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Et in Macedonia Ego: The Global Arms Trade and Violence as Catalysts for
Independence Movements and Nation Building in Ottoman Macedonia,
1878-1913

by

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Abstract:

The international arms trade at the end of the 19th Century benefited from several technological advances that fomented an arms race among the Great Powers. A surge in the effectiveness of insurgencies and nationalist movements across the globe, due to increased access to contemporary small arms and ammunition, saw agitation for autonomy and national recognition become real concerns for peoples subjected to imperial rule. Ottoman Macedonia stood at the epicenter of some of the most devastating historic, religious, ethnic, political, and national contests that were both raised and came to their bloody conclusions during the final tumultuous decades of the Ottoman presence in Europe. The most effective catalyst for change proved to be the deployment of armed insurgent fighters that delegitimized Ottoman rule, established parallel state structures, and encouraged the people living in Ottoman Macedonia to not only participate in the toppling of Ottoman power in Europe, but to identify themselves with a particular religious or national group in a way that they had never before. As such, the international arms race and military surplus market created the conditions under which the slow-moving tools of nation building in Ottoman Macedonia, such as churches and schools, were subsumed and accelerated by the accessibility of small arms and the use of violence as a tool for winning freedom and sovereignty in the process of national creation.

Introduction:

Nestled within the imposing walls of Belgrade's Kalemegdan Fortress at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers is an establishment simply labeled *Vojni Muzej*, or Military Museum. Established in 1878, the museum chronicles the martial history of Serbia and the broader Balkan Peninsula through the display of historical artifacts and scale model dioramas. The path leading to the museum is flanked by rows of various German, Polish, Czech, Italian, French, and American tanks, tankettes, infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery pieces from the 20th Century. Within the museum itself are chronologically organized, dimly lit halls of glass cases filled with treasure troves of historical war materiel. Arms and armor from the medieval period and the time of Ottoman conquest make up much of the early exhibitions. The more modern exhibitions, however, were of great interest to myself as a first time visitor. Cases of small arms and uniforms from the Late 19th Century and 20th Century were astounding both for their sheer scale and for the number of manufacturers represented. German, French, British, Austro-Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Danish, American, and Yugoslav small arms are all present, covering the more than century-long Balkan experience of international and internal armed conflict. From the Macedonian Uprisings and the Balkan Wars to the World Wars and the Yugoslav Wars, small arms have proven significant to the historical consciousness of the Balkans both as means of making war and as tools of self-determination as shown by the focus placed on them by the museum.

It was clear to me from the exhibitions on the Macedonian Uprisings, the Second World War, and the Serbian conflict with NATO that the availability of arms is a key aspect of national definition, and in some cases defiance, in the Balkans. Small guerilla groups armed with rifles, handguns and submachine guns formed the foundation of national identification and governmental structures in nations whose people have long experienced conquest and division by external powers. The Yugoslav and present-day periods of arms production in the Balkans attest to this fact as Serbia and Croatia have robust domestic defense industries and both nations have adopted rifles from domestic manufacturers to be their primary fighting rifles.¹ Outside of the former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria are considered by the Small Arms Survey, along with Serbia and Croatia, to be major small arms exporters, while Greece is described as a major small arms importer.² In spite of their status as importers, however, the Greeks are also investing heavily in their domestic defense industry, marking a major turn for the nation and further entrenching the argument that access to small arms is considered an essential element of statehood in the Balkans.³

1 HS Produkt. "Our Story." About Us. Accessed May 13, 2024.

<https://www.hs-produkt.hr/about-us>; Zastava Arms. "Profile." About Us. Accessed May 13, 2024. <https://www.zastava-arms.rs/en/profile/>

2 Small Arms Survey. 2011. *Annexes to Chapter 1*. Small Arms Survey.

3 Spyridon Plakoudas, 2021. "The Recent Turnaround of the Greek Defense Industry," *New Lines Institute*, December 19, 2021.

<https://newlinesinstitute.org/strategic-competition/regional-competition/the-recent-turnaround-of-the-greek-defense-industry/>

The structure of this exploration of the historical importance of small arms, the arms, trade, and arms purveyors to insurgencies focused on nation building begins with a section focused on the historical context of the period under review. The historical context section will describe the political situation before and after 1878 in the Ottoman Balkans, with a specific focus on the consequences of the 1870 Ottoman recognition of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. A section discussing the ethnic and religious distinctions in Ottoman Macedonia will then follow in order to give the reader a better idea of who the participants were and what they were fighting for. The paper will next identify key chronological periods in the realms of national competition in the Balkans and the global arms trade. Beginning with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, which will be discussed in reference to the importance of the Treaty of San Stefano in vitalizing ethnic and nationalist movements in the Ottoman Balkans, as well as the Treaty of Berlin which gave rise to revisionist aims among newly recognized nations and autonomous regions. A section on the 1885-1886 Serbo-Bulgarian War will underscore the potential for violence in regional competition, but will also explain how the French adoption of the Lebel Model 1886 revolutionized the international market for small arms, setting off an arms race and procurement frenzy as nations sought to modernize their militaries.

The major focus of the paper will be the 1893-1908 period during which regional competition in the Ottoman Balkans ramped up with the

founding of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and its procurement of small arms and use of armed guerilla tactics to subvert Ottoman rule in Macedonia. This portion of the paper will also be important for discussing the Macedonian identity which became independent from the Bulgarian identity of the External Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. As such, the internal conflict between the two organizations will be reviewed, including the failure of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising of August-October 1903. The Macedonian Struggle will demonstrate the aftermath of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, the struggle between numerous armed groups, and the building of parallel state structures as both drivers of nation building and the destabilization of the Ottoman Empire. The paper will conclude with a section discussing the First and Second Balkan Wars as escalations of the Macedonian Struggle, the continuation of regional contests between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, and the effective end of Ottoman rule in Europe.

In the Late 19th Century, the Balkan Peninsula proved to be a veritable powder keg threatened by the flames of empire, nascent nationalist sentiment, and regional and Great Power competition in the form of the international arms trade. The 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which revised the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano, officially recognized the independent status of Serbia and Romania at the international level and provided broad autonomy for Bulgaria, albeit with reduced territorial control from that of

the San Stefano treaty.⁴ Eager to prove themselves formidable regional powers and to promote and secure nationalist territorial claims, Serbia and Bulgaria jockeyed with Greece, as well as each other, for national expansion and influence by preying on Ottoman Macedonia. The territory lay at the crossroads not only of the regional powers of Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria, but also at the crossroads of empire at the fringes of European control and the meeting point of East and West. The Austro-Hungarians and Russians held adjacent territorial claims and were interested in maintaining or expanding their influence in the Balkans, while the British, French, and Italians operated at the edges, managing the final death gasps of the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Despite Macedonia existing at the center of the Ottoman territory of Rumelia, thus giving the Ottomans *de jure* control, the region served as a frontier for the Ottomans, which historian İpek Yosmaoglu says are “elastic and porous; they are zones of transition, not demarcation lines. People, animals, and commodities move more or less freely (if clandestinely) within and across frontiers, whereas boundaries contain, regulate, and restrict all such motion. Frontiers are defined primarily in military terms; they are zones where sovereignty is not stable and are always subject to change with the movement of armies.”⁶ The fluidity and ill-defined nature of the Ottoman frontier in Rumelia provided a

4 Efe Ozkan, 2022. “An Analysis of the Effect of the 1878 Berlin Treaty on Diplomatic Policy Making.” *The Journal of Southeastern European Studies*, 64.

5 İpek Yosmaoğlu, 2014. *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 82.

6 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 80.

liminal space within which economic contest, communal and international conflict, and conquest sought to make firm the boundaries of the Balkans. Keith Brown describes Ottoman Macedonia as a place “where a variety of political actors practiced the art of not being governed and jockeyed for influence and prestige,” depicting a place where demonstrative violence projected power and people were unused to the presence of formal state structures.⁷ Thus, the frontier served as a vital concept by which arms and their users operated in order to enact insurgent violence, exploit Ottoman weakness, and harden the lines of territorial control in Ottoman Macedonia. Subsequently, violence came to be a major tool of nation-building and the vitality of the arms trade in supplying insurgents and civilians alike with contemporary firearms allowed those groups to contest Ottoman control in a manner that had not been possible before, accelerating the path toward nationhood.

The official arms trade, made possible by rapid technological advances and an ensuing arms race, served as a direct precursor to the illicit trade that armed the insurgents of Ottoman Macedonia. Serbia and Bulgaria sought out modern small arms to equip their military forces in order to secure their newly won statuses. Russia saw fit to provide the Bulgarians with older stocks of Krnka rifles, breech-loading conversions of the Model 1857 rifle musket, and then with newer Berdan rifles, which were purpose-built, single-shot breechloaders. By the time Bulgaria went to war

⁷ Keith Brown, 2013. *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 125.

with Serbia in 1885, its frontline troops were well-equipped with Berdan II rifles.⁸ The Serbs also purchased surplus Russian equipment, including 60,000 Berdan rifles, along with their ammunition in 1890 to equip second-line troops.⁹ The sale of small arms to the independent and autonomous entities of the Balkans was, however, not limited to sales of government surplus. The Serbians ordered 120,000 Serbian Model 1878/80 single-shot breech-loading rifles from Mauser, a private firm, in 1879, receiving the final shipments in 1884 and making another order for 5,000 carbines and 3,000 rifles in the same year.¹⁰ In the late 1880s, the Bulgarians looked to the private Austrian firm Steyr to replace their Berdan rifles, eventually purchasing approximately 90,000 Mannlicher rifles from Steyr in two separate batches in 1891, along with tens of millions of cartridges for their new magazine-fed rifles. By 1897, the number of Mannlicher rifles and carbines in Bulgarian stocks had risen to approximately 160,000.¹¹ By 1899, the Serbs were already in the market for 90,000 magazine-fed Model 1895 Mausers, designated the Serbian Model 1899, which were chambered for the modern smokeless 7x57mm Mauser cartridge.¹²

In order to demonstrate the central role played by violence as a force of generating national, religious, and ethnic sentiments among a diverse and varied people unused to formal state structures and the important role

8 Jonathan Grant, 2007. *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 46.

9 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 101.

10 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 100-101.

11 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 96-97, 99.

12 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 104.

that the international arms trade played in the process, two main arguments are presented under an overarching concept of the frontier. The first, and most simple, is that the contemporary nature of small arms available to insurgent forces allowed them to more effectively engage and destabilize Ottoman control. The second follows the first in that the two tiered arms market and the increased effectiveness of insurgent groups helped to serve as a means of amalgamating nationalist, ethnic, and religious sentiments, forcing the different populations of Ottoman Macedonia to choose sides in a bid for the creation of a national identity. Ultimately, then, the idea of the frontier became a vital factor by which empires and nations came to be differentiated, due in large part to the fact that defining the people who constituted the nation necessarily required the space in which the nation existed. Thus, borders, and by virtue their demarcation and defense, came to be a crucial point of national identity. If people, namely insurgents and arms smugglers, were able to move more or less freely across the borders of the young Balkan nations, their very sovereignty would be threatened, thereby making the closure of the frontiers and the sanctity of borders as defended by force of arms became a defining measure of the success of a nation-state in this period.

The massive increase in arms circulating in the Balkans during the period following the Berlin Treaty gave rise to what historian Ramazan Hakkı Öztan refers to as “the global marketplace of revolution,” through which non-state actors in the Ottoman Balkans managed to purchase

surplus and modern military arms with which to contest the Ottoman monopoly on violence.¹³ This second tier of arms trading combined the porous nature of the Ottoman frontiers with Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece and the wide availability of small arms and ammunition, to achieve the construction of parallel state structures and foment ethnic, religious, and ultimately nationalist ideals among populations previously unaware of such concepts. The trade was carried out at the local level, but was supported by national elements either directly, through the sale of arms from military stockpiles to dealers and smugglers, or indirectly, through feigned ignorance or an unwillingness to confront the heavily armed traders.¹⁴ Smugglers took advantage of both the legal landscape, in that Bulgarian and Greek law regulated only cartridges and explosives on the surplus market, and the geographic landscape to ply their trade. A specific instance related by Öztan mentions “the arrival at the local railway station of 200 Krnka rifles, which were transported on to Krichim, a town at the foot of the Rhodope mountains, where the rifles were loaded onto mules to be smuggled into the Ottoman interior through the mountain passes.”¹⁵ The difficult nature of the landscape worked to the advantage of both the smugglers and their clientele: the insurgents and civilian militias that served as parallel structures designed to replace the almost non-existent Ottoman presence on the frontier.

13 Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, 2017. “Tools of Revolution: Global Military Surplus, Arms Dealers and Smugglers in the Late Ottoman Balkans, 1878-1908.” *Past & Present*, No. 237, 170.

14 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 190-191.

15 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 190.

In some cases, the weapons crossed the frontiers along with the insurgents that were to use them. Arthur Douglas Howden Smith, an American that traveled and fought with Macedonian insurgents, tells of how “[t]he arms and ammunition had been sent on before us by express. Without question, the Bulgarian officials had cognisance of the shipment, but it is their policy to wink at the operations of the bands, as long as they maintain a semblance of secrecy.”¹⁶ As Smith’s cheta, or armed band, prepared to cross the frontier “[e]ach man carried a cartridge belt, containing one hundred and fifty rounds of rifle ammunition; a web belt, containing fifty rounds of revolver cartridges; a French seven-shooter and a Mannlicher carbine and knife-bayonet,” displaying both a remarkable uniformity of equipment across the group of insurgents and the modern and international nature of their armaments. A Bulgarian military officer who stayed at the same hotel from which the cheta left, conveniently turned out his light as the men stepped off: “If called upon for a report, he could swear that he had been in bed when the Mileff cheta departed,” Smith writes, again displaying the indirect dimension of Bulgarian support for the Macedonian revolutionaries and the illicit arms trade.¹⁷

The contemporary nature of the firearms available allowed for the creation of far more effective insurgent groups and the perpetuation of guerilla warfare. Even the obsolescent single-shot black powder breech loaders provided a significant amount of firepower to bands of insurgents,

¹⁶ Arthur Douglas Howden Smith, 1908. *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans: An American’s Adventures with the Macedonian Revolutionists*. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 37.

¹⁷ Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 47.

whose ability to move and fight in small numbers made them all the more difficult to track and force into direct combat in the mountainous highlands of Macedonia. Öztan argues that because these small arms “were faster to load and did not misfire as often as earlier designs had done, a smaller number of revolutionaries could sustain a high enough rate of fire to defend themselves against soldiers who were often better equipped.”¹⁸ A passage from Smith’s account corroborates this: “The night when the courier came in, with the news that the Detcheff cheta (sixty strong), after holding an army of 30,000 men at bay for twenty days, had escaped with a loss of half its strength.”¹⁹ Later in his narrative, Smith describes in detail a delaying action he took part in, whereby a numerically inferior insurgent force managed to hold off a more numerous and better equipped Ottoman force as further demonstration of the capabilities afforded by modern small arms in the hands of motivated fighters in mountainous terrain.²⁰

While it is important to understand the political and economic features of the ongoing conflicts in and around Ottoman Macedonia from the Late 1870s to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, it is also important to understand what the different groups were fighting for.

Yosmaoğlu puts it quite plainly: “The short and cynical answer is that this was not a fight for ‘hearts and minds’ but for territory, above and before all.”²¹ However, she says that such an answer is incomplete, as it ignores

18 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 182.

19 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 22.

20 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 285.

21 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 262.

the human elements of support of the local populace and population control, as well as the value placed on having access to a means of protecting oneself, one's family, and one's village.²² The violence that was enacted and that became a fact of everyday life in Ottoman Macedonia served the purpose of accelerating the processes of nation building that had been started by ethnic schools and religious institutions by co-opting such tools of national constitution and enforcing negative outcomes for non-compliance. The complex nature of ethnic origin and religion in Ottoman Macedonia was further exacerbated by the intermixing and blending of religious and ethnic groups. Albert Sonnichsen, another American who campaigned with Macedonian insurgents, relates a discussion he had with the Austrian head of a Greek school: "'Well,' he admitted, 'it's hard nowadays to know who is Greek and who is Bulgar.' 'By language, I should suppose.' 'Well, no. You see, so many of the Greeks are Bulgarophones. Some are secretly Bulgars, supporting the brigands out in the mountains.'"²³ An idea such as Bulgarians masquerading as Greeks appears outlandish at first glance, but is in fact demonstrative of why violence came to be seen as a necessary tool for carving a nation out of a region where national, religious, and even ethnic allegiances are fluid and uncertain. As such, though mapmakers fought over the boundaries of Macedonia on paper and political opponents sought to determine some sort of defining characteristics of the Macedonian population through censuses, Yosmaoğlu

²² Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 262.

²³ Albert Sonnichsen, *Confessions of a Macedonian Bandit*, 15.

says that the “ultimate terrain through which this struggle was dragged, it seems, was made up of mangled bodies.”²⁴ Thus, the ultimate arbiters of national creation in Ottoman Macedonia between 1878 and 1913 were the international arms trade and the insurgents, militiamen, and soldiers who used the weapons available to them to demarcate harder national boundaries and further delegitimize the Ottoman Empire, thereby allowing the weapons themselves to take on lives of their own as a materialist factor in national formation and legitimation through violence.

Historical Context:

The 1878 Treaty of Berlin defined the political landscape of the Ottoman Empire in Europe for the remainder of the 19th Century and set the stage for major armed conflict in the Balkans in the Early 20th Century. Prior to the Treaty of Berlin and the Treaty of San Stefano which preceded it, much of the Ottomans Balkans fell within the *Rum millet*, a semi-autonomous community of Orthodox Christians under the Greek Orthodox religious umbrella of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. Among the Christians of Ottoman Europe, belief in Orthodox Christianity was the primary source of unity, with ethnolinguistic differences, especially those between Greeks and Bulgarians, being smoothed over by commonly held religious beliefs until the middle of the 19th Century.²⁵ In 1870, the

²⁴ Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 222.

²⁵ Fontini Zarogianni, 2023. “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin.” *The Journal of Balkan Studies* 3, No. 2, 94.

Ottoman government decreed that a separate and autonomous Bulgarian church in the form of the Bulgarian Exarchate be formed, thereby recognizing the Bulgarians, or Slavic-speaking peoples of the *Rum millet*, as a people distinct from Greek-speaking Christians. Part of the decree allowed for the establishment of Exarchate dioceses by a two-thirds vote of the local populations. Such a provision greatly expanded the opportunity for Bulgarian influence in the religiously contested region of Macedonia, causing considerable consternation for the Patriarchate, which had previously enjoyed hegemony over the Christian populace of Macedonia.

Following the 1870 decrees, and an 1872 declaration made by the Patriarchate that designated the Exarchate as “schismatic and its adherents as heretics,” competition for the Slavic-speaking Christian population in Macedonia marked the major point of division between Greeks and Bulgarians, serving as the vanguard of ethnic and then nationalist competition in the region.²⁶ The religious disputes between the Patriarchate and Exarchate were further inflamed by the Ottoman crushing of the April Uprising in 1876, that saw as many as 15,000 Bulgarians killed, and the recognition of an autonomous Bulgarian principality by the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which was a revision of the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano that had concluded the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War. The San Stefano Treaty created a “Great Bulgaria,” which included Macedonia in its entirety and gave Bulgaria access to the Aegean Sea, a resolution that Greece and

²⁶ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” 98-99.

Serbia could not accept as they had nationalist claims on parts of Macedonia and the San Stefano boundaries meant the claims would never come to fruition.²⁷ The Balkan countries were excluded from the treaty proceedings to revise San Stefano and the Berlin Treaty left all parties in the Balkans dissatisfied. The treaty stripped the Bulgarians of their gains from San Stefano and returned Macedonia to the Ottomans, though the Bulgarians eventually incorporated Eastern Rumelia into their territory. The Greeks, on the other hand, were given nothing until 1881 when they received Thessaly and the Arta region of Epirus. Following the territorial changes, both Greece and Bulgaria bordered Ottoman Macedonia, intensifying their religious and ethnic nationalization competition in the region, and ultimately destabilizing Ottoman control and galvanizing the local population. The Berlin Treaty was designed to answer the Eastern Question, but instead fomented a series of violent confrontations and an ongoing insurgency that lasted into the 20th Century.²⁸

Community Identities in Historical Macedonia:

Keith Brown argues that when discussing Ottoman Macedonia in the context of this period between the Treaty of Berlin and the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, the questions asked by scholars tend to focus on a “strongly

²⁷ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” 103-104.

²⁸ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” 107-110; Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 24-25.

presentist, politicized orientation...For what it really asks is, 'Of which subsequent nation-state were these people members-in-waiting?'"²⁹

Similarly, Yosmaoğlu argues that "The struggle for Macedonia at the turn of the twentieth century is a difficult story to relate because it was not simply a war fought between states with conventional armies. It was not a purely diplomatic crisis either. It was a protracted conflict, finally a civil war, fought as an insurgency, where the lines separating fighter from civilian, perpetrator from victim, traitor from hero, were not clearly drawn."³⁰ It is important, then, to avoid the modern idea of national belonging where none previously existed in Ottoman Macedonia. Seeing "the region and its natives as vessels either waiting to be filled, or already overflowing, with the substance of national sentiment," does a disservice to the complexity of the topic.³¹ How, then, did the peoples living in Ottoman Macedonia come to identify themselves? What characteristics determined which group a person or community chose to join? Why did the dispute over the identities of the people living in Ottoman Macedonia come to require force of arms and how did insurgents and arms smugglers become the primary drivers of the national and religious identification of the various Macedonian people groups?

Sir Charles Eliot, a British diplomat, in his book *Turkey in Europe* recognized the difficulty of classifying people in the Ottoman Balkans based

29 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 18.

30 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 16-17.

31 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 21.

on any given set of characteristics as “A few years’ observation in Turkey shows that it is impossible to draw hard and fast lines between the different races. One is assured that people who are apparently Greeks are really Vlachs, or hears that a Greek village has become Bulgarian, and perhaps by a second transformation Servian,” making clear just how fraught any attempt to determine the true makeup of the people of Ottoman Macedonia is.³² It must be understood that such endeavors are subject to the fluidity of nearly every common characteristic that identifies distinct people groups. However, Eliot claims that there are four potential methods of classification: politico-geographical, physical, language, and manners and customs.³³

The politico-geographical method is not useful because it is tied to the nation-state, thereby falling into the same trap that Brown identifies, and as Eliot notes “Large areas nearly always contain more than one race...Small areas, on the other hand, do not as a rule contain the whole of a race.”³⁴ In this context, the term “race” is roughly equivalent to the modern conception of ethnicity. Though Eliot sees the politico-geographical method as flawed, it highlights some of the main points of contention in the Ottoman Balkans: more than one race existed within the boundaries of Ottoman Macedonia and, in the case of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, the racial boundaries of people did not coincide directly with the political borders of the states that bore the names of the people groups they represented. The problem was that people living in Ottoman Macedonia did not see themselves as

32 Sir Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd. 291.

33 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 291-296.

34 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 292.

necessarily being part of the Greek, Bulgarian, or Serbian nation, but such concepts were forced upon them to serve the national projects of the three states as they competed to expand their influence into the region.

Regardless, this method is of little use other than to demonstrate the concerns of ethno-political entrepreneurs of the period.

Eliot also dismisses the use of physical characteristics in defining a people group in large part because such a system “tells us so little,” because “external differences between Europeans of different nations depend mainly on expression, manner, and costume, and not on any physical characteristics which can be defined and registered.”³⁵ Essentially, Eliot is saying that Europeans look sufficiently similar to make attempts to differentiate them by distinctive physical attributes impossible. He also argues that the people of the Balkans, being subject to many invasions and conquering empires, as well as interactions with other people groups makes it impossible for there to exist a pure-blooded Greek, Bulgarian, or Serb race. Even if there was such an example of a pure version of one of those groups, Eliot claims that “In Southern Albania, Greeks, Albanians, and Vlachs look very much alike, and a Southern Albanian and a Greek resemble one another more than do a Southern and a Northern Albanian. Similarly, in Central Macedonia, at such a town as Monastir, there is a family likeness among the Christian inhabitants whether they call themselves Greeks, Vlachs, or Slavs.”³⁶ In this way, another reason for uncertainty and

35 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 292.

36 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 294.

competition emerges. Because the Christian populations of Ottoman Macedonia were difficult to tell apart physically, different national partisans attempted to lay claim to the populace as belonging to one group or another by gaining a monopoly on religion and education in order to mold Ottoman Macedonians into their desired ethno-national identity. Again, despite the identification of another challenge of nation-making in the period, classifying the different ethnic groups of Ottoman Macedonia by their physiognomy is of little help.

The final two methods described by Eliot, language and manners and customs, prove to be the most promising means of identifying what groups belong together or constitute an entirely separate group. Eliot says that language is the best means of classifying people groups in the Ottoman Balkans, in large part because it is difficult to change one's mother tongue. In a multiethnic empire, such as the Ottoman Empire, there may be some incentives for people to learn second languages for business purposes, but by and large people will retain their first language, thereby designating them a member of the community where their first language is dominant.³⁷ Of course, the deployment of partisan teachers and socialization that prohibits the use of one language by speakers of another language may be successful in obscuring the original or past identities of people, but most means of classification, especially in the case of Ottoman Macedonia and for the purposes of this paper, are flawed and therefore helpful primarily for

³⁷ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 295-296.

gaining a general understanding of the different people groups involved in the conflicts.³⁸ Additionally, language is still a highly contested identifier of origin in the Balkans, as Bulgaria views the Macedonian language “merely as a regional written form of the Bulgarian one.”³⁹ Despite the modern disputes over language, the majority of discussion about language during the period on which this paper focuses is about whether people spoke Greek or Slavic dialects, providing two fairly broad categories that can be used to demonstrate one of the major social cleavages in Ottoman Macedonia more clearly.

Related to language as a means of identifying people groups are what Eliot calls the manners and customs of people. Specifically, he identifies religion as the most important of the manners and customs, primarily because religion is how society was divided in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁰ Following the Ottoman recognition of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the ensuing schism between the Greek and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches, Orthodox Christian society in the Ottoman Balkans was split between the Greeks and the Bulgars. Eliot argues that division by religion presents two challenges of ethnicity and communal belonging in that “it combines many races under the comprehensive names of Islam and Rûm. Popular language follows the same method. A Bulgarian means a member of the Bulgarian

38 Anastasia N. Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, 125

39 Aleksandar Samardjiev, 2022. “North Macedonia: EU membership remains a never-ending challenge.” *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa*, August 11, 2022. <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/North-Macedonia/North-Macedonia-EU-membership-remains-a-never-ending-challenge-219967>

40 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 296.

Church, and if a Bulgarian-speaking village recognizes the Patriarch of Constantinople and not the Exarch, its inhabitants are as often as not called Greeks,” thereby demonstrating the complex overlap of language and religion.⁴¹ He goes on to describe the specific situation of Macedonia where “there has been much dispute as to whether certain parts of Macedonia are Servian or Bulgarian, and many villages which were formerly reckoned as Bulgarian have declared themselves Servian,” and that the lack of an independent Serbian Church meant that in the Ottoman Empire, “Servians, as opposed to Bulgarians, are called Greeks,” indicating that Serbians and Greeks were more likely to co-identify with each other in spite of linguistic differences because of a shared Church. Bulgarians, though Slavic-speakers, were othered because of their excommunicated and schismatic religious status.⁴²

Another consequence of using religion to classify people, according to Eliot, is that ethnicity or race “is regarded not as something natural and immutable, but as a matter of conviction, which can be changed as easily as religion,” emphasizing that there was space for competition between what Yosmaoğlu terms “political entrepreneurs,” over what Eliot calls “a ‘national idea.’”⁴³ Eliot argues that such a concept was really the project of “a certain number of energetic politicians try[ing] to force the idea into the heads of their fellows,” which had only two real avenues under the Ottoman

41 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 297.

42 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 297; Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, 79.

43 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 297; Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 219.

system: language and the Church.⁴⁴ Thus, language and belief overlapped because Macedonians were interested in hearing Church services in a language that they could understand.⁴⁵ In turn, the political elite of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece sought to capture a portion of the Macedonian population by teaching them languages that suited the different national ideas and such teaching was carried out through the Church or under its supervision.⁴⁶ Despite the importance of language and religion in Ottoman Macedonia as “a set of guidelines and rituals according to which the rhythm of daily life was set,” Yosmaoğlu argues, and this paper will contend, that disputes over belief and language are simply the context of national development in the region, but such processes of contestation over the identities of populations were hardened by violence, thereby making armed insurgents, who relied on and were sometimes part of the ecclesiastical structures, the arms smugglers who supplied them, and the global arms trade that made massive amounts of modern small arms available, the key drivers and catalysts of national competition in Ottoman Macedonia.⁴⁷

Religion, Language, Division, and Rebellion

The competition over religion and the ensuing battle for identity had several major implications both in terms of the needs of the Churches and how the people of Ottoman Macedonia responded to and took part in the

44 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 298.

45 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 22.

46 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 298-299; Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 175.

47 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 172-174.

conflict. Patriarchate rule over the *Rum millet* was threatened by the expansion of the Exarchate, primarily in the Slavic-speaking areas of Macedonia, as conversions of towns and villages reduced the size of the income-providing follower base for the Patriarchate.⁴⁸ In addition, the Church was often directly tied to the establishment of schools where people learned Bulgarian or Greek and used such connections with the community to engender public support and coordinate propaganda.⁴⁹ In the case of the Bulgarian Church, it provided support for insurgent groups and was the main conduit through which the insurgents connected with the peasants whose interests they claimed to represent. As such, the Church provided the structure within which insurgents and political entrepreneurs operated.⁵⁰

The Church became the most visible element of alternative state structures in Ottoman Macedonia by serving as tax collectors for the insurgents who held judicial, legislative, and administrative power in the regions in which they operated. Thus, the Church was a lifeline for the guerillas and was treated as an arm of the revolutionary movement. In addition to its physical capacities, the Church proved to be important in that “both the Exarchist and Patriarchist sides carried immense moral authority over the peasants,” such that the activist clergymen were able to push their

⁴⁸ Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 22.

⁴⁹ Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, 93.

⁵⁰ Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 175; Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, 97.

congregations toward or away from the Exarchist or Patriarchist causes.⁵¹ Eliot describes the diffusion of ethnic and national ideas through religion as “missionary enterprises which, by means of schools and churches try to convert people to the Bulgarian or Servian faith,” denoting the fluidity of the ethno-religious and ethno-national situation in Macedonia at the time.⁵² Eliot goes on to argue that “In order to understand the Macedonian question, and, in particular Macedonian statistics, this peculiar system of altering race-names must be borne in mind...In one sense, a race in Macedonia is merely a political party, but it may be better defined as a body of people with a common language and customs, and generally with a common religion,” thus, not only does Eliot’s definition make clear the importance of the church in the identities of Macedonians but this definition of race will be used to evaluate the different groups operating in Ottoman Macedonia as well.⁵³

There is an historical connection between churches and armed groups in the Ottoman Balkans. Because the Patriarchate was a Greek institution and governance over the *Rum millet* was religiously defined, the Greeks dictated the relationship between the Klephts, typically defined as brigands or bandits, and the Armatoles, or Christian gendarmes, both of which became more prominent forces in European Turkey following the end of the Janissary tribute scheme in the late 1600s. The absence of large numbers of

51 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 176.

52 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 298.

53 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 298.

Ottoman officials in the region meant that local Greek governments controlled the Armatoles, who, in turn, kept the Klephts in check, ultimately linking armed Christian militants, the local governments, and the Church in maintenance of state structures long before even Greek independence.⁵⁴ Thus, a model existed for later groups attached to both the Patriarchate and the Exarchate.

The Greek case serves as an important historical touchpoint as well because of its experiences before and during its war for independence. The Greeks experienced much predation at the hands of Turks and Albanians following an abortive attempt at independence in 1770. As many as 50,000 Greeks were massacred in the aftermath and the violent disorder continued for nine years until the Ottoman government reasserted control. They would suffer again during the 1787-1792 Russo-Turkish War. The Klephts and the Armatoles served as the primary armed forces in defense of the Greeks and, following uprisings in March 1820 which saw Ottoman reprisals in the form of the hanging of the Greek Patriarch and the execution of many more Church officials, sustained insurgency broke out until Turkish massacres of Greeks drew the attention of other major European powers, forcing them to intervene and establish an independent Greece 1830. The Ottomans, faced with an independent Greek state to the South of their European holdings and a large Greek population within its own frontiers sought to placate the Greeks of the Empire in order to reduce the chances of internal strife

⁵⁴ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 303-304.

during conflicts with Greece, ultimately creating a quasi-symbiotic relationship between the Ottomans and their remaining Greek subjects, reducing the Greek claim to representing the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire in Europe.⁵⁵

In opposition to the Greeks, Eliot places the Serbs and Bulgarians of Ottoman Europe in the same category, due to the fact that he claims that Bulgarians “though not originally Slavs they have been completely Slavised, and all ties arising from language, religion, and politics connect them with the Slavs and not with Turkey or even Hungary,” however, this lumping together of two Slavic groups indicates that there are noticeable differences between the Bulgarians and the Serbians.⁵⁶ Eliot goes on to talk about the large Greek populations and smaller Turkish and Vlach populations interspersed within the majority Slav areas and the fact that the ethnographic maps change based on the political persuasions of the cartographer, but he notes that “the Greek Archbishop of Gumurjina complained to me [Eliot] that his flock were all turning Bulgarian and speaking that language,” thereby demonstrating both the complexity of ethnic and religious identities and the perplexing nature of populations moving from one identity to another.⁵⁷ The idea that a formerly Greek congregation could change its identity was alarming to the Patriarchate and a boon for proponents of the Bulgarian ethno-national identity and the Exarchate, creating a situation in which competition for apparently

55 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 315-321.

56 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 344.

57 Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 344.

nationally malleable congregants between the Greeks and the Slavs of the Balkans. He observes that by 1888, ten years after Lady Fanny Janet Blunt described the Ottoman Christians of the Balkans as Greeks in her book *The People of Turkey*, Bulgarian schools and the Bulgarian Exarchate had been successful enough to credibly claim much of Macedonia and even Albania as Bulgarian. This claim was disputed by the Serbians, leading to a contest not just between Slavs and Greeks, but Bulgarians and Serbs as the Slavs of Ottoman Europe sought to separate themselves both from the Greeks and from each other.⁵⁸

Within the Slav category containing Serbs and Bulgarians, Eliot contends that there are three types of Slav: “pure Slavs, Slavised Bulgarians, and pure Slavs who have been influenced by Slavised Bulgarians,” all of which have elements of Greek influence.⁵⁹ As such, he refrains from making strong statements as to what defines a Serb and what defines a Bulgarian, especially in the geographical context of Ottoman Macedonia. The only identifications he is willing to make is that the Slavs Northwest of Uskub are more closely linked to the Slavs that inhabited the Serbian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin frontiers, while the populations East of the Struma River and between the Struma and Vardar Rivers are, though mixed, more closely related to the Bulgarians. Those Slavs that remained outside of the areas defined by Eliot are, he argues, “intermediate between Serbs and Bulgarians...the practical conclusion is that neither Greeks,

⁵⁸ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 345.

⁵⁹ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 372.

Servians, nor Bulgarians have a right to claim central Macedonia. The fact that they all do so shows how weak each claim must be.”⁶⁰ With this assertion, Eliot identifies that not only were there Slavs in Macedonia that were neither Serbian or Bulgarian, but that they may have had the strongest territorial claim to Ottoman Macedonia.

Authors Gabor Demeter and Krisztian Csaplar-Degovics echo the claims of Eliot. They agree with Eliot that within the 70,000 km² territory (27,027.15 mi² or slightly larger in size than the American state of West Virginia) of Macedonia, which they bound with the Sharr Mountains in the North, the Rhodope Mountains in the East, and Lake Ohrid in the West, none of the groups defined either ethnically or religiously made up more than 50% of the 2 million inhabitants of the region. Thus, they argue that “Macedonia was an ‘impossibly complex unfriendly terrain’ for the *national idea* as well - simply unsuitable for the emergence of the nation state without major changes,” which encapsulates perfectly the purpose of this paper.⁶¹ Demeter and Csaplar-Degovics contend that not only was Ottoman Macedonia a frontier, but a borderland as well. According to this contention, the main features of a frontier are “budget deficits, a high proportion of military and administrative-bureaucratic costs relative to the total expenditure of the province, a high ratio of deviant (imprisoned and handicapped) persons, alternative sources of power (beyond central

⁶⁰ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 373.

⁶¹ Gabor Demeter & Krisztian Csaplar-Degovics, 2018. *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 13.

government), a high migration rate, and solutions or reactions differing from generally accepted social norms..."⁶² whereas borderlands are defined as "*special frontier zones, either separating political entities (thus functioning as buffer zones) or divided between states (dispute areas), far away from centres. On the one hand, the centre was unable to maintain and assert power here, but on the other hand neither could local authorities,*" which builds on the weakness of the state in Ottoman Macedonia

The Treaties of 1878 and Their Implications

Bulgarians were first recognized by the Ottomans in 1870 with the acceptance of a Bulgarian Church independent of the Greek Church, though the concept of the Bulgarian people arose in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The recognition of the Bulgarian Exarchate divided the Christians of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and advanced the Bulgarian national ideal.⁶³ The Berlin Treaty of 1878 stripped the Bulgarians of the unity promised by the massive Bulgarian state created by the Treaty of San Stefano, as Eliot makes clear that the Principality of Bulgaria formed by the Berlin Treaty "is not co-extensive with the Bulgarian race," with much of the population of Bulgarians existing within the borders of Ottoman Macedonia that was handed back to the Ottomans by the Berlin Treaty.⁶⁴ Thus, with the Christian peoples of Ottoman Europe thoroughly divided from each other

⁶² Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 15.

⁶³ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 347-349.

⁶⁴ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 352.

religiously and ethnically and both the Greek and Bulgarian states having significant populations outside of their borders, 1878 set the stage for conflict over Ottoman Macedonia. As Eliot put so well: “[I]t must be admitted that the problem so successfully solved by Austria is not the real crux of the Eastern question. She [Austria] administers a country [Bosnia] inhabited by Christian and Moslim Serbs, but what European power or what European method could deal satisfactorily with a country inhabited by Turks, Albanians, Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians, and Servians, all ready to cut one another’s throats?”⁶⁵ The disentanglement of these ethnicities had the potential to become violent very quickly.

The Treaty of San Stefano directly threatened the interests of the Ottomans, Greeks, and Serbians. In one fell swoop, it created a massive Bulgarian state in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. The Danube River formed the Northern border, while the Rhodope Mountains marked the Southern boundary, and the Black Sea and Vardar and Morava Valleys formed the Eastern and Western borders respectively. The entire territory, which even gave the Bulgarians access to the Aegean Sea at Kavala and the Gulf of Orfano, encompassed all of Macedonia and Western Thrace, making the territory between 163,000 and 172,500 km² (62,934-66,602 mi² or similar in size to the state of Wisconsin).⁶⁶ These territorial gains disturbed the Greeks because the Bulgarian expansion handed the Greeks a

⁶⁵ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 382.

⁶⁶ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 103.

devastating defeat in what they considered to be “a propaganda war and an educational and religious race in Macedonia against Bulgaria and its Exarchate,” where the Bulgarians had essentially won, according to the Treaty of San Stefano, based on the outside interests of the Great Powers.⁶⁷ Additionally, the ethno-national interests of Greece and Greeks in the Ottoman Balkans were threatened in Greek-majority areas, such as Kavala and Serres, because the borders defined by the San Stefano Treaty allowed the Bulgarians to rule over areas that were not primarily Slavic. Bulgarian access to the Aegean also created the problem of naval competition, thereby widening the front of Greek and Bulgarian confrontation.⁶⁸

Along with the Greeks, the Serbians found the San Stefano Treaty to be too extreme and had no desire to allow the Bulgarians to consolidate their claims as they necessarily threatened Serbian security and ethno-national interests. The required implementation of a rule similar to the Organic Law of 1867, which recognized and allowed for Greek self-governance within the constraints of Ottoman administration on the island of Crete, in Thessaly and Epirus was designed to appease the Serbians and the Greeks by allowing for local self government in those two regions. However, the Ottomans were unwilling to carry out the rule. In much the same way the Organic Law of 1867 was rendered essentially unrealized, the

⁶⁷ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 103.

⁶⁸ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 104.

organic law provision of the San Stefano Treaty was largely ignored, leaving the Serbs and the Greeks unable to combat Bulgarian and Ottoman influence and forcing the Greeks to seek closer ties with the Ottomans in order to hold some sway in Ottoman Macedonia and to interdict the Bulgarian ethno-national, religious, and territorial advances.⁶⁹

Greece and Bulgaria were not involved in the Berlin Treaty negotiations that began on 13 June and ended a month later on 13 July 1878. However, a Greek delegation was allowed to ask for considerations to be made for delivering Crete, Thessaly, and Epirus into the hands of the Greek state. These territorial requests were much diminished from the desires of Greek nationalists, but the Greeks lacked Great Power representation at the Berlin Treaty proceedings. Bulgarian interests, in contrast, were represented by the Russians, who were intent on maintaining a Slavic vassal or satellite state in the Balkans.⁷⁰ In spite of Russian representation, the Greater Bulgaria defined by the San Stefano Treaty was divided into three separate territories. The first was the “Autonomous Bulgarian Tributary to the Sultan Principality” which represented about a third of San Stefano Bulgaria and had a Bulgarian prince.⁷¹ Eastern

⁶⁹ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 104; Charles W. Dilke & Demetrius N. Botassi, 1897. “The Uprising of Greece.” *The North American Review* 164, No. 485 (April) 456-457; N. Pantazopoulos, 1961. “Community Laws and Customs of Western Macedonia Under Ottoman Rule.” *Balkan Studies* 2, No. 1, 18.

⁷⁰ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 106.

⁷¹ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 106-107.

Rumelia, which encompassed primarily the territory of Northern Thrace, was afforded a local militia, a Christian governor, and general governmental autonomy despite remaining under direct control of the Ottomans. Lastly, Macedonia was restored to Ottoman control, with no provisions for shared governance.⁷²

The Greeks and Bulgarians essentially fell victim to Great Power politics in the Summer of 1878. Though 50,000 Russian troops were to be stationed in the Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Rumelia for a period of nine months following the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, the idea of a Greater Bulgaria had been quashed with the dismemberment of San Stefano Bulgaria and the restoration of Macedonia to the Ottomans. The Greeks on the other hand received nothing but a call for discussions between Greece and the Ottoman Empire about the Greek acquisition of Thessaly and Epirus, which the Ottomans continually delayed until 1881 when Thessaly and Arta in Epirus were given to the Greeks. While Crete remained out of reach for the Greeks, the concessions of Thessaly and Arta gave Greece a border with Macedonia, thereby reinvigorating Greek ethno-national desires and renewing competition with Bulgaria.⁷³

The revisions of the San Stefano Treaty by the Berlin Treaty and the eventual capture by the Greeks of Thessaly and Arta meant that ethno-

⁷² Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 107.

⁷³ Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 107.

national ideals had to also be revised. Competition over Macedonia resumed, but the Greeks accepted that the seizure of all of Macedonia was an unachievable goal as the population in the North was primarily Slavic and, thus, more inclined toward the Bulgarians. Therefore, they forwent Northern Macedonia in favor of focusing on Southern Macedonia, which gave them a direct historical claim to the ancient rulers of Macedonia, primarily King Philip and Alexander the Great. In order to carry out this refocusing, the Greeks renewed educational and religious competition, but also began distributing arms and military materiel to the Greeks of Ottoman Macedonia.⁷⁴ The Bulgarians, having been stripped of Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, and Thrace, were forced to restrategize their recovery of these territories.⁷⁵

After the Treaty of Berlin was enacted, the border demarcation process between Bulgaria and Ottoman Macedonia proved to be unsatisfactory. The borders were drawn by a committee that both the Ottomans and the Bulgarians felt did not properly consider local needs and the defensibility of the borders. Ongoing disputes, such as the moving of border markers by local villagers and cross-border raids and skirmishes, were difficult to navigate and though the committee completed its work by 1879, armed confrontations continued to be a point of contention in these

74 Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 107.

75 Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 108.

newly demarcated border regions. Thus, in this case, it was interstate war that began to generate and harden national identities.⁷⁶

Linked to the border disputes was the question of the resettlement of refugees. Nearly 40,000 Muslim refugees arrived in Macedonia from Bosnia and Nis, while others attempted to return to their homes in the newly recognized Bulgarian principality.⁷⁷ Ethnically Bulgarian emigrants from Macedonia had opportunistically moved into the homes in Bulgaria vacated by the Muslim refugees during the Russo-Turkish War and, aided by Bulgarian authorities, refused to leave. The Bulgarian prince argued that “nothing much could be done on this issue because it was a natural outcome of the war,” thereby justifying population exchanges and ethno-national homogenization through violent conflict.⁷⁸ Gul Tokay argues, then, that “the Treaty of Berlin destroyed the pluralist order: the newly independent Balkan states adopted the idea of a single ethno-linguistic nation based on European Models. This was a natural outcome not only of the war but also of the nation-state building process,” however these population exchanges and consolidations had the potential to weaken Bulgarian claims to the Macedonian territory, though it was also these Bulgarian emigrants that formed the basis of the Macedonian revolutionary organizations in the

76 Gul Tokay, 2011. “A Reassessment of the Macedonian Question, 1878-1908.” In *War and Diplomacy, The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, edited by Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, 253-269. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 256-257.

77 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 22; Tokay, “A Reassessment of the Macedonian Question, 1878-1908,” 257.

78 Tokay, “A Reassessment of the Macedonian Question, 1878-1908,” 257.

following decades as they sought to reclaim and protect those Slavs who remained in Macedonia.⁷⁹

Divisions between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate further deepened the divide between Ottoman Christians, as well as weakening the Ottoman state. The Patriarchate accused the Exarchate of promoting specific ethnic ideals, while the Exarchate took over state duties previously performed by the Patriarchate such as collecting taxes and settling disputes. The resulting loss of revenue for the Patriarchate meant that financial support from Greece was required to continue competing with the Exarchate. Thus, the ethno-religious disputes were nationalized, making them far more divisive.⁸⁰ As a result, local authorities became involved in the appointment of teachers at Church-run schools, allowing the state to exercise control over what was taught and further entrenching the idea that religion and state were linked directly.⁸¹ This linking was also true in the cases of Bulgaria and Serbia, where the interests of the state and the Church typically aligned, either because the Church existed before the state, as in the case of the Bulgarians, or the state and Church arose alongside each other, as in the case of Serbia. In contrast, the Greek state structure and the Patriarchate clashed more often over control of schools. According to Demeter and Csaplar-Degovics, the nationalization of religion was slow, but ultimately contributed both to the increased division among

79 Tokay, "A Reassessment of the Macedonian Question, 1878-1908," 257.

80 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 23-24.

81 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 26.

the Orthodox Christians and to the further deterioration of Ottoman influence and control in Macedonia.⁸²

In the period following the Berlin Treaty, Serbs also began to agitate for increased religious freedom, including Church-supported education. Within Macedonia, the Serbs opposed Bulgarian Exarchate control of the Slav populations and argued for the division of Kosovo between the Serbian state and Montenegro once the Ottomans were driven from Europe. In spite of Serbian territorial desires that necessarily threatened Ottoman control in Macedonia, the Ottoman government supported Serbian religious leaders against the Exarchate by reinstating the Serbian Church's status as autocephalous in 1879. Though limited in geographical scope, the reinstatement provided official recognition of an alternative Slavic religious institution to spite the Bulgarians.⁸³ The Ottomans also increased the number of troops present in Macedonia with the hope that the military would both discourage the revisionists of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece and demonstrate to the Great Powers that the situation in Macedonia was being handled by a competent military force and governmental structure in order to inhibit Great Power interventions on the part of Macedonian Christians.⁸⁴

Embedded in the Berlin Treaty were two important articles that gave the Great Powers a great deal of influence over Ottoman affairs as they related to the Christian population. The 23rd article dealt specifically with

⁸² Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 26-27.

⁸³ Radmila Radic, 2007. "Serbian Christianity." In *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, edited by Ken Parry, 231-248. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 235.

⁸⁴ Tokay, "A Reassessment of the Macedonian Question, 1878-1908," 261.

Macedonia, requiring that the region be moved toward reforms that made it an autonomous province. The 62nd article was more broad and allowed for Great Power intervention in the Ottoman Empire if the powers determined that Ottoman subjects, primarily Christians, were not being treated in accordance with European standards.⁸⁵ Thus, not only were the Ottomans facing internal threats of instability immediately following their defeat in the Russo-Turkish War, but they were also facing external threats on their sovereignty as it related to control over the Christian populations of Ottoman Europe. The spread and emphasis of ethno-political conflict between Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians in the Ottoman Balkans, then, necessarily threatened Ottoman rule. If the Ottomans were unable to curb religious and ethno-nationalist agitation, the Great Powers would become more heavily involved in Ottoman affairs, further weakening the Ottoman position. The Russo-Turkish War, San Stefano Treaty, and Berlin Treaty demonstrated the fluidity of the Ottoman frontiers in the Balkans, giving context to the contestation of Ottoman Macedonia within the two-level game of Great Power competition and regional disputes based on ethno-national and religious ideals.

1885-1886: The Serbo-Bulgarian War and the European Arms Race

Bulgarian domestic politics as a newly autonomous principality were heavily influenced by Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Berlin

⁸⁵ Demeter & Csaplár-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 29.

Treaty. Alexander of Battenberg, a relative of the Russian Tsar, was elected to become Prince of Bulgaria. Prince Alexander quickly removed the Minister President, Petko Karavelov, and replaced him with a Russian, General Ehrenroth, and relied heavily on other Russian generals in the Bulgarian ranks to rule. A contemporary observer, Arthur Ernst von Huhn, argued that the Russian officers involved in Bulgarian governance saw both Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia as extensions of Russia and, following the death of Tsar Alexander II, became increasingly hostile toward Prince Alexander. Von Huhn made clear that “the Russian officers and officials treated even the Prince with haughty disdain, and it soon became evident that their only object was to render the Prince’s stay in Bulgaria so disagreeable as to force him to resign the government...even Aksakoff himself addressed the Prince, to his face, in these curt words: ‘We have nothing against you personally, but we shall never stop agitating until we have accomplished your fall, *because you are a German!*’”⁸⁶ These sentiments related by von Huhn strengthened the Bulgarian notion of ethnic sovereignty as Alexander was motivated to appeal to the sensibilities of his subjects who felt that the Russians were overstaying their welcome.⁸⁷ The two primary political parties in Bulgaria, the Liberals and the Conservatives, managed to unite to force Prince Alexander to restore the

⁸⁶ Arthur Ernst von Huhn, 1886. *The Struggle of the Bulgarians for National Independence Under Prince Alexander: A Military and Political History of the War Between Bulgaria and Servia in 1885*. London: John Murray, 14-15.

⁸⁷ Von Huhn, *The Struggle of the Bulgarians for National Independence Under Prince Alexander: A Military and Political History of the War Between Bulgaria and Servia in 1885*, 15.

constitution by 1883. With Thessaly and the Arta region of Epirus freshly ceded to the Greeks in 1881, the Bulgarians sought to strengthen their position by uniting the Bulgarian principality with Eastern Rumelia. They accomplished this on 18 September 1885 by supporting an uprising in the region which gave Prince Alexander the governorship of Eastern Rumelia.⁸⁸

While the Russians were openly opposed to the incorporation of Eastern Rumelia into the Bulgarian Principality, causing them to remove their officers from the Bulgarian ranks, the Serbians took more direct action to keep Bulgaria from gaining strength and creating a regional imbalance in the Balkans.⁸⁹ Serbian troops were massed on the Serbian-Bulgarian frontier and Bulgarian troops were massed in kind. Prince Alexander issued a letter to King Milan of Serbia stating that Serbian troops had crossed the frontier into Bulgarian territory to which Milan issued a letter of denial. Following a further exchange of letters between Alexander and Milan, Serbia declared war on Bulgaria on the grounds of “innovations in the Bulgarian customs regulations designed to injure Serbian trade, ill treatment of Serbian subjects in Bulgaria, and attacks upon the Serbian army,” making clear that a major element of provocation was the claim that

⁸⁸ Roumen Daskalov, 2020. “Bulgaria from Liberation to Independence, 1878-1908,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, Eds. John R. Lampe and Ulf Brunnbauer, 72-79. London: Routledge, 73; Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 108-109.

⁸⁹ Daskalov, “Bulgaria from Liberation to Independence, 1878-1908,” 73.

ethnic Serbs living in Bulgaria were being mistreated and required the assistance of their Serbian brethren.⁹⁰

The Serbians were repulsed in short order and the Bulgarians began to cross the frontier into Serbia on their own offensive when Austria-Hungary, backed by Russia and Germany, threatened to send troops to aid the Serbians. A truce was enacted on 3 March 1886 and restored the pre-war conditions, meaning that Bulgarian control over Eastern Rumelia was essentially enshrined by the 1886 Treaty of Bucharest.⁹¹ Additionally, the Ottomans had refused to intervene, even in Eastern Rumelia, thereby marking Bulgaria as a major regional power and threat to Greece and Serbia. However, Russia, seeking to dampen the Bulgarian rise, encouraged Bulgarian officers to foment a coup that deposed Prince Alexander on 9 August 1886. The Bulgarian National Assembly under Stefan Stambolov returned Alexander to the throne, but the prince quickly resigned under pressure from the Russian Tsar, leaving Bulgaria essentially leaderless until Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was elected Prince on 25 June 1887.⁹² The international community refused to recognize Ferdinand and Stambolov, supported by Great Britain for his anti-Russian views, seized power.

Stambolov, faced by internal and external pressures, ruled Bulgaria with an iron fist and managed to extract Ottoman concessions for the establishment

90 Frank Maloy Anderson & Amos Shartle Hershey, 1918. *Handbook for the Diplomatic History of Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1870-1914*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 125.

91 Anderson & Hershey, *Handbook for the Diplomatic History of Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1870-1914*, 125-126.

92 Daskalov, "Bulgaria from Liberation to Independence, 1878-1908," 73-74.

of Exarchate Churches in Macedonia, the most important in the contest between Bulgaria and Greece being those in Ohrid and Skopje.⁹³ However, he refused to allow the growing Macedonian movement any freedom from the Bulgarian state, making enemies of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization that was established in 1893. Stambolov was forced from office in 1894, when Prince Ferdinand managed to secure the loyalty of the Bulgarian military, and he was assassinated a year later in July 1895.⁹⁴

During this time, the Great Powers attempted to force the Greeks to draw down the number of troops mobilized between 1885 and 1886, culminating in a naval blockade that lasted from April 1886 until the Greeks dispersed their troops in June 1886.⁹⁵ The period of 1879 to 1886 proved to be disastrous for Greece, with only Thessaly and Arta to show for their pains. The Bulgarians managed to consolidate their control over Eastern Rumelia and, though the Greeks were able to renew the struggle for Macedonia thanks to the new border afforded by the Ottoman cession of Thessaly and Arta, Greece was economically damaged by the blockade. 1885 proved to be a crucial year in ratcheting up the tensions between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria over Macedonia, with the first interstate conflict demonstrating both the potential for violence to solidify national

⁹³ Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 109.

⁹⁴ Daskalov, "Bulgaria from Liberation to Independence, 1878-1908," 74.

⁹⁵ Zarogianni, "Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin," in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 109.

claims and for Great Power interests to directly influence conflict between the three regional powers. The Greeks, according to Zarogianni, came to recognize the importance not just of religious and cultural connections to the Greeks of Macedonia, but also “their sense of belonging to the same ‘*ethnos*’ or ‘nation,’” thereby identifying the state with the nation and superimposing state desires on national struggles in Ottoman Macedonia.⁹⁶ Ultimately, these transitions in the disputes between Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria can be linked back directly to the Berlin Treaty “as a result of moving from a competition, one expressed especially in Macedonia between an existent state’s expansionary vision and a nation’s will to create a state, to a struggle between two sovereign states for more territory, for the religious and ethnic loyalty of its population...and for foreign support for their endeavors,” as such, the two tiers of competition enforced by the Berlin Treaty came into sharp relief following the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885.⁹⁷

The Lebel Model 1886 and the Primary Markets of the European Small Arms Race

While Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria were dealing with the aftereffects of the Russo-Turkish War, San Stefano Treaty, and Berlin Treaty, the major European powers were wrangling with rapid technological advancements in

⁹⁶ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 109.

⁹⁷ Zarogianni, “Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *The Journal of Balkan Studies*, 110.

the realm of small arms. The transition from single-shot, breech-loading rifles, such as the British Martini-Henry, the German Dreyse Needle-gun and Mauser Model 1871, and the French Chassepot and Gras, to magazine-fed, bolt-action rifles, such as the German Mauser 1885 M.71/84, was disrupted by the French development of the first stable smokeless powder. Initially called "Poudre V" for its inventor, Paul Vieille, but more well-known as "Poudre B" for its pale, whitish coloration, replaced black powder as the standard propellant for French small arms cartridges.⁹⁸ Smokeless powder gave its users several advantages over users of black powder. The first was increased bullet velocities, allowing for flatter trajectories and greater effective ranges. The second advantage was the smokeless nature of the powder, which allowed for better command and control and considerable visual signature reduction.⁹⁹ Combined with newer magazine-fed style rifles, the smokeless powder cartridge had the potential to exponentially increase the fighting effectiveness of a single soldier, however, the heightened velocities came with requirements for better metallurgy and stronger actions, meaning that older rifles, or even newly developed magazine-fed rifles chambered for black powder cartridges like the Mauser M.71/84, could not simply be converted and rechambered for the newer and more advanced smokeless powder cartridges. For example, the black powder 11mm Gras cartridge produced 26,000 psi in the chamber, while the 8mm Lebel produced 40,000 psi, requiring a stronger action and two-lug bolt

⁹⁸ Ian McCollum, *From Chassepot to Famas: French Military Rifles, 1866-2016*, 139.

⁹⁹ Stephen Wren, 2023. "A Forgotten 'Merchant of Death': Auguste Schriever, the Deal-Maker of Liege." *Arms & Armour* 20, No. 1 (April), 91-92.

head to adequately withstand the more than fifty percent increase in chamber pressures.¹⁰⁰

The Lebel, officially adopted by the French military as the *Fusil modèle 1886* in 1887, and its new 8mm Lebel cartridge, which used a necked down and modified version of the 11mm Gras cartridge case, was able to push a 232 grain projectile at approximately 2,400 feet per second. The end result was a rifle and cartridge pairing that “really did significantly outperform all other military rifle ammunition of the day.”¹⁰¹ Ultimately, three million of the rifles would be produced by the end of 1894, entirely replacing the black powder 1874 Gras.¹⁰² This leap in small arms technology sparked a major arms race amongst the larger European powers creating what Stephen Wren argues was “a time of plenty for dealers in military rifles. Technological change provided them with ready supplies of cheap stock and easy access to a communication and transport infrastructure that helped them sell their wares around the world. There was demand too...an increasingly fearful and fractured world armed and rearmed its armies as it lurched towards disaster.”¹⁰³ The Lebel was quickly outcompeted by rifles such as the 1889 Belgian Mauser, the later German Gewehr 1898, and the British Lee Enfield adopted in 1895.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of its relatively rapid

100 McCollum, *From Chassepot to Famas: French Military Rifles, 1866-2016*, 141.

101 McCollum, *From Chassepot to Famas: French Military Rifles, 1866-2016*, 142.

102 McCollum, *From Chassepot to Famas: French Military Rifles, 1866-2016*, 142.

103 Wren, “A Forgotten ‘Merchant of Death’: Auguste Schriever, the Deal-Maker of Liege,” 90.

104 McCollum, *From Chassepot to Famas: French Military Rifles, 1866-2016*, 142.

obsolescence, the Lebel forced a major change in the global small arms market.

In the same year that the French adopted the Lebel, the Ottomans purchased 500,000 Mauser M.71/84 rifles and 50,000 carbines, which were chambered for black powder cartridges, essentially making the new Turkish guns immediately obsolete in Great Power terms. However, in the contract with Mauser, the Ottomans ensured there was a clause that if a better rifle was developed during the course of the contract, the remainder of the order would be filled with the new rifles. This clause proved to be useful when Mauser developed the model 1890 rifle, which was chambered for a smokeless powder cartridge, resulting in the final 280,000 rifles of the Turkish order being filled with the model 1890 rifles, though these remained in their crates in storage, rather than being issued out. The Ottomans purchased a further 201,000 Mauser Model 1893s chambered for the 7.65x53mm smokeless powder cartridge.¹⁰⁵ The Germans, too, had just adopted the Mauser M.71/84 in 1885 at great expense, with 7 million Marks being earmarked for the production of 175,000 rifles. The Germans ended up with nearly 1.1 million of the M.71/84 that were obsolete almost as soon as it was adopted. These rifles were replaced with the Gewehr 88, or “Commission Rifle,” by 1890, but this rifle, the first small-bore, smokeless powder, magazine-fed rifle in German service had a service life of less than ten years before being replaced by the Gewehr 1898. Such endeavors

105 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 83-84.

doubled the German budget for the military in the interval between 1886 and 1893.¹⁰⁶ Other European powers followed suit as the Austro-Hungarians adopted the Mannlicher Model 1890 and later the Mannlicher M1895, while Russians adopted the Mosin-Nagant in 1891 and ordered 500,000 of the rifles from France while they tooled up the main state-run arsenals for production, and the British adopted the Lee Enfield in 1895, resulting in Europe that “was awash with perfectly functional but obsolescent and obsolete military rifles that could be bought and sold, often on the open market,” thereby establishing the development of the first tier, or primary, small arms surplus market.¹⁰⁷

As all of the major powers raced to develop or purchase their own smokeless powder repeating rifles, huge numbers of relatively new black powder rifles were made available on the surplus market to both clear space in Great Power inventories and to help offset the costs of manufacturing and purchasing new rifles. This dynamic formed the foundation of the surplus arms trade in Europe in which both state-connected dealers and private sellers were involved. However, Grant argues that in the case of the state-connected arms dealers “the intent was not profit but influence as they ruthlessly undersold the private merchants to make diplomatic gains.”¹⁰⁸ For example, the Great Powers were eminently concerned about whether or not the Ottoman Empire, by all accounts a

106 Wren, “A Forgotten ‘Merchant of Death’: Auguste Schriever, the Deal-Maker of Liege,” 92.

107 Wren, “A Forgotten ‘Merchant of Death’: Auguste Schriever, the Deal-Maker of Liege,” 92.

108 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 37.

significantly weakened entity, should have been supported for the sake of regional stability or had its decline and division guided by the other Great Powers. The British and Austrians, at least initially, sought to prevent the stirring of religious tensions in the Ottoman Balkans by limiting arms sales to parts of the Ottoman Empire with primarily Christian populations. The French and the Russians, on the other hand, sought to deal more directly with the Ottoman question. The French hoped to gain diplomatic influence in the region to put pressure on the Austrians, while the Russians had scores to settle with the Ottomans themselves. As such, the surplus small arms resulting from several decades of Great Power military advancement were made available and supplied to the Christian populations of Ottoman Europe.¹⁰⁹

The Orthodox Christian peoples of the Balkans, as discussed above, had territorial motivations and a need for small arms. The Serbians, Greeks, and Bulgarians, once sufficiently autonomous or independent, sought out supplies of small arms on the primary surplus market. As the Bulgarians functioned effectively as a Russian territory in the period immediately following the Russo-Turkish War, the Russians supplied the Bulgarian military first with Krnka rifles, then with Berdan and Berdan II rifles. Prior to the Bulgarian seizure of Eastern Rumelia, the Russians also offered Berdan II rifles and cartridges to the Eastern Rumelians at the standard state rate, allowing the Eastern Rumelians to purchase 40,000 rifles at 18

109 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 37-38.

rubles apiece from the Russian state-run Tula arsenal, making their first payment for 5,000 rifles in 1883.¹¹⁰ However, when Bulgaria seized Eastern Rumelia, the Russian halted ammunition shipments to the Bulgarians, including nearly 8 million cartridges that were already prepared for shipping, leaving the Bulgarians in a difficult position. The Austrians were the only other likely supplier of arms, but the Bulgarians initially refused to purchase Austrian rifles because the Austrians had supplied small arms to the Serbs during the 1885 Serbo-Bulgarian War. As such, the Bulgarians turned to a private supplier of Russian Berdan rifles and contracted for 30,000 rifles at 58 francs per unit in 1888. When the rifles began to arrive though, they were clearly of poor quality and were most likely rifles rejected for Russian military service. The Bulgarians canceled the contract and, as they were already purchasing 5 million Berdan cartridges from the Austrians, eventually opted to instead purchase Austrian Mannlicher rifles.¹¹¹ Because the Mannlicher rifles of this period were undergoing fairly significant changes in that the black powder M1888, itself a modified and improved version of the M1886, was in the midst of being upgraded first with the use of a semi-smokeless powder cartridge in the form of the M88.90, and then with the addition of a strengthened chamber and sights graduated to accommodate the trajectory of the new cartridge in the M1890, it is unclear which Mannlicher rifles the Bulgarians were actually purchasing. Regardless, they were sufficiently happy with an initial order,

110 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 46-47.

111 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 96-97.

totalling approximately 90,000 rifles and 40 million cartridges in 1891, that by 1892 the Mannlicher had become the standard Bulgarian service rifle and the Bulgarians had been drawn into the Austrian and German spheres of influence through arms sales.¹¹²

The massive Bulgarian military expenditures, which amounted to a budget increase of nearly 6.7 million francs between 1886 and 1892, were justified by “the necessity of supporting this burden in the self-interests of the young nationality, as apart from considerations of defense of their liberties, or resistance to aggression by jealous neighbors, all Bulgarians unite in very definite aspirations as to political expansion.”¹¹³ Thus, the purchase of modern small arms was directly linked in Bulgarian political circles to the security of not just the state, but the Bulgarian identity, thereby allowing the Bulgarians to spread their influence into Ottoman Macedonia. The Bulgarians continued purchasing Austrian arms as the 19th Century came to a close. An 1897 contract secured 17,000 Mannlicher repeating rifles and 3,000 carbines for the Bulgarian government, bringing the total number of Mannlichers in Bulgarian stocks, regardless of type, to 160,000 units.¹¹⁴

The Serbians were not idle either as they carried out trials between 1879 and 1880 to determine what rifle was best to adopt. As mentioned in the introduction, they settled on the Mauser 1878/80, a single-shot, bolt action rifle that would first see combat with the Serbians in the 1885 Serbo-

112 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 97.

113 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 97.

114 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 97.

Bulgarian War. The war proved to be difficult for Serbia not just tactically, but logistically as well. The Serbs relied heavily on Austria to either provide and manufacture ammunition or allow the transport of it across Austrian territory. The Austrians sold 300 boxes of Mauser ammunition to Serbia during the war and allowed 3 million more cartridges to be shipped from the MacKenzie Company in the UK, through Austria, to the Serbians. In order to supply their Peabody-Martini rifles, the Serbians purchased 1 million cartridges from the John Mor and Son firm in London, 8 million more cartridges from Austria, and a further 6 million from Belgium. Following the war, Serbia purchased 100,000 rifles and a further 34 million cartridges for the new rifles, and then subsequently ordered a further 20,000 Mauser repeating rifles in 1887. This purchasing schedule for the purposes of rearmament following the war caused significant financial challenges for the Serbians. Serbian troops went without pay for three months and the order of 20,000 rifles was changed to be only for the rifles and not the cartridges as Serbia sought to produce gunpowder domestically.¹¹⁵

After purchasing 60,000 surplus Berdan rifles and their cartridges from the Russians in 1890 for their reserves, which were obtained because the Russians offered them a good deal, the Serbians sought their first smokeless powder rifle. They again turned to the Russians who had just adopted the 3-line rifle M1891 Mosin-Nagant, but the Russians were not yet actually capable of producing the rifle domestically and had outsourced

¹¹⁵ Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 100-101.

it to the French. However, when the Serbians signed a contract with the French in 1892 for between 80,000 and 90,000 rifles, it became clear that the Serbian production run would not begin until 1895 as the Russian run was scheduled to end in 1894. The Serbs appealed to the Russians in hopes of siphoning off the 80,000 rifles they needed, but the Russians rejected the proposal. Once the Russians had received their rifles, though, they entertained the idea of selling a small batch of 16,000 to 20,000 rifles to the Serbians in 1897, with the potential for another order to total 100,000 rifles over the next several years. The Serbs had lost patience with the Russians and turned to Deutsches Waffen-und-Munitions Fabriken, signing a contract in 1899 for 90,000 Mauser rifles and 600 cartridges for each of the rifles. Once the Serbs managed to pull together the funds for the order, shipments of rifles from Loewe in Berlin began to arrive. About halfway through the contract run, the rifles and their cartridges proved to be of subpar quality, with a Serbian rejection rate of 64 percent of the rifles. In 1901, the Serbians ordered 100,000 new Mausers from Oberndorf in hopes of keeping up with the Bulgarians.¹¹⁶

The Greeks too sought out German and Austrian suppliers for small arms, in large part because they faced significant resistance from France in the late 1870s and early 1880s. They had initially sought out 30,000 French rifles in 1880 from the French government, but were forced to purchase from a private seller instead, paying for 50,000 Chassepot rifles and their

116 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 103-104.

cartridges. The French held up the shipment over fears that the Greeks would use them in a war against Turkey, thereby angering the Greeks and turning them to Steyr in Austria, from which they bought 40,000 rifles.¹¹⁷

The primary surplus market of the Balkans, which quickly resulted in regional powers such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece purchasing large quantities of small arms, generated a massive influx of near-contemporary rifles into the region. As each of these nations made major investments into modernizing their small arms to keep up with each other, they generated a secondary surplus arms market that they used to supply insurgents in Ottoman Macedonia. The smuggling of arms into the Ottoman Balkans then became a lucrative trade that benefited the ethno-nationalist movements that operated within and at the fringes of Ottoman control as they were able to access significant quantities of relatively modern rifles, leveling the playing field with Ottoman troops in the region.

The Secondary Arms Market and the Destabilization of Ottoman Control in Ottoman Macedonia

It is at this point that the nature of the frontiers of Ottoman Europe become exceptionally important. Historian Isa Blumi argues that it was the “small-scale challenges to imperial rule,” such as smuggling, that weakened the foundations of Ottoman control by creating parallel societal structures that operated outside of the capabilities of the Ottomans to control it.¹¹⁸ In

117 Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money*, 110.

118 Isa Blumi, “Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire’s New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910.” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9, Nos. 1 & 2 (Summer) 252.

much the same way that the 1878 Treaty of Berlin changed the regional balance of power by weakening Bulgaria and giving Serbia and Greece an opportunity to contest Ottoman Macedonia, Blumi asserts that the Treaty also changed the local dynamics between Ottoman officials, who sought to establish and harden the boundaries set by the Treaty, and “local merchant communities whose livelihoods were increasingly threatened or irrevocably changed by these new boundaries.”¹¹⁹ Resistance to change in trade methods became the impetus for increased resistance to the Ottomans more generally, creating a sense among local communities that they need not conform to Ottoman demands, regardless of the lines drawn on a map that supposedly contained them within Ottoman territory or excluded them from it. Though he focuses more on Albania, important lessons can be drawn from Blumi’s analysis of the manner in which the change in definition from trade to smuggling changed the relationship between Ottoman representatives and local communities, in large part because the ideas and concepts map well onto Ottoman Macedonia.

The problems of the frontier are exposed in the Balkans because, as Blumi argues, “more ‘rational’ uses of imperial space was impossible to do from an Istanbul-based ministry because no one in the capital understood the outlying areas...the management of imperial policy by locally based administrators was made more difficult by the underlying effort to impose

119 Blumi, “Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire’s New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910,” 256.

'progress' and 'modernity' from afar."¹²⁰ Smuggling and illicit trade then became a way for local communities not only to adjust to new regulatory regimes, but also to resist progress and Ottomanization. It is important, then, to understand what it is that smuggling means in the context of the Ottoman Balkans. The activity of smuggling posed a direct threat to Ottoman territoriality because it represented, at least to the Ottomans, disorder at the frontier and, thus, a lack of control, which in turn enabled the regional powers of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece to chip away at the officially defined borders of Ottoman Macedonia. It also, according to Blumi, has a financial element which "connotes an illegal act, one that avoids taxation levied by the state," which is an important consideration because it further deteriorated the ability of the Ottomans to pay soldiers their wages or even provide food, supplies, and equipment to the troops on the frontier.¹²¹ Taking into account the local perspective, however, means that what had come to be defined as smuggling by the Ottomans and the other Great Powers who determined the borders of the Balkans in 1878 was, to the locals at least, business as usual. But the blend of the lucrative nature of smuggling, an already extant willingness to defy Ottoman authority, and the growing presence of insurgent movements in need of arms created significant motivations to traffick in small arms.

120 Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910," 257.

121 Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910," 264.

Recalling that Yosmaoğlu's definition of frontiers includes the idea that "[p]eople, animals, and commodities move more or less freely (if clandestinely) within and across frontiers," Blumi recognizes that Ottoman regulatory policies were doomed to fail.¹²² He argues that "Ottoman tax policies depended on the assumption that borders could be policed and that officials would be loyal in their enforcement," however, the reality of the situation was much different, with corruption taking a toll on tax revenues as the taxes collected from traders often went directly to the officer collecting them.¹²³ This corruption had the doubly negative effects of driving traders onto the black market and further robbing the Ottoman state of much needed funds for development and border enforcement.¹²⁴ As such, the Ottoman government failed to assert its dominance, allowing black market economies and parallel state structures to emerge. This situation served as a catalyst for turning Ottoman Macedonia into one of the "zones of war and then territorial conquests for the new neighboring nation-states," that Blumi describes.¹²⁵

Due to its illicit nature, the arms trade in and around Ottoman Macedonia is difficult to discuss in the same manner as the primary arms market. However, historian Selim Hilmi Özkan suggests that it was similarly

122 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 82.

123 Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910," 266.

124 Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910," 266.

125 Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878-1910," 269.

international in nature, though the local dynamics are of the most interest. The trade was incredibly lucrative, with smuggled rifles fetching as much as seven or eight times their worth on sanctioned markets. Additionally, smugglers often had ethno-nationalist motives, purchasing arms and moving them for insurgents in Ottoman-controlled regions. In other cases, firearms that were distributed by the Ottomans themselves for local defense ended up being handed out by village leaders to insurgents and local militiamen during uprisings. Between May and June 1903 some 1886 rifles, 227 revolvers, and 54,336 cartridges were seized by Ottoman authorities just in Skopje alone, demonstrating the large numbers of small arms circulating in Ottoman Macedonia.¹²⁶

Transactions in arms also became the means by which alternative state structures began to compete with the Ottomans for funding through taxation. Before 1903, Macedonian insurgents, primarily those of Slavic origin, did not take funds directly from friendly villages in Ottoman Macedonia, but instead required that a certain amount of money be pooled and tracked for the purpose of purchasing, among other supplies, rifles and ammunition for common defense. In this way, it was not only the capabilities afforded to the insurgents by the rifles themselves, but the requirements for their procurement that gave the insurgents legitimacy as near-state actors.¹²⁷ However, it is clear that the ideals of state-making held by the insurgents cannot be separated from the material demands of such

126 Selim Hilmi Özkan, 2016. "Arms Smuggling Across Ottoman Borders in the Second Half of the 19th Century." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, No. 3, 302.

127 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 130.

goals. Brown asserts that “more than liberty or death, or autonomy for Macedonia and its residents, the petitioners...talked about the MRO’s [Macedonian Revolutionary Organization] pursuit of the hardware of killing and self-defense,” making clear that the capacity for violence held significant importance in the strategies of the insurgents.¹²⁸ To this point, Brown quotes a Macedonian historian, Ivan Katardziev, who argues that “[w]eapons had a magical power in the revolutionary mobilization of the village masses. They were tangible proof of the possibility that the goals of the organization would be realized, and provided a sense of security in the eyes of a disempowered population.”¹²⁹ So, while ethno-nationalist ideals served as a basis for forming and motivating the insurgent groups working in Macedonia, it was the actual capability to enact violence, both in an offensive capacity and in self-defense, that made both the insurgents and the regular people of Macedonia more secure in their ability to resist the Ottoman state. Thus, the small arms made available through the secondary surplus market were a requirement for the solidification of nationalist ideals and the implementation of parallel state structures. Without weapons, the ethno-nationalist movements would have been unable to sustain themselves and the populations they were trying to capture.

The Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire were prohibited from owning and carrying arms, further compounding the problems caused by the Ottoman inability to counter smuggling operations.¹³⁰ By driving

128 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 145.

129 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 146.

130 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 146.

traders underground into black markets, traders were more than happy to deal in illicit goods, such as small arms, because they were breaking the law anyway and the trade was highly profitable. The two groups, smugglers and insurgents, then became somewhat loosely united against the Ottomans in their struggle to resist the hardening of the frontiers, as the Christian insurgents also simply accepted that they were in violation of the law and felt that the arms they were procuring gave them the ability to contest the question of whether or not they were supposed to have access to such weapons much more effectively than before. Ottoman gendarmes and field guards were often killed by insurgents who then stripped them of their rifles and ammunition, a testament to the ineffectiveness of Ottoman control strategies in Macedonia and the increased capacity for violence among insurgents. British vice consul James McGregor indicated in a report that “the general impression is that a well-disciplined organization exists which already possesses at least 40,000 rifles...and also a considerable amount of ammunition,” which gives an idea of the emphasis placed on arms procurement by insurgent organizations.¹³¹ Even when the Ottomans attempted to collect weapons under amnesty periods, mass non-compliance was usually the end result and those firearms that were turned in were “‘old and worthless’ and represented less than 10 percent of total still held by the organization.”¹³²

131 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 147.

132 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 147.

The diversity of arms was also noted by an officer at the French consulate, matching well with the wide variety of sources that the primary surplus arms trade involved. The consulate official, Max Choublin, notes that of firearms seized by the Ottomans “1,416 ‘old Russian’; 120 Gras; 92 Martinis; 41 Mannlichers; 18 ‘Turk’ [*sic*]; and 25 Snyders [*sic*]” meaning that many of the sources of small arms for the military needs of Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria also happened to be where insurgent weapons were coming from.¹³³ In fact, Brown discusses this fact when talking about the Russian rifles seized by the Ottomans. The rifles were likely Berdan and Krnka rifles that had been supplied to Bulgaria by Russia, and when the Bulgarians began purchasing Mannlichers, they emptied out their old stocks and made use of the Russian surplus by passing it on to insurgents in Macedonia that were sympathetic to the Bulgarian cause. The presence of Mannlichers in the number of rifles seized also points to this Bulgarian-insurgent connection where the state was often a major supplier of weapons as a means of exerting influence in Ottoman Macedonia.¹³⁴ The Ottomans claimed that such connections were evidence of external interference in Ottoman domestic affairs and that the interference was the primary driver of violence, instability, and decreased Ottoman control in Macedonia.¹³⁵ Though the Bulgarian state was heavily involved in the trade, it was incumbent upon individuals, such as Iljo Lokardev and his father, to travel to Bulgaria to purchase rifles and smuggle them into Macedonia. Lokardev

133 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 147.

134 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 148.

135 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 168.

recalled going to Bulgaria to buy 350 rifles for the insurgent leader, and former Bulgarian military officer, Boris Sarafov. While supplying the Macedonian insurgents with their older rifles gave the Bulgarians the ability to make room for more modern weapons, Brown also argues that providing arms to the insurgents had “symbolic effects as well as practical, insofar as it contributed to the impression that the MRO was simply an extension of Bulgarian state policy,” thereby linking the rifle to the ideals represented by the power of the rifle.¹³⁶

Private intermediaries took advantage of the burgeoning arms trade between Bulgaria and the Macedonian Slavs. Some, such as Naum Tufekchiev, were hardliners of the Macedonian cause and were willing to take significant risks to see the region liberated from the Ottomans. Tufekchiev was personally involved in two assassinations of Bulgarian officials, the first of which took place in 1892 which saw Bulgaria’s ambassador to Constantinople, Georgi Valkovich killed, while the second took the life of Stefan Stambolov, the Minister President of Bulgaria.¹³⁷ The killing of Stambolov in 1895 was one of the first major operations of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and was one of the factors that caused division between the Macedonian and Bulgarian movements. Tufekchiev also urged the Slavic Macedonian organizations to take up arms and became, along with the Ivanov brothers, the primary arms supplier for the Macedonian movement. They worked with Boris Sarafov, a prominent

¹³⁶ Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 148-149.

¹³⁷ Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 184-185.

member of the External Macedonian Organization in Sofia, to provide increasing numbers of small arms to the Macedonian revolutionaries.¹³⁸ The Ivanov brothers not only sold weapons to the revolutionaries, but donated large sums of money and sometimes even the rifles themselves in support of the cause. In one case, they simply handed over 100 Snider rifles to Macedonian insurgents, and in another case, they gave rifles to insurgent-affiliated rifle clubs that helped to train future revolutionaries.¹³⁹

The Tufekchiev-Ivanov concern procured thousands of old Bulgarian rifles from the Bulgarian Minister of War in 1896, amounting to 14,800 rifles and 24,000 carbines. The Ottomans became aware of this deal and lodged a complaint with the Bulgarian government, but the Bulgarians replied that they had no use for the Krnka and Berdan rifles as they had recently replaced them with Mannlichers and, as such, were free to do with them as they pleased. The Ivanovs then reportedly sold the rifles for six francs each, barring Muslims from purchasing and selling rifles to Christians from majority Muslim villages at cut-rate prices.¹⁴⁰

While the Ottoman government was determined to restrict arms shipments to the insurgents, there was very little actual capability or desire on the part of the men charged with such duties. Border guards almost refused entirely to interdict arms shipments at night, allowing huge quantities of firearms to enter Macedonia essentially unchallenged. The Ivanov's business model was well suited to their clientele because the rifles

138 Öztan, "Tools of Revolution," 186.

139 Öztan, "Tools of Revolution," 187.

140 Öztan, "Tools of Revolution," 190.

they provided had already been cleaned and repaired in Ivanov-owned workshops and were then offered at good prices. In just ten months, under the supervision of Sarafov, the Ivanovs and other arms dealers supplied “10,000 Krnka and 1,100 Mannlicher rifles, more than 1,000 revolvers and 1.5 million cartridges to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization,” while the Ottomans only uncovered the occasional stockpile of a couple hundred rifles.¹⁴¹

It was not just Bulgaria that was a source of arms, though, as individuals affiliated with insurgent organizations also traveled to Greece to purchase weapons, as evidenced by the presence of Gras rifles in the stockpiles of the insurgents. The Greeks adopted the French Gras in 1874 and then replaced them when they adopted Mannlicher rifles in 1894. Here a similar dynamic to the Bulgarian source played out, where Gras rifles were surplussed as the Greeks adopted more modern rifles. In contrast to the Bulgarian case, however, the Greek government was not friendly to the smugglers who were traveling into Greece to purchase rifles for the insurgents.¹⁴² As such, it was often the case that Slavic insurgent sympathizers who could speak Greek without an accent traveled to Greece on the pretense of purchasing weapons for Greek paramilitary organizations in Ottoman Macedonia, which the Greek government was more than happy to provide for.¹⁴³ This dynamic exemplifies the many challenges of state-building in and around Ottoman Macedonia. It was essentially impossible to

141 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 191-192.

142 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 151.

143 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 181.

determine who belonged to what group and so, at least in the Greek case, restrictions on who arms could be sold to were nearly impossible to enforce. Additionally, the trade demonstrates that even along official trade routes, detection of smugglers was very difficult, emphasizing the frontier-nature of state boundaries at this time in the Balkans.

The trade in Greek rifles was closely linked to charcoal trade and the smugglers typically followed the historically established routes of migrant workers as they were often migrant workers themselves who were purchasing rifles both for their own use and to supply insurgents at the behest of insurgent organizations. The Gras rifles were bought from local Greek and Jewish businessmen, and brought into Macedonia singly or in pairs, buried in loads of charcoal. Though an important source of rifles, Brown argues that these were also mostly devoid of ideological considerations, in large part because the rifles were being bought often for personal use or other community members, but also because there was not any implied attachment to a specific state entity. This means of weapons procurement did carry its own, perhaps more existential, risks as weapons traffickers were targeted in Ottoman raids and charcoal workers were, in some cases, massacred by Greek paramilitary groups who hoped to stem the flow of weapons to their Slavic opponents.¹⁴⁴

The last common source of small arms for insurgents were the Ottomans themselves. In some cases the weapons were bought directly

144 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 151-152.

from Ottoman gendarmes or even local Muslims who, unlike their Christian counterparts, were not typically prohibited from owning firearms. In other cases, insurgents raided Ottoman warehouses for weapons.¹⁴⁵ Enterprising Ottoman soldiers would be paid by insurgents to bring rifles to the insurgents, as Brown notes: “we paid 5-6 liras each, and every 10-15 days he [the Ottoman soldier] brought one, with ammunition, and left them at Miše Dimov’s stables.”¹⁴⁶ This arrangement was preferred early on in the procurement process for insurgent organizations as it raised less suspicion and identified pliable government officials and soldiers. Brown also asserts that there were several other advantages in that “it created highly efficient and virtually unbreakable circuits of arms trading. The rifles concerned crossed the borders of Macedonia without any risk to the organization’s personnel. And because the final transaction was illegal, the risk of the Turk or Albanian betraying the organization to the authorities was low.”¹⁴⁷ The trade with Turks and Albanians truly exposes the impossibility of the Ottoman situation in Macedonia. The inability to control the flow of weapons, which proved to be incredibly powerful both symbolically and physically, was massively detrimental to Ottoman control. The frontiers of Ottoman Europe proved to be a major leak in the sinking ship of the Ottoman Empire and the large numbers of weapons that crossed the

145 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 153; Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 182.

146 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 153.

147 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 153.

frontiers with relative ease empowered the insurgencies and built upon the foundations of nationalist ideals set out by the schools and Churches.

The open defiance of the insurgents in openly brandishing their rifles further strengthened both their legitimacy, as they often seemed untouchable by the Ottoman military, and the national ideals they represented. Thus, the rifles became symbolic themselves, being tangible representatives of rebellion, thereby empowering the villagers that purchased them.¹⁴⁸ Taxation, then, also became a legitimate institution among insurgent-sympathizers as they physically benefited from their own tax money through the purchasing of firearms. So not only did the rifles give the insurgents increased tactical capability, but increased stock amongst the people they were competing for, because, likely for the first time in their lives, the people of Ottoman Macedonia began to have control over their own lives, and it was the insurgents, and the rifles they carried and procured, that gave them that control. Öztan argues that during this period of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the Ottoman Balkans became a “gun society,” ultimately marking firearm ownership as an essential element to the Balkan identity during this period.¹⁴⁹ For the Ottoman Empire’s part, they were primarily concerned about the physical effects of increased ownership of modern rifles on their Balkan communities. Essentially, the Ottomans were engaged in an expensive arms race with the insurgents themselves as the revolutionaries were emboldened by their new

148 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 156-157.

149 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 193.

rifles “to engage in battles that ‘could last a day or more, with extended exchanges of rifle fire.’”¹⁵⁰ Such capacities for violence, and the difficult terrain of the Balkans, drained Ottoman morale as indicated by an Ottoman officer who said that “ten battalions would not suffice to capture 100 men,” a dismal assessment of the Ottoman position in Macedonia.¹⁵¹

Though civilian access to arms gave Macedonians, especially Macedonian Slavs, significantly greater freedom in their interactions with the Ottoman state, the violence enacted with those firearms was controlled by the insurgent groups. Brown asserts that this was done “in particular, to manage the single largest potential source of deadly confrontations, tensions between armed Albanian representatives of Ottoman rule and the organization’s adherents—and to build instead the potential capacity for violence, to be unleashed only on command,” which is supported by the fact that it was only when insurgents ordered that arms be bought that civilians went out to buy them and those arms, unlike the ones that the insurgents carried with them at all times, were kept in caches that were accessed only in emergencies.¹⁵² Therefore, the control of arms was as much about the legitimacy of the insurgents and the ethno-national ideas they represented, as it was about the management of communal violence in Macedonia.

1893-1908: The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, the Ilinden Uprising, and the Macedonian Insurgency

150 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 194.

151 Öztan, “Tools of Revolution,” 194.

152 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 168.

“⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”

- 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 (ESV)

The end result of the wide availability of small arms caused by international and regional arms races was the rise of organized armed groups in and around Ottoman Macedonia. The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization served as the primary vehicle of Bulgarian, but also Slavic, ethno-national ideals. Founded in 1893, the Organization was initially a highly secretive group consisting of six men that envisioned an autonomous Macedonia and adopted a slogan popularized in the 1876 Bulgarian uprisings: “Liberty or Death.”¹⁵³ The members of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization sought first and foremost to have the Christian provinces of Ottoman Europe be granted autonomy by the Ottoman Empire as prescribed by the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, making clear the long and politically motivating effects of the Treaty. The Organization also diverged from the Bulgarian Exarchate in that the Exarch Josif, head of the Bulgarian Exarchate, “asserted in 1903 that ‘revolution will not rescue Macedonia, only evolution and education,’” indicating that the two primary Bulgarian factions were those that adopted what Brown calls the “‘evolutionist’ approach,” and those who, like the members of the

¹⁵³ Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 70.

Organization, were revolutionaries.¹⁵⁴ The revolutionaries were typically younger, represented by students, teachers who traveled into Macedonia, and professionals motivated by the language of liberty and freedom from Ottoman oppression.¹⁵⁵

The original members of the Organization, Dame Gruev, Andon Dimitrov, Ivan Hadzhinikolov, Hristo Tatarchev, Petar Poparsov, and Hristo Batandziev, hoped to create a revolutionary organization that would prepare and enable the Macedonian people to rebel against Ottoman rule. One of the best remembered members of this early group, Dame Gruev, was a college-educated school teacher in Macedonia and was politically motivated by the earlier revolutionary movements in the Balkans. Gruev sought to bring revolution to Macedonia and, in an 1894 meeting of the Organization that involved an expanded group of Macedonians, it was agreed that teachers would be essential elements of the revolution. However, at this same meeting, the Organization agreed that these teachers had to be kept independent from the primarily Exarchate-run schools of Macedonia, and, as such, would infiltrate Macedonian schools, rather than collaborate with the Bulgarian Church, in order to remain free of Bulgarian interference.¹⁵⁶ The period of 1894-1897 was spent organizing and growing the influence of the organization among Macedonian Christians in the towns

154 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 24.

155 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 24.

156 Victor Sinadinovski, 2017. *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*. Abbotsford: Pollitecon Publishing, 25-26.

and villages of Macedonia who were eager to throw off the Ottoman yoke after what they considered to be five hundred years of tyranny.¹⁵⁷

The Organization's roots and ideals were embodied by its oathing process, which was administered typically by a committee leader or teacher, though priests were preferred, and taken on a Bible, a dagger, and a revolver, demonstrating both the Christian and militant elements of the Organization, especially in its early years.¹⁵⁸ Brown argues that the "oathing in" process was distorted by outside observers to appear reliant upon the Bulgarian Exarchate and their teachers and, thus, the Bulgarian government's nationalist designs. The process, however, actually represented the fractious nature of the Macedonian revolutionary movements, where some Macedonians, typically the "evolutionists," saw themselves as "Bulgarians-in-waiting," and as such, held views that were consistent with the Exarchate's desires to absorb the Slavic population of Macedonia.¹⁵⁹ The "revolutionists," Brown asserts, saw the evolutionary process of becoming Bulgarian at the behest of the Exarchate "as promising only a new set of exploitative external rulers over Macedonia's population," indicating the early fractures were not only based on freedom from the Ottomans, but freedom from Bulgaria for nationalist-minded Macedonians.¹⁶⁰ Competition between the Bulgarian Exarchate and the

157 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 27.

158 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 27; Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 74, 81.

159 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 76.

160 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 76.

Macedonian revolutionaries often expressed itself more openly than just the oath-taking process as well. In one case, “a Bulgarian Exarchist school teacher...who had advised villagers not to pay the dues demanded by the Macedonian committee, was “literally cut up [*sic*] to pieces by four young Bulgarians from 18 to 20 years of age sent for the purpose from Perlepe [Prilep].”¹⁶¹ Clearly, violence was not reserved just for the Ottomans, but for community members who did not adhere to the requirements of the Organization, thereby marking violence as a key enforcement tool for hardening the Macedonian identity.

Violence against non-conformers is exemplified by another incident related by Brown where the Ottomans had sought to recruit a force of Christian gendarmes to police the Christian communities and “[t]he only Christian, apparently, who braved the threats of the committee and sent in an application was a man of Lopotnitsa [*sic*; Lopatica]...and he was found three days later...floating in the river with his throat cut and a paper fastened to his coat, bearing the inscription ‘the fate of those who would serve the Turks.’”¹⁶² As such, collaborators of any kind that went against the commands of the Organization were subject to violence. The oath, then, Brown argues, was “a boundary-making mechanism of a different order and scope from any of the devices employed by the different expansionist national movements. The oath demarcated a terminal community constituted not by primordial sentiment, but by self assertion.”¹⁶³ Therefore,

161 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 76.

162 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 2.

163 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 76.

the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization had no need for the historical claims on territory expressed by the Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians, because they created a new community through violence and oath-taking that formed the basis for the Macedonian nation. The violence also bound participants to the organization in much the same way dealing with arms smugglers did. Because the activity was illegal and sought to subvert the state, secrecy was an essential element to the survival of the Organization, thus implying strict obedience and adherence to the hierarchical structure of the Organization.¹⁶⁴ Such obedience and adherence, then, functioned as both participation in the building of parallel state structures and the weakening of Ottoman control as more and more of the Slavic Macedonian population became bound to the Organization through subversive activities.

The development of the Macedonian identity was an iterative process, but was broadly controlled by the leaders of the Organization. In 1897, the leaders laid out five principal goals for the Organization to achieve: “first, to organize Macedonia into an autonomous state; second, to mold the organization into a people’s movement that would be prepared for a revolution; third, to give IMRO membership solely to those who resided in Macedonia, a concept defined as internalism; fourth, to struggle for substantial improvement of economic and political conditions in Macedonia; and finally, to preserve its own independence as a fighting organization.”¹⁶⁵

164 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 79.

165 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 29.

In these five points it is evident that independence, both territorial and ideological, are of utmost importance, and that the leaders of the Organization associated that independence with its armed struggle and fighting. Though the goals of the Organization were fairly political and high-minded, some contemporary observers argued that there was a distinct difference between the revolutionaries' ideals and the common Macedonian's understanding of them. For instance, Edith Durham asserted that to the average Macedonian, "liberty meant revenge: 'They were to have had no taxes to pay, and would be allowed to carry guns and shoot Turks. This was their only idea of liberty...'"¹⁶⁶ In this way, local customs, such as the "blood-feud system," bled into the ideological aspects of the revolution.¹⁶⁷

The blood-feud system is an intricate means of conflict resolution and a potential social arena for the development of ethno-national identities. Brown discusses the concept in the context of Slav and Albanian interaction, but it also speaks to the importance of revenge in the context of the IMRO's struggle for control over its narrative and goals, especially because Albanians were often seen as part and parcel of Ottoman oppression in the Ottoman Balkans. Albanians were "tax collectors, gendarmes, or field guards, while retaining their sense of autonomy and their license to raid their Albanian and non-Albanian neighbors," thereby serving as appendages of the Ottoman state apparatus, despite their

¹⁶⁶ Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 163.

general indifference toward Ottoman authority.¹⁶⁸ The highly prescribed nature of the blood-feud served as a cultural touchpoint for the Organization's relationships with non-Slav and non-Macedonian entities in Macedonia, at least in the early years, as broader and more open forms of violence became commonplace in the run-up to and during the period of heightened insurgency.

The Organization also mediated this tension with alternative conceptions of liberty by directing such energies into the broader ideals of avenging the centuries-old wrongs of the Ottoman Empire. In some cases, the criminal aspect of the Organization also allowed for the absorption of societal malcontents in a form of social mediation. Some insurgents were already criminals, having carried out extrajudicial killings of Ottoman soldiers, gendarmes, or field guards, and, as such, chose to become revolutionaries rather than be executed by the Ottomans. To the Organization, this was a perfectly reasonable course to take to join the insurgency and a natural means of redirecting uncontrolled violence into the highly organized methods of violence of the Organization. For example, one IMRO insurgent interviewed by H.N. Brailsford spoke of burning ten Ottoman soldiers alive after drugging them. Brailsford "'tried to suggest that such reprisals were a mistake, since they alienate the sympathies of Europe. He [the IMRO insurgent] replied that by murdering ten men who richly deserved it, he had obtained ten rifles for the cause of liberty,'"

168 Brown, *Loyal Unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*, 158-159.

demonstrating in just a few short words the nature of the violence, the importance of the concept of liberty when contrasted with considerations of the outside observers, and the vitality of rifles in the carrying out of the struggle.¹⁶⁹

In its mission to establish parallel state structures, the IMRO developed a court system that mediated local disputes and served justice in ways that the Ottomans could not or would not.¹⁷⁰ This hearing and carrying out of judgment was partly the work of the *chetas*, or professional revolutionary bands, that roamed the mountains and villages of Macedonia to patrol and protect the IMRO's territorial claims from the excesses of the Ottomans and their paramilitaries. Arthur Douglas Howden Smith relates the process of one of these meetings, giving an idea of the way they were carried out:

On the next morning, many men came in from the outlying farms to see the voivode [the leader of the *cheta*]. They sat in a circle on the gallery, hidden from spies by curtains, and talked for hours. Man after man got up and spoke, and then listened gravely to Mileff's reply... Some of them had grievances to report, of one kind or another. Some had requests to make, or suggestions, or complained about their neighbours; every man, in his turn, stood up and made orderly speech, in a distinctly disorderly manner. For Mileff was holding nothing less than a court of justice—he, an outlaw, proscribed and hunted, with a price upon his head. Instead of going to the recognized rulers of the land, to whom they paid their regular taxes, these men preferred to go to the revolutionary voivode and pay an additional tax, in order to make possible his organisation.¹⁷¹

169 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 31.

170 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 34.

171 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 108-109

In this way, the insurgents earned trust with the communities they claimed to represent, assumed roles typically held by government officials, and adjusted their plans to meet the needs of their constituents. These courts often also had far more rapid resolutions than appealing to the Ottoman authorities would have had and the villagers who brought complaints were treated equally, giving Organization members the sense that the extra money they paid in taxes to the IMRO were actually going to their benefit, rather than into the pockets of some corrupt administrator. The *chetas* and the courts they held gave the average Macedonian a real and tangible connection with the IMRO's governing structure. As members of the IMRO, Macedonians were citizens who participated in the expansion and strengthening of their own national identities and futures, while under Ottoman rule they were merely subjects beholden to the whims of petty administrators, brigands, and the all-powerful Sultan.

While the IMRO ultimately held control over the use of violence, the meetings of village headmen with the *cheta* leaders could dictate the mission, tempo, and intensity of violence on the ground. In the same meeting that Smith's *cheta* leader heard the smaller complaints of the local leaders, the village chiefs also brought to Mileff a matter that required the attention of the professional revolutionaries. According to Smith, after the villagers had reported on their villages' militia strength and the number of rifles and amount of ammunition they had available, the headmen reported that a "squad of Bashi-bazouks [Turkish or Muslim paramilitary members],

eight strong, had ridden down to the village and requisitioned twenty head of horses and cattle. When the headmen had protested, the Bashi-bazouks laughed at and insulted them...As a result, the villagers were in fear of their lives. They appealed to the chetniks for aid.”¹⁷² A plan was then devised to eliminate the bandits that had been preying upon the villagers for more than a year. Mileff, who from Smith’s account was a learned and well-traveled man, determined that the *cheta*, along with fifteen village militiamen, would assault the hideout of the Bashi-bazouks in the night. Once they reached the building in the village of Osikovo in which the Bashi-bazouks were based, a militiaman attempted to gain entry by speaking in Turkish and telling the guard that he was a friend. When the guard became suspicious, Mileff ordered his troops forward with the cry of ““Viva Makedonia!”” and they shot the lock off of the front gate. A fierce firefight broke out and some of the Macedonians managed to get inside the house, but they soon decided to burn the Bashi-bazouks out instead by setting the house alight. The men refused to leave the home and, as such, were burnt alive inside of it while the insurgents watched.¹⁷³ Such was the nature of the fighting in Ottoman Macedonia, to which Smith had to say:

Looking back, coldly, it seems a monstrous cruel thing to do—this roasting alive of half-a-dozen men. It is difficult to believe that it could have happened in this so-called enlightened twentieth century...But, after all, it could not have been helped. It was the quickest and cheapest way to get rid of a nest of vermin that had been terrorising

172 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 110.

173 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 127-131.

the country-side,--thieves, murderers, and women-stealers every one of them. It does not do to fight Turks in a half-hearted way.¹⁷⁴

From this episode, it becomes clear that the *chetas* operated as a rapid reaction force that could respond to the needs of the Macedonians much faster than the Ottomans could, if the Ottomans ever decided to do so. Thus, the violence enacted by the *chetas*, with assistance from the village militias, proved to be a key element in legitimizing the court system developed by the IMRO by meteing out direct justice to address the grievances of the local populace.

However, Smith's experiences occurred during the height of the Macedonian insurgency following the Ilinden Uprising and, therefore, must be put into context by explaining how hostilities became more general and antagonistic as a result of the Uprising's failure. The Ilinden Uprising was the culmination of several years of preparation by the Organization, but also the factionalization of the Bulgarian-Macedonian movement. The Bulgarian Exarchate was aware of the revolutionary activities of the IMRO and its attempts to infiltrate the Bulgarian school system in Macedonia, which they saw as antithetical to the goals of the Exarchate and the Bulgarian state. In 1897, the Exarchate attempted to purge its Macedonian Churches and schools of IMRO influence, denouncing the Organization's operatives as socialists in hopes of appealing to the wealthier Macedonians that were sympathetic to the Bulgarian cause.¹⁷⁵ In the same year, the Ottomans also

174 Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, 130.

175 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 39.

became aware of the IMRO's existence through an investigation into the death of a Turkish landowner who was killed by IMRO insurgents. The villagers of Vinica, the village where the murder had taken place, suffered greatly during the investigation from mass arrests, torture, and sexual violence. Ultimately, Ottoman troops uncovered a major arms cache, revealing the broader conspiracy of the IMRO.¹⁷⁶

To compound the IMRO's issues with the Exarchate and the Ottomans, the Bulgarian state formed an alternative organization that Prince Ferdinand deemed to be more controllable and in-line with the interests of Bulgaria. The Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee, or the External Organization, was formed in 1895 and made up of Macedonians living in Bulgaria. Bulgarian nationalists hoped that the External Organization would supersede the Internal Organization and secure a future for the Bulgarian state in Macedonia. Ivan Hadzhinikolov organized an 1895 cooperation agreement between the IMRO and SMAC with Trajko Kitanchev, a Macedonian nationalist among the ranks of the SMAC, that secured the IMRO's independence from the External Organization.¹⁷⁷ Kitanchev vowed to support the IMRO and to that end organized an arms transfer through Naum Tufekchiev for 4,000 rifles and several explosives and cases of ammunition. However, Kitanchev died in late 1895 and was replaced by Bulgarian General Danail Nikolaev, who

¹⁷⁶ Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 39-40.

¹⁷⁷ Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 49-50.

began to transform the External Organization into an instrument of the Bulgarian state. In response, Tufekchiev formed the Macedonian Committee which the External Organization was only able to rein in with promise that military operations to liberate Macedonia were in the near future of the External Organization. In the midst of these disputes, armed groups were being sent into Macedonia by Boris Sarafov, a Bulgarian military officer. One group of sixty men, led by Sarafov himself, stormed the town of Melnik and burned the government buildings while killing or capturing as many as fifty Ottoman troops before being forced to retreat.¹⁷⁸

The IRMO-SMAC relationship continued to deteriorate after General Nikolaev declared to Goce Delchev, a former Bulgarian military cadet who represented the IRMO in Sofia, that the IMRO should submit to Bulgarian and SMAC rule and would only be useful for propaganda purposes because the peasants that made up the ranks of the IMRO would not be capable of liberating Macedonia. Delchev rebuked this assertion based on his view that “Macedonia and its movement belonged only to the Macedonians. He said that ‘whoever hankers after, and works for unification with Bulgaria and Greece may consider himself a good Bulgar or Greek, but not a good Macedonian.’”¹⁷⁹ This dispute defines the major break between Bulgaria and the IMRO, as well as the defining of the Macedonian nation that separated Macedonians from Bulgarians. Interference from outsiders, specifically

178 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 50-52.

179 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 52.

those aligned with the Bulgarian government, became a major concern for the IMRO. However, the IMRO successfully diminished the influence of the External Organization and by 1898 was in a position to select its head. The soldier Sarafov was put forward to lead the External Organization and by 1899 a training center for Macedonian insurgents was established under his command. However, Sarafov quickly began to subvert the ideals of the IMRO, paying his men large wages to help them purchase luxury items, much to the chagrin of the IMRO leadership.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, the Bulgarian state formed two organizations, the Brotherhood of Mercy and the Revolutionary Brotherhood, that sought to compete with and subvert the IMRO, but were unsuccessful in doing so and in 1900 were forced to merge with the IMRO. The Organization's leaders were split on the meaning of the merger as some saw it as disastrous because it allowed Bulgarian agents into the ranks of the IMRO, while others hoped that it would end the factionalization of the Macedonian cause. With the absorption of the Brotherhood of Mercy and the Revolutionary Brotherhood into the IMRO, the Bulgarian military moved to gain influence over the SMAC. This move failed as Sarafov had a falling out with the Bulgarian, General Tsonchev, who had attempted to claim control of the SMAC.¹⁸¹

Most of the leaders of the Organization were arrested in the Summer of 1900, throwing the higher levels of command into disarray. In 1901,

180 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 55.

181 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 56-57.

Hristo Tatarchev was arrested by Ottoman authorities with letters ordering the assassination of a traitor to the Organization. He was charged with “Organizing a revolutionary force against the Ottoman Government, with the object of establishing in Macedonia an autonomous government or bringing about the annexation of the country to Bulgaria, by inducing the inhabitants to join the Macedonian Committee, supplying them with arms, and stirring up their mind,” indicating that the Ottomans knew of the IMRO, but were uncertain as to whether or not the Organization was beholden to the Bulgarian state.¹⁸² This arrest, along with the uncovering of another IMRO cell planning to start an uprising in April 1901 and the arrest of hundreds of rebels as a result of Ottoman infiltration, put the IMRO in bad shape at the start of the 20th Century.¹⁸³ The Bulgarian General Tsonchev appeared again at the head of the SMAC and sent Bulgarian insurgents to disrupt the IMRO’s operations in Macedonia. At the 10th SMAC Congress in 1902, Tsonchev approved the starting of a revolution in Macedonia under the SMAC’s flag, attempting to supersede the IMRO’s plans. A Bulgarian Colonel, Atanas Jankov, arrived in Macedonia to carry out Tsonchev’s orders, but local IMRO-aligned Macedonians attacked Jankov’s group, driving Jankov out of Macedonia and absorbing his men into the IMRO’s bands.¹⁸⁴

182 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 42.

183 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 42-43.

184 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 65.

In spite of these setbacks, the IMRO's influence was still growing. Greek reports stated that all but 130 villages in Macedonia had allied themselves with the IMRO by 1902.¹⁸⁵ Looking to make use of their strength, the Organization increased the intensity of their guerilla actions in the years following their discovery. During the Summer of 1902, an IMRO contingent attacked a Turkish formation of approximately 2,000 men near Bitola, reportedly killing 148 and wounding 216, though all sixty of the insurgents were killed either during the 16-hour exchange or were executed afterward.¹⁸⁶ Albert Sonnichsen, an American who traveled to Macedonia to join with an IMRO *cheta* observed that “[b]y now it must be evident that the ‘Macedonian-Adrianopolitan Interior Revolutionary Organization’ had outgrown its name, that it had become, in fact, a provisional system of government established by the Macedonian peasantry to replace Turkish anarchy,” demonstrating the effectiveness of the Organization in its construction of parallel state structures in the period between 1893 and 1903.¹⁸⁷

It was within this context of internal strife, division, and subversion that the Ilinden Uprising of 1903 came about. The SMAC's constant agitation for revolution was opposed by a handful of leaders who argued that the IMRO was still unprepared and needed more weapons, supplies, and time to train. Those that supported the idea of a 1903 revolution were

185 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 42-43.

186 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 44-45.

187 Sonnichsen, *Confessions of a Macedonian Bandit*, 108.

agitated by the recent Ottoman successes and seeming deterioration of the Organization as a result.¹⁸⁸ Delchev, one of the major opponents of early revolution and the co-optation of the IMRO by the External Organization, was killed during a battle in the town of Banitza where twenty insurgents were surrounded by approximately 1,000 Ottoman troops. With him, died the last of the resistance to the 1903 uprising.¹⁸⁹ Beginning on 2 August 1903, the Macedonians initially had some success. As many as 26,000 Macedonians took up arms against 350,000 Ottomans, with the IMRO committing as many as 15,000 fighters.¹⁹⁰ Three Ottoman battalions engaged 1,000 insurgents near the town of Bitola and were driven back, taking more than 200 casualties; in other battles, the Ottomans retreated from their positions in Kosinets, Zagorichani, Nestram, Rula, and Gabresh. The most important success, however, was in Krushevo, where the Macedonians captured the town, seized the Ottoman barracks, rebuffed an Ottoman counterattack, and raised a flag emblazoned with “Freedom or Death,” over the town to proclaim a republic.¹⁹¹ The republic was short-lived as 18,000 Ottoman troops descended on the town on 12 August and swept the insurgents’ defenses away, killing approximately 100 civilians and

188 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 86.

189 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 92-93.

190 Brailsford, H.N., Baron d’Estournelles de Constant, Samuel T. Dutton, M. Justin Godart, Francis W. Hirst, Paul Milioukov, Josef Redlich, and Walter Schucking. 1914. *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 34; Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 34.

191 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 99.

destroying 350 homes.¹⁹² Hundreds of Ottoman troops were killed in other engagements, but by the end of September the Ottomans began to recover and by 1904 the Uprising had been extinguished. The result of the Uprising was “200 villages ruined by Turkish vengeance, 12,000 houses burned, 3,000 women outraged, 4,700 inhabitants slain, and 71,000 without a roof.”¹⁹³ Demeter & Csaplar assert that approximately 70,000 Macedonians were left homeless by Ottoman reprisals and a further 30,000 became refugees.¹⁹⁴ The IMRO was significantly weakened and Macedonians began to turn to Serb, Bulgarian, and Greek insurgent groups for support as the Ottomans began to burn, rape, and pillage Macedonia in response to the insurgent activity.¹⁹⁵ The Macedonians remained thoroughly fractured following the disastrous failure of the Ilinden Uprising, but the experiences and lessons learned helped to sustain the insurgency for the next several years.

The Logic of Violence and the Macedonian Insurgency

After the defeat of the Uprising, Macedonians were forced to return to their normal daily lives, though rocked by the aftershocks of the Uprising’s violence. This communal experience of violence, according to Yosmaoğlu, was “a prerequisite to the politicization of communal difference.”¹⁹⁶ She

192 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 101.

193 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 34.

194 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 35.

195 Sinadinovski, *The Macedonian Resurrection: The Story of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization*, 103.

196 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 217.

goes on to assert that the violence enacted by both the Ottomans and the various insurgent groups “rendered impossible the option for individuals to remain bystanders by creating an atmosphere of inescapable terror...and... it made people aware of their ties to a larger community outside their immediate vicinity—they were now tied by blood to an imagined community.”¹⁹⁷ In much the same way Brown discusses the IMRO’s oathing process as a means of community building separate from the historical claims of the Serbians, Bulgarians, and Greeks, Yosmaoğlu sees violence as hardening this community; the members had all taken the oaths or served as part of the Organization and, following the Ilinden Uprising, they had suffered together at the hands of the Ottomans as a result of community action. Additionally, although the insurgents had been defeated in the field, violence remained a tool in their arsenal of social compliance within the Macedonian communities. For instance, Yosmaoğlu relates a story from 1906 where three men and a teenager had been killed because the three Greek Orthodox men had testified in court against a Bulgarian man and the teenager was delivering animals to them for their journey home. They had all been shot but were actually killed with knives and the head of one of the men had been severed and placed at his feet.¹⁹⁸ Thus, a message was sent not to cooperate with the Ottoman authorities, especially against Bulgarians. To this end, inter-communal violence became means of

¹⁹⁷ Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 217.

¹⁹⁸ Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 221.

hardening community boundaries in ways that drawing lines on maps could not.

Demeter & Csaplar identify three main vectors of inter-communal conflict in the period following the Ilinden Uprising. The first was religious conflict between Patriarchists and Exarchists, an extension of the competition between the Churches in the 1870s and 1880s. The next was religious conflict between Christians and Muslims, a broader manifestation of anti-Ottoman sentiments held by the Christian peoples of the Balkans, especially as the Ottomans encouraged Muslims to raid Christian villages. The third type of conflict that they identify is intra-Muslim conflict which, though an important social dynamic, generally falls outside of the scope of this paper. Demeter & Csaplar go on to assert that inter-communal conflicts were not always caused by ethno-religious hatred, but because communities were encouraged to form around ethnic and religious identities, conflict between communities appeared to outsiders to be solely ethnically or religiously motivated.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, while violence between Christian communities played a major role in defining the boundaries of Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian territories, religion quickly became peripheral to national identities. When *chetas* arrived in a village and asked about the national makeup of the inhabitants, priests would often respond that the village was Exarchist or Patriarchist, but the insurgents demanded to know if the people were Bulgarians, Serbs, or Greeks, indicating that the ethnic

199 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 39-40.

and national ideals superseded religion when it came to identity. In this way, violence, or the threat of violence, enforced norms surrounding the various national ideas, causing people to identify as one nationality or another to avoid violence, thereby being absorbed into the preferred nations of the insurgents. Of course, as had been the case before the Ilinden Uprising, identity remained fluid and often changed depending on which type of militant was in the village that day.²⁰⁰

According to Demeter & Csaplar, there were four large Bulgarian *chetas* and six smaller ones operating in Skopje Sanjak, while there were two small Muslim bands, and two larger and six small Serbian groups in the same area. Large bands are defined as having more than twenty-five members, meaning that, assuming that the smaller groups had eight to ten insurgents, there were at least 260-300 insurgents operating in the Skopje region.²⁰¹ When supplemented by locally organized militias, these professional insurgent groups often functioned as legitimate and formidable guerilla forces. Among these groups, Demeter & Csaplar identify three primary types based on their objectives: “*social* (revenge for local injustice), *economic* (from self-sustainment to weakening the economic basis of the enemy), or *political* (promoting national propaganda).”²⁰² The social group typically fell within the less professional bandit elements that were

200 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 44.

201 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 44.

202 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 48.

organized around community protection and the outlaw lifestyle. The second group, however, are what Demeter & Csaplar call “the real *entrepreneurs of violence*,” which falls in line with Yosmaoğlu’s “violent specialist” concept discussed below.²⁰³

These “entrepreneurs of violence,” alternatively described as “merchants of violence” by Demeter and Csaplar, were comprised of, according to Leon Trotsky, “some intellectuals, men of ideas, nationalist zealots, but these were isolated individuals. The rest were just, thugs, robbers, who had joined the army for the sake of loot.”²⁰⁴ As such, there were accordingly large numbers of membership in organizations, especially the IMRO, that sought to ward off the “violent specialists.” 35,000 IMRO members were documented in the Skopje Sanjak in 1906, which represented ten percent of the region’s population and twenty-five percent of the Exarchist population in Skopje. In that same period, approximately fifty-five percent of all insurgent groups operating in Macedonia held and promoted Bulgarian sentiments.²⁰⁵ Thus, while violence had the capability to cow populations into changing their identities, it also had the capability to strengthen it by uniting individuals under specific national causes. The end result was essentially a mass mobilization of the Macedonian populace that Yosmaoğlu asserts “was one with a built-in momentum, gaining traction

203 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 48.

204 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 52; 54.

205 Demeter & Csaplar-Degovics, *A Study in the Theory and Practice of Destabilization: Violence and Strategies of Survival in Ottoman Macedonia (1903-1913)*, 55.

from the multiple incentives present for opting into the armed struggle and the barriers making it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to remain a fence-sitter.”²⁰⁶ As such, although violence was not a desirable outcome for most Macedonians, the only other option was to become a victim of violence, giving violence, and its nation-building capabilities, a significant amount of momentum. One reason for joining the conflict, according to one Macedonian who served as an insurgent from 1903-1904 before turning himself in to the Ottomans, was the “fear that the soldiers [insurgents] who had arrived in the village would beat [us] up,” therefore, engaging in violence was not always a voluntary prospect and it was difficult to avoid.²⁰⁷

The function of violence as a tool of binding groups together and driving others apart denotes the broader capacity of violence as a force for nation-making. Yosmaoğlu argues that the human bodies produced by the violence became physical territorial markers and the killings “were shows of control meant to inspire fear among enemies and awe among supporters, deriving legitimacy through the sheer audacity of their commission,” thereby demonstrating the importance of violence to the building of state-like power among insurgent groups.²⁰⁸ In other words, the insurgents used the connection between the state and its monopoly on violence to make clear the boundaries of their control. Violence was a tool of communication,

206 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 255.

207 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 256.

208 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 222.

not the end in itself. It was instead designed to limit contact between ethnic groups and make the separated communities more self-reliant and wary of interacting with different ethnic communities. Yosmaoğlu asserts that this separation was “a significant (and necessary) element in the normalization of acts of violence against the separated ‘other’ because it served the very human need to put a distance between an individual and his or her deeds that might result in harm to another person,” essentially, the less contact ethnic groups had with each other, the more comfortable they were with enacting violence on each other, thereby further driving them apart.²⁰⁹

Such violence was carried out by “‘violent specialists,’” such as the armed insurgents, who used the tools available to them to force the Macedonian population into different ethnic categories.²¹⁰ She argues that these specialists “occupied a moral space separate from the rest of the members of society, just like the soldiers whose use of coercion was sanctioned and legitimized by the higher interests of the state,” and therefore connects the insurgents to the function of the state structure, marking both the insurgents and the violence enacted by them as important to state formation.²¹¹ Political violence became so common during this period that the authorities often attributed political motivations to unsolved crimes. A report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

209 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 233.

210 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 220.

211 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 234.

asserted that by the start of 1904, “the number of political assassinations in Macedonia had...reached an average of one hundred per month.”²¹²

Opportunists were therefore emboldened by the assumption that whatever crimes they committed would be subsumed by the everyday violence of the insurgency. Life became cheaper and the costs of crime were lowered because the violence of the insurgents was accepted as a legitimate enforcement mechanism when it was clear that the Ottoman state would only respond to the violence of the insurgents with violence against civilians. Constant low-level violence numbed participants and bystanders alike to the horrific nature of the insurgency and the Ottoman campaign to suppress it. Yosmaoğlu argues that this “desensitization should be seen as a context-specific deterioration of social norms rather than their general dissolution into a Hobbesian catastrophe,” meaning that the natural state of Macedonia was not constant violence, but that, following Ilinden, the consistency of violence made Macedonians aware both of their mortality and apparent lack of control over it, as armed men representing any faction could strip them of their lives in short order.²¹³ In this way, violence became an accepted fact of life, not just a political tool.

The larger, national-level consequences of violence of course had their roots in local-level violence, giving insurgent groups some level of legitimacy, at least as far as their own self-justification went. Insurgents,

212 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 32.

213 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 245-247.

such as Jane Sandansky, held the opinion that their actions were justified “because their authority stemmed from the will of the ‘people.’ The money and resources they ‘collected’ from the people were not exactions but ‘taxes.’ Likewise, there was nothing arbitrary about the summary executions they performed because they were the result of due deliberations and the just punishment for crimes committed by the perpetrators—not victims. In this regard, their moral logic was irreproachable.”²¹⁴ By taking how the insurgents viewed themselves into consideration, the continuation of violence even several years after Ilinden brings into focus its meaning beyond simply state creation. Yosmaoğlu asserts that Sandansky’s proclamation that “‘Yes! We are cruel and ferocious; without pity against informants and our enemies,’” was designed to make people fear the consequences of working with entities other than Sandansky and his men.²¹⁵ Sandansky goes on to say “[o]ften we punish not only the latter [his enemies], but also their wives, children and their sons to give an example to others, in case they want to follow the way of the condemned. Mercy! Forgiveness! These words are strange and unknown to us. We are without mercy. We have but one punishment, only one suffering for the guilty. Death! Death to the snitch! Death to the traitor! Death to all who give us trouble!”²¹⁶ Thus, violence existed as the ultimate acceptable

214 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 258.

215 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 258.

216 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 258-259.

response to transgressions. Not only were the transgressors to be killed, but their bloodline wiped out, giving violence and the bodies it produced a significant meaning tied directly to the system which the enactors of violence upheld. The refusal of taxation and the refusal of justice, both of which were considered refusals of the will of the people, were punishable by death, and it was the responsibility of the insurgents to carry out the sentence.

Attacks on migrant workers, who naturally had to cross ethnic boundaries to make their living, served to produce a sufficient numbers of bodies to send the proper message and constituted sufficient levels of control according to Yosmaoğlu:

One of these attacks occurred in December 1907, when a group of 125 workers, originally from Razlog and Nevrekop (Gotse Delchev) in the northeast part of the province, were on their way back home from Salonika. The group, accompanied by two gendarmes, was ambushed by a Greek band outside of the village of Limpsasa (Olimpiada) in the district of Cassandra...Twenty-five of the workers were killed, three were gravely injured, and three others were unaccounted for after the attack.²¹⁷

Such violence against impermanent inhabitants successfully delimited the places where certain ethnic groups could and could not go. Yosmaoğlu argues that the Greek insurgents were attempting to keep Greeks and Slavs from mixing as they had no capability to assert the Greek national idea in Slav-majority areas further North. Thus, “the fight was carried out in areas where the allegiance of the population could still be contested,” in essence

²¹⁷ Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 261.

marking the as of then ethnically unsettled frontiers as places of friction and conflict.²¹⁸ The territory came with the people and, as a result, competition for territory necessarily involved winning over or driving out populations because where the population could not be contested, neither could the territory without massive operations resulting in major population shifts. The end result was that violence, according to Yosmaoğlu, “*was* the most effective tool at the disposal of warring factions given the institutional parameters in which they were operating...participants in the insurgency had taken up weapons not only to fight against the Ottoman forces for abstract principles but also to establish their own territorial hegemony, which implied controlling the population that inhabited that territory, through force when necessary.”²¹⁹ Though the insurgent groups served as effective local agents and enforcers of national ideals, the movements were too fractured to capitalize on their local successes. Ultimately, the broader national goals of the insurgents that stemmed from their local perspectives gave way to state-aligned national ideals in the form of Serbian, Bulgarian, and Greek troops, diminishing the role of insurgents in the Ottoman Balkans.

1912-1913: The Balkan Wars

Following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, Muslim settlers from Bosnia and Herzegovina began moving into Macedonia in an effort made by

218 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 262.

219 Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, 263.

the Young Turks to assert Turkish control over Macedonia through a process called “Turkizing” by the International Commission into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars.²²⁰ Ethnically Bulgarian tenant farmers were dispossessed of their lands or expelled by the Ottoman authorities in order to make room for these immigrants. In hopes of curbing insurgent activity as a response to the injustices, the Young Turks enacted the “‘band’ law” in November of 1909 that made “the regular authorities of the villages, all the families where any member disappeared from his home, the whole population of any village harboring a *comitadji* [insurgent], responsible for all the deeds and words of the voluntary, irregular associations,” thereby using collective punishment of civilians to discourage Macedonians from again taking up arms.²²¹ In 1910, the Ottoman authorities began to search for weapons in Macedonian villages resulting in, according to a Bulgarian deputy, 1,853 individuals being assaulted, the executions and arrests of a further 3,060 Macedonians, and the displacement of another 4,060 people who either left for Bulgaria or moved deep into the mountains.²²²

1910, the authors of the International Commission argued, represented the end of any hopes for Macedonian autonomy. The only options were “dismemberment and partition,” as all of the regional powers had overlapping claims on Macedonian territory, so even if the Ottomans

220 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 36.

221 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 37.

222 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 37.

were to be pushed out of Macedonia and out of Europe, the Macedonians had no choice but to choose the side of Greece, Serbia, or Bulgaria.²²³ On 31 October 1911, the Organization “declared publicly that it assumed responsibility for all the attacks on and encounters with the Turkish army by the insurgents in this and the previous year, and for all other revolutionary manifestations,” demonstrating that although the situation for Macedonia was dire, the struggle against the Ottomans continued, even at a reduced capacity.²²⁴ However, because the ousting of the Ottomans from Europe required cooperation among the regional powers, and the regional powers all laid claim to some portion Macedonia, the Macedonian national idea would be left by the wayside so that the Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians, and Montenegrins could organize an assault against the Ottomans. The “Ottomanizing” policy of the Young Turks, the concept of assimilating all ethnicities in the empire into an Ottoman national idea, gave the regional powers enough reason to align themselves with each other.²²⁵ The Commission argued that it was the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 that motivated the Bulgarians to allow for territorial concessions in Macedonia to the Greeks in order to agree upon an alliance. In essence, the regional powers had become less concerned with gaining influence with Macedonians and more concerned about taking their territorial claims

223 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 37-38.

224 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 37.

225 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 42.

outright, thereby treating different regions of Macedonia as game pieces to be traded with other regional powers.²²⁶

An agreement was reached in early 1912 that determined the territories to be annexed by each country and approved by the Russians in the event of their success. Russian approval was also required to take action beyond the defensive measures of the treaty, meaning that the offensive organized by the Balkan countries had to have the implicit backing of the Russians, likely to avoid, in part, the diplomatic issues caused by the Bulgarian annexation of Eastern Rumelia. If offensive action did not come about, the goals of the alliance would be to promote Macedonian autonomy and “the ‘peaceful co-existence of the different nationalities in Turkey, on the basis of real and actual political equality and respect of rights accruing from treaties or otherwise conceded to the Christian nationalities of the Empire.’”²²⁷ As such, the regional powers gave themselves the ability to take offensive action against the Ottomans if those principles were violated in Macedonia, which, according to the regional powers’ views on the “Ottomanizing” policy of the Young Turk regime, conveniently were at that very moment being violated. In addition, an Albanian revolt against the Ottomans forced the Young Turks to grant autonomy to Albanians in Macedonia and Old Serbia, thereby threatening the territorial claims of the

226 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 43

227 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 46.

regional powers and, as the regional powers argued, the elimination of the Christian peoples of Macedonia.²²⁸

Ultimately, the Montenegrins declared war on the Ottomans on 9 October 1912, forcing the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbians to demand from the Ottomans the autonomy of Christians in Macedonia and its division into supervisory units to be controlled by each of the powers. The Ottomans refused and declared war instead. The Commission attributes three main causes to the outbreak of the First Balkan War, however, the third is of the most importance: “the consciousness of increased strength which alliance gave to the Balkan states, each with a national mission before it, namely, the protection of the men of its race and religion dwelling in Turkey, against the Ottomanization policy which threatened national existence.”²²⁹

Therefore, the Balkan states would have had difficulty allying themselves with each other had they not each had territorial claims on land within Macedonia. Their source of competition also became a means for their success in binding the Balkan states together against the Ottomans. As such, the violence and political intrigue of the Late 19th Century served to harden and define the national identities of Serbians, Bulgarians, and Greeks.

The rapid success of the First Balkan War in driving the Ottomans out of Europe quickly gave way to original competition. The Commission argues

²²⁸ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 46-47.

²²⁹ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 49.

that the only way the Second Balkan War could have been avoided would have been to force the Ottomans into an autonomy arrangement while they still held sovereignty over Macedonia. However, this solution, they assert, would have been only a temporary fix to the longer term problem of national identity. The Macedonians, including members of the Organization, felt that their efforts had finally been recognized and celebrated the arrival of the Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian troops, but this jubilation soon turned into enmity for the new occupiers. One newspaper claimed that the allies “in their blind chauvinism take no account of the national sentiments of the people temporarily subject to them,” while an editor’s letter asked “*Is this a war of liberation or a war of conquest?*” demonstrating the deterioration of the Macedonian condition once the war had started.²³⁰ It was in this moment also that the Greek and Serbian troops realized that the ethnic brothers they expected find in Macedonia did not really exist in the same sense in which they understood and so, while the idea of a latent Greek or Serbian Macedonia did not prove to be true, they determined that the Bulgarians had subverted their brethren and, as such, needed to rescue them from the clutches of Bulgaria. Those Macedonians who had turned to the Greeks or Serbians in the period following the Ilinden Uprising and the Serbian and Greek insurgents who had operated in Macedonia before the war, assisted the occupying armies in rooting out supposed subversive elements that espoused Bulgarian or Macedonian national ideals. Being that

230 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 50.

the invaders shared or came from nations that had cultivated national identities within Macedonia, those people who identified themselves with such national identities were more willing to extinguish the Macedonian movement than they were when under the control of the Ottomans.²³¹

The Bulgarian and revolutionary elements of Macedonian nationalism were severely weakened and nearly destroyed by the Serbian and Greek occupations in the First Balkan War. Rather than suffer the many years of waiting and constant violence for the Macedonian national identity to burst forth, as had been the hope of the revolutionaries and those loyal to them, the people of Macedonia were willing to submit to whatever regional power occupied their lands so long as they could be free from "Ottomanization" and could identify themselves with their new occupiers. The Bulgarian schools were shut down and teachers were forced to teach in Serbia or Greek lest they be imprisoned or forced to flee to Bulgaria. The Exarchist Churches were then made to change the language of their sermons to Greek or Serbian, if the priest refused or hesitated, he was stripped of his congregation and it was handed over to a Patriarchist priest. Bulgarian villages were then visited by Serbian or Greek troops who forced the villages to proclaim themselves as Serbian or Greek and to denounce their Exarchist priest. If any villagers did not change their nationality, they were beaten into submission.²³² In these cases, violence was used in much the

231 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 51.

232 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 52-53.

same manner as during the Macedonian insurgency in that it was used against the Ottomans as a show of force and against non-conformers so as to strengthen the national claims made by the states. Those who refused to comply were beaten, killed, or driven out in an effort to ethnically homogenize the populations in the different zones of occupation in Macedonia.

One Macedonian, who identified as a Macedonian Bulgar, claimed that “‘Anyone calling himself Bulgarian...risks being killed. The Servians have introduced their communal administration throughout the villages, and installed a Servian schoolmaster for every ten villages. We can not act and we are in a difficult position because the Servians have taken the Bulgarians’ arms...Even the staunchest Bulgarians are ready to become Servians.’”²³³ The sentiments expressed by the Macedonian Bulgar reveal the dire situation of those people who identified themselves as Bulgarians, the importance of arms as a means of control over national identity, and the results of violence intended to create new national identities. During this time, the Greek and Serb militaries were also preparing for war against the Bulgarian state. Serbia demanded territorial compensation for Bulgarian failures to carry out parts of the alliance during the war and, thus, turned on their former allies. For their part, the Bulgarians made preparations for the prosecution of war against their former allies for several reasons:

²³³ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 55.

(I) to bring the state of mind of the army up to a certain point and put them in a position (literal translation) to regard our allies up to today as enemies; (II) to accelerate the decisions of Russian policy by the fear of war between the allies; (III) to inflict heavy blows upon our adversaries in order to compel them to treat the more readily and make concessions; (IV) since our enemies are in occupation of territories which belong to us let us try by our arms to seize new territory until the European powers intervene to stop our military action.²³⁴

The Bulgarians, then, were also primed for war. Of important note is that the Bulgarians expected the international community to intervene in the violence as a legitimate means of consolidating territorial claims where it had not been before, and the concept that the Bulgarian government had to reorient its military in a manner that allowed the troops to see their former allies as opponents.

On 29 June 1913, war again broke out. The Serbians and Greeks made rapid advances on Bulgarian territorial claims in Macedonia, while the Romanians mobilized and crossed their border with Bulgaria. The Ottomans even began to send troops into Thrace, further destabilizing the Bulgarian position. The Romanians were halted by a Bulgarian appeal to Austro-Hungarian intervention on 21 July, but the Greeks and the Serbians would not be stopped until a ceasefire was signed on 31 July. On 10 August 1913, the Treaty of Bucharest was signed, ending the conflict with Bulgaria being severely wounded. Peace with the Ottomans came on 29 September. The Greeks and the Serbians “claimed that ‘balance in the Balkans’ had been

²³⁴ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 68.

secured” but little had actually been settled.²³⁵ For the time being, however, Bulgaria was in no position to retaliate and was forced to accept the Treaty of Bucharest without modification.

The Costs of the Balkan Wars

“The balance sheet of war must bear at its beginning, in order to characterize it properly, the list of the dead and wounded. Human lives brutally destroyed by arms, existences broken off in suffering after wounds and sickness, healthy organizations mutilated for ever; this is the result of war, these its consequences of blood and pain.”

- *The International Commission into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars, 243*

The Bulgarians reportedly suffered 44,313 men killed and a further 579 officers killed. Nearly 8,000 Bulgarian men and officers were listed as missing and more than 103,000 men and officers were wounded. The Serbians reported 22,000 men dead and a further 25,000 wounded, though the official report to the Serbian government was 12,000-13,000 killed, 17,800-18,800 dead from wounds or sickness, and 48,000 wounded, resulting in a final tally of 25,800-31,800 dead from all causes and 48,000 wounded.²³⁶ The Commission claimed that the Greeks, Montenegrins, and Ottomans refused or were unable to provide casualty counts. These numbers, of course, only count the dead, wounded, and missing of the militaries. The human cost among civilians was much greater. Greece took in nearly 157,000 refugees of whom some 70,000-80,000 were Muslims that

²³⁵ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 69.

²³⁶ Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 243.

desired to go to Ottoman Turkey rather than remain in the Balkans, leaving an approximated 90,000 refugees to be resettled in Greece's territories. Bulgaria received 104,360 refugees of whom "30,000 came from parts of Thrace recovered by Turkey, and 50,000 from Macedonian districts assigned to Servia or Greece. According to returns made by the Bulgarian government, 40,000 persons, or 10,000 families, left their homes without hope of returning."²³⁷ In this way, the violence of the wars engendered a great population reshuffling that aided in the solidification of state borders. Though large numbers of refugees left their traditional homelands, the lack of hope for return meant that the refugees accepted their places of displacement to be permanent homes, rather than temporary.

Those that participated in and experienced the wars had their views of nationality forever changed. Under the flag of nationalism "[t]he peasants who cheerfully left their homes and their families, while the government took their animals and their carts for purposes of transportation, went forth in a glow of national feeling and patriotism not unmixed with the thought of liberating their brothers in Macedonia."²³⁸ The wars, thus, had a nationalizing effect on the peoples of the Balkans, causing them to identify both themselves, and the people of Macedonia they sought to liberate, with their own conceptions of nationhood. However, fighting to force others to conform to external national ideals resulted in significant levels of violence

237 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 258.

238 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 265.

against civilian populations that extended beyond that of simply displacing them. One Greek soldier wrote of the atrocities:

I have no time to write to you at length, but I can tell you that appalling things are going on here. I am terrified by them, and constantly ask myself how men can be so barbarous as to commit such cruelties. It is horrible. I dare not (even if I had time, which I have not) tell you more, but I may say that Liouma (an Albanian region along the river of the same name), no longer exists. There is nothing but corpses, dust and ashes. There are villages of 100, 150, 200 houses, where there is no longer a single man, literally *not one*. We collect them in bodies of forty to fifty, and then we pierce them with our bayonets to the last man.²³⁹

Thus, the soldiers were bound to each other by shared atrocities and the civilians by their shared suffering. Where the populations were not killed or driven out, they were converted:

At Pechtévo (Malèche plateau) a special committee has been formed, with Bulgarian Sub-Prefect, Chatoyev, as its President, and among its members John Ingilisov, the director of the Bulgarian schools, and the priest, Chatoyev, brother of the Sub-Prefect. This committee was instituted to convert all the Turks of Malèche to Christianity. By order of the committee, 400 peasants of the place were armed with muskets and sticks; they attacked Turks of the neighboring villages and forcibly led them into the church at Verovo, where they were all baptized. Finally on February 17, baptism was carried out at Béloro, where there were ten Turkish families and ten Bosnian (Servian) Mahometan families. Pechtévo alone was spared, the reason being (so we were told) that the Sub-Prefect would not allow violence in the town. A Turk from Pechtévo told us that every Turkish house had to pay two pounds for its protection. Four Turks who could not pay such a sum hanged themselves in despair in their houses.²⁴⁰

In these cases, violence was a means of forcing people to submit themselves to the ethno-national whims of the combatants. As to the Serbians, though

239 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 149.

240 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 156.

they claimed that the territories they had gained control over in Macedonia were simply a unified Old Serbia, the citizens were not treated as Serbs. Instead, they were “treated as ‘rebels in a perpetual state of revolt.’”²⁴¹ So clearly, while the regional powers asserted that they were simply reclaiming their historical territories, they were having to overcome major social forces, such as the different senses of ethno-nationality, and, as such, were dealing with the consequences through violence and suspicion.

The insurgent groups had been left during the wars to police the rear areas without being formed into official units by the police. Christians took this opportunity to burn Muslim villages and in Monastir alone an estimated 80% of Muslim villages were destroyed.²⁴² The Commission asserts a generalized statement that such violence “is the habit of all these peoples. What they have suffered themselves, they inflict in turn upon others.”²⁴³ While this statement certainly is broad in its description of the people of the Balkans as inherently violent people, it does demonstrate the cycle of violence by which victims become perpetrators and perpetrators become victims. Such was the nature of these conflicts and the insurgency before them. The people of the Balkans were not unusually violent, but the high levels of violence they experienced over extended periods in their day-to-day lives forced them to meet that threshold of violence in response to

241 Brailsford et. al *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 162.

242 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 72.

243 Brailsford et. al, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War*, 73.

protect themselves, or else submit to the most violent armed groups. Hundreds of villages and thousands of homes were burned as a result of the wars. Thousands of civilians were massacred and hundreds of thousands more were displaced, and the end result was new borders for young nations hardened by conflict with populations traumatized by the scale of violence and a lasting, if mostly untrue, reputation for savagery and brutality.

Conclusion

Violence and the arms trade proved to be key elements of the political developments of the Balkans over a span of more than thirty years from 1878-1913. National awakenings and nation-building were directly connected to the availability of contemporary small arms to civilians and insurgent groups on illicit markets. Without these tools, the IMRO and other insurgent groups would have struggled to not only combat the Ottomans, but also to wield the social power afforded to them by the weapons they carried. Had the rifles instead been percussion cap rifle-muskets, rather than the more modern breech-loading and magazine-fed rifles, the insurgents' capacity for violence would have been greatly diminished. Additionally, the IMRO gained much of its power and legitimacy by managing violence and communal conflict, specifically through the oath-taking process, the court system, and the taxation regime. Following the failure of the Ilinden Uprising, violence became a more general tool of the many different insurgent groups to force the Macedonian population into regionally determined ethnic categories as parts of campaigns to delineate

frontier boundaries and refine them into distinct and controllable borders. Violence, then, proved to be the primary, and most effective, means of hardening the boundaries between communities, finally resulting in the Balkan Wars that enshrined state interests and state borders in an international context, rather than the locally-bound sense of community.

With the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 came renewed violence, both state-level, as in that violence between states, and local, as in that violence enacted by state actors or entities loyal to state governments on civilians and insurgent groups. Similar strategies to those used by insurgents to bring areas and populations under their control during the insurgency period, such as the use of violence against non-conformers, continued to be used by state actors, though often on a much larger scale. The state-level violence forced population exchanges that the local-level violence could not. Where the locally-focused insurgent groups sought to force civilians to conform to their preferred national identity, state actors drove non-conforming populations out and brought conforming populations in, resulting in consolidated national identities, rather than ethnic groups spread amongst each other. Of course, national identities would not have arisen without the competition between the Exarchate and the Patriarchate, but schools and Churches were much slower means of altering national identities. As such, armed insurgent groups, aided by widely available modern weapons technology, were required to more quickly bring about the solidification of national identities amongst the populations of Ottoman

Macedonia. Additionally, the violence that the insurgents were able to enact with their rifles allowed them to compete with the Ottomans and create new ethnic communities, such as the Macedonian identity, or reinforce more established ones, such as Serb, Greek, or Bulgarian.

While the Balkans have gained a reputation for being a violent, backward, and savage place beholden to medieval traditions and sadistic warlords, it is clear that these ideas are based on misinterpretations of complex social dynamics that are completely natural parts of state and nation-formation. The conflicts in the Balkans were horrifically bloody and produced large numbers of civilian casualties, but they were ultimately clashes of ideals, existential conflicts whose consequences included the destruction or creation of national identities. As such, because the population's identities were tied to the land, and the conflicts were over territory, people responded to violence with violence, thereby making victims out of perpetrators and perpetrators out of victims. The Balkans are not especially violent, but the reality is that violence was, in the case of Ottoman Macedonia, a catalyst for changes that were initiated in the 1870s. Effective violence was then facilitated by the French adoption of the Lebel and subsequent European arms race that produced the two-tiered arms market which made thousands of rifles available to insurgent movements and political and violence entrepreneurs. Macedonia, then, found itself at the crossroads of empire, nation-building, state-creation, and rapid

technological development, resulting in locally disastrous conflict with international consequences.

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