

# **‘Conquering the souls’: nationalism and Greek guerrilla warfare in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904-1908**

DIMITRIS LIVANIOS

## **Abstract**

This article aims to analyse the Greek struggle against Bulgarian bands and ‘Bulgarian’ villages in Ottoman Macedonia between 1904 and 1908. Greek views on the necessity of violence, the logic of terror, and guerrilla tactics are examined and set against their particular context. It is argued that the form, purpose and intensity of violence were shaped not only by Greek intentions and peasant reactions, but mainly by the prevalence in Macedonia of pre-national religious identities, which obstructed the transformation of peasants into Greeks and allowed violence to function as the ultimate arbitrator of ‘national’ affiliations.

## **I. The setting: the predicament of nationalism in Ottoman Macedonia**

If the primary objective of warmaking is to ‘compel our enemy to do our will’, as Clausewitz has argued,<sup>1</sup> then the Greeks set themselves an even more demanding task in the early 20th century. As Greek and Bulgarian guerrilla bands clashed in Ottoman Macedonia between 1904 and 1908, trying to win the hotly disputed ‘national’ allegiances of the Orthodox peasant population, the Greeks, or at least the more enlightened among them, quickly realised that their main aim was not just to defeat their opponents militarily but something much more

I am grateful to Dr. John Campbell, Dr. Mark Mazower and Dr. Renée Hirschon for their much appreciated comments on earlier drafts of this article. A special word of thanks is also due to Dr. Basil Gunaris for his help and our long conversations on things Macedonian.

1. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (London 1993) 83.

elusive: 'to conquer the territory of the souls'<sup>2</sup> of the Macedonian peasants.

However, before discussing the Greek military effort against the Bulgarian bands, it is necessary to point out that the 'soul' of the peasants of Ottoman Macedonia, consisting of the *Vilayets* of Salonika, Monastir and Kosovo,<sup>3</sup> proved to be a rather slippery animal, no less difficult to define than to catch. Throughout the period between the establishment of the Bulgarian national Church, the Exarchate, in 1870, which delivered a deadly blow to the unity of the *Millet -i Rum*,<sup>4</sup> and the partition of Macedonia following the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the bone of contention between the Greeks and the Bulgarians was the 'national' orientation of the demographically dominant Slav-speaking Orthodox population.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, it is exactly the issue of national affiliation that mattered least to the Slav peasants. Despite the cohorts of energetic priests, vocal teachers, prolific journalists, and the few converted in their midst, who tirelessly waved the flag of nationalism in Macedonia, there is enough evidence to suggest that the majority of the Slav peasants found it extremely difficult to identify with national ideologies, which

2. 'Να κατακτήσωμεν το των ψυχών έδαφος'. Αρχείον Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (Archives of the Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs, hereafter: AYE), file YPE/1904, A.A.K./ST, Lambros Koromilas (Greek Consul-General in Salonika) to Ministry for Foreign Affairs [hereafter: M.F.A.], no. 11, 30/9/1904.

3. As everything in Macedonian history, this territorial demarcation has far from been unanimously accepted. Some Greek scholars refuse to accept the Vilayet of Kosovo as Macedonian territory, and Serbian accounts include the region's northern part in 'Old Serbia'. For conflicting views on the delimitation of Macedonian frontiers see: V. Colokotronis, *La Macédoine et l' Hellénisme. Etude Historique et Ethnologique* (Paris 1919) 607. T.R. Georgevitch, *Macedonia* (London 1908) 2-6. Richard von Mach, *The Bulgarian Exarchate: Its History and the Extent of its Authority in Turkey* (London-Neuchatel 1907) 43.

4. For the Greek-Orthodox *Millet* see Richard Clogg, 'The Greek *Millet* in the Ottoman Empire', in: Benjamin Braude-Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society, I, The Central Lands*, (New York 1982) 185-207.

5. Unsurprisingly, statistics (and maps), which were produced at an astonishing pace, more often reflected the intentions of their makers rather than the actual demographic situation. The idiosyncratic Ottoman statistics which counted religious affiliations instead of 'nationalities', further perplexed the issue. Be that as it may, the numerical supremacy of the Slav-speakers in the three *Vilayets* is beyond doubt. They dominated

others tried to impose upon them. The main cleavage in Ottoman Macedonia at that time, that between the followers of the Bulgarian Exarchate, considered by Sofia as 'Bulgarians', and those who remained loyal to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, claimed by Athens as 'Greeks', did not appear to be a clear-cut national distinction, but rather an uncertain divide, which the peasants of Macedonia found easy to cross when told, or forced, to do so. What determined their choice, always tentative and reluctant, ranged from financial considerations, social cleavages, and local politics, to personal animosities, leaving thus precious little room, if any, for 'national' orientations.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, it was not surprising that the choice between the Exarch and the Patriarch often appeared to be capricious and rested on rather peculiar grounds. In Resen, in Western Macedonia, for example the peasants flocked to the Bulgarian Church, instead of opting for the Greek, because of the sublime voice of its cantor. It seems that his was a gifted family, for his son, Boris Christoff, became a very distinguished Bulgarian opera singer.<sup>7</sup> In other churches, where the excellence of their cantor was not sufficient to attract large audiences, the gramophone was used, a novelty at the time, in order to reveal to the God-fearing peasants what the Most High thought about the subject; as should be expected, God spoke Bulgarian and

the rural areas, while Greek-speakers were mainly confined to the southern and littoral areas of Macedonia and the urban centres. The Macedonian landscape was also punctuated by scattered Vlach- and Albanian-speaking villages (the latter dominant in Kosovo) while the Jews formed sizeable communities in Salonika (half the city's population), Kastoria and other towns. For statistical data see Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C. 1914) 28, 30. For Bulgarian accounts see Jordan Ivanoff, *Les Bulgares Devant le Congrès de la Paix. Documents Historiques, Ethnographiques et Diplomatiques* (Berne 1919) 294-304, and especially Vasil Künchov, *Makedoniya: Etnographia i Statistika* (Sofia 1900). For a Greek view see Colokotronis, *op. cit.*, 603-619. For maps of Macedonia see H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool 1951).

6. For a stimulating discussion of this issue see Basil Gunaris, 'Social Cleavages and National 'Awakening' in Ottoman Macedonia', *East European Quarterly* 4 (1996) 409-426.

7. Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London 1994) 20.

advised the peasants to side with the Bulgarian *comitadjis*.<sup>8</sup>

Whenever contemporary sources referred to what the peasants themselves had to say about their national orientation, it appeared that they were concerned with 'real' issues that seemed to them to be relevant, and not with the choice of a nationality: A Slav in Western Macedonia, who spoke also Greek, told a French traveller in the late 19th century that he was not prepared to waste his time thinking about Serbia or Bulgaria. The main issue was not to be under the Turkish yoke. 'Our fathers were Greeks and none mentioned the Bulgarians', he remarked. 'We became Bulgarians, we won. If we have to be Serbs it is not a problem. But for the time being it is better for us to be Bulgarians'.<sup>9</sup> Against this background, it was not surprising that a French Consul in Macedonia remarked to H.N. Brailsford, a British journalist that, if he was given enough funds, he would be able to persuade the Slavs that they were in fact Frenchmen.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the distinction between the Christians and their Muslim overlords was the only one that could be fully understood in Macedonia is also evident from the testimony of many other contemporary observers. In 1908 a British author gave the following description of a Macedonian peasant: 'Antoni Stancoff, [from the village] of Frangotchi. Speaks no Greek. Is a Patriarchist. Does not know the difference between Patriarchist and Exarchist. Suffers from the exactions of the Turks. Does not want any bands in his village. Has no preference between Greek and Bulgarian, so long as the Turk goes.'<sup>11</sup> At about the same time, when Brailsford asked a group of Slav-speaking boys in Ochrid who built the medieval fortress of the

8. Georgios Modis, *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών και η νεώτερη μακεδονική ιστορία* (Salonika 1967) 149. For the *comitadjis* (Bulgarian guerrillas) see below, p. 201.

9. 'Εμείς δεν σκοτιζόμαστε και πολύ για Σερβία η Βουλγαρία, αρκεί να μην είμαστε κάτω από τον Τούρκο!. Οι πατεράδες μας ήσαν Έλληνες και κανείς δεν έλεγε τότε τα περί Βουλγάρων. Γίναμε Βούλγαροι, κερδίσαμε . . . Αν πρέπει να είμαστε Σέρβοι καμιά αντίρρηση. Για τώρα όμως είναι καλύτερα Βούλγαροι.' Victor Bérard, *Τουρκία και Ελληνισμός. Οδοιπορικό στη Μακεδονία* (Athens 1987) 169. Greek trans. of *La Turquie et l' Hellénisme Contemporain* (Paris 1893).

10. H.N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: Its Races and their Future* (London 1906) 102-103.

11. Allen Upward, *The East End of Europe* (London 1908) 181-182.

city, the boys answered that ‘the free men’ did. When he enquired whether these ‘free men’ were Turks, Bulgarians or Serbs, he was told: ‘No they weren’t Turks they were Christians’.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted here that for the peasants, this fundamental distinction between the Christian and the Muslim had also some ‘physical’ dimensions, which could prove crucial when the wrong man was found in the wrong place. In 1903 a Greek chieftain encountered a peasant in the area of Grevena, where there were many Greek-speaking Muslims. The unfortunate peasant started crossing himself frantically and begged the suspicious chieftain to believe that he too was a true Orthodox and not a Muslim. At the end, he had to produce the ultimate proof: he was uncircumcised. After that demonstration his life was spared.<sup>13</sup> Identity, it would appear, could not be a matter of choice; it ‘existed’ independent of what a person said. In a very real sense, it was ‘incorporated’ into the peasants’ bodies, and thus it could be proved beyond doubt.

What these, as well as many other similar incidents, clearly illustrate is that the common Balkan ‘mentality’ of the Orthodox Greek *Millet*, the ‘symbolic universe of the eighteenth-century Balkan society’, as Kitromilides has termed it, was still providing the peasants of Macedonia with the terms of reference, with which they made sense of identity questions. This common pre-national mentality, formed by the traditions of the Orthodox Christian religion, and cemented over the centuries of Ottoman rule, had more room for the Christian ‘commonwealth’ than the ‘nation’, and it was still relevant at the turn of the century. And this, despite the emergence, initially timid and later on irresistibly powerful, of secular and mutually exclusive national ideologies, that were to eventually destroy the Christian unity, shatter its common ground and make a Serb, a Bulgarian or a Greek out of a Christian.<sup>14</sup>

12. Brailsford, *op. cit.*, 99.

13. Efthimios Kaoudis, ‘Ένας κρητικός αγωνίζεται για τη Μακεδονία: Απομνημονεύματα, 1903-1907’, ed. by Aggelos Chotzidis (Salonika 1996) 41.

14. Paschalis Kitromilides, ‘“Balkan mentality”: History, Legend, Imagination’, in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996) 163-191. See also his *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy* (London 1994), for a perceptive discussion of those issues.

It is within this framework that the exchange referred to above between Brailsford and the Slav boys can be properly understood, and it reveals something about the predicament of nationalism in Ottoman Macedonia: the peasants were asked to answer questions they could not understand. They were asked to address issues that belonged to the era of nationalism at a time when they, lagging behind, still lived in a pre-national era, which seemed to refuse to die a natural death, although its days were clearly numbered.<sup>15</sup> But as the same acute observer noted, in that part of the world 'centuries do not follow one another, they coexist'.<sup>16</sup> In Macedonia the coexistence of pre-national Christianity with national ideologies proved to be a cause of misery and dislocation, for at about the same time that Brailsford gently enquired about the nationality of the young boys, another sort of men asked the peasants exactly the same question. But these men were armed, and they knew the answer they wanted to hear.

Armed men had never been an unfamiliar sight in Ottoman Macedonia. At the turn of the century the peasants already had the misfortune of knowing all too well a variety of them. For a start, brigandage, a common feature of Balkan societies, was widespread in Macedonia, causing considerable insecurity to life and property, which was further accentuated by the heavy-handed attitude of the Turkish detachments pursuing the outlaws.<sup>17</sup> But the most important

15. It should be added here that the unwillingness of Christian peasants to identify with national ideas was by no means confined to Macedonia, but it was a common feature in all parts of the Greek *Millet*. In late 19th century Asia Minor, for instance, when a Greek-speaking Christian was asked if he was Greek, he replied: 'No, I'm not anything. I've told you that I'm a Christian, and once again I say to you that I am a Christian'. Ioakeim Valavanis, *Mikrasiatika* (Athens 1891) 26-27, as quoted by Richard Clogg, 'Anadolu Hıristiyan Karindastlarımız: The Turkish-speaking Greeks of Asia Minor', in: John Burke-Stathis Gauntlett, eds., *Neohellenism* (Canberra 1992) 67.

16. Brailsford, Macedonia, *op. cit.*, 1.

17. For an overview of brigandage in the Balkans see Traian Stoianovich, *Balkan Worlds: The First and Last Europe* (New York 1994) 165-168. For Macedonia see the colourful (and romantic) account of Herbert Vivian, *The Servian Tragedy With Some Impressions of Macedonia* (London 1904) 253-267. For the Greek case see the lucid account of John S. Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause: Brigandage and Irredentism in Modern Greece, 1821-1912* (Oxford 1987).

threat to public order in the province came from the activities of the *comitadjis* (Committee-men), the notorious guerrillas of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, who from the late 19th century roamed the province forcing Patriarchist villages to defect to the Exarchate. This was the time when, according to a popular saying, 'the day belonged to the Turk, the night to the *comitadji*'.<sup>18</sup> The campaign of terror inflicted upon the peasants by the Bulgarian bands was followed in the summer of 1903 by another major disaster: on 20 July (New Style: 2 August) IMRO staged an uprising 'against the tyranny and the barbarism' of the Turkish yoke, which was brutally suppressed by the Turkish army, and an assortment of irregulars. Thousands of peasants, although they had shown little active support for the 'Ilinden' uprising, fled to the hills, while tens of villages, mainly in the *Vilayet* of Monastir, were reduced to ruins by the Turks.<sup>19</sup>

It may safely be said that the successive waves of oppression and violence experienced by the peasant population had a cumulative effect and seriously affected their psychology. Given that security of life and property was never guaranteed, an all-pervading fear was a constant feature that haunted their existence, and survival became their primary concern. It was fear and oppression that moulded their character and made them appear (to those observers who took an interest in their affairs) complacent, resigned to their miserable station, ready to accommodate the powerful of the day, and apathetic to any preoccupation other than their livelihood. The image of the apathetic and resigned Macedonian peasant was very slow to die out and remained quite vivid as late as the early 1940s. A British Liaison Officer in Florina, in 1944, was told by a Slav peasant (in Greek)

18. P.R.O. F.O./371, 14316, C4470, Foreign Office Memorandum dated 5/6/1930. For IMRO see Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893-1908* (Durham and London 1988).

19. For accounts of the revolution and its preparations see: Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia* (Salonika 1963) 98-106; Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878-1918: A History* (Boulder and New York 1983) 283. Joseph Swire, *Bulgarian Conspiracy* (London 1939) 99. See also a useful collection of documents in: Basil Gunaris, ed., *The Events of 1903 in Macedonia as Presented in European Diplomatic Correspondence* (Salonika 1993).

that ‘we have had so many different masters that now, whoever comes along, we say (placing his hands together and smiling pleasantly and making a little bow) “kalos orisate”’ [welcome]. Another Slav just added that all he hoped for was ‘to know that what I work for, what I swear for, will at the end be mine’.<sup>20</sup>

## II. Violence as midwife: guerrilla tactics

It was against this particular social background that the Greeks began to form bands in Macedonia and to pursue in a systematic way their struggle against the Bulgarian *comitadjis*, between 1904 and 1908, when the Young Turk revolution raised anew hopes for reform, which were dashed shortly afterwards. This period has been classified in Greek historiography as ‘the Macedonian Struggle’ (Μακεδονικός Αγώνας), and was quickly idealised.<sup>21</sup> By 1904, the element of terror introduced by the Bulgarian bands in forcing Patriarchist villages into the fold of the Exarchate had reached alarming proportions. According to Nikolaos Evgeniadis, the Greek Consul in Salonika, very few Slav-speaking peasants still dared in 1904 to declare themselves Greeks.<sup>22</sup> As should be expected the nature of the Greek effort to reverse the situation in Macedonia in favour of the Patriarchists, was heavily determined by (and indeed in many respects was modelled after) the

20. P.R.O., F.O./371, 43649, Report by Capt. P.H. Evans entitled: ‘Report on the free Macedonia movement in area Florina’, dated 1/12/1944. The Report has been published by Andrew Rossos, ‘Document: The Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia: A British Officer’s Report, 1944’ in *Slavonic and East European Review* Vol. 69, No. 2 (1991), 282-309.

21. For general surveys see: Dakin, *op. cit.*; Nikolaos Vlachos, Το Μακεδονικό ως φάσις του Ανατολικού Ζητήματος (Athens 1930); Konstantinos Vakalopoulos, Ο Μακεδονικός Αγώνας. Η ένοπλη φάση, 1904-1908 (Athens 1987). See also the official account Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών και τα εις Θράκην γεγονότα, produced by the Dept. of Military History of the Greek General Army Staff (Γενικό Επιτελείο Στρατού, Διεύθυνση Ιστορίας Στρατού, (hereafter: GES/DIS) (Athens 1979). For an assessment of the Greek historiography on the ‘Struggle for Macedonia’ see Basil Gunaris, ‘Reassessing Ninety Years of Greek Historiography on the ‘Struggle for Macedonia’, 1904-1908’, in: Peter Mackridge-Eleni Yannakakis, eds., *Ourselves and Others. The Development of a Greek Macedonian Cultural Identity Since 1912* (Oxford and New York 1997) 25-37.

22. ‘Ελάχιστοι τολμούν έτι να ελληνίζωσι’. AYE 1904/Salonika Consulate (Jan.-June), Evgeniadis to M.F.A., 28/2/1904, no. 107.



Bulgarian precedent and the particular way by which the Macedonian peasants declared their preference for the one or the other side. Violence and a campaign of terror of a distinctive kind, as will be seen, proved to be the only effective way to determine the peasants' choice.

Since the main aim of the Greek struggle was to 'conquer the souls' of the peasants and to check the activity of the Bulgarian bands rather than to liberate Macedonia from the Turks, it followed that their military effort should be subordinated to, and guided by, political and psychological objectives. It should be primarily a psychological expedition carried out by military means. Lambros Koromilas, Greek Consul-General in Salonika, the co-ordinator and the prime mover behind the Greek struggle in the *Vilayet* of Salonika, noted in 1904 that 'the unfolding struggle is only racial [φυλετικός] and political'. Konstantinos Mazarakis, an officer of the Greek army and himself leader of a guerrilla band under the name of Captain Akritas, echoed Koromilas in saying that the purpose of the struggle was 'to conquer the souls and not territory'. For him too the struggle was indeed purely 'political'.<sup>23</sup> In this perspective the Greek bands should in effect be the military arm of a much wider organisation aiming at keeping as many Slav peasants as possible loyal to the Patriarchate. Greek priests and teachers had already been active in preaching the Greek cause. In 1904 the time had come for the guerrillas to do the same, in their own, more forceful way.

The conclusion that violence should be used to redress the balance in favour of the Greeks, as the Bulgarians had done before them, was not a difficult one to reach, for many of those responsible for the organisation of the Greek struggle fully understood that the peasants had no definitive national affiliations, and that their preferences were the product of duress and, among other things, social and political circumstances. When a prominent Greek notable from

23. AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, Koromilas to M.F.A., 2/11/1905, no. 785. Konstantinos Mazarakis-Ainian, *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών. Αναμνήσεις*, in the collection of memoirs *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγώνας. Απομνημονεύματα* (Institute for Balkan Studies, Salonika 1984) 258. Cf. Dimitrios Kakkavos, *Απομνημονεύματα. Μακεδονικός Αγών* (Salonika 1972) 38.

the village of Goumenissa unduly delayed his wedding on the grounds of financial difficulties, Koromilas thought it necessary to ask the Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs to allocate some money to enable him to marry sooner rather than later, so that the peasants would stop complaining about that ‘unending engagement’ (ατελείωτος αρραβών).<sup>24</sup> The fact that Koromilas believed that an honourable settlement of that issue would help the Greek cause in the village and keep the peasants loyal to the Patriarchate, highlights the validity of traditional social and moral codes in shaping the peasants’ ‘national sentiment’. Turning to a more ‘political’ issue, Mazarakis emphasised that the Bulgarian movement in Macedonia stemmed from friction in the village councils and was affected by class issues: ‘the opposition became Bulgarian and proselytised the illiterate peasants . . . the contempt [against the peasants] shown by the bourgeois who spoke Greek added to the peasants’ reaction’.<sup>25</sup>

Yet again, fear remained the main force. According to Mazarakis ‘it was by the persuasion of the gun’ and the shedding of blood that a village ‘became Greek or Bulgarian’,<sup>26</sup> while Dimitrios Kakkavos, another active participant in the Greek struggle, did not fail to comment on peasants with ‘fluid consciousness’, where the only way to force them to decide which side they were on was a display of force by a band.<sup>27</sup> A Greek chieftain, Vasilis Stavropoulos (Captain Korakas), described the typical way ‘fluid consciousness’ was moulded to become more ‘solid’, when he entered with his band the Exarchist village of Nestrami (after 1913: Nestorion), in Western Macedonia. The local notables, the priest and the teacher were all too keen to line up and pay their respects to the Greek band, but Stavropoulos was impatient to get to the bottom-line: ‘By the way,’ he asked them in an alarmingly casual way, ‘what are you Greeks or Bulgarians?’ The answer was rather predictable: ‘now that you are with us . . . we will become Christians again (θα χριστιανέψουμε)’. This was a significant

24. AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, A.A.K./B., Koromilas to M.F.A. 30/9/1905, no. 665.

25. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 203.

26. *Ibid.*, 251.

27. Kakkavos, *op. cit.*, 87.

answer: Stavropoulos asked him about ‘nations’, but the priest replied in religious terms, which were the only terms he and his flock could understand. At the same time, though, they asked Stavropoulos to leave the village, for a notorious *comitadji*, the fearsome Mitre-Vlach, happened to be around and if he learnt about the Greek visit the Bulgarian reprisals would be devastating. Stavropoulos, apparently convinced, obliged.<sup>28</sup> As should be expected the alternation of Greek and Bulgarian visitors, meant that a village would change ‘national’ camp as many times as the number of the ‘visitors’ it received.

Needless to say, all the peasants wanted was to be left in peace and to secure their modest property. Consequently, compliance with the powerful of the day, by giving the right answer to the right people, was one way for them to keep band violence out of their villages. Another was to accommodate both Bulgarian and Greek bands without betraying them to the Ottoman authorities or to one another. This peculiar coexistence was beneficial to both the bands and the peasants. The former could use those villages as a base, have some rest under a roof, and enjoy some basic luxuries that were denied them in the mountains; the latter secured their very existence. Mazarakis referred to one such village, Osliani (Aghia Photeini), by saying that its inhabitants, behaving ‘in a political manner’ (πολιτευόμενοι), welcomed both sides. Although he could not claim that he had converted the village to his cause, at least he knew where he stood.<sup>29</sup>

If violence was decisive in shifting a village’s allegiance, it should not be reduced to a mindless bloodletting. This could not only discredit the Greek cause in the eyes of the Great Powers, which closely monitored the situation in Macedonia, but would also alienate the peasants and provoke an escalation of Bulgarian reprisals. According to the main orchestrators of the Greek struggle a judicious balance had to be struck: a certain amount of violence should be exercised against the peasants but not in an indiscriminate fashion which could only be counterproductive. Koromilas had very clear ideas about the

28. Vasilios Stavropoulos, Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών. Απομνημονεύματα, in: *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγώνας*, *op. cit.*, 402-403.

29. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 247.

logic of the Greek violence: the Greek campaign, he argued, needed the element of ‘punishment’, but it should be used in a measured fashion in order to produce the maximum psychological results for the Greek side. Consequently he suggested that assassinations should be committed by the Greek bands but not against innocent villagers. The targets should be influential Exarchist figures, priests, teachers, prominent notables, or Bulgarian guerrilla leaders, who formed the pillars of the Bulgarian organisation in the villages, and whose removal would lessen the grip of the Exarchists in the particular village, lower their morale, while at the same time hearten the Patriarchist side. ‘The art’, he insisted, ‘is to find *who* should be punished, *the soul of our opponents*’.<sup>30</sup> In the same vein, Kakkavos noted that every assassination the Greeks committed should be well-judged and aim at a specific purpose, to remove an influential Exarchist or to avenge the death of Patriarchists. Another Greek guerrilla leader, Alexandros Xanthopoulos, remarked that ‘the chieftains should act politically rather than militarily . . . for indiscriminate killing does harm rather than good and makes more enemies’.<sup>31</sup>

However, the realities in the field often frustrated the restraint and the selective use of assassinations. The Patriarchist faction of almost every Macedonian village had suffered for many years at the hands of the Bulgarian bands, and as soon as Greek bands started operating in Macedonia, they came under extreme pressure from the local Patriarchists to engage in a mindless slaughter of Exarchist peasants. For them, only excessive killing would avenge the Bulgarian terror of the past and protect them from future Bulgarian reprisals. ‘The mood of the countryside demands killings’, remarked Koromilas; only the sobering sight of the corpses of their opponents could allay their

30. ‘Η τέχνη είναι να ευρεθεί ποίος είναι ο τιμωρητέος, η ψυχή των αντιθέτων’. See his letters to Mazarakis, dated 1/5/1905 and 7/6/1905, in Mazarakis, *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών*, 91, 95. Koromilas’s letters are included in the 1963 edition of Mazarakis’s memoirs, and the quotations are from that edition. All other quotations are from the 1984 edition unless otherwise stated.

31. Memorandum ‘The Situation in Macedonia’, in AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, A.A.K./B., dated 6/5/1905. Kakkavos, *op. cit.*, 87.

fears.<sup>32</sup> When the Bulgarians murdered the Patriarchist priest of the village Mesimeri, in 1905, the peasants sternly warned Mazarakis: 'either you take revenge for his death or we too will become Bulgarians. We cannot stand this any more'.<sup>33</sup>

This pressure for revenge accounted for many atrocities by the Greek bands, for the pleas of the Patriarchists made a more broad-minded use of violence very difficult, and even cautious Greek chieftains found themselves obliged to give in to their demands. In September 1905, for instance, Konstantinos Boukouvalas (Captain Petrilos), an officer of the Greek army, killed ten Exarchist peasants under severe pressure from Patriarchists who 'demanded hundreds of murders'.<sup>34</sup> Koromilas tirelessly tried to impress upon the Greek chieftains the need for restraint.<sup>35</sup> His advice, however, was often overtaken by a terrified 'mood of the countryside', what Clausewitz called 'the crude expression of instinct',<sup>36</sup> according to which the time had come for the 'other' side to receive its overdue punishment. Violence had formed a vicious circle impossible to break.

This was highlighted in cases where cautious, sensitive, or even romantic Greek chieftains refused to succumb to those pressures only to face the open disapproval and disquiet of the local Patriarchists. This was the case of Pavlos Melas, a young and romantic nationalist officer who led a guerrilla band in Western Macedonia in 1904. When he entered the village of Strempeno (Asprogeia) in order to find the killers of a local chieftain who had worked for the Patriarchists, he thought it would suffice to make them swear on the bible that they would become again Patriarchists, and after that he let them walk out free. Such leniency was met with the deep resentment of the

32. 'Το πνεύμα της υπαίθρου ζητεί φόνους. Έχουσιν ανάγκη να ίδωσιν θύματα των αντιθέτων ίνα έλθει η ψυχή των εις τον τόπο της.' AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, Koromilas to M.F.A., 7/9/1905, no. 246.

33. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 249.

34. AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, Koromilas to M.F.A., 4/9/1905.

35. Cf his view that 'Η ιδέα της στρώσεως δια πωμάτων είναι εσφαλμένη. Δεν θα φέρει αποτελέσματα.' Koromilas to Mazarakis, 7/6/1905, in: Mazarakis, *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών*, 94. Quotation from the 1963 edition.

36. Clausewitz, *op. cit.*, 85.

village's Patriarchists.<sup>37</sup> Life had become so cheap in that game of terror, that those who seemed to accord it undue value were in danger of losing the respect (and ultimately the support) of their own side. In Macedonia leniency was a sign of weakness not strength.

On the whole, murders had many uses: apart from the removal of prominent Exarchists, they served as reprisals for the death of Patriarchists or they were used as an efficient way for cutting off the *comitadji* communication lines between Exarchist villages. In effect, that meant the assassination of a number of peasants at the cross-roads. The ensuing fear ensured that the roads would remain unused for some time.<sup>38</sup> In other cases, a few killings could clear a strategic area of Exarchist peasants, thus allowing the Greek bands to travel without the fear of being betrayed by the peasants to the Ottoman authorities.<sup>39</sup> In many cases (again following a Bulgarian practice), a note was left on the dead body, indicating the reason for his 'punishment', which sometimes included the name of the chieftain responsible, so that the peasants were left in no doubt that this was a 'political' killing and not the doing of a stray brigand.<sup>40</sup> To increase psychological pressure, threatening letters were also sent to prominent Exarchist figures and even to villages, demanding immediate defection from the Bulgarian camp and detailing the gruesome consequences of their present conduct.<sup>41</sup> The effect of those letters depended on the notoriety of the name of the band leader, whose signature it

37. See the memoirs of the Cretan chieftain Karavitis in the newspaper, *Ελληνικός Βορράς*, 5/6/1949.

38. Some examples in the memoirs of Panayiotis Papatzaneteas, *Ο Μακεδονικός Αγών. Απομνημονεύματα* (Salonika 1960) 13.

39. See examples in GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 175-177, for the clearance of the area south of Aliakmon river, and Kakkavos, *op. cit.*, 110-111, for the clearance of the forest of Hilandar Monastery in Chalkidiki.

40. Papatzaneteas, a man of few words, chose to put his notes on the lips of the dead Exarchists. They read: 'This is the sort of death they receive, those who *abandon their Orthodox religion and join the Bulgarian schism*'. [emphasis mine]. Papatzaneteas, *op. cit.*, 13. Typically, the emphasis was on the Christian aspect of the struggle, not on the 'national'.

41. Examples of Greek letters to villages in AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, A.A.K./B., Koromilas to M.F.A. 16/10/1905, no. 726. Again in sending letters the Greeks followed the Bulgarian precedent. For some interesting Bulgarian letters to Greek villages with references to the Parthenon see Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 242.

contained, and the resolve of the inhabitants. Their answer was one factor determining the outcome of the visit.

Another factor responsible for the degree and nature of Greek violence, as well as for the overall conduct of the bands was their composition. In planning the Greek struggle, Koromilas thought that it was absolutely essential that local Slav-speaking Patriarchists participate in large numbers in the bands. Their presence would refute the claims of the Bulgarians that the Slav-speakers were converted *en masse* into the Bulgarian 'national cause', and that the Greeks were just 'importing' bands from the Greek state. Apart from political reasons, practical ones also argued for their participation: the 'locals', as the Slavs were referred to by Greek sources, knew the language and the psychology of the peasants whose 'soul' the Greeks wished to 'conquer', and they also had an intimate knowledge of the terrain in which the guerrillas had to operate. For these reasons Koromilas insisted that the Greek effort in Macedonia would succeed only if it acquired a 'purely local provenance'.<sup>42</sup> His view was shared by the Macedonian Committee, an Athens-based irredentist organisation which formed and sent bands to Macedonia, and instructed its guerrilla leaders to see to it that band activity should have 'a genuinely Macedonian character'.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Greeks were fully aware of the need to present their armed struggle as a local reaction, they soon found that many difficulties had to be overcome. To begin with, the local Patriarchist element was initially more than reluctant to participate in the bands. The Greeks were latecomers in practising the game of terror the Bulgarians had initiated years before, and the Bulgarian activities had almost paralysed the will of the peasants to fight.<sup>44</sup> They understood all too well that if they participated the only result would be more

42. 'Καθαρῶς αὐτόχθονα προέλευσιν'. AYE 1904/Salonika Consulate, (Jan.-June), Koromilas to M.F.A., 21/6/1904, no. 8.

43. 'πάσα ἐπιχείρησις . . . νὰ φέρει χαρακτῆρα γνησίως μακεδονικόν.' GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 155.

44. AYE 1904/Salonika Consulate, (Jan.-June), Koromilas to M.F.A., 30/5/1904, no. 6; AYE 1904/Salonika Consulate, A.A.K./ST, Koromilas to M.F.A., 1/11/1904, no. 16, and 15/11/1904, no. 25.

savage reprisals, and given that their main objective was to be left in peace they steadily refused to form bands. The late emergence of the Greek struggle also mattered in some other respects: the Exarchist bands had not only consolidated their position but also preached the gospel of revolution against the Turks, thus managing to win over the most daring and politically active elements among the peasants.<sup>45</sup> This aspect was quite important, for as has already been noted, if the peasants took the trouble to concern themselves with 'political' issues, then the division between Christians and Turks was the only one they could make sense of, and the *comitadjis* were the first to exploit it to their advantage. On the other hand, the fact that many peasants recruited by IMRO to fight the Turks did so as Christians rather than as 'Bulgarians', did nothing to diminish the reality that, by severing their ties with the Patriarchate, they were perceived as espousing the Bulgarian 'national' cause.

The solution Koromilas arrived at was to recruit local brigands, a pool of armed men that had always been available and accessible.<sup>46</sup> To use brigands for 'national causes', turning a number of enterprising marauders from despised outlaws to 'national' figures was something that the Greeks, like all Balkan nations, frequently availed themselves of, whenever irredentism reached boiling point and a supply of seasoned men of arms was needed to spark off revolutions in Thessaly or Macedonia. For Koromilas, and for many others, that step was as dangerous as it was necessary. The motives of the brigand were naturally less noble than Koromilas would wish them to be, and Mazarakis emphatically argued that their use in the struggle was a mistake, for it proved impossible for 'professional guerrillas and brigands' to become 'national apostles'.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Mazarakis himself used brigands in his own band clearly shows the limitations of that view. Brigands were useful for they knew the terrain, as well as the language and the character of the peasants, and could endure the miserable life the guerrilla had to lead. Consequently, their use

45. AYE/Salonika Consulate, A.A.K./ST, Koromilas to M.F.A. 17/12/1904, no. 48.

46. For the use of brigands in the 'Struggle for Macedonia', see J.S. Koliopoulos, *op. cit.*, 215-236.

47. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 184.



was something that in principle everybody condemned but in practice almost everybody adopted.

From 1905 onwards, as the Greek struggle progressed, and the limitations of brigands became obvious,<sup>48</sup> a new pattern emerged. It was decided that the leadership of most bands should be entrusted to young and enthusiastic officers of the Greek army, who knew more about discipline, followed the instructions given by Koromilas, and in general, were more sensitive to the 'political aspects'<sup>49</sup> of the Greek struggle. Although there were many bands which included exclusively local Patriarchists or men from Greece, in broad terms most Greek bands had a mixed composition. Their leader would be an officer, or a chieftain (in many cases a Cretan), leading a band consisting of local Patriarchists together with men from various parts of Greece, and especially from Crete.<sup>50</sup> The occasional sprinkling of brigands could also be found in many bands.

The composition of a band could be as much a source of strength as a point of friction and weakness. Grouping in the same band men from different regions of Greece together with local Patriarchists and brigands was not always an easy task. Cretans, for instance, did not appear to fit particularly well in mixed bands. They were fearless but discipline could not be counted among their many attributes, especially if their leader was not himself a Cretan; they had courage but they did not seem to understand the psychology and the needs of the local Patriarchist Slavs. On those grounds, Mazarakis was against the formation of exclusively Cretan bands, pointing to their insensitivity and unruly temperament.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Cretan band leaders, like Georgios Tsontos (Captain Vardas), an officer who

48. The first bands organised in 1904 by Koromilas and headed by undisciplined brigands proved to be a totally disappointing undertaking. AYE 1904/Salonika Consulate, Koromilas to M.F.A., 15/11/1904, no. 25.

49. Kakkavos, *op. cit.*, 86.

50. The number of Cretans who participated in the Greek struggle was fairly high. A sobering indication is that, according to official Greek sources, out of the 400 dead bandmen during the four-year struggle, 136 were Cretans. The second largest group of men, after the local Patriarchists. See: GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 378.

51. According to Mazarakis the Cretans were '... ανυπόφοροι, φιλέριδες, ιδιότροποι και τελείως ακατάλληλοι δια προπαγάνδαν'. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 216.

led a mixed band of Cretans and local Greeks, very much doubted the ability of mixed bands to act as a cohesive unit. Cretans seemed to be comfortable only in the company (and under the leadership) of their compatriots.<sup>52</sup>

If Cretans were a difficult lot to handle, brigands were much more so. It has already been noted that their presence in the Greek struggle was a product of need rather than choice; consequently, as Koliopoulos has argued, their recruitment was based more on what was expected from them than on what they were prepared to offer. They were a mixed lot. Some of them proved to be of much use to the Greeks, when they decided to offer their badly needed services. Kota, from Roulia (Kota), was the indisputable chieftain in the Korestia area, in Western Macedonia, and his recruitment in 1903 by the Bishop of Kastoria Germanos Karavangelis was of crucial importance for the fortunes of the Greek cause in the area. Other, less well known and powerful irregulars, men like Garefis from Mt. Pilio for instance, were loyal and indispensable members in many bands and commanded the respect of their captains. A great number of brigands, however, 'hired their steel' to the Greeks, for as long as Greek funds would flow, a source of income which the brigands supplemented by looting Exarchist villages. A regular salary (no matter how small it was) was a powerful attraction, and apart from brigands it also attracted many chieftains who had been old members of the IMRO and found it convenient to transfer their loyalties (whatever that meant) to the Greeks in anticipation of wages.<sup>53</sup> There is evidence to suggest that even prominent members of the IMRO were not left unmoved by such a prospect: according to Allen Upward, Captain Apostol, a notorious *comitadji*, offered to drive back into the Patriarchate flocks of peasants 'in return for a salary of £1,000 a year' from the Greeks.<sup>54</sup>

Koromilas's firm leadership of the Greek struggle in the *Vilayet*

52. Vardas felt that '... δεν είναι εύκολον να υποβάλητε εις τον τυχόντα εντόπιον η ξένον Κρήτας συνειθίσαντες να έχωσιν ιδικούς των, ούτε ενάντιον.' Γενικά Αρχεία του Κράτους (General Archives of the State, hereafter: ΓΑΚ), Vardas Archive, f. 15, 13-17/10/1906, p. 113.

53. Kakkavos, *op. cit.*, 88-89.

54. Upward, *op. cit.*, 31.

of Salonika ensured that the presence of brigands did not pose a serious threat in that area. But in the *Vilayet* of Monastir their activities were particularly harmful. Scores of enterprising irregulars, attracted by salaries and the prospect of loot, were recruited by the Macedonian Committee and sent to the Vilayet, where they practised their time-honoured predatory skills without the slightest attention to the real needs of the Greek struggle. The Greek Consulate of Monastir tried hard to impose some sort of discipline, but many brigands, 'good for nothing, illiterate and some of them even vicious', kept themselves busy by stealing livestock and selling it to Greece. It is not surprising then, that a number of attacks on Exarchist villages by those bands had nothing to do with the measured and 'psychological' use of violence advocated by the Greek Consulates, but degenerated into atrocities and sheep-stealing.<sup>55</sup> Turning men of that sort into 'national apostles' proved to be impossible.

If the activities of some brigands discredited the Greek cause, the military tradition they personified was more than useful to them. The bands had to operate under extremely adverse circumstances and their very survival in Macedonia was a considerable challenge. The terrain was mountainous and unknown, Exarchist peasants, or pro-Romanian (ρουμανίζοντες) Vlach shepherds, were all too eager to betray the Greek bands to the Ottoman authorities, and a detachment would soon be sent in pursuit of them. In order to survive in that particular setting the Greek bands adopted the same methods the brigands had used for centuries. They learned to move constantly and only at night, in order to avoid being betrayed to the Ottomans, and to rest during the day; to walk (or rest) in absolute silence, and not to light a fire, no matter how freezing the cold was. Apart from being invisible the band had also to be mobile: constant movement was crucially important for the survival of the band and it was the yardstick against which a successful captain would be measured; as an old brigand advised

55. For a number of those brigands, which included Loukas Kokkinos, Groutas, Georgios Dalipis and others, see AYE 1906/Monastir Consulate, Xydakis to Skouze, dated 25/9/1906; AYE 1906/Monastir Consulate, Memorandum by 'Simis' [Nikolaos Kontogouris], dated 4/9/1906; ΓΑΚ, Vardas Papers, f. 13, Vardas to 'Pamikos', dated 7/9/1906. Cf. Koliopoulos, *op. cit.*, 232.

Mazarakis, 'a good brigand is not shot at easily'. Brigands were masters of their trade, but many men and captains, especially those coming from Greece, had no proper training in guerrilla warfare and found life in the mountains difficult to adapt to. Mazarakis noted that only after ten days did they manage to sleep during the day and walk at night, something that also irritated Vardas, who during the day felt 'like a prisoner'. In Alexandros Xanthopoulos's band, even coughing was not allowed; if a man had to cough he should lie with his face down so as to produce minimum noise.<sup>56</sup>

Ignorance of those basic 'rules' of guerrilla warfare proved costly to those who were slow to conform to them. In early 1906 four bands were attacked (and defeated) by Turkish detachments in the village of Strempeno in Western Macedonia, because their captains were unwise enough to stay for a week in a place 'full of traitors'.<sup>57</sup> In other cases the inadequacy of the captains had more gruesome ramifications: after a battle with a band near the Patriarchist village of Lehovo, the Turks diverted their wrath against the village and burned down many houses. The Greek Consul in Monastir concluded that when the bands fail to hide they 'exposed to disaster' not only themselves but also 'our villages'.<sup>58</sup> The strength of the bands was another factor that affected their mobility. Big bands were difficult to hide (and to provision) and became a highly visible target for the Turkish army, as proved by the case of the band led by Nikostratos Kalomenopoulos (Captain Nidas), consisting of 115 men. It was the biggest band that came from Greece and shortly after its arrival it was attacked in April 1905, and Nidas himself was taken prisoner.<sup>59</sup> Most bands, however, were much smaller in size, and averaged from 20 to 40 men.

Given the need for light feet, it is no surprise that the bands took no prisoners with them. They were useful for intelligence gathering

56. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 232. ΓΑΚ, Vardas Archive, f. 13, Vardas to 'Pamikos', dated 10/12/1905, p. 13; AYE 1905/Salonika Consulate, Memorandum by Xanthopoulos, *op. cit.*

57. AYE 1906/Monastir Consulate, Xydakis to Skouzes, 16/6/1906, no. 2419.

58. AYE 1906/Monastir Consulate, Kontogouris to Skouzes, 4/2/1906, no. 99.

59. GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 191-193.

about the *comitadjis* or the Turkish troops, and captains made sure that prisoners of every description did not enjoy the luxury of remaining silent. They were always a disposable commodity. If they stayed with the band for too long they became a burden which could dangerously slow down its movement. The common fate of prisoners, after they had revealed all they knew, was death, unless the captain decided to spare them in order to avoid Turkish reprisals against innocent peasants. Failure to silence them once and for all was not sound tactics in guerrilla warfare, for the prisoners would rush to give valuable information about the band to the *comitadjis* or the Turkish authorities. After all, if the captain hesitated to do the job, he could always delegate the responsibility to his brigand companions who invariably showed less hesitation.<sup>60</sup>

If the mere survival of the band required consummate skill and adaptation to a difficult terrain, their expeditions against Exarchist villages, one of their main tasks, was no less demanding. As has already been noticed, the Greek Consuls in Macedonia, and especially Koromilas, always emphasised that if Greek violence was to be successful, it had to be 'political', and to be used carefully to produce psychological pressure rather than unmitigated terror: to conquer and convert the 'souls' rather than to destroy them. Some of the limitations in the use of that particular kind of violence have already been discussed: the need of the local Patriarchists to take their revenge, and the composition of the band; an undisciplined group of brigands, for instance, was more likely to commit atrocities than an organised band led by an officer of the Greek army. Apart from these factors, the degree of violence depended not only on the 'quality' of the attacker but also on those attacked.

Although generalisations are liable to be misleading, it may safely be said that in most cases the ferocity of the attack was dictated by the attitude of the villagers. In that context, the more attached the village was to Exarchism the more violent the attack was likely to be. For many villages, a mere 'visit' by the band would suffice to

60. For treatment of prisoners and their fate see Papatzaneteas, *op. cit.*, 23, 49-50, Stavropoulos, *op. cit.*, 430-431.

bring it back into the Patriarchate. The process was rather simple. As Captain Vardas told a sympathetic British observer: 'When I go into a converted village, I call the people together into the market-place, and tell them it was wrong to desert the old faith [i.e. the Patriarchate]. If there is a Bulgarian priest, I send him way, unhurt, unless he makes a fuss, or is likely to tell the Turks about us'.<sup>61</sup> Although the fate of the Bulgarian priests was normally more grim than Varda's rather charitable account would have it, the 'catechism' of a band leader, stressing the Christian aspect of the Greek cause and accompanied by a show of force, would prompt the villagers to rethink their loyalties. It should be stressed here that the Christian 'rhetoric' of the Greek bands was instrumental in their effort to win over the population, for the peasants could not identify with novelties such as 'Greece' or 'the Greek nation'. A number of guerrilla leaders had no illusions about that: 'I told them', writes Pavlos Melas referring to his men, 'that the basis of the war we are waging will be religion, because it is mainly religion that the Bulgarians attack'. Significantly, the same chieftain used a seal which bore the cross and the inscription 'Ἐν Τούτῳ Νίκα'. If the concept of nation eluded the peasants, the powerful reference to the Emperor Constantine the Great would not.<sup>62</sup>

Whenever a village was considered to be more than superficially attached to 'Bulgarianism' more active measures were taken. The Captain would reinforce his catechism by burning the Exarchist church books, setting some houses alight, and killing a few prominent Exarchists. In 1905, Vardas was advised by one of his men that if they did not burn down at least six houses in the village of Strempeno, the peasants would revert to Exarchism no matter how long the band was around.<sup>63</sup> For that sort of village, words were empty if not backed up by deed.

There was, however, another category, which demanded even more forceful action. Villages that were pillars of the Exarchist cause and regularly hosted *comitadji* bands. That category invited all-out attacks,

61. Upward, *op. cit.*, 328.

62. Natalia Melas, *Παύλος Μελάς* (Athens-Ioannina 1992) 370-371.

63. ΓΑΚ, Vardas Archive, f. 14, 5/6/1905, p. 158.

and paid the highest price. An example, remarkable for the ferocity with which it was carried out, but otherwise not typical, was the attack on the village of Zagoritsani (Vasiliada) in the Korestia area in March 1905. The village was a *comitadji* stronghold, so much so that 'all the inhabitants were animated by the same ferocity as their champions'. Their hatred of the Patriarchists was 'so bitter that they would not exchange the salutation on the road which is customary even between Moslems and Christians'.<sup>64</sup> Zagoritsani was attacked by the combined forces of four bands (Vardas's being one of them), which amounted to more than 300 men. After an hour and a half of fierce battle with the *comitadjis* the Greeks left the village, leaving at least 62 dead and many burnt houses.<sup>65</sup> The atrocities committed, including the killing of women, earned Vardas considerable notoriety and became a recurrent theme in Exarchist propaganda in Europe.

Yet again, that particular operation demonstrated the limitations, and the counter-productive results, of excessive violence. In many respects the attack backfired. Although it may have afforded the local Patriarchists some gratification, for Zagoritsani was used as a base for *comitadji* activity against Patriarchist villages, the attack led to the intensification of Turkish military presence in the area, making the movement of the Greek bands almost impossible for some time, as Vardas himself came to admit.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, apart from the propaganda use which the Bulgarians were all too eager to make of it, it gave them a handsome pretext for the atrocities against the Greeks of Eastern Roumelia, which occurred in 1906. On these grounds, captains like Mazarakis, who were more receptive to the 'political' use of violence, as opposed to short-term results, forcefully criticised the attack against Zagoritsani.<sup>67</sup>

64. Upward, *op. cit.*, 327.

65. For accounts of the attack, see Dakin, *op. cit.*, 224-225. The official version is given in GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 188-189. P.R.O. F.O./195, 2207, Reports from McGregor [British Vice-Consul, Monastir] to O'Connor, dated 9/4/1905, and 12/4/1905.

66. ΓΑΚ, Vardas Archive, f. 14, 1/5/1905, p. 105. It should be added here that the Macedonian Committee, which commanded many bands in the Vilayet of Monastir, ordered them to refrain from further action after the Zagoritsani affair. GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 343-344.

67. Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 184, where he condemns what he called 'ομαδόν σφαγαί και περιπολήσεις ολοκληρών χωρίων, ως της Ζαγορίτσανης'.

Despite these views, and sobering warnings from the Consuls in Monastir and Salonika, forceful operations did not cease. Villages like Smilevo, an IMRO stronghold during the Ilinden uprising, Kladerop (Kladorachi) in Florina, base of the prominent *comitadji* Naum, or Staritsani (Lakomata), the base of the even more notorious Mitre-Vlach, to name but a few, received more than their due from a number of Greek bands.<sup>68</sup> In most cases, the attacks were carried out at night,<sup>69</sup> by one or more bands as need demanded, and never lasted long. A protracted battle risked the arrival of Turkish detachments, which the bands had strict orders to avoid, or the attack by *comitadjis* from neighbouring villages. The village was surrounded by the band and the speedy attack was directed against the houses that hosted the *comitadjis*. 'After firing a few shots' (μερικές ντουφεκιές), as a common description has it, and throwing some make-shift bombs<sup>70</sup> the band retreated to safety. A couple of hours would be more than enough, and few operations lasted longer. It can be said that these surprise 'hit-and-run' attacks afforded one of the very few opportunities for direct engagement with *comitadjis*. The bands (both Greek and Bulgarian) had to survive if they were to continue their activities against the villages, and therefore both sides were unwilling to fight each other in the open and in broad daylight, risking a premature defeat, a feature the British Consuls did not fail to report.<sup>71</sup> Although many Greek Captains and men (especially Cretans) were impatient to fight with the *comitadjis* at any time, more sensible chieftains, and

68. For those attacks see GES/DIS, *op. cit.*, 198, 222, P.R.O. F.O./195, 2207, McGregor to O'Connor, Monastir, dated 16/8/1905, Stavropoulos, *op. cit.*, 400-401.

69. In the Greek Consul in Monastir, Athanasios Chalkiopoulos emphasised that 'long experience and study' demonstrated that attacks against villages should be carried out only after sundown. AYE 1906/Monastir Consulate, Chalkiopoulos to Skouzes, 15/5/1906, no. 309.

70. More often than not the bombs used by the bands were a danger for the bandmen rather than for the houses attacked. At least one captain was killed while trying to burn a house with a bomb, and the Greek Consul in Monastir prohibited their use. See Chalkiopoulos's despatch in note 69, referring to the death of the Cretan Captain Leonidas Vlachakis (Captain Litsas).

71. P.R.O. F.O./195, 2232, Sonnichsen to Graves, enclosure in Graves to O'Connor, Salonika, 22/3/1906. For the reluctance of Bulgarian bands to fight the Greeks outside their villages cf. Melas's observations, in: Natalia Mela, *op. cit.*, 389.



certainly the Greek Consuls, realised that the survival of the band should not be jeopardised by an idea of bravery that, although useful in a war, hardly suited guerrilla operations.

Apart from Exarchist villages, a number of attacks were also directed against Vlach settlements.<sup>72</sup> Vlach shepherds occupied many strategically important points in Macedonia and the eagerness of their small but active pro-Romanian faction to betray the movement of Greek bands to the Turks and the *comitadjis* caused serious problems. Many Greek captains resented the 'treachery' of that faction, and frequently retaliated with violent attacks. Koromilas, always apt to see the broader picture, strongly condemned the killing of Vlachs for its only result was closer cooperation of the shepherds with the *comitadjis*. More importantly, the Turkish authorities supported the Vlachs (as an element of their 'divide and rule' policy), and consequently the more they were attacked by bands, the more intense the Turkish military action became against the Greeks. As in many other cases, Koromilas's voice was not heard, and many principal Vlach centres in Macedonia, like Negovani (Flampouro), or Avdella, paid dearly for the intelligence services they rendered to the Bulgarians.<sup>73</sup>

### III. The logic of terror

A distinguished student of Balkan history has recently argued that the premodern 'Balkan man was impulsive and inclined to violence'.<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century very few would have disputed that view. As Europe started 'constructing' the image of the Balkans,

72. For the Vlachs see T.J. Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: the History of a Balkan People* (London 1987). For a contemporary description see Upward, *op. cit.*, 175-180.

73. For the 'treachery' of pro-Romanian Vlachs see Φθινόπωρο του 1904 στη Μακεδονία. Το ανέκδοτο ημερολόγιο του Ευθύμιου Καούδη, ed. by Basil Gunaris (Salonika 1992), 84; Mazarakis, *op. cit.*, 204-206. For Koromilas's views see AYE/A.A.K./B., Despatches to M.F.A. dated 30/11, 13/12, and 24/12, 1905. The Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs concurred with his views and condemned violent action against the Vlachs. See AYE 1906/Foreign Ministry, F.M. to Salonika Consulate, 2/1/1906, no. 5392. For attacks against Vlach villages see: P.R.O. F.O./195, 2208, Young to O'Conor, Monastir, 20/11/1905; F.O./195, 2263, Graves to O'Conor, Salonika, 4/6/1907; F.O./195, 2206, Graves to O'Conor, Salonika, 9/3/1905.

74. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, 59.

the violent temper of the ‘natives’ was always stressed as one of the characteristics of the ‘races’ that inhabit the unhappy peninsula. The ‘Balkan man’ was frequently portrayed as a ‘savage’, sometimes a noble one, but more often than not given to violence and murder.<sup>75</sup> Just a year before the ‘Macedonian Struggle’, Europe had another opportunity to express that view, with the murder of the Serbian King Aleksandar Obrenović and his Queen Draga. The murder of the Serbian royal couple, whose amorous pursuits had made them the laughing-stock of Europe, included scenes with soldiers who ‘drew their sabres and hewed off the fingers of the King and Queen’ and then ‘levelled [their] revolvers and fired’; the murder shocked Europe and its gruesome details were circulated by many newspapers, to the macabre fascination of their readers.<sup>76</sup> In that context, the appalling atrocities committed by Bulgarian and Greek bands during the four-year-long ‘Macedonian Struggle’ could only reinforce the image of the violent Balkan man. ‘It is the French Reign of Terror. It is the jacquerie’, noted a contemporary observer on hearing about Bulgarian atrocities.<sup>77</sup> But this was not an apt comparison.

In the early 20th century the peasants of Macedonia were still immersed in religious and regional identities. In order to reply to the game of terror initiated by the Bulgarian bands, the Greek struggle aimed at forcing Exarchist peasants to revert to the Patriarchate, and to protect those who still adhered to it. In doing so, the element of violence was essential. ‘Nationalism’, whatever that meant in early 20th century, rested on the barrel of a gun. Violence proved the only way of securing the allegiance of the peasants. The degree of violence used, however, was determined by both the realities in the field, and the intentions of its perpetrators. Brigands, men of few words, had less time for national catechism than officers of the Greek army, but both were needed: the former for their knowledge of local psychology and of the terrain, and the latter for their clearer perception of the ‘political’ work. Their men were also a mixture: young men from

75. For a lucid account of European views of the Balkans see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (Oxford 1997).

76. For a typical contemporary account see Vivian, *op. cit.*, 104-119.

77. Upward, *op. cit.*, 328.

the Greek state and Macedonia, full of national pride, took to the hills to help the Greek national cause. They fought side by side with others, mostly old irregulars, who were less inclined to fight unless booty was in sight. Although that combination looks rather curious, it was the only one that the situation allowed for.

The 'Macedonian Struggle' was neither the first nor was it destined to be the last instance of violence used for political purposes in the Balkans. Yet again, the effort to ascribe violence in general to some congenital characteristics of the 'Balkan man', or to a Balkan culture and glorification of bravado,<sup>78</sup> would go neither far nor deep enough. In Ottoman Macedonia, violence was primarily the offspring of the union (more accurately: clash) of nationalism with pre-national, religious mentalities. If that offspring caused so much pain, it was because the union was unsavoury.

*Pembroke College, Cambridge*

78. Cf. Ernest Gellner's view that the recent horrors of Bosnia were somehow facilitated by the fact that there are societies in the Balkans where 'men prove their manhood not by success in a career but by quickness on the draw . . .'. Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London 1997) 61. For a subtle and perceptive analysis of the concept of 'heroism' in the Balkans see John Campbell, 'The Greek Hero', in: J.G. Peristiany-Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge 1992) 129-149.