was seized by several Turks and brought to their home, where they sexually assaulted her. She escaped and then made a complaint to the Veles authorities "who refused to seek out the criminals." Her former captors warned her to not return to her village.⁷⁵ She was forced out of her home and to start life anew in a distant village.

In another village, Vinichani, "the Turks took violent possession of a young girl and forced her to marry a Turk living in the village." Soon after, they ordered her to convert to Islam. Some of the girl's relatives and the village's Christian peasants complained to the Turkish authorities, but the authorities tossed the complainants into jail. The girl was thrown in with them, and in her hopelessness exclaimed: "Oh, God are we handed over to tyrants, or have we a king to protect us? I have been torn from my family and barbarously outraged, and no one says a word in my defense." Indeed, her kidnapers and rapists went unpunished.⁷⁶

In Topojani, "[a] girl of 16 was carried off by Turks." The mother of the girl protested and pleaded with the Turks to return her daughter, but it was to no avail. Then she took it upon herself to walk to Bitola in order to appeal the crime to the *Vali*, but she was murdered by Turks on the way.⁷⁷ This type of murder was not uncommon, and Turks were not content with Macedonians stopping them from their right to any of their

possessions. And women to the Turks were a possession they believed that they could covet at any time:

If a Turk finds a Christian woman who pleases his fancy it is only necessary for him to have her summoned before the nearest magistrate and asked if she desires to become his wife. If she consents the marriage ceremony is performed at once. If she refuses persecution begins – not only herself, but her father, mother, brothers and sisters are arrested for fictitious offenses and thrown into prison. They may be accused of treason and shot; they may be fined the entire value of their property, and made to suffer other penalties which the Turks show great ingenuity in devising. Some women yield to save their families, and are self-condemned to spend their live in the perpetual slavery of the harem[.]⁷⁸

Thus, the courts in Macedonia were useless for Macedonians in these matters, as in all matters. Macedonian girls were the target of Turkish eyes, and the Christian religion – while not banned – was completely degraded. But Macedonian culture and identity was also attacked. The Turks were wary of Macedonians maintaining or further developing any sense of pride in their culture and identity. For example, Macedonians were not even able to sing or whistle folk songs without fearing for their well-being:

Like all primitive peoples, the Macedonians record events closely touching their lives in those folk songs which are sometimes preserved for centuries, composed by no one knows whom...The children sing them in chorus as the kaimakam passes along; they can only be scolded, or smacked, at the worst, but God help the adult who even whistles them within official hearing.⁷⁹

An example of this can be seen in Mite Kolev's and Stojan Stojkov's trip to Prilep in October 1905. The two men, who were from the village of Beshishta, sat down in a tavern for some drinks after buying some items and had planned to shortly depart for Beshishta. As they drank, they began to sing Macedonian folk songs. A police officer arrested them for singing these songs, as it violated the law of the "publication of harmful writings." After rotting in prison for two months, they were sentenced to eight days in prison (which they still had to serve) and furthermore were ordered to pay a fine. Another example of this same law being enforced occurred with the imprisonment of nine

Macedonians from Ohrid, who were singing Macedonian folk songs in one of their houses as part of Christmas celebrations.⁸⁰ Hence, it was practically forbidden for Macedonians to do anything but be miserable and depressed – and even then, they still faced innumerable assaults and harms at the whim of the Turks.

If the laws governing Macedonians were demoralizing, then the prison system in the Ottoman Empire was a dehumanizing experience repeatable only in the most gut-wrenching nightmares. In 1884, one visitor to Solun had the rare opportunity to tour the White Tower, an infamous prison in Macedonia. The White Tower had been unofficially known as the Bloody Tower by the Macedonians because of the numerous public hangings of Christian prisoners, sometimes en masse, that transpired there. It was in that very year, 1884, that the Sultan discovered it had been known by this name and he ordered the authorities in Solun to start using the term ‘White Tower’ when referencing it.⁸¹

As the visitor briefly toured the prison and conversed with prisoners and prison guards, he discovered that 380 prisoners were crammed inside, of which three dozen were officially declared political prisoners (however, he suspected the number of political prisoners was drastically underreported). Although each prisoner received a bed and mattress, the authorities only nourished them with bread and water. It was up to a prisoner’s family and friends to bring coffee, meat and other foods.⁸² The German Vice Consul, Herr Padel, also visited this Solun prison many years later in 1902. Inside, he saw “sickening sights” that demonstrated “the worst horrors of the darkest ages of Turkish tyranny still continue unabated.” About 300 prisoners were awaiting “the certain condemnation to death.” Further, overcrowding was a real concern:

[The] gaols have for several years past have been filled to overflowing, and frequently there have been scenes of overcrowding almost equally in atrocity indicted upon English victims in the Black Hole at Calcutta. In the midst of filth quite indescribable, men, women and children are huddled together, so that there is not much room to sit down, much less to lie and sleep. Many of these people have never been proved guilty of anything, but are only under suspicion of being in sympathy with the Macedonian cause.⁸³

At any given time before the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and after the Ilinden Uprising, the prison fortress in Solun housed 1,500 prisoners. One room that measured 560 square feet housed 70 prisoners – giving each prisoner 8 square feet of living space, which is smaller than a typical baby crib. Many of these prisoners were executed; and one in particular was publicly hung in front of the White Tower where his body remained for three days.⁸⁴ In April of 1902, four women from Novo Selo (near Strumica) journeyed to Solun to complain that thirty villagers, including their husbands, were imprisoned in the White Tower without having been tried. Three of the prisoners died due to the callous conditions before their hearings were even scheduled.⁸⁵

The prisons in Macedonia were known for such dreadful conditions that the European powers were regularly encouraging the Sultan to implement prison reform. At the turn of the century, in one newly built prison in Skopje, which had been expected to upgrade the conditions for inmates, the conditions instead changed for the worse. The untried suspects were clustered into an underground environment much shoddier than the above ground quarters inhabited by the convicted. As with this new Skopje prison, most prisons provided no room to lie down and dead inmates were carted out daily. The Turks were cognizant of the despicable conditions and therefore they made it very difficult for outsiders to visit the prisons. On the rare occasion – and usually after warning so that they could improve the prison's conditions temporarily – the authorities would allow a foreign officer to visit the prisons in order to gauge the progress or regress of the prisoners' conditions.⁸⁶

An essential flaw of the prison and court system under the Ottoman Empire was that many Macedonians had to wait several months – and some well over a year – before their trials commenced. In certain villages near Brod, eighty Macedonians were arrested in connection with the murder of a priest. Only two of them, whether they were actually guilty or not, were sentenced for the murder. But the other seventy-eight had to wait in jail for up to six months before being released or acquitted. In another case, twenty-three men – including the mayor – from a village in the vicinity of Solun, suffered in prison for five months before their trial, a proceeding in which they were all acquitted. In another case, five men – including a priest – from the village of Ljubojno, in the Prespa region, lingered for fourteen months in prison before their trial began. After a quick proceeding, they were found innocent of murder.⁸⁷

The most accurate descriptions of prison life hail from prisoners themselves. One such inmate, Dobre Daskalov, who became an IMRO

member due to his baseless arrest and terrible treatment, recalled life in solitary confinement for the few months he was detained there in 1902:

Night after night I heard through the walls of my cells the moans, the screams, the bootless ejaculations of peasants who were brought in and beaten on their feet until they could not use their limbs. The door of an adjoining cell would open, grate upon the ear, and then close on the stalwart ruffians...who perform the duties of executioners. I was an unwilling ear-witness of these horrible scenes almost every night of my imprisonment, and it made me wild to think that I could do nothing to help the wretches who were thus tortured next door to me.⁸⁸

Another IMRO member who had served prison time talked to a visitor about his experience. The author recalled:

He was incarcerated in a kind of small cellar...where a man can neither sit nor stand nor stretch himself. It was underground and very damp. At night soldiers pour water on the wretched inmate from above, often in a continuous stream, so that even sleep is prohibited. This treatment lasts sometimes three days.⁸⁹

Conditions, indeed, were intolerable in Turkish jails. Much of this was due to a lack of funding set aside for prisons, and much was attributable to the local authorities and jail wardens themselves. The jail wardens of a prison in Skopje were so upset by the unexpected visit by European consuls seeking to “ascertain the pitiable state of the prisoners” that they beat and tortured twenty Macedonian prisoners, blaming them for the visit. But it was not only authorities that beat and tortured the Macedonians. Muslim prisoners escaped punishment for committing extraordinary crimes against the Christian Macedonians. In the Solun prison, a Macedonian schoolteacher was thrown from a distance of 30 feet by Turkish inmates and sustained severe injuries. A gang of Turkish prisoners also murdered two Macedonian political prisoners by stabbing them to death. These crimes went unpunished because they were insignificant to the ruling Muslim elite.⁹⁰

Toward the end of the Ottoman Empire’s reign, Macedonian prisoners attempted an escape from a prison in Bitola. “Armed with clubs and iron bars,” the prisoners broke through a wall and attacked the guards. However, a large contingent of police rebuffed the Macedonians’ escape, killing ten and wounding ten others.⁹¹ These

Macedonians were a handful of thousands who had been arrested before and after the Ilinden Uprising. These arrests were constant, causing Macedonians to further rebel against their intolerable conditions and their potential fate. In 1903, before the insurrection and after a group of anarchist Macedonians conducted a dynamiting terror campaign in Solun, the Turkish officials spent months arresting thousands of people. Here is how one author described how judgment was delivered:

When the gaols were filled with 'suspected' peasants, extraordinary tribunals were created in the several consular towns to judge the prisoners. I visited one of these while 'in session.' The building was a shanty in the outskirts of the town; it had been white washed for this function. The usual cellar (an excavation under a Macedonian house) served to hold the prisoners in waiting. A score of them, manacled, were brought from the gaols every morning, and choked into this dark hole, whence, one at a time, they were unchained from their partners and sent up the ladder into the court. Three dreamy looking Turks and two corrupted Christians (a feature of the reforms) tried the peasants. There were no witnesses –at least not when I was present—and the case seemed to go for or against the prisoner as he himself could persuade the sleepy judges of his innocence. The judges never asked a question; the whole evidence, pro and con, was drawn by one Turk in a shabby uniform, who stood before the handcuffed prisoner, questioned him, and then advised the judges –still sleeping—of his testimony. Judgment was by no means summary; it was not 'Who are you?' – 'Ivan Ivanoff.' – 'Guilty!' ...So slow was the process of these courts that another amnesty took place before they had tried half the prisoners. Nevertheless, the number of condemned was large, and for many months the weekly steamer which conveys political prisoners into exile was crowded on touching at Salonica.⁹²

Another author gave a similar description to the trial days and courts:

It is a court from which there is no appeal, and men are daily sent to exile, or death –it is the same thing often – or, and this is more seldom, set at liberty. The house is built on the side of a little hill, entered from the lower side by the cellar, from which one climbs

to the main floor, level with the road above. Guards stand at the cellar door, where we are allowed to enter, to save a long detour. The interior is dark, so dark that at first we can distinguish nothing, for we are blinded by the glare outside. But we are suddenly conscious that it is packed with human beings, and hark, that is the mournful clank of chains. There is something that strikes to the very marrow in the sound of iron fetters on the limbs of men...The space around us is full of men, chained by clumsy iron bars, wrist to wrist. They are awaiting their trial. Ere the guards can hurry us up the ladder, a young man in European attire steps quickly forward, dragging his companion with him. He is of refined appearance, neat even in this black hole, and suddenly begins to speak in faultless French. " I am a teacher from Ochrida." He is talking very fast, for gendarmes are coming down the steps. " Four months ago my father, brother, and I were arrested, and have been in prison ever since." " What have ye done? " we query. " God knows; we know nothing," he continued in the same rapid manner, though his voice trembled with excitement. " Our house and all our goods are confiscated. For the sake of humanity, do something for us. For the love of God, obtain our freedom."⁹³

Even if the Macedonians were given some sort of respectable and equitable trial, they were never tried or judged by their peers under the Turkish system. For example, when the Macedonian revolutionary insurrection began on Ilinden, the Sultan "instituted a new criminal court...for the trial of insurgents who are captured in arms." That new court consisted of Turks, Albanians and Greeks but not Macedonians.⁹⁴ The Macedonians were disadvantaged in every aspect of society not only compared to the Muslims, but even to their ethnic rivals of the same religion.

The Young Turk Revolution in 1908, which had been building up for several years prior, promised much social, legal, political and financial reform for both Christians and Muslims. Not surprisingly, the Young Turks chose Macedonia as their base of operations. First, Macedonia was experiencing the greatest turmoil and threatened to be the region that could most likely ignite the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Second, the Young Turks realized that, in addition to England's proposed Turkish reforms in Macedonia having been rejected by the other European powers, representatives of Austria and Russia were working to create disorder and strife among the Christian communities in Macedonia. Unless the Turkish authorities improved governance, the

local communities would remain susceptible to foreign propaganda and therefore align themselves with the intervening powers. Third, the Young Turks needed an army to force its agenda onto the Sultan, and the Ottoman troops in Macedonia were in the most disaffected position in the Empire. These troops were treated terribly, poorly fed and rarely paid, in addition to being submerged in perpetual guerrilla warfare against revolutionary bands (as well as against bands from the other Balkan countries). These troops, then, would be most likely to revolt against the Sultan. Fourth, with a headquarters in Macedonia, the Young Turks were a safe distance from Constantinople, the capital of the Empire, and they could therefore proceed more effectively and efficiently without the central authorities hammering down on them.⁹⁵ Finally, it was easier to communicate with Europeans from Macedonia than from any other place in the Empire.⁹⁶

One of the key figures of the Young Turk revolution was Niazi Bey. He was born in Resen, near Lake Prespa in Macedonia and had been involved in the Young Turk movement since 1897. He was also known as a predator of the IMRO bands, especially after the Ilinden Uprising failed. Niazi Bey expressed sympathies with IMRO's cause while at the same time fulfilling his military duty to hunt and fight them. One time he commanded the Turks in a fight between 3,500 Turkish troops and a few dozen Macedonians who fought until they perished on Babina Mountain in Bitola. Near the end of the fight, the remaining seven Macedonian rebels huddled around two bombs and blew themselves up instead of surviving to be captured by the Turks. Niazi ordered his own troops to honor the dead 50 Macedonian rebels: "Look at these heroes! That's how they fight for their rights and liberty!" He ordered his troops to fire volleys in the air in their honor. He simultaneously respected and destroyed IMRO bands.⁹⁷

It was his proclamation of revolt on July 4, 1908 in Resen that triggered the Young Turk revolution. The Sultan proceeded to suppress Niazi and his strong following. The Greek government and many Greeks in Macedonia either sided with the Sultan in his battle against the Young Turks, or they remained indifferent. The revolt in Resen lasted several weeks, but it showed the weakness and vulnerability of the Sultan's reign. On July 23, 1908 the Young Turks issued an ultimatum to the Sultan: the Sultan was either to restore the Constitution of 1876 within twenty-four hours, or he would perish in a firestorm of a strong and angry Turkish army. The Sultan agreed to their demands quickly and quite unexpectedly.⁹⁸

By 1908, there were about 20,000 members of the Young Turks in the European provinces (Macedonia, Thrace, and Albania). These members were part of a secret organization that based many of their notions on structure and ideology from IMRO's operations and activities.⁹⁹ This is not surprising because IMRO was a very successful organization, and many Turks looked up to them while despising them. But IMRO was fighting and striving – first and foremost – for basic dignity and humanity. Many of the Young Turks, on the other hand, were more concerned with the ignorance and primitiveness of their government than the corruption and inhumanity it practiced.¹⁰⁰ Regardless, the Young Turks developed a large gathering of disgruntled Turkish soldiers and officials that sought to upset the current Ottoman structure.

Still, the Young Turks could not easily assume control of Turkey without the support of the Macedonians. They had to convince the Macedonians to join them in the revolution. They argued that the Macedonians could never defeat the Sultan on their own; that if the Great Powers did intervene, it would not work out to the advantage of Macedonia, as the Great Powers would be working primarily for their own interests; and that it would be better to join other Ottomans to keep Macedonia united in the Empire, rather than divided between its neighbors. In the new Turkey, all Macedonians would have equal rights. This would not be the case in a free but divided Macedonia, argued the Young Turks.¹⁰¹

One high ranking Turkish official sympathetic with the Young Turks' aims met with an IMRO leader and explained why the Macedonian cause was failing and needed to align with the Young Turks' mission:

Why take up arms? Armed revolution is obsolete, futile. Do like the Young Turks; accept things as they are for the time being, but agitate. Join them, and make the progressive movement a solid force...The majority, Turks as well as Christians, are progressive, but the majority are for peaceful means...You are destructive, wasteful – why not create?¹⁰²

The Macedonian organizations were persuaded by these arguments and joined the Young Turks. Still, they were not overly enthusiastic about joining the Turks. They had several doubts and hesitations, especially in relation to whether they could trust that the Young Turks would significantly change society.¹⁰³ After all, the Sultan had been

promising reform for three decades and the Macedonians' situation had only deteriorated.

However, with the success of the initial Young Turk maneuvers came the concession of the Sultan and the implementation of the Constitution. The Macedonians were now optimistic that conditions for Macedonians would exponentially improve. On the day that the new Constitution was announced, all peoples of Macedonia took to the streets for celebration:

The walls of Salonica contain at this moment all the elements of hate and cruelty which have made Macedonia a hell on earth for all its inhabitants. These people, who come linked arm-in-arm, laughing together, drinking endless coffees together, dancing together, have schemed and plotted against each other's lives for years past: they have burned each other's villages and flocks and granaries, they have killed each other and each other's women and children with every refinement of cruelty; the problem of their reconciliation has baffled all the cabinets of Europe. A fortnight ago, no one in Macedonia would have dreamt this thing were possible.¹⁰⁴

However, in the early spring of 1909, just a few months after the Young Turks' success in the previous summer, the old Turkish forces retracted their promises and booted out the Young Turks who had made inroads into the Sultan's government. But the Turkish army and population had prepared for this scenario and marched to the Turkish capital. Jane Sandanski, one of the Macedonian liberation movement's most revered and notorious leaders, led 1,200 Macedonians in this attack on Istanbul. His faction included Albanian volunteers and Turkish troops. After a three-day battle, the Young Turks permanently eliminated the old regime. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was dethroned and his brother Mehmed Reshad V was chosen as his replacement.¹⁰⁵ The Young Turks now held onto all the power in the Ottoman Empire. These successes of the Young Turk movement caused the European Powers to abandon their new attempts to reform Ottoman rule in Macedonia, for which they had been scheming since the Ilinden insurrection.¹⁰⁶ The Europeans believed in the promise of the Young Turks and were relieved to release themselves of the Macedonian burden.

One of the first tasks of the new Turkish regime was to reassure the Macedonian Christians that the pursuit of justice was a priority for them. For example, they immediately executed two Turks and an

Albanian who had murdered scores of Christians. These pursuits of Muslim criminals who committed excesses and cruelties against the Macedonians were welcomed by the Macedonian peasants. While there were still some grievances about crimes that had gone unpunished, there were no new allegations of the outrages that they had experienced under the previous regime.¹⁰⁷

Macedonians were even represented in Turkey's new parliament. While the total number of Macedonians amounted to only four representatives, it was a drastic and significant improvement over the zero they previously had in government. Two of these representatives were Jane Sandanski's followers. Unfortunately, some Macedonians felt that Sandanski's men would not fairly represent them because Sandanski and his men joined the Young Turk revolution. In many Macedonians' minds, the Turks were still the enemy and aligning with them meant one was aligning against the Macedonians. However, this sentiment, while understandable, was not completely justified. In the beginning of the new Turkish regime, Sandanski's men were adamant that the authorities pursue justice for the Macedonians and punish any Muslims who committed crimes against Christians. Sandanski and his men preferred to work with a progressive Turkish movement instead of engaging in perpetual bloodshed with the Turks. Still, rumors circulated that Sandanski and his men would be too hesitant and afraid to persistently advocate on behalf of the Macedonian people. Many Macedonians believed that if the idea that the government in Macedonia could not remain just and neutral on religious matters, then old intrigues and divisions would flourish.¹⁰⁸

As a matter of fact, issues with unjust governance appeared during the elections. Gerrymandering, for example, was common. In a district where the number of Muslim voters was one-third the total of the Macedonian voters belonging to the Bulgarian Church, the Muslim vote was afforded the same weight as the Macedonian Christian vote. Moreover, in the district of Strumica, Macedonians predominated, but electors were chosen in the following proportions: 12 Turks, 9 Macedonians, 5 Greeks, and 1 Jew. Three contributing factors created this predicament for the Macedonians: Turkish gerrymandering; voter lists written only in Turkish and Greek so that Macedonians could not quite understand; and Muslims under the age of 25 were allowed to vote while Christians under 25 were not.¹⁰⁹

The fantasy of a Turkey where justice prevailed and all peoples were treated equally eventually disappeared. Initially, when it appeared that

Turkey was headed toward reform, peasants began – much to their excitement and relief – to buy back land from their overlords with money they had earned from working abroad. But the Turkish government soon put a halt to this by buying up all available land in Macedonia. The authorities displaced many Macedonian farmers and replaced them with Bosnian Muslim refugees and other Muslims. This was the beginning of a process to Ottomanize Macedonia and the Macedonians more forcefully than had been witnessed since the first two centuries of Ottoman rule.¹¹⁰

The new Turkish rulers' assimilation campaign sought to instill a false Ottoman sense of patriotism by attempting to eliminate the national and religious sentiments of the Macedonians.¹¹¹ As a matter of fact, one correspondent who interviewed a Young Turk right after the success of the movement learned that this had been their plan all along:

I asked one of the leaders of the Young Turks whether [autonomy] would be granted to the province, and his reply was, 'Never, never, never!' It is the programme of the Young Turks to make all Christians Ottomans, to assimilate them, a thing which no other Turks have attempted except by sword.¹¹²

The Turks thought to themselves, "if the same Macedonian village could within the space of ten years be first Bulgarian and then Servian and then Greek, why not Turkish?" (The policies of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia in Macedonia are detailed later.) One could not accuse the Turks of creative aspirations. Even a French politician stated that "he could make all Macedonia French" if given a few million francs. "He would found schools and teach the children that all Macedonians were descendants of the French crusaders, who in the twelfth century had conquered and occupied Salonica."¹¹³ Thus, the Turks thought they could manipulate the Macedonians in the same fashion that Macedonia's Christian neighbors manipulated them.

Starting in the late spring of 1909, the original Young Turk committee started ordering the assassinations of Macedonian rebel leaders who caused havoc under the previous regime. By the fall, the Turks violated the constitution for free association of organizations and forbade ethnic or national organizations to be formed in Macedonia. While they were legally banned, some of these groups began to operate in secrecy as revolutionary organizations.¹¹⁴ In November 1909, the Turks enacted a law holding responsible all families where a member of the household

disappeared, along with the whole population of a village harboring any rebels, for the deeds of the revolutionaries.¹¹⁵

By 1910, nearly five dozen IMRO chiefs, who had been granted amnesty along with hundreds of others IMRO members after the Young Turk revolution, were arrested in their villages and sentenced to rot in prison. Other IMRO rebels soon began fleeing to the mountains and reforming their bands. At the same time, any school teacher who did not subscribe to the Ottoman national identity was removed and replaced with Muslims or Christians who upheld and promoted Ottoman national ideals.¹¹⁶

IMRO thus began pursuing their old methods of revolutionary work against the new Turkish regime. In a manifesto they released, they justified their resurrection: "The population is at the mercy of innumerable lord-tyrants. Plunders, murders, abduction, and violation of women and children, are of daily occurrence. The laws of the land are a dead letter."¹¹⁷ IMRO had returned to initiate rebellions and uprisings, as well as to provide safety and security for Macedonians. To the Macedonians, this was necessary because under the Young Turk regime, Macedonia had spiraled into a chaos just as bad as it had ever been subjected to. One correspondent wrote in 1911:

The conditions are even worse than they were under the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid. There is a complete absence of security for life and property and the authorities appear to be unable to put any check on the prevailing lawlessness.¹¹⁸

One author, writing just after the Balkan Wars ended, put it this way: "If autocratic Sultans had punished the poor Macedonians with whips, the Young Turks flayed them with scorpions."¹¹⁹

The Balkan states in 1912, shortly before the first Balkan War began, proposed a series of reforms to the Ottomans to deal with Macedonia and the engulfing hell. The six main points were: 1) to divide the remaining provinces of European Turkey into ethnic circumscriptions; 2) to appoint Swiss or Belgian officials as governors of those provinces; 3) to treat all schools equally, regardless of religious affiliation; 4) for all groups to be equally represented in the Turkish parliament; 5) to admit Christians in every single branch of the empire's administration; and 6) to create Christian military divisions. This all was to be done "under the auspices of representatives of the Powers."¹²⁰ However, as will be shown later, the Balkan states really had no desire to better the conditions of the Macedonians. Their only aim was to secure their

national and financial interests in Macedonia through any means necessary. This amalgamation of enemies teaming up against Macedonia turned a chaotic situation into a purely devilish creation. Still, until the Balkan countries wrestled Macedonia away from Turkey and then split it between themselves, many Macedonians were willing to accept any help to throw off Turkish yoke. They never imagined that the injustices that plagued them under the Ottoman times would repeat themselves.

The underlying problem of Ottoman rule in Macedonia revolved around a system overshadowed by abuse and corruption. While economic and religious policies certainly scarred the relationship between the Macedonians and their Turkish masters, the extent of that domination would not have been as ruinous had the Ottoman organism disinfected itself of abuse and corruption. The source of Ottoman corruption began with the Sultan and then seeped down the rungs of command to the lowest-ranked officials. These virtually irrelevant officials – who were minions in the Sultan’s mind – snootily pursued growth of rank (whether in the government or the army), which they trusted would subsequently inflate their fortune and social status. They observed and copied their senior officials’ behaviors and attitudes as examples of the best (if not the only) avenues for implementing their crooked designs.

All civil and military power in Turkey was centered in the hands of the Sultan.¹²¹ Even those Turkish officials who desired to rule well (or to implement policies slightly different than the Sultan desired) had no power to part from the dictated course. The Sultan was obsessed with controlling and manipulating every possible aspect of governance. Here is how one author put it:

Practically, government begins and ends with the sultan, whose policy is to centralize power in his own hands in order to facilitate his projects of oppression. The representative councils provided for in the law have either never met or are completely insignificant... It is useless for a provincial treasurer to protest that his district has already paid its legal contribution in taxes: his inferiors have their independent orders, and if he hesitates to act on his they will put theirs into force. So the soldiers go around again to collect fresh toll, and gradually the people are reduced to a level of poverty from which violence alone can extract more taxes.¹²²

The few decent Turkish officials were a rare breed, however. All appointments to even a municipal office were in the power of the Sultan's palace.¹²³ Perhaps had officials and administrators been democratically elected, Turkey would have eventually evolved into a respectable and equitable society. The failing of the Young Turk revolution to secure this type of society suggests otherwise, however.

The Sultan was well aware that relinquishing control would threaten his power and wealth. A Turkish diplomat from Constantinople wrote in February of 1906 about how the Sultan was hesitant to put forth reforms in Macedonia:

He subsidizes numberless employees and officers, some of whom he unworthily promotes, for they each and all act as his personal spies, informers and special agents. All these men were paid out of the revenues of Macedonia. Once the control becomes a reality they will have to be paid out of the income of the remaining provinces which do not come within the pale of the financial control or not paid at all. And there is the rub! Once the revenues of the Macedonian provinces are properly expended on local wants, on public works and in defraying regularly the salaries of officials, civil and military, as well as in paying the cost of maintenance of the third army corps, there will be very little left to fill the coffers of the Sultan. He will be debarred from applying revenues to illegitimate and unauthorized objects. The pashas, generals and officials in Macedonia who will suffer by the introduction of financial reforms may, the Sultan fears, join the rank and file of the 'discontented' and conspire against his throne and person. The evil may spread by contagion to other districts and thus swell the numbers of those whose interests are affected by the control."¹²⁴

The Ottoman *pashas* that would 'suffer' from the implementation of reforms were markedly creative in sketching plots of corruption. Road-building in Ottoman Macedonia is a fine example. If the Sultan required a road to be built between Skopje and Bitola, then the authorities would relocate male peasants from villages surrounding Bitola to a camp near Skopje, and male peasants from villages around Skopje to a camp near Bitola. The men were left without food provisions and instructions on their construction duties. After several days, the Macedonians would begin to complain about their unsatisfactory conditions and treatment. These grumblings from the chorus of unfed men encouraged the *pasha*

to proclaim that a revolt had broken out. The soldiers would then raid these men's villages (which were defenseless, because the men were absent, meaning that the Turks were less likely to encounter dangerous resistance), and pillage all the homes of anything deemed valuable. In the end, construction was halted and the road remained unbuilt, leaving the country with pitiful infrastructure; the *pasha* pocketed the money intended for the new road, as well as the money grossed from looting the villages; and hundreds of Macedonian families were left with nothing.¹²⁵ In this way, the Ottoman authorities sustained their selfish conducts and Macedonian society was prevented from progressing.

Furthermore, the Turkish authorities often merely disregarded corruption in the Muslim private sector. Actually, in many instances the authorities collaborated with the Muslim citizens to degrade and bankrupt the Macedonians. As mentioned before, some Macedonians were legally allowed to own small parcels of land under certain conditions. In Kumanovo in 1904, rich Turkish land owners and representatives of the Turkish agricultural bank formed a society "to dispossess the Christian" landowners. The bank functionaries illegally sold the estates of many Christians and then mortgaged them to the bank. All those estates were then sold to Turks.¹²⁶

Yet, it is not uncommon in any society for private citizens to take advantage of others. In Macedonia, the problem with this (as described previously) was that the Macedonians had no means of redress. However, the Turkish authorities themselves were consistently scheming to deprive Macedonians of anything and everything. American missionaries, who operated in Macedonia for many decades, were exposed to the many irregularities and abuses of Ottoman officials. They reported on these observations quite often. For example, here is a description of one Turkish official's particular abuse in the Razlog district in 1904:

Even the guardians are sometimes robbers. During the past three years... a Turkish officer, who has been sent out from Serres to hunt up the mountain brigands, has chosen to help himself somewhat freely. Two years ago a wealthy man of V. was taken by brigands to the mountains and held for ransom, but escaped. [The Turkish officer] was sent after the robbers – but took from the villagers forty-eight liras, besides, it was said, forty more for the support of his band while he chose to stay there. From the small village of Palat he took eleven liras, and going to a neighboring hamlet of poor Gypseys, by beating, he forced them to give him

three liras. Adding together the sums which he is reported as having taken in three years, they amount to about two hundred (200) liras gathered in, and he is still 'on duty.'¹²⁷

These guardians constituted one segment of the Ottoman system that was exceptionally noteworthy for its extraction of money from the Macedonians. These Muslim men were called *bekjis*. Theoretically, these *bekjis* were guardians appointed by each village for the purposes of rural policing, protecting harvests from spoliation, overseeing the gathering of crops, keeping watch in vineyards, and defending peasants and their chattel from raiders. A village could have as many *bekjis* as it wanted or could afford, and the villagers could choose each one democratically. In reality, however, these guardians were loathsome tyrants. Petty authorities and brigands would force upon a village their nominees for *bekjis*, who would then proceed to scope out the land for the brigands and assist them in their criminal activities. Some villages were forced to appoint ten of these guardians, each demanding anywhere between 20 and 50 *liras* per year as payment for their services. The brigands that controlled the *bekjis* would also influence higher-ranked Turkish officials and politicians, who would aggravate persecution against villagers if they complained about the *bekjis*.¹²⁸

As mentioned, the *bekjis* official duty was "to watch the fields, orchards, and cattle of a town or village." But in reality, he was the scourge of every Macedonian:

He interferes with the domestic affairs of the peasants, regulates their marriages. He stays in any house he likes, and behaves as lord and master. He helps the Turks who wish to abduct Christian girls. He points out to the brigands the most well-to-do peasants. He is the right-hand man of the local bey, and procures concubines for his harem. The honour of no woman is safe from him. He steals the best grapes and fruit by night, and sells it to anybody who likes to do business with him.¹²⁹

In the villages around Prilep, this problem exploded into a plague after the failed Macedonian uprisings in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The appointment of a new *Mutessarif* (a governor of a province), Abdul Rahman Effendi, had helped to check these outrages because he legitimately strove to reform the *bekjis*. Effendi, who had the support of Ahmed Eyoub (a *pasha* in Bitola) managed to rid Prilep's environs of these rogue *bekjis* and proposed to apply a system of *bekji* reforms to the

entire Bitola district. The plan was to replace the current *bekjis*, who usually came from brigands, with Turkish soldiers from the regular army. The village could choose as many as it wanted and could financially support. The proposal of using Turkish regular troops was not a terrible one at the time because Christian inhabitants had better relations with the common Turkish soldier than with Turkish irregulars and their Muslim neighbors.¹³⁰ However, these reforms did not quite succeed as intended. In the end, the average Macedonian peasant had about 10% of his income set aside to pay off Turkish policemen and guardians, “not for protection, but for a precarious immunity from outrage.”¹³¹

Corruption, however, varied from official to official, and how one governed also generally depended on the principles (or lack of) that they believed in. One commentator from the 1880s claimed there were two general types of governors in the Ottoman Empire:

The one represents the ideas of Sultan Mahmoud, who regarded his empire as a whole, and all the elements in it as of equal value. Such men concern themselves with matters of general order and public utility; they accept the local balance whichever way it may be, they help to keep it true, and they always win popularity. The other represents the idea of the present day – the Islamic idea; and these men are those who warp the local balance and bring confusion into their provinces.

Because there was deep mistrust of the former type of governors, as their ideals were not dictated by the fanatic Islamic ideology, they were placed in the provinces of Macedonia. This would seem, then, that the rule and social balance in Macedonia should have been tolerable. However, the many recent wars meant that the military was put into practical control of Macedonia and the Macedonian governors had no control over public order. The central Ottoman government “thought it necessary that the military surveillance in that province should be exceptionally strict.” This resulted in a military rule over the Macedonian districts that was “represented by a gang of...ruffians” who were “indolent, corrupt, dissolute and violent.”¹³²

To be clear, the Macedonians did not invite such miserable treatment from the Ottomans by doing anything provocative or endangering. However, the Ottomans had a warped sense of what entailed provocative. To them, because the Macedonians did not convert to Islam, and because the Macedonians demanded some form of justice

and economic relief, the Turkish authorities and the Muslim population in general felt justified in exploiting and discriminating against the Macedonian Christians. The IMRO was a response to these abuses and injustices; and as one author pointed out, the flame of IMRO could have been exhausted – or never sparked in the first place – had the Turks simply refrained from the excesses committed against the Macedonians:

The secret committees and the bands, their instruments, are the offspring of the revolutionary movement; they could soon be suppressed, or they would perish for want of sustenance, if the real grievances were removed, which lie at its foundation. It was not to sit at a comedy that the Macedonian peasant took off his coat in 1903. For the most part they are stolid and fairly level-headed people going about their business in a quiet, unemotional kind of way...They do not give one impression of being an unreasonable or difficult people, whom no reforms would satisfy or who require to be helped over every fence.¹³³

The Macedonians were not an unreasonable people. But they remained a passive and submissive population for far too long. This helpless attitude by the Macedonians only invited more misery and violence into their lives. Once the Macedonians organized more wide scale rebellions, the Turks were not pleased. To submerge the population into deeper fear and anguish, they unleashed their soldiers and the Bashibazouks onto the Macedonian peasants. These villainous creatures deemed no barbarity too extreme and no life too precious in their pursuit of blood and loot.

III.

The Crimes of the Turkish Army and Bashibazouks

The IMRO spent a decade organizing and recruiting before they initiated the Ilinden Uprising in 1903. It only took a couple of months in 1903 to reverse the incredible gains that IMRO had made - the aftermath of the failed Ilinden Uprising was devastating, marked by Turkish brutality and repressive measures. The scene became more chaotic than it ever had been and the Macedonians were in a desperate position. However, the record of Turkish devastation against IMRO began upon discovery of their existence, and extended not just to IMRO members, but to every Macedonian.

Stupendous taxes, social injustice and rampant corruption executed both by Ottoman authorities constituted the pleasant side of life for Macedonians. But the frequent one-two punches of Turkish soldiers and Bashibazouks repeatedly paralyzed the Macedonians personal, social and national development. The Ottoman soldiers were scantily paid (when they were paid), poorly fed and inefficiently trained in combat. Furthermore, numerous wars and diseases added to their miserable conditions. This paved the way for many soldiers - especially in the final decades of Ottoman rule - to unleash their frustrations and grievances on the vulnerable and defenseless peasants. The Bashibazouks were a different breed of scavengers: they were irregular troops that hailed from all across the empire. They either accompanied troops into battle or followed them shortly after official business was concluded. Their notoriety as distinctly evil hordes stemmed from the fact that they operated in two capacities, as soldiers and as brigands. They fought the rebels (something regular brigands avoided) and then they looted and pillaged the peasants. Moreover, rape and murder was an enjoyable pastime for them. A Bashibazouk was described as "a Mussulman irregular, who goes with the Turkish army to aid it and to plunder. Parties of them can go out on expeditions without the regulars, and, despite all official denials, they do so raid."¹³⁴

Both the troops' and bashibazouks' carnage was topped off by their intolerance of Christians. Being that they were incapable of making any significant dents in the structure and operations of IMRO, they instead

retaliated against the peasants at every opportunity. These factors fueled their crimes, abuses and outrages against the Macedonian population. Rape, murder and wholesale looting and burning of entire villages became the standard during and immediately after any revolt. But these misdeeds were also not uncommon in times of peace. As one author put it: "Long periods of careless tolerance have alternated with savage massacre."¹³⁵ This was the Ottoman inferno in which the Macedonians were suffocating.

The period before the Ilinden Uprising and the escalation of IMRO activities was rather difficult for the Macedonians. The peasants often suffered at the hands of these military men. One Macedonian rebel leader described what life was like for Macedonians during normal conditions:

The labourer is never sure of his life, and if he chance to have a comely daughter she is a curse to him and his. I have myself seen Turks maltreat the people in a way that would transform a saint into an assassin. I have had acquaintances who were shot dead in broad daylight without a word of warning, and I knew families whose women were brutally beaten first and then dishonoured. These misdeeds take place in normal time[.]¹³⁶

Shortly after the discovery of the secretive IMRO, Turkish higher-ups spread the word for Bashibazouks and Albanians to inflict mayhem on the Macedonian Christians. In one instance, three Albanian landowners, after getting drunk during lunch, stumbled into their fields and began randomly shooting at the farmworkers, wounding three and killing one. A shocked old man protested by arguing that because they killed the peasant, his wife and children would likely starve and not survive the upcoming winter. The Albanians, out of sheer cruelty and amusement, summoned the dead man's family and killed them in order to rescue them from potential starvation.¹³⁷ In another case, shortly after a failed spring uprising in Zeleni, the Turks cracked down on Macedonians in the district of Bitola. Four hundred Macedonians were detained for "alleged connection with the revolutionary plot." As the Turkish soldiers reined them in, a large group made an attempt to escape, so the Turks gunned them down, killing six and wounding over thirty. Meanwhile, in a related incident, two IMRO teachers who were thought to have incited the revolution were arrested and tortured. "One died as a result of the cruelties imposed, and the other committed suicide to escape further torture."¹³⁸

In July of 1902, a group of Macedonians insurgents again rose up against the Ottoman Empire, hoping to start a wide-scale rebellion. They were entrenched on the banks of Lake Ostrovo, withstanding the attack of one thousand Turkish regular troops and several hundred Bashibazouks. Finally, the Turkish soldiers placed Macedonian women and children in front of them “as a screen and stormed the position of the rebels.” The rebels maintained their fire, killing many of the women and children. Many of the dead were killed by their own husbands, fathers and brothers. After dispersing the insurgents, the Turks looted and burned down the villagers’ houses. “Children are reported to have been torn to pieces in the presence of their parents; men were roasted alive, and others tortured with red-hot moulds placed on their heads. Batches of peasants are said to have been starved to death.”¹³⁹

Despite the change of leaves, the autumn of 1902 was no prettier and the “red hot moulds” were finding a special place in the toolkit of Ottoman soldiers. One newspaper reported that the Turks would “place red hot iron caps on the heads of the Christians, pour burning petroleum over their feet, and in some cases bind 60 or 70 prisoners together and leave them in this helpless state to starve to death.” The report went on to describe the torture committed against the religious leaders of Macedonia, such as compelling a priest “to oversee the murder of infants” and forcing another “to drink filth from a chalice.”¹⁴⁰ The Turks aimed to impose their authority onto the Macedonians through any and all available cruelties.

One particular way of doing so was through persistent and intense beatings of the peasants, which were a constant occurrence in most households. Velika Nedanova Gjakerkoska of Krushevo gave a detailed account of one. She had been married three times – her first two husbands were killed by Turks, as was her son Blazhe. Her third husband avoided death at their hands, but did not escape Turkish nastiness:

After some time the Turks came and took my husband Nedan and asked him to reveal the komitet that sought weapons from him; but he said nothing, because he was in that organization. They beat him and he was laid up in bed for six months. I wrapped him in woolen blankets and bathed him. I crumbled his food into small pieces and fed him like a little baby, because he couldn’t eat. He was very badly beaten.¹⁴¹

The start of 1903 foreshadowed an especially gloomy year for the Macedonians. Bulgarian authorities summed up the horror stories told by Macedonian refugees arriving in Bulgaria:

Two hundred Turkish troops, accompanied by a horde of Bashi Bazouks, entered the Macedonian village of Zeleznitza, arrested 40 of the principal inhabitants and maltreated them. First they were all bound together with ropes and mercilessly thrashed with thick thongs. Their wives and daughters were handed over to the common soldiers as presents and two children were killed in front of their parents. An old man of 80 was tortured to death in a manner too horrible for description and a woman who defended herself had four fingers of her right hand chopped off.

At Padez, the priest, Stoimenoff, was hanged by his feet from a balcony, after which a fire was lighted on the ground beneath. He was half burned and half suffocated to death. Another resident of this village named Koleff was tortured for twelve hours before death put an end to his agonies. His ears and nose were cut off and his hands crushed with heavy clubs[.]¹⁴²

In another example of merciless Turkish rage, twenty Macedonian refugees and fugitives who were returning from Kyustendil (Bulgaria) to their homes were slaughtered by troops, causing villagers from neighboring villages to flee into the mountains.¹⁴³

A foreign observer wrote about the awful methods that the Turks were employing to torture and murder the Macedonians during the winter. Beatings and lacerations were accompanied by fire and rope:

A fiendish ingenuity has been displayed in the invention of the most agonizing forms of torture. Cords are tied around the limbs of the victims until the extremities swell up and grow livid from the accumulation of blood, and then huge weights are suspended so as to inflict the utmost possible pain on the affected parts. One favorite mode of dealing with prisoners in order to force them to disclose the whereabouts of the insurgent leaders is to slowly burn the soles of their feet before a fire...One poor woman recently gave birth to a child while undergoing the torture, and died in terrible agony.¹⁴⁴

The army did not spare innocents – wholesale massacres were necessary to instill fear into the populace. On April 21, 1903, in Smrdesh, Turkish troops and Bashibazouks used cannons to destroy over 300 hundred houses, and the women, children and elderly left behind were mercilessly slaughtered. Several hundred villagers had fled to the mountains. One band of about forty women and children were caught by the Turks, and after torturing the innocents, they murdered them.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, after a failed uprising in the Struma region, the Turks unleashed their usual over-the-top reprisals on the peasants and not the rebels. Here is one description of the horrors:

Most of these misery-stricken women and children were almost naked, wasted to skeletons, with deep sunken eyes and pinched cheeks. Several were mutilated or disfigured, and the horrid welts, the open wounds, the horrible marks of the red-hot pincers with which they had been tortured were witnessed by all. One of the women of Dubnitza, who seemed more dead than alive, told the sickening story of how her brother had his head cut off before her eyes, after which she had to stand by while the ruffians chopped the body into fragments. Several witnessed the agony of their tender daughters, children of ten to thirteen, and heard their piercing cries as the men who wore the Sultan's coat subjected them to nameless violence...Other little girls and boys were deliberately and ruthlessly tortured to death, whilst place was assigned to their fathers and mothers who were forced to listen to their agonizing screams and watch the contraction of the tender bodies each time that the once pretty faces were slowly lowered into the fire.¹⁴⁶

When Hilmi Pasha, the new Inspector General of Macedonia, began implementing his policies for reform in Macedonia, the crackdown on Macedonians only intensified. Hilmi Pasha had “divided all the Macedonian arrests into two categories, guilty and suspected.” There was no category for innocent.¹⁴⁷ Thus, all Macedonians were at the mercy of the emotions of the Turkish troops and officials.

As a result of the Solun bombings in 1903 – when several young Macedonian anarchists attacked Turkish government buildings and foreign interests with guns and bombs – the Turks revamped their revenge on the people. Hundreds of innocent Macedonians were arrested for suspicion of somehow being involved in the outrages.

Further, many Macedonians were outright murdered in Solun as revenge:

Once he saw a boy going to a well in the square before his house, who, whilst stopping to fill the pail, was pierced through the skull by a bayonet wielded by a passing soldier... [Other] men were once examined by the Vali in his house, and subsequently sent back to jail. To get there they had to pass through a narrow doorway where stood four men with bludgeons. These miscreants wantonly struck at each pair that passed 'anywhere, on the head, arms, body, or legs - there was no escape. The bruises were awful and some died - those that were struck on the head.¹⁴⁸

The widespread arrests and murders continued throughout the summer. In June of 1903, the Turkish authorities arrested "103 Macedonian and Bulgarian school masters and merchants" that they considered to be "dangerous ringleaders of the revolutionaries." They were sentenced without a trial and exiled to Libya and Yemen.¹⁴⁹ One newspaper reported on other arrests taking place:

Now a general arrest of good, bad and indifferent takes place...Any man, or even boy, who from fear takes flight at the approach of soldiers is shot down as necessarily guilty...Incarcerated, they are held without trial at the will of their keepers...and...the so-called courts cannot examine all the arrests in time to satisfy the foreign consuls and diplomats urging upon the Turks to release the innocent. The whole procedure shows how farcical is the Turkish administration.¹⁵⁰

But that was a relatively easy punishment for stirring a revolution, and the civilian peasants bore the brunt of Turkish aggression. One author explained:

[T]here is not a home in Macedonia that has not been outraged, there is not a family that has not followed with bowed heads behind the coffin of some member...It is impossible for England and America to grasp in all its grim abomination the fact that there is scarcely a family in Macedonia intact. The population has been decimated. Mothers have lost sons and husbands, murdered in cold blood by the Turkish gendarmerie and soldiery; fathers have lost children and have been driven enchained to behold the shame

of their daughters. Every family in that land of sorrows wails a grave.¹⁵¹

Thus, in the summer months before Ilinden, an atmosphere of complete fear filled every Macedonian home. If there was ever a time when fear was justified in Macedonia, it was the summer of 1903.

But all of this was foreplay with respects to what was to eventually be unleashed onto the Macedonians. During and after the Ilinden Uprising in August of 1903, the Turkish soldiers and Bashibazouks unleashed fury on both the revolutionaries and civilians. The war crimes committed would set a precedent for how the Balkan people would behave in the Balkan Wars and World War 1 commencing a decade later.

In general, the picture painted by officials and witnesses to the Turkish response to the Uprising was one of horrendous outrages and a bleak outlook for the Macedonians. One consular dispatch stated that the "Bashi Bazouks assisted the regular troops in the work of repression which is said to have been carried out with sanguinary ruthlessness, the object of the Turks being apparently to exterminate...all the Christians of whatever nationality."¹⁵² The Turks desired nothing more than to deliver unchecked punishment on the Macedonian population. For example, on August 13, the Turkish army stormed into the village of Neokazi near Lerin. The troops were not satisfied with simply burning the villagers' homes. Despite the fact that only a handful of men from Neokazi had joined the IMRO, the army found it easiest to take revenge on those who were absolutely innocent. The soldiers gathered all the men in the village under the pretext that they were going to be taken to the jail in Lerin for holding and questioning. Halfway on their march to Lerin, the Turkish soldiers murdered sixty of the men, claiming that they were probably relatives of IMRO revolutionaries.¹⁵³

In the weeks after Ilinden, the anxiety of the Macedonians in northwest Macedonia was building, even though that area had not been a hotbed for recent revolutionary activity. Macedonians from Debar poured into Skopje, fearing massacres by the soldiers and local Muslims. Near Kichevo, there were several battles between Christians and Muslims. One monastery there was destroyed by Albanians "after a determined struggle between the defenders of the monastery and the insurgents, during which both sides lost heavily."¹⁵⁴

In other areas of northern Macedonia the panic and fear was widespread. The Christians and Muslims in Kumanovo made a pact to mutually protect each other in the event that any group attacked them.

In and around Skopje, the peasants were hiding their valuables wherever they could, anticipating that they would soon be pillaged and looted. And in a bold move in Kratovo, half of the Turkish garrison deserted the army, not wanting anything to do with the brutalities that accompanied quelling the Uprising.¹⁵⁵

What kind of cruelties would not only drive the population into such a panicked state, but even cause soldiers to quit? One Macedonian explained:

With knives, they cut off my index fingers and severed the cords of my wrists and my ankles. Not so that the arteries would bleed and I should die, but so that I could not work or walk well. Then the Bashi-bazouks took me and some others who moaned, and drove blazing pine-splinters into our fingers behind the nails.¹⁵⁶

Or take the example of the torture of a young Macedonian girl in Smilevo, located in western Macedonia. Western and central Macedonia bore the brunt of the Turkish massacres because this is where the Uprising was centered. In Smilevo, shortly after the Uprising's failure, the Muslims picked a specific girl for their opening act of cruelty. This girl had sewn a black flag with the slogan "liberty or death" embroidered on it and had given it to her father and brother for the uprising. She had learned her needlework at the American mission in Bitola. Hidden described what happened to her:

They beat her, tore her clothing off, and drove her through the streets. Hags of Turkish harems spat on the poor creature. An Albanian stabbed her with a bayonet, and finally chopped off her right hand that had sewed the black flag, and carried the trophy aloft on his upraised bayonet as he danced through the streets.¹⁵⁷

Smilevo was only one of scores of villages that suffered tremendously. Here's how one commentator described the Turkish destruction of another Macedonian village:

Soldiers had come fresh from a defeat in the hills, and had suddenly surrounded the flourishing village, setting fire to the outer ring of houses. Then, as the frightened inmates rushed into the streets, the shooting began; and while the soldiers killed and tormented, the Bashi-Bazouks ransacked each house, igniting it when this work was done. Ah, how merrily they ran to and fro,

screaming wildly as the circle of flames grows smaller! What sport to the harassed soldiers to kill slowly and with impunity. 'Tis verily better fun than being dynamited in the hills. They take the sword-bayonets now, for fear of shooting each other, and laugh as the pile of dead grows higher. Into the flames with the infants! – it is good to hear the mothers shriek, and to cut them down as they run blindly at the butchers, armed only with their teeth and nails.¹⁵⁸

In the village of Armenci, in late August 1903, the Turks massacred 180 men and 200 women after defeating insurgents in a battle.¹⁵⁹ Around the same time, many of the Macedonian villages in northwest Macedonia, such as around Kichevo and Debar, were pillaged.¹⁶⁰ The Turks also destroyed 150 out of 157 houses in Armensko, and almost every inhabitant remaining was massacred, and the women especially suffered painful torture by the Turkish soldiers' bayonets. Meanwhile, in Drachevo, six miles from Skopje, most of the girls and women were massacred and maltreated, and many of them had been former students of the American missions, which had cultivated the girls in all the arts of modern civilization.¹⁶¹ Five days after this incident, the Sisters of Mercy were permitted to visit the village. They only found thirty living souls, mostly women and children, all who were wounded.¹⁶²

In the village of Stojlova during the first days of September, the Turks defeated some insurgents there and then massacred all the remaining inhabitants in the village. As per usual, they burned down the village.¹⁶³ In Velkosti, near Debar, Bashibazouks "entered the village, plundered houses, and assaulted the women they found there, while the rest, surrounding the village, killed all the inhabitants who tried to escape." They killed a total of sixty villagers, including twelve women and children who were burned alive in their houses and one child who was hung.¹⁶⁴

The Turks pretended that excesses were not occurring and did all they could to mute Western journalists from reporting on the crimes. In September, the Turkish authorities were itching to expel a news correspondent for an article he wrote about the aftermath of Ilinden. The British Ambassador managed to prevent the expulsion, and reports like following continued to flow out of Macedonia:

The Turks burned eighteen children to death in a baking oven at Pisoder, near Armensko, on September 12th. They massacred 200 women and children at Jervan in revenge for a defeat at the hands

of the insurgents. Fifty women and children returning starved from the mountains to their devastated homes were murdered by soldiers. Between September 10 and 12 the Bashibazouks destroyed four villages near Krushevo in the presence of the Kaimacam (administrator) of Krushevo in person, massacring and mutilating the inhabitants.¹⁶⁵

When the Turkish officials were not covering up or denying these excesses and wrongdoings, they were defending them. When they were not defending them, they were at least justifying them and minimizing their seriousness. In the words of one senior Turkish official:

You must remember...that the majority of the soldiers employed are merely raw levies from distant parts of the Empire, who know little of obedience, and care less. Scarcely supplied with the bare necessities of life, a Macedonian village is an oasis in their desert existence, where they are naturally inclined to satisfy their most pressing needs. Remember further the sexual temperament in Turkey, as enjoined by the Koran, as also the libidinous temperament of the troops; and surely, if there is not some excuse, the faults laid at their doors are very natural.¹⁶⁶

However, there could be no justification for the cruelties released onto the Macedonians. Nowhere in Macedonia was safe from the Turkish onslaught. Out of this grew an uncontrollable internal refugee crisis, which became a game of hide-and-seek between the soldiers and peasants. For example, especially for the elderly, women and children, being a refugee was extremely disparaging. Food was scarce and the mountain weather was starting to turn for the worse as autumn came and eventually turned into winter. One such small group in the Prespa region decided to descend from their hideouts in the mountains to search for food in the village of Nakolec. There they encountered Turkish soldiers who mutilated some women and then massacred the entire group.¹⁶⁷

More disheartening was the tragedy of 300 women and children refugees in the Kostur region. Many of them were from the village of Zagorichina and had been wandering the countryside for days. They sought the assistance of the Turkish commander there to protect them from the Bashibazouks. "The commander promised them protection, but when the [refugees] left, the Bashi Bazouks pursued, outraged and killed many of the women and children."¹⁶⁸

The refugees inside Macedonia were desperate and helpless. Reports began to emerge of how the madness lobbed onto them drove them into a tragic madness of their own. One woman who had been hiding out with her three children in the woods for several weeks killed two of her “own children to preserve the third” child from succumbing to starvation.¹⁶⁹ During the immediate years following the insurrection, nearly half of the children in Macedonia were dying as a result of starvation and malnutrition.¹⁷⁰ These are the most devastating results of wars.

Women refugees suffered the worst because, in addition to suffering the brutalities and tortures that men faced, they were targeted by soldiers and bashibazouks for fulfillment of their sexual needs. A.G. Hales highlighted some of these incidents:

Those who have fled to the forest have been hunted down by the soldiers. The carrying off of girls presented heartrending scenes. The cries of the girls filled the forest, but their fainting and despairing appeals failed to touch the hearts of the savage soldiers, who like a pack of wolves fell upon them and carried them off into more secret places to outrage them. Those whom they have not killed are still in their power...

An incident with six girls was related to me. They had fled to save themselves from outrage, were discovered by the brutal soldiers, who seized them, but they finally escaped from their ravishers and concealed themselves in a ravine, when they heard the creaking of carts returning from Malo Tirново where they had carried government stores. They came out and begged the drivers to take them up and carry them to this town, but their ravishers were after them, and carried away their victims into the forest again. They cried, screamed, tore their hair from their heads, but there was no help from anywhere.¹⁷¹

The plight of the refugees was burdened by the significant early snowfall in the mountains that started in the middle of September. This snow was forcing them out of hiding into lower elevations and even back into villages. Further, the Turkish government even invited the return of the refugees, promising them that it was safe. In one village, fifteen peasants returning to work in their fields were attacked and murdered, sole for one who managed to escape. Refugee women

discovered and carried their bodies to a local official “who refused to hear their story.”¹⁷²

The Turkish soldiers had become uncontrollable, and that may have been the Sultan’s intent. In one instance, a station master hired eight Macedonians to repair a section of railroad. A detachment of troops swept down on the workmen, mistaking them for dynamiters, and fired on them, killing three instantly, without making any inquiry. The other five fled into the woods. The station master pleaded with the Turks not to pursue them, telling them he had hired them. But they ignored him and chased the five men into the woods and slaughtered them.¹⁷³

By the end of September, 1903, the Turks had completely destroyed 111 villages in Macedonia.¹⁷⁴ Many were in western Macedonia, around Bitola, Ohrid, Resen, Lerin and Kostur. Here is a description of what the typical situation was for villages and peasants in the Prespa region immediately after the Uprising failed:

There was a wild *saue qui peut* [stampede] when the soldiers came; a volley was fired into the thick. Some were killed, others suffered outrages at the hands of the enraged soldiery; the majority got away into the mountains, and stayed there till the cold drove them down. The women went into the villages at night to make bread from the pretty numerous stores of corn which, hidden in holes, had escaped looting. In some cases where the band had given much trouble the village was burn to the ground, and the wrecking was so complete that all the pots and pans were piled in heaps and smashed. The church was usually plundered and desecrated. Sometimes its floor was torn up in search of hidden treasure.¹⁷⁵

Anoter visitor to the Prespa region recalled her visit and the stories she heard about the chaos that had ensued:

Pretor, the last place on my list, was one of the most miserable. It was a little hole of a place, and all plundered. Even the best house had no glass windows, holes in the floor and a huge hole in the roof for chimney. The master of the house, a broken old man, pointed to a spot near the door. This was where his wife was shot; the blood ran down there by the steps; she died almost at once. Then they had to fly for their lives, and had no time to bury her. When, after three months, they returned, he collected her bones

and buried them, but someone, he regretfully added, had broken them.¹⁷⁶

The aftermath of Ilinden in 1903 and the reprisals during the 1903/1904 winter resulted in over 30,000 Macedonians fleeing abroad, mostly to Sofia, Bulgaria (though some did go to US, Canada and Australia).¹⁷⁷ Many Macedonians also left because of famine and increased prices in the years after Ilinden, as well as to find work because the land had been devastated. Near Ohrid, one village with 250 houses had lost 400 men to emigration, leaving women behind to work the land around the houses, while the fields were left unattended as no men were there to work on them.¹⁷⁸

Confounded with the problems of savagery and brutality against the Macedonian population, disease hovered near epidemic proportions. Brailsford told of his visit to the village of Aposkepo near Kostur in December 1903:

Every house but five or six had been burned, and the villagers had an unmistakable air which told of want, disease, and ebbing vitality. I asked for the priest, the teacher, and the head-man, only to be told that all of them had died within the past two weeks. Further inquiry, family by family, showed that since the return from the hills after the insurrection, practically every household had lost an inmate from disease, and in almost every one of the wretched shelters which the peasants had built among charred ruins of their homes one person at least lay ill. The prevalent disease was a sort of maglignant influenza which resembled typhoid in its symptoms.¹⁷⁹

The Macedonians were forced to deal with the expected and unexpected consequences of a failed rebellion and did not have the resources or preparedness to do so.

But as mentioned, the end of the rebellion did not signal the end of their agonies. While the rebellion was crushed well before the end of 1903, Turkish soldiers bothered and brutalized the Macedonians for several years after. The soldiers' barbarities evolved from actions deemed necessary for scaring the population from ever rebelling again, into amusement rides that filled the boring lulls in their day with cheap entertainment. In a village near Voden, for example, a contingent of sixty Turkish soldiers stole the clothes of one man after failing to find any insurgents near his village. The man complained but they feverishly

beat him for speaking out against them. One clever Turk must have then decided that they could employ him for more useful purposes. Upon coming to a river crossing, they forced the naked man to carry each of the sixty soldiers across the river on his back. After this exhausting endeavor, they beat him unconscious. His brother complained about this and the authorities threw him in jail.¹⁸⁰

While the Turks were humored by their treatment of the Macedonians, the Macedonians were never afforded a break from the cycle of torture and murder. In the summer of 1905, a band of fifteen bashibazouks attacked Macedonian peasants working in their fields in Carevik, near Prilep. Seventeen Macedonians were murdered, including three married women and three young girls.¹⁸¹ A year later in Mogila, after eliminating and killing many members of a rebel band, Turkish troops and bashibazouks stole the clothes and belongings of the dead, mutilated their bodies, and then sacked every house in the village. After plundering the homes of food and clothes, they destroyed that which they could not carry away.¹⁸² Also in 1906, the priest Kuzman from Babino was murdered; the bashibazouks cut off his head and left it next to his corpse on the road, which they had set afire.¹⁸³

The year before, however, was nearly just as bad for the villagers of Mogila:

On the 28th August, 1905, the inhabitants of Moghila were awakened before dawn by a valley...the villagers barricaded themselves in their homes. The first rays of sun encouraged three of them to go out, but they had not left the village before they were killed by a terrible volley...Then five other villagers risked their lives, but with more success. They succeeded in passing the ranks of the soldiers, and informed the civil agents at Monastir, who sent them to the Hilmi Pasha.

At midday, Hilmi Pasha sent fresh troops to Moghila...An hour later, the inhabitants began to come out of their houses when suddenly the trumpet sounded. This was the signal for a general massacre. All the villagers who had come out of their houses were shot down like game. The massacre lasted an hour. Another blast of the trumpet made it stop, when the officers saw the Italian officer Ciconini gallop up.¹⁸⁴

Similar stories were heard around the entire country. In Vrania, in eastern Macedonia, Turkish soldiers detained eleven men walking

home from their fields. One fifteen-year-old attempted to escape and was shot to death. As retaliation – or as planned all along – the ten other men were decapitated. But the soldiers were not finished with their game. They went into the village and targeted the houses of the richest peasants: brothers Apostole and Elias Mitrev. Apostole was not home, so he was saved from the barbarities. But Elias, his wife and servant were tortured and then murdered. Apostole's wife was assaulted and wounded, but she perished in the fire that the Turks set to the house. Two others were luckier:

[Milka's] son, who had hidden on the roof to escape the flames, had to jump from a considerable height. He managed to escape nevertheless, after receiving three balls in the body from a volley fired by the soldiers while he fled. A woman, who, hidden in a chimney, had witnessed this horrible scene, succeeded also in escaping certain death by jumping from a window as soon as the soldiers had left the house.¹⁸⁵

The crimes continued until the Turks' last days in Macedonia. In the winter of 1912, Bashibazouks numbering twenty-five aimed their assault on a Macedonian monastery near Skopje. A newspaper based in Solun described the events:

The band seized and bound two-by-two all the nine inmates of the monastery...The band took their captives into the chapel of the monastery, and there, after long and cruel tortures, beheaded and mutilated them. Before taking their leave, the band pillaged the chapel, carrying off silver candlesticks from the altar, together with everything else worth taking.¹⁸⁶

A particularly shocking case of cruelty surfaced in a village near Ohrid in 1906. A young orphan was tending to his sheep when he was stopped by Turkish troops inquiring as to the whereabouts of an IMRO band. The boy claimed to have not seen any rebel bands. After smacking him around with their rifle butts, the soldiers asked him again if he had seen the rebels. Upon his denial, they slit his throat and buried him near the road where they had encountered him. A few hours later, a shepherd and his dog traversed that road. The shepherd kept on walking, but the dog began scratching and digging at where the boy was buried. After his dog failed to follow him, the shepherd walked over to the dog and, to his surprise, he heard faint moans coming from

beneath the ground. He quickly unearthed the child, who was barely hanging on to his life. Although in critical condition, the boy was taken to a hospital in Solun for the best care possible and managed to survive. He would later find his way into an Irishman's orphanage in Sofia.¹⁸⁷

This Irishman was Mr. Pierce O'Mahoney. In 1904, he established an orphanage in Sofia for the education of Macedonian orphans of the failed Ilinden uprising. His motivation for founding it was based on the "piteous accounts of the terrible massacres and cruelty practiced on the poor Macedonians and the destitute condition of children whose parents had been killed." In addition to the boy with the sliced throat, his orphans had many tales to tell. One had witnessed the Turks crucify his parents to the wall and then set them ablaze.¹⁸⁸ O'Mahoney's school was a savior for many young boys and succeeded in fulfilling its mission. Several students would go on to agricultural school or join the military, while many others picked up useful skilled trades.¹⁸⁹

This orphanage was one of many initiatives by Europeans and Americans to provide relief for the Macedonians suffering from Turkish cruelty. During the winter following Ilinden, Italian, English and US funds provided food and seeds for refugees and ruined Macedonian villages.¹⁹⁰ And as of 1912, Americans had invested between 3 and 4 million dollars into Christian missionary work in Macedonia. The largest amount of money came from the following three New York City families: Dodge, James, and Kennedys.¹⁹¹

Still, as much as the international community wanted to help, not enough of it – both politically, financially and materially – was coming to the Macedonians. And even when it was, the Turkish authorities were bent on preventing help getting to the Macedonians. For example, after Krushevo fell to the Turks, the Turkish peasants and soldiers took horrible revenge on the citizens. Women were raped and townspeople's money and jewelry were taken. Anyone who resisted was killed instantly, such as when the Turkish peasants killed a priest who was trying to protect his daughter from being raped. This sacking lasted three days. All local doctors were killed and the drugs were either destroyed or confiscated. When the Sisters of Mercy applied to the Hilmi Pasha to distribute aid and medicine to the peasants, he replied: "Those who are going to die will die, and those who are going to live will live. Drugs are no use." Then he denied the Sisters permission to help the suffering Macedonians in Krushevo. Furthermore, the Turks took 200 women and girls as young as eight from Krushevo to the army barracks at Mica, Tronova, and dressed them in Turkish attire so the

European councils would not suspect that they were actually Macedonians and then demand their release.¹⁹² The Turks ensured that the Europeans could not help even where they were able and willing.

But the international community was at least very cognizant of the Macedonians' sufferings and called for relief and justice. In September of 1903, a committee of leading American citizens from Philadelphia and New York determined that the world could not let the Macedonians further endure such inhumane treatment at the hands of the Turk:

The suffering and destitution, resulting from insurrection in Macedonia, are extreme. Forty thousand Macedonians have managed to cross the border into Bulgaria. Several times that number remain in Macedonia, homeless, their herds and crops destroyed, perishing of cold and starvation...We cannot help being concerned with the relief of fellow human beings and fellow Christians, of innocent women and children, who are perishing by the hundreds and will perish by the thousands, most cruelly, unless Christian Europe and Christian America come to the rescue.¹⁹³

In February of 1904, the state of Connecticut sent a petition, signed by prominent citizens and the government, to the federal government urging it to stop the unbearable injustices in Macedonia. In part, it said:

We, the undersigned citizens of the State of Connecticut, desire to express our horror and indignation of the shocking atrocities that have been and still are being perpetuated upon our fellow Christians in Macedonia, by the forces of a government with which our country holds diplomatic relations, and would, furthermore, most respectfully urge upon the Congress of these United States, through its chief executive, that it use its good offices, in cooperation with the other Christian nations, England, France, and Italy, toward the speedy fulfillment of the Treaty of Berlin, 1878, which guarantees to those Christians humane rule and protection from lawlessness and traditional outrages.¹⁹⁴

In Europe, however, no significant actions were taken by England or France in response to the Turkish onslaught because they did not want to upset the Turkish government or provoke anti-French or anti-English sentiment amongst their Muslim dominated colonies in Asia and Africa.¹⁹⁵ As a result of valuing financial interests and colonization

overseas as more important than human rights, the Turkish government was given the freedom to neglect the Macedonians however they pleased. The Ottoman government was responsible for the deaths of almost 15,000 civilians in Macedonia from the summer of the Uprising through the winter.¹⁹⁶ To put that figure into perspective, only about 1,000 IMRO members were killed in fighting. Thus, because the Ottomans could not put a significant hamper against the IMRO in the battlefield, they decided to exact revenge on the general population to psychologically and spiritually disable the Macedonian movement.

With all of these escalating tragedies under Ottoman rule, why did many Macedonians remain in their villages or return to start anew? Why did they not emigrate to safety? Some did, to be sure. However, even many of those that could flee refused on the simplest of grounds. They were dedicated to their home, their village and their land. Brailsford discussed this with peasants in one of the northernmost Macedonian villages:

“Why do you stay? Why do you not emigrate in a body? You have no lands to lose. The railway is barely ten miles away. You can almost see the Servian hills, and to Bulgaria is only three day’s tramp. Why do you not go to a land where you might be both prosperous and free?” The answer gave me the clue to the deepest instinct in the Balkan peasant’s nature. **“Who,”** they said, **“would care for the monastery, if we abandoned it? The Turks would seize it.”**¹⁹⁷

It is safe to say, then, that the Macedonians displayed tremendous courage when conditions were not enviable. One’s existence was reduced to mere survival; and the countless horrors that one was exposed to made the Macedonians practically immune to, and accepting of, the dominating forces of violence and corruption. Goff wrote about this in 1921:

Constant war and repeated local disasters have combined to bring about a *laissez-aller* attitude towards mundane affairs and conditions. Under an overwhelming catastrophe, the native merely shrugs his shoulders or hold up his hands in impotent resignation or grief...Oppression and an entire lack of education...have joined forces and evolved crafty disposition and a natural tendency toward savagery – a savagery, not born out of aggressiveness, but of a kind which never forgets an injury, is patient and implacable

in revenge, and generally strikes back in the dark. Such a temperament, having a cheap regard for life, knowing no such deterrent as an efficient police force, regards lawlessness as a perfectly natural state; it yields to no order or power, except that which is backed by stronger physical force or, to be more exact, superior armament in the shape of a longer-bladed knife or a larger-calibre pistol...On the whole, however, the struggle for the means of livelihood occupies their lives so completely that they experience very little of that leisure or idleness which so often witnesses the beginnings and causes of disputes and quarrels.¹⁹⁸

Lawlessness. Savagery. Disaster. These are some of the words Goff used to describe the Macedonian state of affairs during the last few decades of Ottoman rule. Injustices, abuses and villainous crimes combined to make daily life a hurdle for most Macedonians. But the most efficient and fearful culprits in Macedonia during this period were not the Turkish soldiers and irregulars. Rather, they were the wicked scoundrels that roamed Macedonia in gangs, robbing, kidnapping and killing Macedonians, like packs of hyenas shredding their prey into digestible scraps. These hooligans were known as Macedonia's brigands and bandits, and they left a legacy of anarchy in Macedonia that none have been able to match. It is one thing to fear atrocities when the people have taken up arms to protest injustices; it is completely another thing to be just as afraid for one's life in the most peaceful of Ottoman times.

IV.

Brigands and Bandits

Before and during the Macedonian revolutionary period, brigands, bandits and bands of criminals were a common plague in rural Macedonia. In addition to the abusive and oppressive measures of the Ottoman authorities, they contributed much horror and grief to the Macedonian landscape. Their existence, combined with the Turkish authority's inability and lack of desire to contain and eliminate them, played a special role in enticing the Macedonians to form rebel groups. Their methods were unmatched even by the authorities and their effect on the population was just as devastating. The combination of Ottoman authoritarianism with the anarchy of brigands generated a society fueled by fear and shaped a Macedonian land that was perpetually drenched in blood.

The word brigand comes from an old word *bringand*, which was at one time simply defined as an armed man. In the Ottoman times, the word brigand meant anyone who made exactions. When a brigand captured someone, he only released him after extracting a heavy sum from his friends or family. Today, we generally refer to this as a ransom¹⁹⁹ and have more modern words for the profession of brigands, such as gangsters or thugs. A big difference between the gangsters of today and the brigands of yesterday, however, is that gangsters primarily operate in urban areas whereas brigands in Macedonia tended to avoid the cities and towns, preferring to live in the mountains and aiming their actions against village peasants or the unlucky straggler who ventured through brigand territory. These people were the primary targets of brigands in Macedonia. The authorities generally resided in the larger towns and cities, meaning that brigand operations in urban areas were risky. The mountains, however, were generally avoided by Turkish police and soldiers, making the work of brigands there a relatively safe and stable profession.

Macedonia contained plenty of brigands and bandits who engaged in work other than kidnapping and ransoming, including petty thievery and even wholesale looting, pillaging, intimidation and destruction. That brigands were virtually free to do as they pleased, and that they were not shy of any nefarious activity, allowed them to become a

dominant force throughout Macedonia. A news article from 1881 suggested that brigandage would continue in Macedonia for many years. As evidence, the writer cited the fact that pashas, priests and peasants were in league with the bands out of either fear or financial motives, and that bribery and corruption were the norm in government circles. According to the author, there were two kind of brigands in Macedonia. The first type possessed, despite his bad reputation, "one or two good qualities, amongst which may be mentioned his strong sense of honor as regards to keeping his word after giving it." The other type was "an inferior kind of robber" referred to as a "sheepstealer...who lives by committing petty larcenies...perhaps killing poor villagers and small landowners, but has neither the pluck nor the organization to make any grand coup, such as carrying off a European or some wealthy merchant."²⁰⁰ Both types were common and dreaded by the Macedonian peasants.

One observer outlined the epidemic of brigands and banditry in Macedonia:

[B]ands of brigands, thirty and fifty, and a hundred strong, drilled and armed with the best modern weapons, sweep over the country, rifling and burning villages, carrying off prisoners for ransom, committing the most savage excesses, shedding blood in wanton cruelty, rendering the highways and byways of the province impracticable, and driving terror even into the heart of the towns. And the evil is steadily on the increase...The fact is, brigandage here is the outgrowth not only of social disorders, but of the political situation. A series of bad crops, and consequent dearth, which last year amounted almost to famine; the misery bred of the last war; the stimulus given to all the worst passions of an ignorant population by the exacerbation of political and religious rancor; the inefficiency of the police, whom want of pay and of discipline drive into complicity with the law-breakers; the insufficiency of the army available for garrison duty; the apathy or powerlessness of the local authorities, whose best intentions are frustrated by the constant blood-sucking of Constantinople - have cooperated to engender brigandage: but it is by coloring his pursuit with patriotic pretenses, by tempering his excesses with political considerations, that the brigand has succeeded in not only impunity, but popularity and admiration.²⁰¹

Another observer noted that “armed like arsenals, with long pistols long rifles, long knives, Macedonians, Albanians and Arnauts shuffle along with the walk of the mountaineer.” He went on to describe the general fascination with brigands:

You may find a fine old gentleman, dressed in a long skirt that falls below the knees and with pretty weapons fastened to all available protuberances. He will talk to you (if he trusts you and you are fortunately so poor you are not worth capturing) of his system of levying tribute as unconcernedly as if he lived in the day of Ulysses, earning his living with his good sword and shield. Turkish soldiers gaze with respect at the very brigands whom they are sworn to kill. Those brigands swagger through the villages, beloved by all the women, envied and admired by all the men, afraid of nobody...They strut by the Turks superciliously, mockingly. Sometimes the Macedonian brigand sits on a rock just out of gunshot from a garrison of Turks and sings little songs carefully calculated to embitter even the most stolid souls.²⁰²

In the latter half of the 19th century, there were scores of names that spread terror throughout Macedonia, such as Niko, Arkadi and Kriko. In northwestern Macedonia, the Albanian bands surrounding Debar were the most common and they pillaged and murdered anyone, regardless of ethnicity, class or religion. They controlled the mountains from Bitola up to Kichevo and over to the Black Drin, and were considered “demons who [had] the fanaticism of crime.” To the east of the Vardar River, the Macedonians and Bulgarians were generally the most numerous highway robbers and it was in that occupation that they committed their excesses. But to the west and southwest of the Vardar, they did not have the organization and discipline that distinguished the Greek bands as the most notorious and sophisticated of brigands.²⁰³

After the Russian-Turkish war in the late 1870s, the number and type of brigands increased in Macedonia. One traveler observed that visitors to Macedonia invited their own misfortunes:

[I]n that hotbed of complicated foreign intrigue, an abler government than the Turkish might be puzzled how to deal with this growing evil. The traveler must in each case seek information as to the state of public security before traveling...Escorts are generally furnished from the mounted gendarmerie...[I]n many, if not the majority of the cases, the disasters which have occurred

have been directly due to the rashness of travelers themselves, who have persisted...in visiting dangerous districts. Such persons seemed to have relied on the comfortable but erroneous belief that, whatever scrape they might get into, it was the bounden duty of their ambassador, minister, or consul to pull them out of it.²⁰⁴

The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1881 even issued a letter stating that the British government would not pay any ransom for captured British subjects in Macedonia who were not there in an official capacity.²⁰⁵

This should have been a warning to many visitors of Macedonia as to the frequency and dangerousness of these bands of criminals. The Albanian, Turkish and other Muslim brigands of Macedonia were especially ruthless, savage and merciless. Victims of Muslim bands suffered horrendous tortures and deaths during the 1880s. Milcha Velkova, from the village of Otchechi, was carried off by a band of six Turks, who abused her and then cut off her ears and tongue. Menda Svetchovska, from the village of Papraditcha, was carried off into the woods by a body of brigands and hung on a tree upside down with threats of death in order to give up a list of the richest Christians in the village. Near Nogilovo, robbers attacked a small settlement and seized a woman named Jordana Parleta along with her daughter Marie, who was twelve years old. After Jordana could not yield the valuables that the robbers believed she had stored away, they tied Marie to a beam in the barn and began to torture her in front of her mother. They stripped her naked, flogged her until blood poured out, cut off her feet and hands, and finally pulled out her eyes. Jordana, not having any hidden valuables to reveal, could only watch as her daughter bore the woes for her mother's shortcomings. The brigands, not being able to squeeze anything from Jordana, tied her up and sliced off her ears and nose as a final punishment.²⁰⁶

In another village, Turkish brigands killed a priest named George Lopotara by pulling out his arms first. Near Prilep, the Turks attacked a mill, killed the parents, mutilated the sons, and then after assaulting the three daughters, drowned them in the mill stream.²⁰⁷ Further, as an American missionary noted, in the fields around Eleshnica, a ten-year old boy was snatched by brigands, who held him ransom for 300 *lira*. The father could only raise 60 *lira* for his son's release and his son perished as a result.²⁰⁸

The Muslim chief Feyzo was not a particularly famous brigand, but he had a specific hatred for the Macedonians. One brutal attack

happened against three middle-aged shepherds in a village near Prilep. As the three men – Najdo, Sasho and Risto – were tending to their flock, Feyzo and eight of his goons ruthlessly unleashed savageries on them:

They bound them, cut off their ears and noses, and then by the order of Feyzo, tore the skin off their legs, arms and necks, calling out to them as they lay the veins bare, “bear witness before the Prophet that we know how to shed Slav blood.” After this their eyes were put out, and they were cut to pieces.²⁰⁹

By 1889, the *pasha* of the Bitola district declared it was safe to travel in western Macedonia, as 300 brigands had been arrested or killed the previous year.²¹⁰ But as the missionaries reported in 1892, much of Macedonia was becoming more dangerous than ever before:

In the eastern part of the Razlog district...there have at times been many young men, sometimes gathered in bands, who have been the terror of their neighbors. Some of these recently made a descent upon the vineyards...carried off eighteen loads of grapes, and spent the night in the meadows...The shepherds of Elesmitsa have been accustomed to pasture their flocks on the mountains at a distance from home, but these marauders like meat as well as grapes and have taken possession of flocks for their winter's supply, so that the villagers are forced to pasture near the village where the supply of food for their flocks is very meagre... Travelling is very unsafe in many places. Two years ago three robbers bound the guard who was in the guard-house and then, as they passed, robbed twenty men who were returning from a fair in small companies and unarmed...It seemed probable that the robbers were Circassians.²¹¹

The Circassians came to Macedonia as refugees that the Turkish government settled there. Colonel James Baker said of them:

The Circassians in European Turkey are estimated at 200,000 and are the terror of their neighbors... Their depredations go unchecked through fear of reprisals...They know their own power, and unless stringent measures are taken to stop further immigration and to enforce the law more strictly over those already colonized, they must prove a great bar to progress for many years to come.²¹²

But the Circassians were a relatively minor component of the Macedonian ethnic landscape. The Albanian Muslims, on the other hand, were a burdensome menace for the most Macedonians, especially in western and northern Macedonia. "The Mussulman Albanian takes to brigandage because he likes it, and willingly makes a profession out of it," reported one newspaper.²¹³ The Albanians around Debar were especially dangerous and held "the reputation of a lawless, fanatical, and anti-Christian community." As a matter of fact, in 1901, the Albanians there were holding conferences to devise plans to suppress any IMRO uprising that was soon expected.²¹⁴ But the peasants were their primary targets:

The worst case of all is that of the Slavonic population, which borders on the Albanian country - from Old Serbia in the north down to Kichevo and Ochrida, which are exposed to the continual raiding of the clansmen of Dibra. In some of these valley the Albanian invasion is an annual event, in others it is chronic. Cattle are lifted, crops of corn or hay are carried away before they can be garnered. There are seasons when it is impossible to cut wood on the hillside, or, indeed, to venture outside the precincts of the village. There are four villages in an abandoned glen to the west of Kichevo which reckon on four or five visitations every year...

Perhaps the worst scourge of these regions is the Albanian pastime of kidnapping, to which the tribes of Dibra are specifically addicted. The method is to capture stragglers, usually a solitary lad or an old man who is surprised cutting wood or herding sheep at a distance from the village. He is carried off to Dibra and kept there until his ransom is paid. An enterprising bey will sometimes have several of these captives at once in his tower. They are sometimes fettered and driven out at sunrise with the cattle to labour in the fields till evening. I knew one family in the Malesia (Ochrida) region to which this catastrophe had happened thrice within the memory of a young man who cannot have been more than thirty years of age. I knew another case in which the ransom demanded for a young boy was as much as 100 Turkish liras. His family were no more than peasants, though of the wealthier class. Half the money was found by selling their flocks and their land, the other half was provided by the elder brother, who earned it by

leaving his wife and children and working for five years in Constantinople.²¹⁵

Between 1877 and 1880, the village headman of Galichnik, western Macedonia, kept a record of Albanian crime against the village and showed that wealthy sheep farmers were attacked, and many times the Albanian bandits would sell back the sheep they stole to the farmers.²¹⁶ In summer of 1894, the Albanian bandit leader Sefer and his brother pillaged thousands of *grosi* from each peasant household in the village of Zvechan. This was the third time Zvechan peasants had to pay ransoms to bandits in one year. Shortly after, they were again attacked by Sefer and warned to pay another ransom, but the village pleaded for more time as they were so poor that they would never be able to meet his demand. Sefer refused to extend his deadline. Thus, anticipating an attack, the villagers gathered their belongings and spent two weeks sleeping in the woods. Sefer arrived to an empty village and set it alight, destroying nearly two dozen homes. Several families fled Zvechan for good because of this persistent treachery.²¹⁷

Sefer was by no means the only notorious Albanian brigand. One time, in 1894, the band of Karabadzhakot kidnapped two children from the village of Dupeni, near Prespa, aged 10 and 14. Duljan, the father, was ordered to pay 500 *lira* for the children's safe return. This was too much money for a common peasant to assemble even after several years of labor. He sold his possessions and earned 50 *lira*, then borrowed 100 *lira*, which was all he could muster. This was enough to save the life of his youngest child, but the oldest child was beheaded, with the head being delivered to the father shortly after the deadline passed.²¹⁸

No village in Macedonia was immune to such barbarity. The cruelties inflicted upon the poor peasantry was so commonplace that it became a normal part of life. Unfortunately, the citizens were helpless in putting an end to the banditry. For one village near Gostivar, a noted Albanian brigand had become such an intolerable nuisance to the peasants that they protested to the Governor of the district. The Governor, thinking that diplomatic means made more sense than enforcement measures, demanded the brigand to consider changing occupations. The brigand replied that switching trades would be a wonderful idea, but only if he would be made Prefect (high ranking official) of Gostivar.²¹⁹ This would be a position, of course, where he could execute just as much damage to the pockets and lives of the peasants as being a brigand. In nearby Kichevo, the Albanian Muslim bands would visit the bazaar and at Christian shops throw a

handkerchief on the floor of a leading merchant and demand he fill it or else threaten to kill him. The cemeteries of Kichevo include many headstones that read: "Shot at the door of his shop."²²⁰

In the late 1800s, Albanians also targeted individual girls for kidnap and conversion to Islam for marriage. In one village, it was customary for older, married women to wear black and younger women to wear colorful clothes. Because kidnappings were becoming frequent and villagers were scared, young girls dressed in black while farming in the fields so the Albanians could not distinguish the old from the young for targeted kidnapping. By 1903, several villages had reported kidnappings and forced conversions by Albanians, including the following villages in the vicinity of Kichevo: Dvorca, Svetoracha, Leshnice, and Lupshta.²²¹

The captive's conditions under Albanians was not generally pleasant, compared to the conditions of captives under Greek and Macedonian bands. One man recounted how his brother was ransomed and treated by Albanians from Debar:

They carried off the three boys to Dibra and shut them in a cellar, and threatened to kill them all unless their friends paid 100 [Turkish liras] for each of them within six months...We sold all our beasts, but with that and all my savings we only had 60 [liras]. When the time was nearly gone I managed to borrow 40 [liras] from X; he is very rich, and says he is a patriot, but he made me pay 20 per cent for it. We bought my brother back. He was nearly dead and covered in sores. He had been in the dark all the time. My mother washed his shirt four times, and still little beasts came out of it.²²²

Sometimes, however, it was not Albanian brigandage that threatened people but the Albanian thirst for revenge. In 1890, a train traveling from Skopje to the interior of Macedonia struck and killed an Albanian woman crossing the train tracks. No one was held responsible for her death. Then, a foreigner visiting Macedonia noted how the Albanians exacted their revenge:

About 90 feet above the line some 70 Arnauts were seen, and favored by the slow speed of the train, fired their repeating rifles into the windows as we passed. The stoker of the engine was killed, and three of the passengers, all Mussulmans, were dangerously wounded.²²³

Albanian vendetta feuds had been part of their culture, due primarily to Albania being a land of unorganized clans where, while technically Ottoman territory, the Albanians were permitted to do as they pleased, as many had become Muslims and it worked to the Turks' favor to have an ally in suppressing Macedonians and other Christians. But Albanians were not the only peoples who acted out in vengeance, even though the law of vengeance was more deeply engrained in their culture. One Greek band leader, named Georgi Dimopoulo, in early 1901 had sought out vengeance against a former Council of State, Mikhalaki Bey. Dimopoulo's band attacked Mikhalaki Bey's property, but a land steward and police officer fought them until the very end. Dimopoulo set fire to the property, forcing them to flee. Then he decapitated the land steward.²²⁴

Greek bands were especially prevalent in southern and central Macedonia. The common Greek brigand was not always ethnically Greek, but often times a Christian Albanian or Armenian who had military training but had deserted the army to pursue more lucrative endeavors. Brigands usually commenced their work in the early spring by gathering together and electing a chief, who was usually an experienced Greek bandit. The chief would oversee all movements of the band while two or three captains were elected to assist in organizing the band. The brigands' dress was similar to that of the Albanian peasant. Typically, they wrapped a cartridge belt across their chest and stored a revolver, knife, sword and their possessions in a belt around their waist. They would operate through the summer and autumn until snow blanketed the mountainside, and enjoyed their loot during the winter until the following spring, when they were reinvigorated with the urge to replenish their sacks.²²⁵

These Greek bands rarely mistreated their captives during negotiations and always gave the prisoner the last loaf of bread or glass of wine. But their entire day was spent wandering around and sleeping in the grass and forest with the night sky as their canopy. While they would bind their captive's hands together, it was done only to signal to others that he was a captive. They would have a few people with eyes on him at all times to minimize the risk of escape. All topics were permitted to be discussed between the captors and captive at any time, except the subject of his release.²²⁶

After a week of trampling through the mountains, they would set up a more permanent camp once they believed they were safe from the

reach of Turkish troops. At midday they would have a sheep or goat for lunch. After the meal, they would remove the intestines and wrap it around the eyes of the animal, saving it for the chief, as it was considered a delicacy. They also believed in a superstition regarding the animal which revolved around examining the marks of the flat portion of the shoulder blade. If there was a small hole, the ransom would not be paid as it represented the grave of the prisoner; if there were lines in the direction of the leg bone, the ransom would be paid; but if the lines ran at a right angle, they would likely be pursued and captured.²²⁷

The above account of the lifestyles of brigands comes from the observations of Colonel Synge and his wife, who were captured by Niko's band, a well-known Greek band in southern and central Macedonia. Captain Niko was "one of the most notorious and vainglorious of the Greek brigands" in Macedonia. Colonel Synge had retired to Macedonia, where he passed his time hunting deer, helping refugees, and organizing his estate,²²⁸ and Niko snatched him while he was delivering aid to refugees in late February of 1880.²²⁹

Niko was "well known for his savage cruelty. He would commit a murder or two in in a town or village and carry off boys of tender age, and then barter the noses and ears of his victims for cash with the helpless parents." If a boy's family had not been able to produce the ransom in its entirety, he would send them the boy's head.²³⁰ One instance of this was well known in Macedonia in the 1880s:

Some years ago he took two little children, for whom he demanded four and three hundred liras respectively. The larger sum was paid, and like a strict man of business, he gave up the child; in the second case he had to do with poor parents, to whom the sum demanded was an impossibility. Fifty liras were sent up, and sent back again. The wretched parents sold all they had, raised a subscription, and got together another one hundred. Nicko sent this back as before, with the brief message that if he was not satisfied in three days the child would not be living. He kept his word; the parents received the body in four quarters, and Nicko told his own horrified ruffians that business was business in this as in everything else.²³¹

Niko had no regard for the sex of children, either. On one occasion, he kidnapped two young Macedonian girls. The parents were poor but managed to raise enough money (100 pounds) to release one of the girls, as in a case mentioned before. But Niko still demanded another 100

pounds for the other girl's release. The parents could not raise this money and their daughters' head was found in front of their house a few days after failing to pay the ransom.²³²

Therefore, it was best that Synge did not offend Niko and hope that his relatives could produce the ransom. The ransom that Niko demanded for Synge's release included 15,000 *liras*, 15 martini rifles, 500 cartridges for each rifle, 15 gold watches with gold chains, 15 revolvers with 500 cartridges each, 15 swords and 15 gold rings, among other valuables. After some intense negotiations, the required ransom decreased by one-fifth of what was originally demanded. Upon his release, the brigands gave Synge some cognac, shaved him and returned his possession to him. After counting the money, Niko gave Synge 50 pounds.²³³

In addition to being cruel, Niko was very cunning. One time a man approached him requesting that Niko kill a British officer named Smith who had settled in Macedonia and married a Greek girl. Niko agreed and wisely took the payment in advance. Then, instead of killing Smith, he decided to hold him ransom because he "was more anxious for Smith's gold than for his life." After Niko set fire to Smith's property, Smith's wife pleaded with him to go with Niko so that no more harm would come to their house and family. Smith went with Niko. Niko then managed to get a lot of money from the British Ambassador for this former British officer. Therefore Niko cunningly doubled what he normally made in a kidnapping venture.²³⁴

Niko operated with his brother and brother-in-law, along with deserters from the Greek army and Christians involved in insurrections against the Turkish army. Niko's title as the most notorious Greek brigand eventually faded and a few years after kidnapping Synge, he was killed upon visiting his native village.²³⁵

Niko, however, certainly was not the only recognizable Greek name and face. In his time, he also sometimes cooperated with other Greek chiefs, including Yani, Panayeti and Jallo. When one visitor came to Macedonia in the late 1870s, the Turkish government thought that an escort of 100 Turkish soldiers was not enough to guide this figure through Macedonia, but rather suggested kidnapping the wife and children of Yani so that Yani did not attempt any brigandage against the visitor. The traveler managed to stop this Turkish plan and instead sought out a conversation with Yani. Yani told him:

I am aware you have saved my wife and child from being taken by the Turks; it is well for you that you did so, for had the soldiers

laid a hand on them, my colleagues, the other chiefs, with their bands, would at a signal have gathered round me, and you and your hundred Turks would have been cut off to a man. Since I am here, however, I am not going away empty-handed; the owner of the mines you have come to inspect is a rich banker at Constantinople, and, thanks to our forbearance, his men are allowed to work them in safety. I now require you to give me a watch, a good field-glass, and a supply of tobacco.²³⁶

On October 30, 1880, the Greek chief Kathrakia's band entered the village of Krupica. The owner of the particular house he attacked was not home, but Kathrakia found and took 3000 *liras* the owner had stashed away from the recent sale of property. But Kathrakia was not content with solely stealing. He maltreated the homeowners' three children who happened to be home, and he then cut them into pieces.²³⁷

Kathrakia was a country-wide known brigand. On one occasion, his men swarmed down on the village of Melovishta while the peasants were gathered in a church for service. Several of his men surrounded it and he walked in with a dozen armed men. He was dressed, as normal, in the "pseudo-Albanian outfit" and covered in gold jewelry. He politely waited until the ceremony was finished. Once complete, he selected eight of the churchgoing villagers to be his hostages. He said that if the villagers wanted to see their family and friends alive again, they would have to pay 3000 *liras*. Over the next ten days, the villagers managed to collect 200 *liras* and two young men who had close relatives among the hostages volunteered to bring the money to Kathrakia.²³⁸

After meeting some of Kathrakia's scouts in the outskirts of the village, the young men were marched through the mountains for two days. Upon arriving at Kathrakia's headquarters, Kathrakia refused the payment and threw the money back at them. "Go back to your people and take your paltry money," he said. "I am not to be thus trifled with. Not one *piaster* will I abate from the sum I have demanded. I have kept my part of the pact until now. My prisoners are well and safe. But beware of how you shirk your share of the conditions." Kathrakia then paraded the prisoners in front of the village envoys. As the last one, an old man, shuffled forward, Kathrakia sliced off his head and it rolled to the feet of the two envoys: his son and nephew. Kathrakia then warned the young men to tell their fellow peasant what they had witnessed and to start taking him seriously.²³⁹

Brigandage was so firmly cemented in Greek culture in Greece, as well as within the small Greek population in Macedonia, that it was not

unusual to find any member of Greek society acting as brigands. For example, one short-lived band consisted of “several priests, a Greek Archimandrite, the Superior of a monastery, and three ladies.” In the late summer of 1889, they kidnapped a Macedonian named Simo Naum from Klissura and took him to Kostur, “where he was confined for 10 weeks in the house of a Greek priest.” After demanding a ransom, negotiations proceeded with the Greek Archimandrite leading the team of brigands. After securing 300 *liras*, he still yearned for more money from Simo’s friends. But Simo’s friends would not tolerate this absurd demand and shot two of the brigands during the negotiations. They then chased after a third brigand, who ran to the structure where Simo was confined. Simo’s friends managed to free him and the authorities intervened by arresting the remaining living members of that band.²⁴⁰

Another Greek brigand chief once caught a young Armenian man in Macedonia who was suspected of revealing the band’s location to the authorities. The chief summoned the Armenian’s mother to come meet him outside of the village. When the mother appeared, he showed her how he treated traitors by slicing her child’s body into four pieces. Then he threatened to burn down her entire village if she failed to summon the villagers to come witness what had happen to a traitor. In another instance, a man had given up all of his belongings to some particularly cruel brigands except for a silver cross hanging from his neck. Upset with his protest, they poured petroleum oil over him and burned him; but he survived and lived the rest of his life marred with the terrible scars. A more comical, but still viscous, band made a captive Turkish priest climb to the top of a tree and perform the call of prayer as he would normally do in a mosque; except this call to prayer lasted hours instead of the normal few minutes.²⁴¹

Greek bands formed inside of Greece often raided the Halkidiki peninsula in southeastern Macedonia. In 1898, one band kidnapped and held ransom the British Vice-Consul, Mr. Chevalier. They managed to squeeze 15,000 *lira* from the Turkish government for his release. In another case, in 1899, they looted the farm of a monastery on Mount Athos, wounding two monks while pillaging it. In the same year, that same band attacked another nearby monastery and plundered as much as they could, killing the superintendent of the farm in the process. In 1900, a different band of brigands raided another Mt. Athos monastery and farm, taking everything they could after beating the monks who resisted. The monks reported the attack to the authorities and asked for protection. But none came. The same brigands then attacked the monks

for tattling on them, this time torturing them by pouring petroleum on them and setting a few of them alight. One monk succumbed to his injuries and died.²⁴²

Macedonian brigands were not as common in the 1880s and 1890s as Muslim, Albanian and Greek brigands, but they still made their presence known. One of these bands kidnapped the daughter of a wealthy Greek merchant and demanded "a heavy ransom for her return." The woman's father, however, had difficulty raising the necessary money so the brigands sent the woman's hand to the father and threatened that he "would get back his daughter in sections if he did not make haste with the ransom." This encouraged him to work effortlessly to successfully raise enough money for her safe return.²⁴³ In another instance, Macedonian brigands in the southeastern parts of Macedonia kidnapped the brother of the Austrian consul near Serres and held him for ransom. The brigands were armed with dynamite and targeted the brother because the consul was "a wealthy land proprietor and a Greek."²⁴⁴

A primarily Macedonian band, which also consisted of some Christian Albanians, kidnapped in 1888 a German man named Herr Binder who recounted his experience:

We were taken prisoners on the Sunday evening at half-past 8. Messre. Scrikofsky, Landler, Mitkol, and myself were sitting quietly at Café Manto, in Bellova, when five brigands entered, their yatagans in hand. The chief approached Landler, and said, 'Signor Landler, follow me!' Before Landler could answer he received two blows in the face and was led into the next room. The brigand chief then came up to me and seized hold of me by the wrist. As I hesitated I also received two blows in the face. The brigands brandished their yatagans over our heads, and all resistance would have been in vain...We were taken away about one kilometer, to a pit where the brigands had put me already in 1884. There we found 13 brigands waiting for us. We marched the whole night till 3 in the morning, when we rested till noon. On the Monday we sent the first letter to Frau Landler, asking her to make every effort to obtain our release...

On the Wednesday our provisions, consisting of bread, mutton, tunny fish, and cognac, taken by the brigands from the café at Bellova, were exhausted. The next two days all we had to eat was beech leaves, clover, and grass. Tobacco we had in abundance. Six

of the band were sent to capture somebody provided with eatables. In four or five hours they returned with two Turks, one of whom received 12 francs the next morning to go and buy bread with. He was told that if he did not come back his comrade would be put to death...

The Turk, however, did not return. The chief was furious, and wanted to slay the other Turk with his yatagan, but his followers prevented him doing so. Afterwards, we set out again, and marched for some time. The brigands took bread and buckwheat from a shepherd, which was distributed among them and ourselves...Hassan [the other Turk] had tried to escape and the brigands had beaten him till he lost consciousness. It was then decided that he should be killed...Lots were drawn in a hat, and the marked paper was drawn by Gejargi. Hassan was standing five yards off. In an imploring tone he called out, 'I have 60 pounds at home, and you shall have it if you spare my life!' The brigands laughed incredulously. Hassan was not killed directly. He was left in mental agony another 18 hours.

Towards 5 o'clock the next morning Gejargi and three others lagged behind, and we knew Hassan was to die. Shortly afterwards they came up without Hassan, and Gejargi, with an air of satisfaction, wiped his knife from which the Turk's blood was dropping. They said it was difficult to cut off Hassan's head. The executioner had to try three times before he succeeded. Hassan's murder furnished the brigands with matter for conversation for a whole week.²⁴⁵

Eventually, when they made it into the Macedonian interior, the brigands stopped the forced marches because they felt at home in Macedonia. Herr Binder's ransom was shortly paid. On their departure, the brigands gave their captives money for "good luck" along with the money they had initially pilfered from the captives. They then told them that the ransom was going to be used for political purposes, as the brigands wanted to attempt a coup. Regardless of Binder's belief in what was actually going to come of the money, he said that the brigands had their peculiar ways:

They cross themselves morning and night, and before each meal. They live in accordance with certain laws. None of them may

marry, as they are afraid a woman might betray them. They are not even allowed to talk about themselves. Every prisoner has to pay a ransom, as it would destroy their authority to release their captive without one...Each shot the that the brigands are obliged to fire in defending themselves costs 100 pounds.²⁴⁶

A Serbian brigand named Djevdjevich was known less for his cruelty and more for his swiftness and kind-heartedness. He operated for nearly a quarter of a century from the early 1880s, both in the borders of Serbia and Macedonia, depending on which government's police were searching for him. He particularly liked to rob rich merchants. Here is a typical demonstration of his atypical behavior for a brigand:

One day he waylaid a merchant who was traveling on horseback to a market town with a thousand ducats, which he intended to invest to the best possible profit...The merchant submitted with fairly good grace to be despoiled of his ducats and watch, and was dismissed with perfect courtesy, more frightened than hurt. Ten years later he was traveling the same way when Djevdjevich stopped him again.

Djevdjevich asked the man if they had known each other. The merchant replied that they did and that Djevdjevich had robbed him ten years earlier. The merchant told him that "it was the turning point" of his life - he lost his business, he was no longer a merchant, he only had a donkey instead of a horse, and his clothes were raggedy and torn. He begged Djevdjevich not to steal the 100 *ducats* in his possession because they were not even his. Instead of stealing from him, Djevdjevich gave him 2000 *ducats* to regain his fortunes and business. "When you are once more rich you shall again travel here at your peril," he said, "and I will see if I cannot get back from you the whole sum at compound interest."²⁴⁷

Another brigand that straddled the Serbian and Macedonian borders was Bale de Bachista. He primarily worked in northwestern Macedonia and Kosovo (also a part of Turkey at that time) in the 1890s and 1900s. Unlike Djevdjevich, he was vicious and not a man adored by the people. It was reported that he had held thousands of people for ransom and killed over 150 people whose ransoms were not paid, as well as committing countless other murders. What made him more unique than the rest was that, combined with his cruelty and constant exploits, he

was considered to be a paid Austrian agent, working to foment unrest in Macedonia to Austria's favor.²⁴⁸

Many visitors to Macedonia feared the persistent brigandage that plagued the land. American missionaries bringing Protestantism to Macedonia were constantly worried about brigandage as they traveled through Macedonia and would include information about them in their reports. "A man has been robbed of 800 Turkish liras in gold and a large amount in silver and 180 robbers had just come over the mountains into Macedonia," wrote one missionary.²⁴⁹ They also reported that in Dupnitsa, where many families of brigands lived, five brigands were executed by Turkish officials. The local populace claimed that the real reason for the executions was not because they were simple brigands, but because these Macedonians were working against the government.²⁵⁰ In an amusing situation, the missionaries recounted how in 1887 some bandits robbed poor peasants from Razlog. They were so poor that the bandits only found their sandals and hymn books to be of any worth. When one of the peasants, who had become a Protestant, offered the bandit a Bible, he refused saying, "that book tells us not to steal but we steal."²⁵¹

The missionaries had good reason to be concerned. An American, Dr. Parsons, had been murdered by brigands who mistook Parson's packages of bibles and books as valuable loot. From that point forward, missionaries and their students were encouraged to dress as poor peasants so not to attract the attention of bandits.²⁵² Dressing as poor peasants was possibly the best course of action to deter the sinister designs of both the authorities and the brigands, as they would not want to waste the effort and time robbing someone who possessed nothing. Harold Lake wrote this about the benefits of poverty in Macedonia:

For this is the law of Macedonia, that you should not build yourself a secure and costly home which your enemy may at any time destroy or take for himself; you shall not plant great fields or any more than is strictly necessary for yourself lest your enemy come and reap your rich harvest; you shall not make an easy road to your home lest your enemy come down it swiftly to your destruction. It is better and safer to have so poor a house that it is not worth the burning, so small a crop that it is not worth the gathering, so painful a road that it is not worth the traveling.²⁵³

However, dressing poor or rich, the brigands generally knew when foreigners were visiting the area – they had eyes and ears everywhere,

and news traveled fast. As of April 1903, one author compiled a list of all foreigners traveling to Macedonia and other Turkish provinces that he had the facts for – it totaled 19 people:

- 1880, Colonel Singe, ransomed for \$50,000.
- 1881, Henry Suter, ransomed for \$60,000.
- 1884, Richard Dussi, \$6,000 paid.
- 1885, Mrs. Giovenov, \$35,000 demanded, \$2,000 paid.
- 1885, Fritz Charmand, \$8,000 demanded, \$1,500 paid.
- 1887, R. C. H. Wilkins, \$30,000 demanded, \$8,000 paid.
- 1890, Gray Hill, \$100,000 demanded, amount paid unknown.
- 1890, Mr. Landler, \$15,000 paid.
- 1891, M. Rayneud, \$5,000 paid.
- 1891, M. Michele, \$2,000 paid.
- 1894, M. Provost, \$3,000 paid.
- 1896, Captain Marriott, \$15,000 demanded, \$120 paid.
- 1896, M. Waligrski, \$4,000 paid.
- 1896, Mme. Branzian, \$50,000 demanded, \$10,000 paid.
- 1898, James Whithall, \$500 paid.
- 1899, M. Chevalier, \$15,000 paid.
- 1900, Gerasim Kirias, \$2,000 paid.
- 1901, M. Alphonse, \$5,000 demanded, \$1,000 paid.
- 1901, Miss Stone, \$125,000 demanded, \$65,000 paid.²⁵⁴

There were many more foreigners, especially non-Europeans, who were captured but received little international attention. Regardless, the compilation of this list demonstrates that missionaries and foreigners were justified in their fears.

The peasants, however, were in such a paranoid and panicked state over the constant brigandage that was tearing up their lives, that any small group of unknown men could be mistaken as a band of brigands. There was one instance where Turkish troops went out on a looting mission near Voden in the village of Rodevo. In the early hours before dawn, the troops surrounded and captured three men pouring unrewarded labor into their fields. They tied up the peasants' hands and had their captives lead them to their village. At dusk, upon arriving with the three captured men in front, the villagers ran out of their houses in a frenzy assuming that they were being attacked by a band of brigands. The few soldiers, scared and unsure what the villagers were doing, fired on them at random and killed ten people. After they looted the homes they set several alight and continued on their merry way.²⁵⁵

Although many Macedonian, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian brigands had branched out into revolutionary and political activity by the turn of the century, criminals with profit as their sole motivator still plagued the land. In 1902, one writer noted that Macedonia was “infested by brigands, who make their living by robbing any travelers who pass through the country without sufficient protection.”²⁵⁶ Another traveler was warned about taking the thirty-mile trip from Skopje to Tetovo: “Dreadful tales were related of battle, murder and sudden death by the way. The whole length of the road was said to be flanked by Albanian villages with the most villainous reputation[.]” As a matter of fact, just an hour’s horse ride outside of Tetovo on that road was an area known as “Assassin’s Corner,” where robbers constantly lurked and attacked unsuspecting and unprotected travelers.²⁵⁷

Most of the remaining bands of robbers and pillagers in the early 20th century were Albanians, who took advantage of the political and revolutionary situation in Macedonia. “The Albanian brigands, co-religionists of the Sultan, made capital out of the growing confusion by levying on Christian and Moslem alike.”²⁵⁸ Here is a description of Albanian bands operating in northwestern Macedonia, where they had burned down one village twice and stole 600 head of cattle from that village in the first four years of the new century:

Bands consisting of usually between fifty and a hundred men patrol the mountains, pouncing down every now and then on some wretched village...if they are in a good humor they will compromise matters by making a collection of the valuables and ready money of the peasants; if on the other hand luck has been against them they will probably make bonfires of the barns and granaries...Often for no cause whatsoever, the Albanians burn the villages they have pillaged.²⁵⁹

Also, during 1901 and 1902, the village of Nikiforovo in the Gostivar region lost a total of 500 *lira* to nine separate Albanian bands due to damaged and burned houses, stolen property, and ransom payments.²⁶⁰

The Albanian brigands from Debar and its surrounding villages were especially active during this time. One band from here paid a visit to Dolna-Belica and killed the priest’s wife. They then took off with a peasant in hopes of securing a ransom for him. The mayor of Lazarpole, on his way to Debar to pay his village’s taxes, was captured by a different Albanian band and held for ransom. The police accompanying him were not harmed and fled. On a later date, six villagers from

Lazarpole were captured and held for ransom. In the town of Debar itself, the famous Albanian brigand Mustapha Djeka took for ransom Tane Ivanov Tzintzar and demanded 60 *liras* for his release, and he then pushed that amount up to 120 *liras* when the clock expired.²⁶¹

Another shocking case from the bands of Debar comes from the Albanian brigand Shakir:

Shakir...carried off the servant of the monastery of St. John, caza of Dibre, and demanded a ransom of 100 [Turkish liras] to release him. The ransom not having been paid at the date fixed, he beheaded the servant, and sent the head to the monastery.²⁶²

These types of cases were common. In Kanica, near Debar, Albanian brigands carried off Trajche Lazarov, a young miller, and demanded 65 *liras* for his release:

When the mother went to see the chief of the brigands, the latter, to frighten the unfortunate women, pulled four of her son's teeth and gave them to his mother, to be carried off with a letter to the prefect of Dibre. At the same time, the brigand caused a boy of fifteen, whose relations had not paid his ransom, to be decapitated before her eyes. When the mother told all this to the prefect of Dibre, he merely shrugged his shoulders by way of answer. The mother managed to get together the ransom by selling all her belongings and appealing to the pity of her neighbors.²⁶³

Probably the largest assault in the recent memory of the Macedonians at that time in Debar occurred just after the turn of the 20th century:

Two or three thousand Albanians invaded the Christian quarter of the town and those of several villages, forced their way into the Christian houses by breaking down the doors with axes, and looted what they wanted, in spite of the presence of Turkish regulars. During the disturbances, which lasted over a fortnight, the Christians, of course, were forced to feed them; in one small village 800 Albanians were kept free of charge during twelve days.

Why did this happen? Because the Ottoman government attempted to create some courts of justice in Debar; and the Albanians, who only knew a sense of justice dictated by intimidation and money, were

completely opposed to courts being opened there so they could avoid prosecution for their crimes.²⁶⁴

This part of Macedonia, generally north and west of Kichevo, had become notoriously unbearable and unmanageable. In the summer of 1905, one British report stated "that owing to the...prevalence of Albanian brigandage...the peasants in many cases prefer to let their crops rot on the ground rather than risk their lives in harvesting them; and even the officials do not venture to visit certain districts."²⁶⁵ Northwest Macedonia was populated primarily by Macedonians, but the Albanians employed terror and violence to survive off the Macedonians' labor.

The Bitola region also occasionally experienced insufferable turmoil, much of the havoc being caused by Albanian brigands. In one village, an Armenian child was captured by a band after being separated from his father in the fields they were working. The captors demanded \$300 for the child's release, and "for weeks the family had eaten bread without salt" in order to muster up the money for his release. In another village, a brigand chief captured three men and sent a letter to the villagers demanding a large sum of money and listing specific articles to be delivered to him by a strict deadline. The village failed to pay and the three men were beheaded.²⁶⁶ In another village near Bitola, Albanian brigands carried off six men and held them for ransom to the amount of 75 *liras*. The village could only muster up slightly more than half of this. The brigands released the prisoners, but warned that if the difference was not paid by a certain date, their village would be massacred and burned.²⁶⁷

The names of Albanian brigands in the early 20th century in the Bitola region included, among several others, Hassan Tchaoush and Islam Onbashi. There was one instance where Hassan held three wealthy Turkish landowners ransom at once. Islam, on the other hand, had led a band of 150 Albanians to steal cattle. On one occasion they stole 400 cattle after killing the herdsman.²⁶⁸ Islam's band was extremely active in the summer of 1902:

At Kositsino, he murdered the usurer Bamadan with his son and nephew, and carried off the two sons of a rich Turk, aged 13 and 15, for whom he is asking 80 *liras* ransom. At Novoselo he carried off the sons of a Christian, Daniel, and of a Moslem, Halil, and asks 100 *liras* for them. At Bresnitza he carried off three Christians, and is asking 150 *liras*; he also killed five others. At Krovschie he forced a woman to become a Moslem, and outraged five girls...At

Tominoselo and Strovia he carried off ten horses and fourteen head of cattle. At Topolnitsa he killed two men, at Monastirets one, and a woman at Bentse.²⁶⁹

That same summer, the Albanian brigand Saadedin robbed a workman near Poretse and sent his ears to the police. Another band of 20 Albanian brigands “carried off four Christians of Molovitsa, killed one of them for trying to escape, and asked 200 liras ransom for the others.” One man from Resen who they kidnapped paid them 30 *liras*, but they still killed him anyway.²⁷⁰

In Topolnica, a village in the Petrich district, eight Albanians attacked four traveling wool-merchants. One managed to escape but the three others were stripped of everything they had, including their clothes. The Albanians then knotted their hands, tied their heads together around the neck, and threw them into the river. The men drowned and their corpses were spotted floating in the Struma River.²⁷¹ In Gradec, a village in central Macedonia, three Albanians fired on four Macedonians “occupied in making wood charcoal.” One of them died and the others were beaten unconscious and their horses, watches and money were stolen.²⁷²

Another Albanian brigand sent “a letter in [the] Macedonian dialect” to a village that he had constantly persecuted:

From me, Tahir Tola, to you, Headman of Galichan: Oh fools of Giaours! For the last time we tell you, my friend Islam Garan and I, that if you do not pay up 2,000 liras, I shall cut and flay every man I find; God shall not give you protection. Michael Chalovski is going to you; I have word of it; you should not lease him any village land. If you do not obey, but think what comes into your heads, I will come with 150 men and bring dust and ashes on you.²⁷³

Turkish brigands, on the other hand, virtually diminished early in the 20th century. While many Turks did not have to resort to brigandage – and while many Turks, soldiers and bashibazouks alike, still would plunder, loot and commit crimes – the typical Turkish brigand was quickly disappearing in the early 1900s. One in particular, Kiazim, was a nuisance for Macedonians in the villages between Kukush and Solun. In 1902, after Kiazim’s band wounded nine Macedonian peasants returning to their homes, robbing them of what they owned, the peasants complained to the Vali who promised to take care of the

brigand leader. Shortly later, Kiazim's body was found floating in a river.²⁷⁴

Another famous Turkish brigand, Haireddine, was killed with two other Turkish brigands when they tried to commit crimes in the village of Nered near Lerin. In the few years preceding his death in 1905, he had committed over 30 murders against Christians. The Turkish authorities, however, considered this to be an act of vengeance by the Macedonian villagers and imprisoned forty of them for the murders.²⁷⁵ Macedonians in eastern Macedonia, however, had to deal with Turkish brigands more than other regions of Macedonia. For example, in Spatovo, near Melnik, a Turkish band of forty men killed three Macedonians after torturing them. They then carried off one of the man's wife, sister and two children.²⁷⁶

Most of the Turkish brigands of this time, however, were not as ruthless as the Albanians and were rather petty criminals simply trying to survive. They usually would just mug the peasants on the road and would forego kidnapping and murder. A couple of Turkish brigands robbed two peasants on a road near Dolno-Divjaci. The peasants were coming back from the market and had to give up 5 *liras*, some sacks of flour and clothes. In another instance, Turkish brigands surrounded a father and his son, and then released the father to return to his village to collect 30 *liras* before they would consider releasing the son. In a more serious instance, seven Turkish brigands, armed with Gas rifles, held up four Macedonians on the road near Babino. The men were returning from the market in Bitola. They stole the horses, goods and money on the men after tying them up. The men eventually managed to untie themselves and complained to the authorities, who brushed off their complaints, saying that Turks could never commit such a crime.²⁷⁷ While simple Turkish bandits in the 20th century might not have been as abundant and ruthless as Albanian brigands, they did contribute to the misery of the Macedonians by locking them into a bottomless pit of poverty.

It is not a surprise, then, that many brigands often failed to secure large ransoms, both because the peasants were extremely poor and occasionally because the brigands made some unwise miscalculations. Take, for example, this attempt to rob the official Turkish mail cart on a road outside of Bitola:

The carriage containing the mail was some distance in advance and the mounted guards had fallen back near another carriage in which there were two travelers. The robbers evidently mistook this for

the post and attacked it savagely killing one of the travelers, three guards and three of the four carriage horses.²⁷⁸

However, miscalculations were not as common as complete failures. "There have been cases in which captives have been rescued in fights between the brigands and soldiers. There have been others in which the captives have been surrendered on condition of mitigated punishment for the brigands."²⁷⁹ Banditry was not a risk-free enterprise.

Much of the banditry happened not in the villages or mountains, but on the poorly maintained roads between settlements. Traveling through Macedonia was such a perilous journey that authorities and prior visitors constantly warned against traveling there. As one visitor noted, "only two years ago, the express train was stopped by brigands, and the passengers held to ransom, and for some time after that most foreigners having business in Salonica preferred to get to it by sea from Marseilles, rather than run the risk of a similar misadventure."²⁸⁰

On a lighter note, in one instance, a traveler accompanying the Turkish authorities witnessed the authorities stop two Albanians near Tetovo with a large flock of sheep. The men claimed they were taking the sheep to Solun to be shipped to Constantinople. But after examining their passports, it was discovered that the men were wanted for many petty robberies. Following some resistance, the police finally disarmed the men and took them to prison – but not before making them return the stolen sheep.²⁸¹ Another author described how such road banditry appeared to be accepted as normal by the people:

Riding one day upon the high-road from the busy little garrison town of Klissoura to the railway at Sorovitch, at mid-day and within sight of the town, I came upon a brigand seated on a boulder which had had placed in the middle of the road, smoking his cigarette, which his rifle across his knees, and calmly levying tribute from all the passers-by.²⁸²

Although still a problem for the government and a drain on the purses of peasants through the early 19th century, brigandage and banditry subsequently retreated for many reasons. On one hand, the Macedonians turned to revolutionary and political activity that focused more on guerrilla warfare against the Turkish government, and later against the Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian governments. They did partake in some brigandage, but their aims were to finance the rebellions. Furthermore, after Turkish rule was expelled from

Macedonia, the economic, social and political dynamics changed. The Balkan governments still supported bands, but these bands served political purposes rather than financial ones. Finally, but not least of all, Macedonia began slowly catching up to the rest of Europe. The borders opened up to the non-Turkish world; backwardness was not the only option for a future; and the means to make a living improved.

However, the Turks left Macedonia worse off than when they conquered it five centuries earlier. Government policies, economic slavery and brigandage combined to make Turkish rule in Macedonia miserable for the peasants. But there were three other elements to this Macedonia saga that contributed gloom and confusion to the Macedonian landscape while the Ottoman dominance was fading. These instigators were none other than Macedonia's Balkan neighbors: Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia.

V.

Macedonia's Neighbors' Deadly Designs

Villainous characters overcrowded the stage of the Macedonian drama. Between the crooked Turkish authorities and the merciless brigands, the Macedonians were melting away in an inferno of somebody else's making. But while much of the world's rational and timid players seemed to possess the clairvoyance to avoid the Macedonian muddle, Macedonia's hungry and devious neighbors hankered to join the Macedonian party. Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia anticipated that time was the only barrier between Turkey's demise and a mad scramble for the spoils. These three nations, however, avoided no treachery or malevolence in capturing Macedonian territory; and they revealed no hesitation in initiating their endeavors, with their first infiltrations into the Macedonian scene commencing several decades before the Ottomans vacated Macedonia's premises.

During these Ottoman years, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia employed three vital tools, to varying degrees, for penetration into Macedonia: their respective Churches, educational institutions, and government-backed armed bands. They aimed to convert the Macedonians into loyal members of their respective nations. Bulgaria was especially fruitful with its Church and schools; Greece was moderately successful utilizing all three methods; and Serbia's propaganda was fundamentally limited to northern Macedonia and would have been unsustainable had they not permeated the Macedonian scene with their armed bands. All three groups clashed with each other as well as with the Macedonians. The addition of these three players to the Macedonian scene created what was (and still is) commonly referred to as the Macedonian Question: What should become of Macedonia; or rather, which country is entitled to possess Macedonia? Without the interference of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, the two possibilities seemed obvious: either Macedonia would be granted autonomy or it would remain a chaotic Turkish region. With Macedonia's neighbors piling into the fray, there were now no less than five different contenders for Macedonia.

These nations' Churches, however, were the principal apparatuses by which they pushed their agenda. From the Churches came the support and will to establish schools in Macedonia (or to attract

Macedonians to universities in their respective countries) and to sanctify the professed righteous work of the armed bands. All three nations had their own national Churches yet essentially adhered to the same Christian Orthodox religion. Noel Buxton highlighted this inseparability between Church and Nation and what it meant for Balkan ambitions in Macedonia:

No one can understand the outlook in Macedonia without realizing that nationalities are identified with churches...religion is degraded to the level of a pretext for exciting national zeal...the respective Churches make no pretense of differing to the smallest extent in theology or ritual...The machinery of the Church is employed for the prosecution of international war.²⁸³

Thus, while the Turks were using government channels and economic weapons to oppress the Macedonian peasants because they had refused to embrace Islam, the Balkan nations were using their respective Churches to wage a campaign of national assimilation against the Macedonian people. Macedonian attempts to reincarnate an Orthodox Church in Macedonia, independent of the Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian sway, were subdued for various reasons. In this way, Macedonia was surrounded by enemies and infected with parasitic vermin, which limited the Macedonians' abilities to seamlessly expand their own national agenda.

Initially, the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs, were not physically hostile toward the Macedonians. Up until the 20th century, their plans consisted mostly of persistent propaganda to win over the hearts and minds of the Macedonian population. It was not until the failure of the Macedonian Ilinden Uprising that they began a completely ruthless program of violence against Macedonians who did not adhere to their respective Churches or nationalities, as well as against bands originating from their enemy competitors.

Bulgaria's claim to Macedonia and the Macedonians pivoted on two disingenuous assertions. First, the Bulgarian propagandists alleged that the Macedonian language (referring to the Slavic dialects spoken within Macedonia) was effectively a Bulgarian language subgroup and that it was more closely related to Bulgarian than any other language, specifically Serbian, or Serbo-Croatian (Serbia commissioned a similar argument in its ambitions to prove the Serbian roots of the Macedonian language). Second, the Bulgarian mouthpieces also conveyed to the world that many Macedonians denoted themselves as Bulgars and must

therefore be Bulgarian. There were other cultural and historical arguments (Bulgarian and Serbian scholars constantly bickered over historical and cultural details), but their strongest arguments dwelt in the language and identity of the Macedonians.

To a limited extent, some Bulgarian arguments expanded their weight as the twentieth century approached. The Bulgarian Church, established in 1870, was granted access to Macedonia in 1878 and began contending with the Greek Church for followers. Eventually, Bulgaria opened hundreds of schools in Macedonia and thus acquired two dependable avenues for inducing Macedonians to proclaim themselves as Bulgarians: the Church and the education system. For religious matters, the Macedonians had a choice between attending services conducted in a language they could not comprehend (Greek), or in one that they could partially understand (Bulgarian), even though it was not their native tongue. Several Macedonian villages aligned with Bulgarian Church for this reason and the Bulgarians spewed this as evidence demonstrating that Macedonians were Bulgarians. The Bulgarian schools, furthermore, provided immersion into Bulgarian history and social studies, plunging the vulnerable Macedonian youth (who had never been exposed to national tendencies because the memory of Macedonian nationhood had just about faded under five centuries of Ottoman rule) into the Bulgarian national agenda.

Up until 1878, Bulgaria's situation was analogous to Macedonia's predicament – it had been deteriorating under Ottoman savagery. But in March 1878, after Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria achieved status as an autonomous principality of Turkey. For all intents and purposes, Bulgaria organized and conducted itself as an independent entity with little need to heed the Sultan's decrees. Initially, large chunks of Macedonia were incorporated into this independent Bulgaria. England and other European Powers thought that this enlarged Bulgaria would primarily serve the interests of Pan-Slavists in Russia (those conspiring to unite all Slavic speakers in one gigantic confederation). Russia hoped that by propping up favorable leaders in Bulgaria it could enlarge its opportunities for expanding its interests in the Balkans. But at the Berlin Congress of July 1878, Macedonia was returned to Turkey with an imaginary limited sovereignty.²⁸⁴ Although this encumbered both Russian and Bulgarian agendas, the Russians still wished to use Bulgaria as their Balkan pawn.

However, Bulgarian allegiances and maneuvers transformed rather quickly and the two nations found themselves growing distant. Instead

of appreciating Russian sacrifice and acknowledging that Bulgaria would have still been enslaved without Russian intervention, the Bulgarians isolated Russia from their decision-making and arrogantly proceeded to dominate the Balkans by their own agencies. Russia then turned to other means for securing their interests in the region, including through cooperation with the Macedonians. This was not an unsound plan on behalf of the Russians, as the Macedonians were extremely appreciative of Russian sacrifice and attached themselves firmly to the notion that Russia had saved them from future torments. As a matter of fact, even into the early summer of 1878 when much of Europe knew that a free Macedonia was no longer a reality, Macedonians from everywhere were traveling to San Stefano to pay respects to the Russian army that aided them in securing their freedom:

Simeon Radev, a native of Resen, recalls what his father, who was at the time in Constantinople on business, told him about his own reactions. His father said: 'During the summer we went to San Stefano to feast our eyes on the Russian Army. An officer started talking to us and asked us where we came from. When we told him, he looked at us with pity, shook his head and said: "Wretched Macedonians! You are again being left under the yoke." We still knew nothing, but his words pierced our hearts like a knife.'²⁸⁵

The heart-piercing news was just the beginning of a new round of troubles for Macedonia. When Stefan Stambolov became a leading figure in Bulgaria during the 1880s and 1890s, he labored tirelessly to prevent an independent Macedonian revolutionary movement from achieving its aims. Stambolov particularly feared that Russia would capitalize on the determined Macedonian effort and that Macedonian susceptibilities to Bulgarian influences would be replaced by fidelity to Russian schemes. Thus, he directed Bulgaria to tighten relations with Turkey so that Bulgaria would be in the best possible position to influence Macedonian developments. By working with Macedonia's subjugators to keep Macedonia within Turkey, it was easier for Bulgaria to smuggle their cause and designs into Macedonia. Turkey, on the other hand, viewed the awkward alliance as a symbiotic relationship, at least temporarily, because Bulgarian intrusions into Macedonia caused rifts between the adherents of the warring Bulgarian and Greek Churches, as well as buffered it from other European inroads into Macedonia. Stambolov proceeded to clear Bulgaria of its Macedonian revolutionaries, of which many were refugees of Turkish oppression,

while others were Bulgarians who had sympathized with the Macedonians. He viewed these Macedonian revolutionary bands solely as Pan-Slavist agents in the service of Russian ambitions. These Macedonian bands had been known to target wealthy foreigners in Bulgaria in order to finance their revolutionary activity; because Stambolov had wiped them out, Bulgaria also earned the sympathies of many European nations.²⁸⁶ Throughout Stambolov's duration as a central Bulgarian figure, Turkey became increasingly tolerant and permissive of Bulgarian religious and educational activity in Ottoman Macedonia.

All of this infuriated the Russian Czar, Nicholas the Second, who had been craving to make Bulgaria a Russian province or at least an organ of the Russian economic and political machine. Stambolov was adamantly against these Russian designs and "evolved a long-term plan involving the peaceful penetration of [Macedonia] using churches and schools as the media of Bulgarianization." Stambolov understood that this approach "would lead to the adoption of Bulgarian national consciousness there and inevitably to the union of Macedonia with Bulgaria."²⁸⁷ In Stambolov's mind, a non-Bulgarian Macedonia was not an acceptable alternative. Writing in 1921, Ferdinand Schevill attributed the part-Bulgarianization of the Macedonian people to Stambolov's policies:

The Bulgar bishops of course installed a Bulgar clergy and set up Bulgar schools, and priest and schoolmaster together made it their business firmly to anchor the Macedonians consciousness in Bulgar nationalism. If it was afterward found very difficult to cure the Macedonians of their Bulgar leanings, this stubborn preference may in no small part be ascribed to Stambuloff's success in planting a virgin soil with the organized propaganda of church and school.²⁸⁸

However, Bulgarian operations in Macedonia met only limited successes. Amongst the Macedonians, there was significant resistance to the slithering Bulgarian dominance of their people and land. Further, in many cases, even where individuals claimed their language, religion and nationality were Bulgarian, they were more dedicated to their Macedonian identity and Macedonian autonomy than they were to the imposed, artificial Bulgarian identity.

Bulgarian activities in Macedonia commenced with intensity in the decade leading up to the Berlin Congress, but the Bulgarians were not

convincingly demonstrating their case that Macedonians and Bulgarians were the same people. Kuzman Shapkarev, a Macedonian who wrote several books in the late 1860s and 1870s, began writing in Macedonian dialects mixed with Eastern Bulgarian dialects. Soon, however, his writings were completely in Western Macedonian dialects. Shapkarev in the latter half of 1870 convinced the citizens of Resen to return the Bulgarian books ordered for their school and use his Macedonian ones instead. The owner of the bookstore in Veles who had to take back the Bulgarian books accused him of writing in an Ohrid dialect that contained “stinks” of Hellenisms and Arnautisms (Greek and Albanian aspects) and of saying that “Macedonians barely freed themselves from the Greeks and what, now we are going to end up as Bulgars?”²⁸⁹ By the 1870s, Shapkarev’s books were replacing Greek ones in southern and central Macedonia because parents preferred them to Bulgarian ones – their kids understood them when they read them aloud.²⁹⁰

In 1871, the freshly formed Bulgarian Church excluded Macedonian representatives from their first council, referring to them as “Cincari” (a term used to denote Vlachs, an ethnic and cultural community found through the Balkans).²⁹¹ These Macedonians were not considered to be Bulgarians and thus were not allowed to be members of the Bulgarian Church council. In 1872, the Bulgarians then began publically adopting the line that Macedonian was a degenerate dialect and that Macedonians should learn Bulgarian instead.²⁹² The Macedonians detested this belittlement and strived to place Macedonian on equal footing with Bulgarian and Serbian. Also in 1872, Venijamin Machukovski submitted his Macedonian Grammar to be published, but the Bulgarians prevented it from hitting the press.²⁹³ Further, in 1874, Petko Rachev Slaveykov, a Bulgarian national revival leader, traveled to Macedonia and wrote that “the Macedonians are not Bulgarians” and that they “strive, at any price, to obtain a separate church of their own.” He said Macedonians possessed an attitude that their dialect should be declared a separate language and that they had a separate national consciousness.²⁹⁴ Thus, while the Bulgarians may have proclaimed to the outside world that Macedonians were Bulgarians, the internal disputes and disagreements between the Macedonians and Bulgarians demonstrated otherwise.

Even though the Bulgarian Church eventually became the Church of choice for Macedonians, it was having difficulty attracting Macedonians into their realm. Once the Bulgarian Church entered the Macedonian

scene in 1878, it began to rival Greek propaganda there. Bulgaria assumed that because Bulgarian was a closely related language to Macedonian that the Macedonians would flock over to the Bulgarian Church. Initially, however, Macedonians realized that the Bulgarian Church existed solely to further Bulgarian propaganda. Therefore, they switched back to the Greek Church to not become Bulgarians. The Greek Church proved itself wise enough (at least through much of the late 19th century) to provide the Macedonians with local, Macedonian-speaking priests.²⁹⁵ Thus, while Bulgaria was employing its Church to convert Macedonians to the Bulgarian nationality, the Macedonians remained wary of national programs and were more inclined to accept a Greek Church that provided them with priests who spoke their local Macedonian dialect rather than a distant Bulgarian language or an incomprehensible Greek language.

The fight against Bulgarian domination and for a Macedonian national development was ever-present throughout the second half of the 19th century. The problem, however, was that Macedonians had to contend both with the physical and economic oppression by the Turks, as well as the simultaneous foreign propaganda of the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs. This made progress on both fronts nearly impossible.

Still, Macedonians maintained the fight against disheartening odds. They discovered pathways to battling this calculated propaganda. From 1892 to 1894, the Young Macedonian Literary Society in Sofia, Bulgaria published the magazine *Loza*. On the surface they advocated for a Macedonian-Bulgarian compromise regarding linguistic matters, but beneath the surface they were separatists who strived to make Macedonian a distinct language. This is evidenced by the fact that they had a public constitution in Sofia and a secret one based in Romania. Certain members of *Loza* would eventually assist in creating the IMRO in 1893.²⁹⁶

In 1894, Petar Poparsov, another Macedonian IMRO revolutionary, “edited... a brochure where he expressed quite a sharp criticism towards the ‘authoritarian’ and ‘corrupted’ course of action of the Bulgarian Church.” The Bulgarian Church “opposed the revolutionary agenda of the organization [... and] considered that the revolutionaries would only complicate the political status quo and hinder the formation of a powerful Bulgarian intelligentsia in Macedonia.” Actually, one of the first armed conflicts that the IMRO participated in was against pro-Bulgarian Church adherents.²⁹⁷

By 1902, Bulgarians were afraid that IMRO and other Macedonians would be successful, so they “sought to provoke reprisals by the Turks against Macedonian villages in order to facilitate eventual Bulgarian intervention.”²⁹⁸ They were successful in causing Turkish massacres against the Macedonians; but Bulgaria failed to intervene to protect and win over the Macedonians. The Macedonians kept on defending themselves from Bulgarian propaganda that continued to stream into Macedonia after this defeat. In November of 1903, Krste P. Misirkov attempted to publish his book “On Macedonian Matters” in Sofia. But the Bulgarian police in December confiscated the books from the printing press before they could be distributed.²⁹⁹ This book thoroughly examined and advocated for the Macedonian people, nation and language, and the Bulgarian aristocrats did not dare to risk introducing such a provocative and pro-Macedonian work of literature into society. But the Bulgarians themselves did introduce a more pernicious form of nationalism into Macedonia. Starting in 1904, after the IMRO insurrection was successfully smoldered, Bulgaria began organizing armed bands to penetrate Macedonia, not only to agitate the Turks, but to counter Serbian propaganda and intimidate inhabitants leaning to Serbia and the Serbian Church.³⁰⁰

Many visitors to Macedonia shortly before the Young Turk revolution recorded how Macedonians thought of themselves and their neighbors. Allen Upward wrote:

I asked him what language they spoke, and my Greek interpreter carelessly rendered the answer Bulgare. The man himself had said Makedonski... I drew attention to this word and the witness explained that he did not consider the rural dialect used in Macedonia the same as Bulgarian, and refused to call it by that name.³⁰¹

These foreign observations on language and even ethnicity were quite common throughout Ottoman rule in Macedonia. In 1895, Mary E. Durham wrote: “The truth is that the dialect of the Macedonian Slav is neither Servian nor Bulgarian, but ‘betwixt and between,’ as he is himself.”³⁰² Furthermore, other writers noted that Macedonians looked to Bulgaria not as the same people, but as a medium to achieve their goals of independence: “The Macedonians do not think that the rule of the Bulgarian policemen will be much better than that of the Turkish *zaptieh*, and they will not fight together unless their independence is guaranteed.”³⁰³

Although Bulgaria had gained essential autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, on paper they were still an organ of the Empire. When Bulgaria declared her complete independence from Turkey in 1908, the Macedonian peasants belonging to the Bulgarian Church denounced the Principality of Bulgaria and warned Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand that they would hold him responsible for whatever evils were unleashed on the Macedonian people.³⁰⁴ The Macedonians were actually infuriated with, and distrustful of, both Bulgaria and Russia for proving themselves more infatuated with self-serving interests rather than principles of liberty, justice and equality. Brailsford had a conversation with several Macedonians and highlighted the common Macedonian reaction to Bulgaria and Russia:

In one Macedonian town I was on good terms with the Bishop, his secretary, and the Turkish prefect. The prefect one day explained to me in great detail the exact shades of revolutionary opinion which the Bishop and his secretary affected. The cleric was a Russophile and a Panslavist. The layman was an ardent Macedonian nationalist, rather distrustful of Bulgaria, and profoundly hostile to Russia. The description was good and accurate.³⁰⁵

This attitude toward Bulgaria was not surprising. The Bulgarians continually conducted themselves contrary to Macedonian ambitions and ideals. For example, in the first half of 1903, Bulgaria was still straining to influence events in Macedonia through its committees and propaganda. But observers noted that these Bulgarian intentions were not encountering a friendly Macedonian population:

Even the committees in Bulgaria have little influence with the Macedonian peasants, who trust to their own leaders and do not care for the political designs of Bulgaria, Serbia or Greece. Their motto is 'Macedonia for the Macedonians,' and their aim the abolition of Turkish rule and the substitution of autonomy.³⁰⁶

Then, when the Ilinden Uprising had commenced and Turkey's massacres of Macedonians exploded, the Macedonians living in Bulgaria were demanding Bulgaria intercede on the Macedonians' behalf if their espousal for Macedonian liberty and justice was genuine. These Macedonians actually gave Prince Ferdinand a 10-day deadline

to make his position known on the Macedonian events unfolding or else they would “notify him that he [was] dethroned.”³⁰⁷

Throughout the Ilinden Uprising and subsequent Turkish reaction, Bulgaria behaved like first-class hypocrites. The Bulgarian leaders spoke out against Turkish oppression and Macedonian liberation. But at the height of the insurrection, and while the Macedonians were being massacred from the summer through autumn, the Bulgarian army stationed at the frontier with Macedonia prevented IMRO sympathizers and Macedonian revolutionary bands (composed of fugitives and refugees) from crossing into Macedonia to fight the Turks. When it was clear that the Macedonian rebellion would not succeed and that the Macedonians alone could not defeat the overwhelming Turkish army, the Bulgarian government began claiming their hands were tied by the Great Powers. Instead of advocating for a liberated Macedonia, Bulgaria now sought to secure “a situation in Macedonia which would be tolerable for Christians.”³⁰⁸ The Bulgarian leaders, thus, were altering their views as the tides changed.

On the other hand, the Bulgarian peasants were fatigued from all the Macedonians that had been pouring into Bulgaria as refugees and fugitives. The Macedonians – ambitious, smart and persistent – took over several aspects of Bulgarian society to varying levels. For example, out of the 38,000 officials in Bulgaria, 15,000 were Macedonians. Half of the Bulgarian Church’s metropolitan bishops were Macedonians by birth and so were one-third of the priests. Bulgaria, a young nation clamoring to organize its own affairs, was distraught over the influx of Macedonians into the country: “[T]he Bulgarian born meets at every step a Macedonian who competes with him for his office or means of existence.” The Macedonian Question was no longer just a political question for Bulgaria but an economic and social one. Thus, the Bulgarian people were increasingly appealing for reform in the Ottoman Empire so Macedonians would stop pouring into Bulgaria.³⁰⁹

The economy, then, proved itself to be the real motivator behind the Balkan intrusion into Macedonia. As a matter of fact, for Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, the entire conquest of Macedonia was essentially an economic goal. Macedonia was a significant chunk of land that contained many valuable resources – as well as some prime agricultural soil – and, just as importantly, strategic transportation routes, which would allow Macedonia’s possessor to control the export and import of goods. These ambitions, however, were not often externally

communicated. Macedonia's neighbors told the world cover stories for why they were entitled to Macedonia.

Greece in particular had many arguments for claiming that Macedonia belonged to it and that the Macedonians were Greek. They first insisted that ancient Macedonia had been a part of Greece. Greek policy initiated a revision of history that spurned a fairytale in which King Phillip and Alexander the Great united Greece (European history, until that point, had taught the world that King Phillip and Alexander conquered Greece). By altering history as such, and by claiming the ancient Macedonians were really Greeks, the Greek chauvinists now set themselves up for arguing that it must follow that over 2,000 years later Macedonia still belonged to Greece and that Macedonians were still Greeks. Thus, Greece insisted they had a rightful claim to the Macedonian land and made it a point in their policy (as well as engraining it into Greek culture) to incorporate Macedonia into the Greek kingdom. Second, Greece countered Bulgarian and Serbian claims that Macedonians were part of their nations and iterated that many inhabitants of modern Macedonia were actually Greeks. That they spoke a non-Greek language did not matter - Greece blamed Bulgarian and Serbian propaganda for infiltrating Macedonia and making Bulgarians and Serbians out of Greeks.

It is true that Serbian and Bulgarian propaganda aimed to make the Macedonians either Serbian or Bulgarian. They had little regard for what the Macedonians thought of themselves and focused solely on amassing villages to declare themselves Bulgarian or Serbian. Before the Bulgarian Church barged into Macedonia, there was only one church that Christians could attend (as per Turkish policy), and that was the Greek Church. To the Greeks, this was enough to prove that every Macedonian Christian was at one time Greek but had only been recently converted to other nationalities.

However, the Macedonian population was non-Greek before Serbia and Bulgaria had national agendas in Macedonia. The Macedonians were well aware that membership in the Greek Church simply meant that one was a Christian and not a Muslim, as that was the only sanctuary for Christians; and they knew it did not indicate anything about cultural, national or ethnic belonging. As one reporter from 1899 wrote:

Up to the early years of this century there were but two dominate ideas in the countries south of the Danube, the Greek and the Mohammedan - to say 'Christian' was to say 'Greek.' The

inhabitants of these lands owe allegiance to the Greek Patriarch, and a resurrection of a great Greek kingdom was the dream of the oppressed Christians. That is so no longer. The Slav has asserted his right in the future...³¹⁰

Actually, before Greek propaganda began to accelerate in the 1880s and 1890s, astute observers in the Balkan field noted that the true extent of the Greek element in Macedonia was non-existent. In 1881, Valentine Chirol wrote that “northwards into Macedonia pure Greeks are no longer to be found. All the communities which are included under that designation are Wallachs; or Romounoi, as they call themselves – Greco-Wallachs, as they are called by the Hellenes.” These Vlachs claimed to be descendants of the old Roman soldiers who had colonized Macedonia nearly two millennia ago. While associating with the Greek Cause had protected them against Turkish assimilation, the language and character of the Vlachs demonstrated they had no blood connection with the Greeks, according to Chirol.³¹¹

Modern Greece itself was a product of European ambitions. The European Powers created Greece in order to retain a Balkan state that would serve their interests in the region. More precisely, the first king of modern Greece was a Bavarian (from central Europe), named King Otto, who ruled Greece for its first thirty years. It was he who reclaimed Greece’s former glory for the Greeks through his obsession with ancient and classical Greece. But it was not until the early 19th century that the people of Greece began discovering the ancient past of the land they lived on and stringing it together with their modern lives to form a national agenda. The effect, however, was to create a dogmatic Greek attitude that aimed to reinstate supposed 2,500-year-old borders (even though a country of Greece had never existed in the ancient times and the term “ancient Greek” simply applied to a linguistic and cultural realm, which itself was not pure). Macedonia was necessary for this Greek agenda. The Europeans manufactured a shiny product that the Greeks poured all their gold into: “The legend that Macedonia is a Greek province like Crete and Cyprus, a true limb of Hellas Irredempta, is firmly planted in the European, and especially in the English, mind.”³¹²

As mentioned previously, the Greeks started with one advantage over all their neighbors in Macedonia – the Turkish sanctioned privilege of allowing the Greek Church control over all Christians, not just in Macedonia, but throughout the entire Ottoman Empire. However, once the Turks realized the potential danger in a Greek monopoly, they

opened the door for the Bulgarian Church (and eventually the Serbs) to divide the Christians into smaller factions. Thus, with all this new competition, Greece found it unfavorably difficult to stiffen its power in Macedonia and resorted to asserting more abrasive measures to their grip onto the Macedonians: armed bands of violent Greek mercenaries.

The Greek priests sanctioned and supported – by all means available – the sadism of the Greek bands in order to push the Greek agenda on the Macedonians and to prevent them from joining the Bulgarian Church. Frederick Moore wrote in *The Balkan Trail* about an experience he had in 1903 with a Greek bishop:

Just beyond Florina the Turks turned us back, and took us, at our request, to the residence of the Greek Metropolitan, where we hoped to get some information of the affair. The Metropolitan was reputed to be the most violent propagandist in the Monastir vilayet. He had recently made an extended tour through his district under the escort of a body of Turks, exhorting all recalcitrant Christians to return to the Patriarchate [Greek Church], warning them of massacre... and assuring them, on the authority of the Vali, immunity from attack by Turkish troops if they became 'Greeks.' In fear of punishment and hope of reward whole villages of terrified peasants swore allegiance to the Patriarchate, and their names were duly written in a great book.³¹³

While the Greeks occasionally invaded Macedonia with bands prior to the Ilinden Uprising, it was not until after its failure (when a small vacuum opened up) that they started marching in thousands of Greek guerillas, paid and supported by the Greek government and Church. For the following four years, Greek bands were the primary instigators of the ensuing chaos that torpedoed through Macedonia. Greece understood that successful implementation of proposed European reforms in Macedonia would lead to good government in Macedonia. Good government in Macedonia would eventually make Macedonia a strong, autonomous state. This result would be contrary to Greece's plans for the partition of Macedonia. Thus, they began collaborating with the Turks, who "aided and abetted the Greek bands,"³¹⁴ to plunge Macedonia into a chaos worse than any the Macedonians had previously endured.³¹⁵

By the beginning of 1905, there were over 30 Greek bands operating in Macedonia.³¹⁶ They operated predominately around Serres, Drama, Demir-Hisar, Kavala, Enije-Vardar, Vodena, Gevgelija, Lerin, Kostur,

Prespa, Mariovo, and Bitola.³¹⁷ In that year, 1,000 Macedonians were murdered by Greek bands, and in the next year the number of slaughtered Macedonians doubled. Macedonians formed bands to protect their villages from being raided; but this was a quandary because having bands compromised the village by attracting Greek fighters to engage with them. Yet, whether or not Macedonian protection existed for a village, the Greeks ravaged southern and central Macedonia. At a wedding in Zagorichani, a Greek band killed 70 men, women and children. Around the same time, eight other Macedonian villages had been destroyed by Greek bands.³¹⁸ During another wedding, this time in the village of Nevoliani near Lerin, a Greek band of nearly 100 mercenaries surrounded the house where the wedding festivities were ongoing. The Greeks began firing through the windows and doors - with their Mauser and Gras rifles - but no one from the wedding party dared to come outside. The unoriginal Greeks then set fire to the house, killing thirteen peasants and severely burning eight, including several women and children. The thugs not only harassed them for not belonging to the Greek Church, they stole all the women's jewelry and "stripped the corpses of their boots and other effects."³¹⁹

On September 9, 1906, a Greek band accompanied by Turks surrounded the village of Smilevo near Bitola. The villagers - with few possessions and little time to react - hurriedly decided that an offering of peace would be in their best interests. Thus, they sent a delegation of young men to greet the Greeks and to offer them watermelons as a welcome. "I don't want watermelon, I want blood," replied the band's chief. The band then proceeded to randomly shoot and kill people while the Turks, who came from neighboring villages, plundered and looted the homes. One recently married woman ran to hide among her livestock, but the raiders noticed she was covered in coins and jewelry, which indicated a potentially significant dowry. Using swords and knives, they ripped the jewelry off of her, leaving lacerations on her head and hands. They were about to kill her until she offered them 3 *liras* that she had stumbled upon in her pocket. Another woman, alone in her house, pretended that her husband was home by shouting for him to fetch the guns at the same time as the thugs happened to be walking by. The bandsmen skipped her house, not wanting to risk their lives. Still, a total of thirteen inhabitants were killed, including four children; and ten houses were burned to the ground.³²⁰

In the next month, a Greek band entered the village of Karadjovo and ruthlessly attacked the inhabitants. Many women were raped, had their

limbs torn off and were then set on fire – a total of 25 were killed. Two dozen men were also killed after being dismembered, and many children were not spared. A Greek consul was implicated in assisting the band with these atrocities and the Ottomans sent four army battalions in pursuit of the perpetrators. Later it was discovered that the Turkish authorities actually assisted the Greek band and allowed them to elude capture.³²¹ Turkey's strategy of "divide and conquer" kept Macedonians in fear and at each other's throats so the Sultan could squeeze the most out of his crumbling Empire.

The Greeks – avoiding serious pursuit by the Turks – continued their barbarities in village after village. In Ghilposte, near Serres, a Greek band used dynamite to blow up ten houses, after raping three women and burning alive seven other people.³²² On November 26, 1907, a Greek band of 60 men swooped down on Zelenichi and broke into the house of Stojan Gatev, where a marriage was taking place, and killed thirteen men, women and children and mutilated others.³²³ In the Serres and Melnik districts in 1907, twenty-three people had been killed by Greek bands and mutilated in one village alone. In Caraja-Kioi near Serres, nineteen old men and women were murdered by a Greek band assisted by Turks in the presence of a Greek priest and a Greek consular employee. In Vranja outside of Melnik, seven houses had been burned and nine women were raped, tortured and then shot to death; while in Bashna, three men were burned alive and six women shot.³²⁴

Compared to the Bulgarians and Serbians, the Greek bands were a numerous and organized force in southwest Macedonia, especially south of Bitola. There were about 2,000 Greek band members operating in this area compared to only 150 Bulgarian mercenaries.³²⁵ Again, much of this was due to the assistance from the Turkish officials, who were often ordered not to engage Greek mercenaries, as well as due to the complete support of the Greek Church. The Greek bishops were shamelessly not afraid of dipping their fingers in filth. One bishop in Plovdiv (in Bulgaria) had his house searched in 1905, where the authorities discovered that the Greek Church was collecting funds for paying Greek bands to raid Macedonian villages, along with instructions to and from priests on how to behave.³²⁶

Of course, as mentioned previously, southwest Macedonia was not the only area of Greek intrusion. They operated in the eastern areas as well. For example, the Greek committee sent a manifesto to the villages near Solun to convert to Greek Orthodoxy and write themselves down as Greeks or subscribe to death.³²⁷ These kind of threats were common

and were often backed with cruelties. One author wrote: "As regards that land of terror, fire, and sword, Macedonia...the blood of those poor and defenseless woman and children who are daily slaughtered by Greek bands cries aloud to Europe for vengeance."³²⁸ The Greek bands were always considered "savage" and existed "by murder and confiscation." Much of their assistance – in money and arms and moral support – came from wealthy individuals in "civilized parts of Greece, from Greeks abroad, and...from agents of the Western powers."³²⁹

The vast majority of the Greek mercenaries were not Greeks from Macedonia (or, to be more precise, Greek Church adherents in Macedonia). They were from Greece proper, and the majority of these were from the island of Crete.³³⁰ They could not communicate with the local Macedonian populations and hired interpreters for this task, according to H.F.N. Lynch. He reported: "The Greek bands are known to take interpreters with them, and you may go into a village which has been bribed or frightened into calling itself Greek, and which will not understand the most ordinary Greek words, such as *kalispera* – good evening."³³¹ The British consul in Solun reported once, in the summer of 1905, that a number of Greeks, 150 from Crete and 28 from Greece, returned to Greece from Macedonia after serving with some Greek bands.³³² A well-known Cretan band leader was named Karavitis. In one particular instance, when pursuing Macedonian rebels between Rakovo and Dragosh, his band stopped six Macedonians who were adherents to the Greek Church and inquired of them as to the whereabouts of the IMRO rebels. The shepherds professed ignorance and were beaten. Three of them were then killed.³³³

Still, some Greek mercenaries were either Hellenized Macedonian or Albanian brigands loyal to the Greek Church. These Greek mercenaries were just as cruel as any other Greek. Reluctant peasants were either beaten or bribed to become Greeks. Any Macedonian belonging to the Bulgarian Church was shot. Enemy houses and entire villages were burned. The bands warned villagers that Bulgarian Church priests were schismatic and those that they buried would never be able to rest in peace. A priest at a Greek high school warned that the Macedonians were murderers, criminals and infidels that should be extinguished from the planet. Those who performed this deed, he argued, were natural heroes and protectors of the Greek Church and nation.

The center of Greek operations was embedded in Solun's Greek consulate. To energize the Greek movement, a new consul named Lambros Koromilas was stationed there. There also existed an

underground organization led by an army cadet known as Athanasios Souliotis-Niolaides. His agents assassinated leading members of the Macedonian and Bulgarian Church community in the region. He even forced Greek shopkeepers in Solun to alter their shop signs so that the Greek lettering was the largest and at the very top. In those days, Turkish, French and Slavic inscriptions were usually written before the Greek translation, as well as in larger font. In 1907, Souliotis urged Greeks to boycott Macedonian businesses, and Greek employers were told not to hire followers of the Bulgarian Church.³³⁴

By 1907, the Greeks were winning in the assimilation attempts of the Macedonian population. One news correspondent wrote:

Favoured by Turkey, the Greek bands, splendidly financed and organized - often amounting to over 200 men - have bribed and massacred Macedonia into an acquiescent Hellenism. In two years they have 'Hellenized' 120 villages by methods that have given a terrible new meaning to an ancient word. The Macedonians, who have still clung to the Slav interest and faith, have either been killed, imprisoned, or have fled.³³⁵

These Greeks not only had the approval and support of Turks, but they also collaborated on missions together. About 100 men visited the village of Kladerop; twenty of them were Turks, twenty were Greek mercenaries, and sixty were local Greek Church adherents. They were all draped in Turkish uniforms. As they marched through the village, they amassed nearly two dozen adult males and demanded that they sign an oath pledging their loyalty to the Greek Church. Seventeen of the men were executed one by one as they refused to sign, and four were carried off as prisoners for the Turks to hold ransom.³³⁶ If they could not make Greeks out of them, at least they would swindle some money from them.

The Turks, however, played all sides and were not always supporting the Greek bands. Once they realized that the Greek bands were outshining the Bulgarian and Serbian bands, the Sultan began to increase his support for the Vlach community, which was trying to resist efforts of Hellenization by the Greeks. In particular, the Vlachs wanted to throw off the tyrannical supremacy of the Greek Church and establish their own Church. The Sultan supported these Vlach ambitions because the Vlach propaganda was not nearly as dangerous as Serbian or Greek propaganda. The Vlachs did not have the desire or

ability to cut off parts of Macedonia and attach it to Romania,³³⁷ the country they looked to as their protector and kinfolk.

Greek bands thus targeted Vlachs with violence as well. In Plyassa, near Gorica, a band of eighty Greeks threatened to destroy the Vlach village and murder the inhabitants if they did not become Greeks. They then entered the church and burnt all the service books, which were written in the Romanian language. A different Greek band, just a few days afterwards in the summer of 1905, entered the Vlach village of Vdela and murdered three notable Vlachs, including a priest.³³⁸ In another instance, on November 30, 1905, a Greek band entered a village on the border of Macedonia and Greece and carried off the village headman George Poupi, who was a Vlach. The Greeks murdered him in the forest and his corpse was found with a note on it: "So perish all who dare to call themselves Roumanian."³³⁹

But the fact that these Vlachs were not actually Greek did not limit the Greeks' early successes in many Vlach-inhabited towns and villages. In the Vlach town of Kosana, the Vlachs were proud of their Hellenization, in which the Greek Church had a big part in promoting. Chirol highlighted in 1881 how propaganda worked much efficiently in Hellenizing the Vlachs than did the armed Greek intrusion twenty-five years later:

For clerical influence is strong here - strong not only with the strength of ecclesiastical authority, but with that greater strength which it derives from the devotion of the population to the venerable old prelate who has lived and done good amongst them for upwards of 80 years. An exception among his class, he has Hellenized his flock not only by schools and sermons, but by kindness and uprightness. The overbearing grasping character of the Greek clergy has often undone the work of Hellenization wrought in the school room and the pulpit. Here the contrary has been the case; and there is therefore little cause for wonder if in the whole Wallach region there is no stauncher bulwark of Hellenism than Kosana...In Kosana it is the bishopric which really governs the town; and the authorities are well content that it should be so. For the inhabitants pay their taxes regularly, with sometimes a little *douceur* over and above; and if their sympathies are Panhellenic, they always restrain them within the most platonic bounds."³⁴⁰

Yet, the overall Hellenization of Vlachs in Macedonia was not as successful as the Greeks anticipated during the Ottoman period, in part thanks to the Romanian propaganda that was easier for the Vlachs to accept. Where the Romanian propaganda did not make Romanians out of the Vlachs, they at least kept them distinguishable from the Greeks. Even as late as World War 1, a visitor to Macedonia noticed that there were no Greek-speaking villages in southern Macedonia (which Greece possesses today). He had traveled through both Vlach and Macedonian speaking villages, "but never a Greek one." He stated: "It is a curious thing that in Greek Macedonia I met with every type of language except Greek."³⁴¹ Thus, while the Greeks did strike fear into Macedonia during their military intrusions and forced villages to swear allegiance to the Greek Church or the Greek nation, they did not succeed in changing the non-Greek character of the Macedonian communities.

That is not to say that Greeks did not exist in Macedonia. The most numerous populations of Greeks were along towns and villages on the Aegean coast in extreme southern portions of Macedonia. Even where they were significant Greek populations a little north, such as in Serres, the Greeks only constituted at most about one-fourth of the population in those towns town.³⁴² Still, even in the southern part of Aegean Macedonia, according to a Greek author in 1913, there was a mixture of "pure Greek" villages and those villages where the population spoke "the Macedonian dialect" and who were of a different race than the pure Greeks. The author claimed he grew up speaking Greek, Turkish and this Macedonian dialect.³⁴³ Moreover, most of the Greeks in these Macedonian towns were actually Vlachs. "Urban Greeks in the Macedonian interior were the descendants of those Christians (typically Vlachs) who had acquired the religion, commercial language and commercial aptitude of the Greeks."³⁴⁴ The Greeks and Vlachs in towns were all identified as Greek because they spoke the language of business in those areas: Greek.

In the end, however, while the Greeks may have succeeded in scaring much of the Southern Macedonian population into temporarily submitting to their viciousness, they were not able to perform a significant conversion of the Macedonians into Greeks. Brailsford underscored two essential explanations for this Greek defeat:

Two fatal errors alone wrecked what was nothing less than a scheme for Hellenising the Balkan Peninsula. The women were not educated, and for all the Greek schools might do, every Slav child learned his own despised tongue at his mother's knee. The

peasants also were neglected. The Greeks regarded them with the unmeasured and stupid contempt which a quick town-bred people instinctively feels for a race of cultivators...The Greeks denied the rights of men to the Slav peasants and refused to accept them as brethren.³⁴⁵

One wondered, though, how long the Macedonians could resist the relentless Greek fury.

As with Bulgaria and Greece, Serbia's ambitions toward Macedonia commenced in the late 1800s. Due to political circumstances, Serbia was a late-comer to the propaganda efforts in Macedonia. For example, while Bulgaria and then Greece had laid out their plans for acquiring Macedonia, Serbia was still transfixed on subverting Bosnia. However, in the 1880s, Austria made it clear that Bosnia was not to be touched. So in 1881, King Milan of Serbia signed a secret treaty with Austria-Hungary stating that Austria "would not oppose [and] would even support Serbia against other powers in the event of the latter's finding a way of extending its southern boundary, exception being made in the case of the Sandjak and Novi Bazar."³⁴⁶ In 1889, a secret Treaty between Austria and Serbia was renewed, and in it Austria promised "to aid in the extension of Serbia in the direction of the Vardar valley."³⁴⁷ Therefore, politics more than a will to involve themselves in the Macedonian jumble inspired Serbia to fixate their ambitions on Macedonia.

With the opening of the Bulgarian Church in Macedonia, many Serbian footholds in Macedonia suddenly changed hands. Prince Lazarovich wrote that after the Serbo-Turkish war in 1878, all Serbian schools in Ottoman Macedonia were closed and replaced by Bulgarian schools, of which none had existed prior to that point. It was only in the 1890s that the Ottoman government allowed Serbians to reopen schools. By the turn of the century, the Serbians had well over 100 schools in Macedonia. The schools were of varying natures: one school in Solun was a classical school for boys, and one in Skopje was a teacher's school.³⁴⁸ Both types of schools worked to Serbianize the youth.

Getting to that position was not an easy road for Serbia. In 1886, the Serbian government organized a meeting with some of Serbia's most prominent scholars, including Stojan Novakovich, Sveta Nikolajevich and Vladimir Karich, to discuss conducting national propaganda in Macedonia. They decided to create an organization named after Saint Sava, a Serbian Patron saint, in order to establish schools, train teachers and promote Serb national consciousness.³⁴⁹ In 1887, their efforts were

incorporated in a department under Serbia's Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.³⁵⁰ Their initial focus was to attract young Macedonian graduates to study in Belgrade. In 1888, there were twenty-three boys at these schools in Belgrade, but those students transferred to Sofia a year later because of strong pressure by Serbs to declare themselves as Serbian patriots.³⁵¹ By 1889, this propaganda department was transferred to Serbia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁵² Three years later, the Serbians attempted to open a Serbian school in Skopje, but they were forced to shut down after locals complained that the law required at least thirty officially registered Serbian households in order for a Serbian school to be opened, and there were not that many Serbian households in Skopje.³⁵³

One of these scheming Serbian scholars, Novakovich, was especially known for his plots to spread Serbian propaganda. In 1889, motivated to combat the Bulgarian propaganda and to promote Serbian interests in Macedonia, he wrote a book of which two-thirds was in Macedonian dialects and one-third in Serbo-Croatian dialects. He had printed 7,000 copies of this book for distribution but suddenly abandoned his effort to sell it because he feared the book would spur Macedonian nationalism.³⁵⁴

Serbian consulate offices were eventually opened in Solun, Bitola and Skopje. The Serbian consul in Solun, Petar Karastojanovich, met with the Greek Metropolitan Grigori, to increase activity against the Bulgarian Church.³⁵⁵ This fixation on Macedonia was evidently becoming the center of Serbia's foreign policy. In 1896, King Alexander of Serbia gave a speech about Serbia's Macedonian agenda, stating: "We must turn our eyes in that direction. There we must save our brothers."³⁵⁶

The Macedonians, for their part, had "made many attempts to unite the Servians with the movement against Turkey." They supposedly reached an agreement in which the Serbians would work separately and independently of the IMRO in parts of Macedonia. The Serbian government was also going to invest three million francs in supporting Macedonian revolutionary work, specifically to buy arms and ammunition.³⁵⁷ For a while, it seemed to the Macedonians that they could work with the Serbs as friends against the Turks, Bulgarians and Greeks.

At the same time, there was talk in Belgrade of securing an alliance with Bulgaria for securing Macedonia's freedom and piecing all three of those countries in one giant Balkan federation. Some of the individuals

involved in these negotiations were Mr. Pachitch, who had held the secret discussions at his house; Milovane Milanovich, a foreign minister of affairs; and Dimitri Risov, a Macedonian revolutionary who was dedicated to the Macedonian Cause but had recently transitioned into becoming a diplomat. On April 12th, Bulgaria and Serbia signed a secret defensive alliance, but a Serbian official gave up the secret, causing them to fall apart.³⁵⁸ The populations of Serbia and Bulgaria were so opposed to the idea of working together that the officials could not afford the political ramifications of publicly deciding to unite.

Therefore, the Serbs intently worked to acquire Macedonia, or at least to prevent Bulgaria and Greece from conquering Macedonia. One traveler to the Balkans noted how Serbian people were not willing to sacrifice an inch of Macedonia to Bulgaria:

[T]he conclusion I have formed is that their views are, on the whole, much the same as those of Servian civilians. Every Servian is an ardent patriot – a chauvinist even...If Bulgaria invaded Macedonia tomorrow, there is not a peasant in all Servia who would not demand an instant advance upon Sofia.³⁵⁹

To accomplish this agenda the Serbians began sending in armed bands, called Chetniks, to hurl more violence and chaos onto the Macedonian people. In particular, these Serb bands operate around Kumanovo, Tetovo, Kriva Palanka, Veles, Kichevo, and Poretschi.³⁶⁰ The leader of these Serbian bands was Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevič-Apis. When he was given tacit approval by Serbian government to cross into Macedonia, he definitely made his presence known.³⁶¹

Colonel Dragutin's agenda was to ensure that the Serbs did not fall behind their Balkan neighbors in the struggle for the coerced support of the Macedonians. They thus aimed to defend the gains they had made through religious and educational inroads, while at the same time confronting the Greeks and Bulgarians when the opportunity would arise. Especially in 1906, these Chetniks "flowed from all parts into Macedonia to enroll themselves in the bands, and many of them perished in the combats with the Bulgarians and the Turkish army."³⁶²

The only way the Serbian government could convince its own people to fight in the Macedonian muddle was through instilling in its people and soldiers a sense that Macedonia historically belonged to Serbia. Macedonia was considered to be Old Serbia or Real Serbia, and the glorious history of Serbia was claimed to have been rooted in Macedonia. That most Macedonians did not consider themselves Serbs

was due to Serbia's enemies, particularly Turkey and Greece. Hence, by the 20th century, it was not difficult to find men willing to murder for lost Serbian lands:

If crime were ever justifiable, ample excuse could be found for Servian committees, Servian bands of brigands and the terrorism of all Macedonian Slavs who refused to confess themselves Servian.³⁶³

Turkey recognized the importance of introducing Serbian bands into Macedonia in order to keep the Macedonian populace divided. In the early months of 1906, Serbia and Turkey came to an agreement by which the Serbs were allowed to send bands into Macedonia in order to counter both Bulgarian and Greek bands:

For weeks past Servian bands have been trickling across the frontier, invading these wretched, harassed villages of Macedonia, and crying to the villagers, 'Call yourselves Servians or -' It is like an election into which a third candidate has entered unmasked and unannounced. The methods of electioneering are primitive. Bulgaria, the original patentee of these methods, objects to seeing her patent invaded. There was a terrific outcry at Sofia; and six weeks ago, the Bulgarians and Servians were nearly at war.³⁶⁴

These 'agreements' were not insignificant. While Serbian bands were committing atrocities against the Macedonians, and while some detachments of Turkish troops were pursuing and arresting these bands, the judges would always acquit them of their crimes. In one village near Skopje, the Serbs had taken two Macedonians hostage and began torturing them. A night patrol of Turks stopped them before they killed the peasants. At court the men of the village who were accused of "concealing" the Serbian bandits were acquitted of harboring them. A similar scenario played out in a village near Kumanovo, where some of the Serbians either received light sentences or were acquitted.³⁶⁵

Serbian propaganda of claiming Macedonia and Macedonians as Serbian officially was temporarily suspended because of a new found friendship with the Young Turk regime in 1908. Serbia proposed an agreement for the development of Novi-Bazar (then part of Turkey; today in Serbia) by mutual free trade.³⁶⁶ But along with the Greeks and Bulgarians, the Serbians had already contributed their fair share of damage to the Macedonian landscape. Lynch wondered when the

brutality would stop and when the Macedonians would unite to defeat these bands: "How long more will they allow their country to be distracted by these profitless struggles conducted by mercenaries in their midst?"³⁶⁷

The Macedonians were their own tribe, separate from all other Balkan peoples. It was only propaganda, violence and Turkish misgovernance that kept them divided. According to the majority of Bulgarian and Serbian propagandists, the Slavic-speakers in Macedonia were either Bulgar or Serb. According to the Greeks, many of them were simply Slavic-speaking Greeks. But foreign observers and academics had different opinions. Austrian Karl Hron in 1899 wrote that Macedonians were not Serbians nor Bulgarians but a specific national group.³⁶⁸ Specifically, he wrote: "Through my own studies...I came to the conclusion that Macedonians are a separate nation by its history as well as by its own language."³⁶⁹ In 1905, German Dr. Karl Oestreich stated that Macedonians were separate from Serbs, Bulgars and Greeks and that there were 1.5 million ethnic Macedonian Christians and half a million ethnic Macedonian Muslims. K Gersin in 1903 wrote that Macedonians constituted their own national group. The Russian G.G. Georgiev in 1913 wrote that Macedonians were a separate nationality of 2.2 million people.³⁷⁰

Jacob Schurman suggested that the simple fact that the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbians were fighting over Macedonia while insisting that Macedonians belonged to their respective nations indicated that the Macedonians were their own people. He wrote:

Central Macedonia has its own dialects any one of which under happy literary auspices might have developed into a separate language. And the men who speak them to-day can more or less understand either Servian or Bulgarian. Hence as the anonymous and highly authoritative author of "Turkey in Europe," who calls himself Odusseus, declares: "The practical conclusion is that neither Greeks, Servians, nor Bulgarians have a right to claim Central Macedonia. The fact that they all do shows how weak each claim must be."³⁷¹

Other foreigners were still struggling to classify the people of Macedonia and the Balkans as if it were some sort of academic or intellectual exercise. "The efforts of the comparative philologists have not yet conclusively decided how to classify the Epirots, the Thracians, and even the inhabitants of Macedonia."³⁷² For many foreign academics,

intellectuals and politicians, the Macedonians identity was a scholarly intrigue. To one observer Macedonians were just people of the land without a concrete nationality. "The Macedonian native, then, is merely a hewer of wood, a drawer of water or, to be more precise, a tiller of soil."³⁷³ However, the Macedonians did not approach their identity in this matter.

What did the Macedonians think about themselves? As stated by a Macedonian priest in 1891: "We the Macedonians do not suffer as much by the Turks ... as by the Greeks, the Bulgarians and the Serbs who have set upon us like vultures upon a carcass in this tortured land and want to split it up."³⁷⁴ And as Krste P. Misirkov, one of the most important Macedonian intellectuals of his time, wrote in 1903: "I am a Macedonian and this is how I see the position of my country: it is not Russia or Austria-Hungary that are the enemies of Macedonia, but Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. Our country can be saved from ruin only by struggling fiercely against these states."³⁷⁵

When Russia helped free Bulgaria from Ottoman control in 1878 and Macedonia remained a Turkish pit, many Macedonians relocated to Bulgaria. Giorgi Pulevski came to Sofia and in 1888 he founded the Slavo-Macedonian Literary Society, but the authorities shut it down and imprisoned some of its members.³⁷⁶ Over a decade earlier, Pulevski had described his views on the Macedonian language and people in a book he wrote:

[A] nation is called a people who are of one kind and who speak the same language and who live and associate with one another and who have the same customs and songs and celebrations – these people are called a nation, and the place in which they live is called the fatherland of that nation. So too the Macedonians are a nation, and this place of theirs is Macedonia.³⁷⁷

The Macedonians were firm in their identity and the name of their land, despite Turkey and other Balkan nationalities trying to uproot the Macedonian identity and the Macedonian name:

[T]he three vilayets or provinces – a term which is still officially applied to the reform area...happens to correspond with the limits assigned by travelers and geographers to Macedonia. There have been, and there still may be living, persons who deny the existence of a country to which that name might be rightly applied. But these

ancient names have an unpleasant habit of outliving the work of the gerrymanderers[.]³⁷⁸

This is not surprising. Macedonia's neighbors knew of the Macedonians' emotional and physical attachment to the Macedonian land. They knew that they were dedicated first and foremost to Macedonia, and they struggled thus to eliminate that connection. But it proved impossible. As Brailsford pointed out, Macedonia was the fatherland of the Macedonians: "Their ballads of revolt, in which the word 'Macedonia' recurs in every chorus, prove that they have already a fatherland."³⁷⁹ Brailsford even further described the Macedonians' aversion to foreign labels and identities:

I questioned some boys from a remote mountain village near Ochrida which had neither teacher nor resident priest, and where not a single inhabitant was able to read, in order to discover what amount of traditional knowledge they possessed..."Who built this place?" I asked them. The answer was significant - "The Free Men." "And who were they?" "Our grandfathers." "Yes, but were they Serbs or Bulgarians or Greeks or Turks?" "They weren't Turks, they were Christians."³⁸⁰

Further, when Durham traveled to Macedonia, in Prespa she conversed with hundreds of Macedonians. She observed this lack of affinity to Bulgaria and Bulgarian history: "In the whole long tour through the Prespa villages, to my astonishment...I found no trace of knowledge of the Great Bulgarian Empire."³⁸¹ Whether or not the Macedonians were subjected to Balkan propaganda, their loyalties remained to Macedonia.

Other observers also noted the distinction between Macedonians and their neighbors. Schevill wrote:

These Slavs may properly be considered as a special Macedonian group, but since they were closely related to both Bulgars and Serbs and had, moreover, in the past been usually incorporated in either the Bulgar or Serb state, they inevitably became the object of both Bulgar and Serb aspirations and an apple of bitter discord between these rival nationalities. As an oppressed people on an exceedingly primitive level, the Macedonians Slavs had as late as the congress of Berlin exhibited no perceptible national consciousness of their own...in fact, so indeterminate was the

situation that under favorable circumstances they might even develop their own Macedonian consciousness.”³⁸²

Further, George Young wrote that “these Macedonians have a character and a dialect of their own, such as would justify their being considered one of the many distinct Yugo-Slav types.”³⁸³

Regardless of Church and State objectives, the toll on the Macedonian people was physical and psychological. By the height of the bands’ criminality in 1906, political and religious murder was so normal, and witnessing murder was so engrained into daily routine, an observer wrote about the inhabitants of Bitola: “Everybody is jolly. Murder is so commonplace that it arouses no shudder. In the night there is the little bark of a pistol, a shriek, a clatter of feet. ‘Hello! Somebody killed!’ That is all.”³⁸⁴

This was daily life for the Macedonians and it shows that when Macedonians were forced to choose to back one of her Balkan neighbor’s agenda, it was about fear and money rather than about being a member of a particular nationality:

I was talking to a wealthy peasant who came in from a neighbouring village to Monastir market. He spoke Greek well, but hardly like a native. “Is your village Greek,” I asked him, “or Bulgarian?” “Well,” he replied, “it is Bulgarian now, but four years ago it was Greek.” “Because,” he said “we are all poor men, but we want to have our own school and a priest who will look after us properly. We used to have a Greek teacher...but we had no priest of our own...We went to the Greek Bishop to complain, but he refused to do anything for us. The Bulgarians heard of this and they came and made us an offer. They said they would give us a priest who would live in the village and a teacher to whom we need pay nothing. Well, sir, ours is a poor village, and so of course we became Bulgarians.”³⁸⁵

This became the norm in Macedonia. Another observer noted:

Race being thus merged in religion – in something that rests on the human will and not on physical characteristics fixed by nature – can in that part of the world be changed as easily as religion. A Macedonian may be a Greek to-day, a Bulgarian to-morrow, and a Servian next day.”³⁸⁶

Another author wrote more humorously:

In one and the same household one will occasionally find representative of all the branches of the human family; the father claiming for himself a Servian descent, the son swearing that nothing but Bulgarian blood flows in his veins, while the daughters, if they are allowed a voice in the matter, will be equally positive that Helen of Troy or Catherine of Russia or the Aphrodite of Melos was their ancestress. The old mother is generally content to embody her national convictions in the declaration that she is a Christian. A true comedy of errors in which no one knows who is who, but everybody instinctively feels that everybody is somebody else. Verily no country ever was in such sore need of a herald's office, or of a lunatic asylum, as Macedonia. It may be described as a region peopled with new-born souls wandering in quest of a body, and losing themselves in the search. Roumanian, Servian, and Bulgarian agents are all scrambling for the appropriation of these erring spirits, while learned professors at St. Petersburg and Bucharest, Belgrade and Sofia, are busy manufacturing genealogical trees and national appellations for all and sundry of these bewildering apostles of emancipation.³⁸⁷

Frederick Moore observed similar situations among the populace:

On another occasion we received a visit from a more enlightened Macedonian. He, too, was a Bulgarian, so he said; and in the same breath told us that he had two brothers, one of whom was a Servian and the other a Greek. This peculiar phenomenon, prevalent in many parts of Macedonia, here came to my notice for the first time. I was puzzled, and asked how such a thing was possible. The Macedonian smiled, and explained that his was a prominent family, and, for the influence their 'conversion' would mean, the Servians had given one of his brothers several liras to become a Servian, while the Greeks had outbid all the other Churches for the other brother.³⁸⁸

It was not difficult for many Macedonians to switch between nationalities when circumstances demanded. Through necessity, many Macedonians possessed at least basic conversational skills in several languages. Luigi Villari wrote: "Most Macedonians are bilingual, when they do not speak three or four or five or ten languages, so that the

change of party is easily accompanied by a change of language.”³⁸⁹ At the same time, this made the Balkan agenda in Macedonia very complicated and hectic. But the Macedonians did not need or want them there. Wadham Peacock summed up these nations’ and their churches’ aims and methods, and what it did and did not mean:

These hostile Churches were the cause of the recent disturbances in Macedonia. Greeks and Bulgarians especially converted the villages with fire and sword, and in Macedonia and all along the Albanian frontier it must never be forgotten, in dealing with the boundary question, that Greek, Bulgarian and Servian means the adherence of the Orthodox Church in those countries, and not necessarily men of those nationalities.³⁹⁰... There was no need to free Macedonia from the Turks – time was doing that – but each of the three Allies hastened to save as much of it as he could from his two partners in the enterprise...³⁹¹

Another author wrote that this caused a double burden on the Macedonians. “In addition to the ever present Albanian and Turkish freebooters, Greek, Bulgarian, Servian and even Roumanian bands are in the field and bloody fights are of daily occurrence.”³⁹² Thus, subscribing to another nationality could theoretically, while not reducing the violence against them, at least provide their children with an education so they could better their lives. Noel Buxton noted that even the schoolmasters sent by the Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian and even the Romanian governments were vying and competing for attendance in the early 1900s through utilizing desperate measures. Many would pay the Macedonians to attend their schools, where the children were clothed and fed while the parents would themselves make an income by sending their kids to that school.³⁹³

Thus, through their respective Churches and schools, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia gained inroads into Macedonia by attempting to divide the Macedonian populace into different groups loyal to different Churches in order to claim that they had a national population in Macedonia. “It is much as though a London-born Roman Catholic were called and counted as an Irishman,” said one observer.³⁹⁴ “[P]eople who call themselves Greek this week will swear they are Bulgarians next week. Nationality in Macedonia is a matter of fear, politics, and religion.”³⁹⁵ This is how Macedonia’s neighbor’s sowed a destruction and havoc on the Macedonian people that the Ottoman authorities were not able to do alone. “The Orthodox faith in Macedonia” said Misirkov,

“has now become so compromised that one can no longer speak of a true Orthodox church, for there are now three churches and they are...Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian.”³⁹⁶

William Le Queux wrote that all Balkan states were interested in the rich Macedonia. He wrote that “all have instituted church and school propagandas in the country, where they wage a furious war between themselves upon the shoulders of the native population.” If Macedonia got autonomy he argued, then foreign propaganda would eventually subside and the problems between the different groups would resolve themselves peacefully under European administration. Eventually, naturally, Macedonia would become an independent state and then would become part of the Balkan Federation, which would be a Switzerland in itself. Such a neutral powerful country would pave the way for progress and civilization, and not be conquered from the North.³⁹⁷ But the Balkan countries were too selfish and mistrusting to realize this goal.

Regardless, the acceptance of this doomed existence lubricated by Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian bands, however, did not lessen the Macedonians’ burdens and fears. “It was always doubtful for the Macedonian Christian,” wrote Buxton” when he went to his work in the fields, whether he would come back to find his property gone or his wife’s honor lost; but now it is doubtful whether he and they will have their throats cut while they are gathering in the crops.”³⁹⁸ Macedonia’s neighbors began to engage in such a bloody competition for the minds and hearts of the Macedonians, that no measures were to be considered reproachable, and no mountain or valley in Macedonia would provide the Macedonians with any level of security or comfort. The clouds over Macedonia, drained of all their water, began unloading a downpour of fire bolts instead. Macedonia had truly become a hell.

All of this - whether they were considered Bulgarian, Greek, or Serbian by their neighbors - did not matter to the Macedonians. They knew they were simply Macedonian, so they paid little attention to the Churches and nationalities they were asked to identify with. What mattered was that they had freedom and security:

It matters very little whether a village which was originally neither Greek nor Bulgarian nor Servian is bribed or persuaded or terrorized into joining one of those national parties. But it does matter profoundly that it should be freed from the oppression of its landlord, its tax-farmer and the local brigand chief.³⁹⁹

The common Macedonian peasant had little regard for these national agendas. They simply desired to live peacefully in their modest homes and in their humble villages, enjoying the fruits of their toil on their small but plentiful farms. To the Macedonians, what one called himself mattered little; what mattered was to be free from persecution so they could speak their own language, practice their own customs, and run their own affairs. Brailsford further highlighted this truth:

The reality behind the whole muddle of racial conflicts, beyond the Chauvinism of the Balkan peoples and the calculations of the greater Powers, is the unregarded figure of the Macedonian peasant, harried, exploited, enslaved, careless of the national programmes, and anxious only for a day when he may keep his warm sheepskin coat upon his back, give his daughter in marriage without dishonor, and eat in peace the bread of his own unceasing labour.⁴⁰⁰

These Balkan national aspirations and the indifference to the Macedonians' interests and needs created an anguished and destitute population. Sloane traced this muddle back to the Treaty of Berlin:

Of the then inchoate nationalities in the Balkans...the Macedonians alone had received no measure of autonomy from the Treaty of Berlin. They regarded with hungry eyes the surrounding peoples who had...and under the hideous compulsion of the komitadjis a village might be Greek one day and Bulgarian the next, or vice versa. While this 'conversion' was due in the main to the exercise of shocking cruelties, yet so lacerated had the human fiber become, so hungry and so destitute the women and the children, that shrewd bribery frequently served the same purpose.⁴⁰¹

These barbarities stimulated an atmosphere that invited Macedonians to despise every outsider and trust nobody. William Le Queux framed the Balkan situation in the following way: "The Turk hates the Bulgar, the Serb hates the Austrian, the Roumanian hates the Greek, the Albanian hates the Montenegrin, the Bosnian hates the Turk, while the Macedonian hates everybody all around."⁴⁰² As seen, the Macedonian disdain for everyone was justified. Their struggle transitioned from one against Turkish oppression to one against the extermination of their culture, nation and identity by their neighbors.

Many foreign observers knew this and espoused the Macedonian Cause to create an independent Macedonia and uphold the Macedonian identity. One senior officer told a visitor to Macedonia, who was trying to understand the differences between the people of Macedonia, that no differences existed between the Macedonian people. "Do not say the Greeks and the Bulgarians; say the Macedonians."⁴⁰³ The world was recognizing the need and desire for an independent Macedonian homeland for the Macedonians. They advocated for it on many levels and advised it as the best path forward for the Balkans. The British, for example, proposed the establishment of an independent Macedonia during the First World War.⁴⁰⁴

This advice, however, did not impede Macedonia's neighbors' effects to devour Macedonia. From 1912 through 1919, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Turkey fought three bloody wars that resulted in Macedonia's division between the former three, and the suppression of Macedonian culture and national identity followed shortly after. From this time period onward, the Macedonians continued their plight for liberty, equality and unification through all available means. While the struggle to liberate Macedonia was successful in part (about two-fifths of Macedonia is independent today), the Macedonians suffered many trials and tribulations during this period. Although the level of chaos and barbarities did not attain the same altitude as during Ottoman domination, the obstacles challenging the Macedonians were equally overwhelming. Brutal policies of assimilation and intimidation, forced population exchanges, internal ideological divisions resulting in thousands of assassinations, World War II, and the Greek Civil War – all of these coalesced to keep Macedonia the most contested, chaotic and dangerous corner of Europe. The Ottoman downfall might have ditched Macedonia into a trance of anarchy and vulnerability; but the Balkan wolves met a Macedonian resistance that fancied death and suffering over the parasitic appropriation of their country and the purging of their identity. With "freedom or death" as their slogan, the Macedonians renewed their struggle against the relentless injustices tormenting their souls and plaguing their land.

“Neither Bulgar nor Serb” said one such old woman...“I am Macedonian only and I am sick of war.”

National Geographic Magazine, 1917

“The inhabitants of Macedonia...call themselves Macedonians, and what they desire and what we ardently desire for them is an autonomy under European control.”

Sister Augustine Bewicke, 1919

“There are also in Macedonia people who decline to be considered either Serbians or Bulgarians and who want to be simply Macedonians.”

Baron Rosen, 1922

“Nine times out of ten these people, despite being the subject of dispute by three adjoining countries – Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece – would reply in response to the question as to their nationality that they were Macedonians.”

Edmont Bouchie de Belle, 1922

ENDNOTES

¹ The terms Ottoman and Turkish are used interchangeably throughout this book. The Ottoman Empire was named after the leader of the Turkish tribes in the late 1200s and early 1300s, Othman, or Osman. This initial kingdom originated in the northwest corner of modern-day Turkey, just southeast of Istanbul (then Constantinople in the Byzantine Empire).

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⁶ Major David S. Anderson, *The Apple of Discord: Macedonia, The Balkan League, and The Military Topography of The First Balkan War* (Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1993) 12.

⁷ William S. Monroe, *Bulgaria and Her People* (Boston: The Colonial Press, 1914), 88. Also, see Ipek Yosmaoglu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1909*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Pres, 2014), 10-11. A high-level Ottoman official was reprimanded by his superiors for "uttering the word *Macedona* during an interview[.]" The Sultan banned the term Macedonia from use in all official correspondences because use of the word, he believed, legitimized the Macedonian rebels' claims, as well as signifying that that province was not really Ottoman territory.

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