



“The ‘Yellow Peril’ of the Caucasian Race:” Macedonian migrants and national categories in Early Twentieth Century U.S. Governmental Sources.¹

By Keith Brown

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Colleagues in the United States tend to smirk when they learn that Macedonia has an Institute for National History. They imagine it, I think, as a place where self-styled defenders of the nation pursue methodologically outdated projects of positivistic, literalist research intended to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the historical roots of the Macedonian nation are long and deeply embedded in the land. To pursue the organic metaphor one step further, this view represents the Institute, and the project of “Macedonian Identity through History,” as something akin to a solitary, proud olive tree—gnarled, twisted, stubborn and enduring—entire unto itself. I think there is, or can be, more to the project of national history than that, and this paper is offered in that spirit, as a kind of manifesto for an approach that resists dogmatism, and recognizes the organic ties between Macedonian national history, and history as practiced elsewhere.

Let me begin by articulating five principles for the practice of national history. First, I attach especially value to so-called “bottom-up” perspectives. In this I am influenced by

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my training in socio-cultural anthropology, which I share with fellow presenters Anastasia Karakasidou and Goran Janev. When it comes to history, then, I take as my second principle a sincere effort to hear voices, and try to enter the world of the past, by as many paths as I can. Because I can't have conversations with people in the past, I am especially interested to find traces of conversations or interactions, or arguments, in the archival record, and eavesdrop on them. I call these moments of friction in the archive. Third, I try to interpret these voices in context, without imposing my own perspective or agenda, or over-simplifying them. As a default, I approach them with humility: I am all too aware that, let's say, a butcher from Prilep around 1903 would be suspicious of me, and might in fact ridicule me as a soft-handed bureaucrat. I take the line that in his everyday life and speech, if his descendants are anything to judge by, he was sometimes serious, sometimes joking; playful, ironic and poetic, as well as brutally straightforward, stubborn, or even pigheaded in different contexts. We don't know exactly how a conversation would go, especially if it turned to national consciousness. Even for leaders like Goce Delchev, Pitu Guli, Damjan Gruev and Jane Sandanski—the four national heroes named in the anthem of the Republic—the written record of what they believed about their own identity is open to different interpretations. The views and self-perceptions of their followers and allies might well be even more elusive.

My fourth principle, then, is to let go of the idea of certainty. I recognize that this runs counter to traditional historical and social scientific commitments to uncovering truth. It also might appear to betray those who see that commitment as a necessary and vital component of their mission to counter deliberate efforts to erase or deny contemporary

Macedonians' connection with the historical past. I should therefore be clear that I am not calling for a post-modern abandonment of empirically-grounded work. Nor do I refute that the historical record provides ample evidence that in the period from 1870 until 1912, Macedonia's population was victimized by a variety of alien forces: British consuls of the time described the fervor with which Grecomans (or, in the local idiom, Grkomani), Arnauts, Bashi-bazouks, komiti, antartes and chetniks robbed Slavic-speaking Christians of their rights to worship as they chose, their property, and any sense of security.

All those named groups, though, have passed into history, which brings me to the dimension of Macedonian history that I find compelling, that the people whose stories, in the last resort, constitute that history have, over the course of the 20th century, demonstrated enduring resistance to grand narratives imposed from outside or from above. So I see continuity in their continuous skepticism toward any and all attempts by states—and their soft-handed servants—to have the last word on who they “really” are (or who they are not). I suggest that such attempts have been made by quite a number of regimes—including for example Greece with regard especially to the rural population in the area around Florina (Lerin) and Kastoria (Kostur). The desire and drive to “fix” Macedonia's population, using contemporary terms that acquired their ethno-national significance only late in the nineteenth century, represents what can be called “historical totalitarianism”, and I consider it the fifth principle of national history to resist historical totalitarianism, rather than enact it, whether wittingly or not. This fifth principle, I suggest, brings the national historian into closer communion with the particular qualities

of endurance—what Macedonians might term *inaet*—of those Prilep butchers and at the risk of falling into paradox, I want to argue—drawing mainly on historical sources documenting labor migration from Macedonia to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century—that the continuity of Macedonian national history is the continuous labor of generations of Macedonians against various forms of historical totalitarianism.

These five principles inform much of my ongoing work, from which this paper is derived.

Here I document the archival traces of labor migration from Turkey-in-Europe to the United States of America in the early twentieth century. I learned of the phenomenon of this migration from the Ilinden Dossier in the National Archives in Skopje in 1993, and subsequently learned more from the rich literature on *pečalba* or *gurbet* from a range of Macedonian and foreign authors (Petrovski 1981; Konstantinov 1964; Gounaris 1989; Palairret 1979, 1987; Schierup and Alund 1987; Cvijic 1966; Petroff 1995). This is a phenomenon, of course, that cuts across history—from early-mid nineteenth century movement into Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Asia Minor, and later, to Europe as well as Australia, South Africa. It remains a phenomenon today, as well. But my focus here is on the specifics of movement in the period after the Ilinden Uprising of 1903. As various sources have confirmed, upwards of 20,000 people—mostly men, but some women—participated in the work of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in those years.²

Where did they go? And in an atmosphere where their true national identity is in much dispute, could we find what they called themselves? In a sense, I was still operating in the

² Although Douglas Dakin (1966) and others who rely mainly on Greek documentation reject this figure as too high, I am persuaded by the Bulgarian and Macedonian historians' position, based on a wider range of sources from Ottoman records and those of the Bulgarian state and the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

heroic discoverer mode of historical inquiry, anticipating that the next folder, or the next fund, or maybe the next archive, would offer the definitive proof, or the master-key, to resolve the question. So I went to the National Archives in Washington DC in that frame of mind: that the immigration records would offer a magisterial verdict on the case of Macedonian national identity.

And of course, as anyone could tell me (and probably, people did: I just didn't hear them) it wasn't so straightforward. What I did find was that the passenger manifests which record every arrival in the United States provide, as well as conventional vital statistics—name, age, sex, profession—the reported place of last residence—often a village name—and also destination, nationality, and a category of “race or people”—the last of which I focus on in this paper. These documents are not authoritative, and I do not treat them as such: instead, they are the traces of a set of interactions between different migrants and a bureaucracy composed of different parts. It is the process of their assembly, rather than the truth-claims that the final product distills, that I find compelling and worth closer scrutiny.

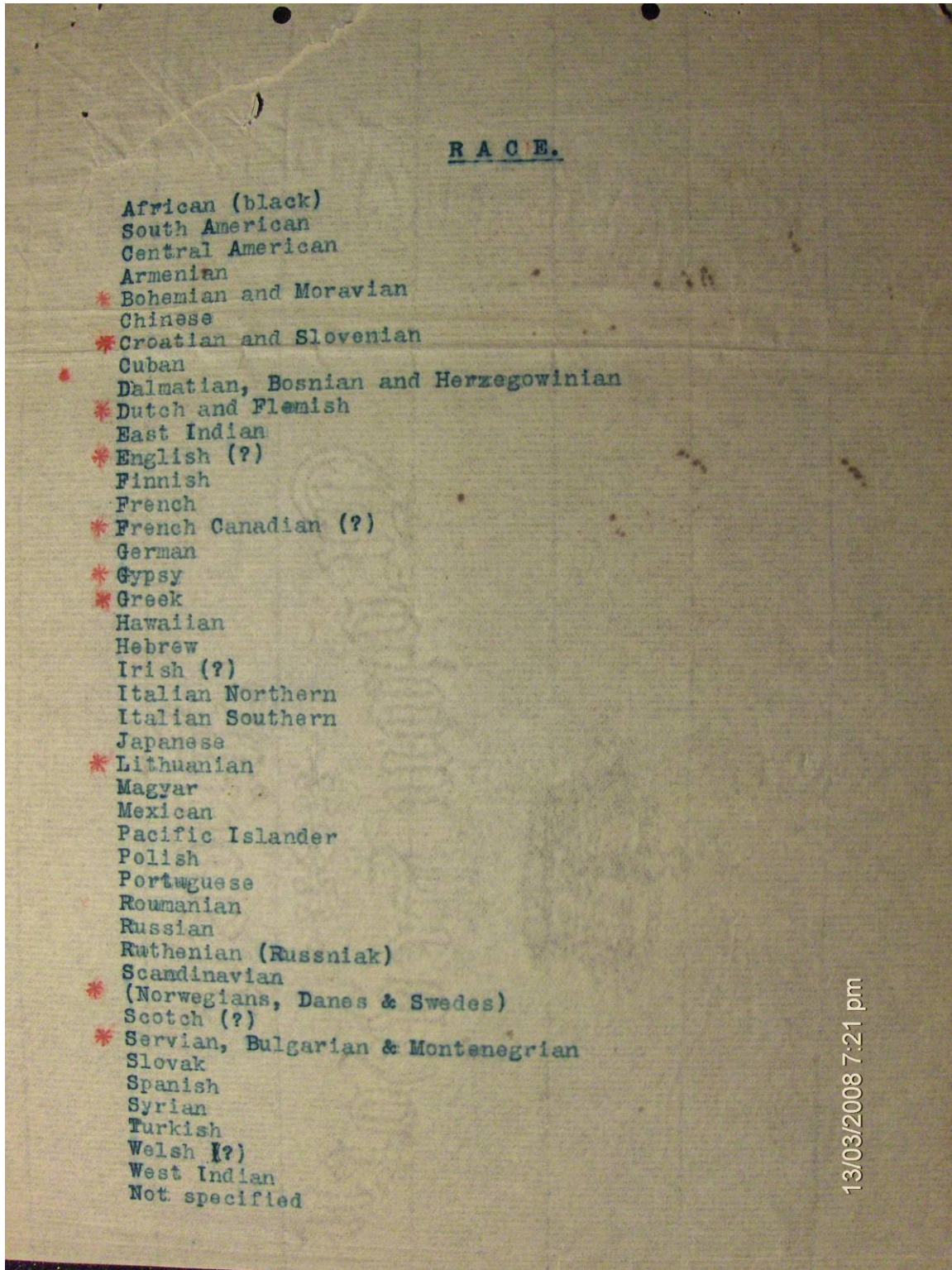
I take the passenger manifests, then, as examples of the kind of conversation or argument on which historians can eavesdrop. In each case, the first draft of the transcript of that conversation was produced by a steamship company in interaction with the individual migrant or ticket-seller, all of whose economic interest was to keep the traffic of people flowing – to secure the entry of the individual, as well as meet the requirements of the United States Federal Government. It was originally filled out with an eye to what it was

meant to achieve. It was then checked – authenticated, supposedly against physical reality—by an inspector at the moment of entry on Ellis Island, or Baltimore, or wherever else the alien made his or (less often) her way onto US soil. That authentication, though, took place with its own urgency. Ellis Island, for example, at the height of the traffic in 1907, processed around 5000 aliens in the course of a six and a half hour working day. At its maximum capacity, the Immigration station had 21 inspection lines operating. The average negotiation and revision of the manifest, then, took place in roughly 30 seconds (Cowen 1932: 185). If we recall the necessity for translation in many cases, there was very little time for any correction to the record.³ Combined with the abundant evidence, from investigations as well as memoirs of immigrants, that the “address given” could often be unknown to the immigrant: that patronymics were used in place of what would be institutionalized as surnames: and that passports were frequently recycled and used by different individuals, or were filled in with inaccurate information, we need also to be cautious of using such material in any straightforward, positivistic way.

So what can we do? The pathway I follow here is to focus on the column headed “race or people,” and compare the top-down logic which dictated what should appear in it with the actual entries that do appear. The decision to create this column, and collect this data, was made in the 1890s, in response to the “new immigration” from the Russian, Austrian and, to a lesser extent, Ottoman Empires. The list of races or peoples that was used was drawn up in 1898 by a commission of scholars, bureaucrats, and front-line employees of the Immigration Service (FIGURE 1).

³ In his memoir, which bears the signs of some stylization or fictionalization, Stoyan Christowe vividly describes the interactions that he and a fellow-immigrant had with an immigration official and a translator (Christowe 1976: 134-139)

FIGURE 1: LIST OF RACES OR PEOPLES, GENERATED IN 1898.



It was a document that represented a mix of philosophical approaches to the question of race: but the central principle was utilitarian. In subsequent writing on the list, immigration officials recorded that it took into account what associations they anticipated these new migrants making with each other – the point was not, then, to speak in a scholarly debate over head breadth –at a time when craniometry was still considered serious science, there was never, as far as I have determined, any suggestion that immigrants be systematically charted as individuals in this way—but rather, to provide raw material on which policy might be made which would bear in mind the kinds of social support, educational or policing needs that cities might have to deal with the new influx of manual laborers into cities and states.

The Immigration Service was, then, interested in “historical races” and the industrial future, rather than genetics (Fairchild 2003). The list is product of one particular effort to distinguish between subjects of empires in Europe by race or nationality, language or religion. Black African immigrants are not sorted with such care (occupying only one category): Asia is split between Chinese, Korean and Japanese (No Thais, Burmese, or Vietnamese, let alone any effort to “sort” and categorize South Asians, which was such a preoccupation of British imperial authorities in the same period (Dirks 2001). Apart from Mexicans and Cubans, other Central and South Americans likewise appear unsorted as “Spanish Americans.”

In the zone of focus—Europe—what seems apparent is a mixture of influences, among which ownership of a distinct language seems paramount, but with a clear political

component—in that categories with a recognized, historical state often persist. In some cases, language and state followed the same lines: so German, French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese all seem somewhat straightforward and transparent. Indeed, this was the implicit model on which the immigration service had relied before 1898, assuming that “nationality”—that is, the passport-issuing government—also revealed something about the individual traveler. Of course, the two discourses of politics and language-use did not always operate so easily, and different, inconsistent criteria seem to have been applied for different cases. There are, for example, no “Swiss” immigrants, the expectation being that political subjects be categorized as German, French or Italian, on the basis either of “stock” or language. Similarly, there are no Belgians, but Flemish (but no Walloons). And the nation-state of Italy found its citizens classified as either (North) or (South) – the distinction being coded as regional. Irish, Welsh, English and Scotch appear as four different categories, while British (like Swiss, a “national” rather than a “racial” category) does not. These are examples of how the information gathered was intended to supplement the category of “nationality” which had been collected before.

The mismatch between those two categories—political citizenship or subjecthood, and belonging in historical, cultural and linguistic terms— was clearest in the case of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires, from which many of the immigrants came. The Immigration Service’s interest in mapping “race or people” onto “nationality” is shown in Figure 2, below.

FIGURE 2: RACES OR PEOPLES MAPPED ONTO EUROPEAN STATES, 1908.

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I. C. 31
THE IMMIGRATION COMMISSION
Washington, D. C.

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND RACE

Owing to the diversity of races in various countries, The Immigration Commission in its investigations particularly desires to secure all data by *race* (or *people*) as well as by *country of birth*. The following list shows the countries from which most immigrants come and the principal races coming from each country. The list is not complete in either respect, but it is sufficiently comprehensive to guide those using it. *Other countries* and *other races* should be enumerated when such other countries and races are reported.

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY:	FINLAND:	RUSSIA:
Bohemian (Czech)	Finnish	Armenian
Bosnian	FRANCE:	Finnish
Bulgarian	French	German
Croatian	Hebrew	Hebrew
Dalmatian	GERMANY:	Lithuanian
German	German	Polish
Hebrew	Hebrew	Russian
Hervat	Polish	SCOTLAND:
Herzegovinian	GREECE:	Scotch
Italian (North)	Greek	SERVIA:
Magyar (Hungarian)	Macedonian.	Servian
Montenegrin	INDIA:	SPAIN:
Moravian (Czech)	East Indian	Spanish
Polish	IRELAND:	SWEDEN:
Roumanian	Irish	Swedish
Ruthenian (Russniak)	Scotch Irish	TURKEY IN ASIA:
Servian	ITALY:	Armenian
Slovak	Italian (North)	Greek
Slovenian	Italian (South)	Hebrew
BELGIUM:	JAPAN:	Syrian
Dutch	Japanese	Turkish
Flemish	KOREA:	TURKEY IN EUROPE:
French	Koreans	Bulgarian
BULGARIA:	MEXICO:	Greek
Bulgarian	Mexicans	Hebrew
Macedonian	MONTENEGRO:	Macedonian
CANADA:	Montenegrin	Montenegrin
Canadian	Servian	Servian
English	NETHERLANDS (Holland):	Syrian
French Canadian	Dutch	Turkish
Irish	Flemish	NORWAY:
Scotch	Norwegian	WALES:
CHINA:	PORTUGAL (Azores, Cape Verde):	Welsh
Chinese	Portuguese	WEST INDIES (Cuba, Porto Rico, Hayti Bahamas):
DENMARK:	ROUMANIA:	Cuban
Danish	Hebrew	English
ENGLAND:	Roumanian	Negro
English		Spanish
Hebrew		
Irish		
Scotch		
Welsh		

Source: enclosure in a letter from the secretary of the Immigration Commission to William R. Wheeler, dated December 15 1908 (NARA RG 85, Entry 9: 52363/25).

Here, the Austrian Empire was represented in sixteen categories (Bohemian, Bosnian, Croatian, Dalmatian, German, Hebrew, Herzegovinian, Italian (North), Magyar, Moravian, Polish, Roumanian, Ruthenian (Russniak), Servian, Slovak, and Slovenian): the Ottoman Empire (as of 1900) by Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Hebrew, Roumanian Servian, Syrian and Turkish).⁴ There is an interesting set of claims about language, then, embedded here: for in distinguishing Bosnian, Croatian, Dalmatian, Herzegovinian, Servian, and also Montenegrin (included as a separate category, presumably guided in part by a history of statehood), the list seems to distinguish between people speaking variants of a common South Slavic language, more recently labeled Serbo-Croat, and separated by political frontiers.

The list also served to create or authorize likeness across new frontiers, between citizens of the relatively new nation-states of Southeastern Europe—Serbia, Greece, Roumania and Bulgaria, or the new central European state of Germany, and non-citizens of shared language or “descent” within empires. This double recognition—which arguably served as endorsement of irredentist ambition on the part of such states—contrasted with other cases of non-recognition: Albanians, for example, a Southeast European people whose aspirations to national unity were entirely based on common language, were omitted from the 1898 list as well as this 1908 list, and were added only in the 1930s (long after the country acquired statehood).

⁴ I have included Roumanian, in the light of Folkmar’s recommendations, discussed below, with regard to Vlachs.

This list poses a particular kind of dilemma for any historian, but especially the historian of Macedonia. It is easy to treat the 1898 list as a bureaucratic relic which demonstrates the persuasiveness of the ideals of nation-statism of the period. What, though, of the appearance of Macedonian on the list in the letter from 1908? The arbitrariness and variability of U.S. documentary practices becomes particularly clear when one considers the way in which the 1911 *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, commissioned by Congress and compiled by Daniel and Elnora Folkmar, re-omits Macedonian, and offers a new formula for discerning the “true” identity of immigrants from the Balkans, summarized in figure 3.

FIGURE 3: Folkmar’s rules for labeling immigrants from Turkey-in-Europe.

Claimed “race or people”	Instructions for “scientific” re-classification.
Albanian	“Classify in accordance with their language as Greek.”
Bulgarian	“Natives of Bulgaria whose mother tongue is Bulgarian.”
Greek	“All aliens whose mother tongue is Greek.”
Turkish	“Natives of the Ottoman Empire whose mother tongue is Turkish”
Wallachian	“Admit this designation as a race and classify in accordance with their language as Roumanian.”
Servian	“This must be limited to natives of Servia.”

Derived from Folkmar and Folkmar 1911: also in NARA RG 85, Entry 9: 52320/11)

This interpretation of the “race or people” of the Ottoman subjects dwelling in the three vilayets of Salonika, Manastir and Uskub, represents an interesting hybrid of positions espoused by Ottoman policy-makers and Patriarchate elites. It postulates that none of the

Ottoman Empire's subjects could be "Bulgarian" or "Servian" (a key plank of the Patriarchate view, also embraced by the Greek government), and also that there are no Albanians—they are either Greek (if Greek-speaking) or, if Turkish-speaking, Turkish. Other subjects of the Empire might be Wallachian/Roumanian (reflecting official Ottoman policy which in 1905 recognized a Vlah millet), or Greek or Turkish, depending on "mother tongue." Although there is no reference to religion, one can argue that the language of liturgy, at a pinch, would stand in for mother tongue – rendering the Slavic-speaking majority of Turkey-in-Europe's Christian population, by a process of following the path of least resistance, Greek.

This is, of course, at odds with what American and British travelers with experience in the region had reported, with regard to the national consciousness expressed by the Christian Slavic-speaking majority (Brailsford 1906; Moore 1906; Upward 1908; Sonnischen 1909). And it is also clear that employees of the Immigration Service, too, quickly rejected such a schema in the way they classified immigrants from the region named by immigrants as either "Turkey-in-Europe" or Macedonia. Even from the compiled statistics of the Immigration Service, Turkish subjects were recorded as Bulgarian or Servian, in contravention of these principles. But beyond that, if one searches the records themselves, the violation of the top-down categorical system is even more striking. In the ten years 1903-1913, in Ellis Island alone, 19,011 incoming aliens reported as their last place of residence either "Macedonia" or "Turkey-in-Europe."⁵ Of

⁵ These statistics are derived from the search engine in Ancestry.com: a random sampling suggests that the entries are mostly accurate. As a guide to future researchers using this path, keyword searches can be misleading: "Macedonia" was the name of a ship sailing regularly from Piraeus to the United States, and so a search with that term yields a large number of Greeks from "Old Greece" who traveled that route.

these, just over 1,000 were recorded as Greeks, just over 1,000 as Turks, and 170 as Roumanians. In other words, in only a little over 11% of cases were the criteria from above applied to process these individuals—a majority of whom provided as their place of origin not Macedonia, but Turkey in Europe. Violations in the case of Servians (492) or Albanians (238) were relatively rare – but still depart from the official practice. The departure from authorized practice was far more striking in the case of entrants from Macedonia who were classified as Bulgarian—a category approved only for “residents of Bulgaria”—who number 3,422 – that is, over three times the number of those classified as Greeks.

These numbers leave 12,634 aliens from Macedonia still unaccounted for. They entered the official records under a wholly unauthorized label, as Macedonians from Macedonia. Almost all have forenames and patronymics largely consistent with names among today’s Macedonian-speaking citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. They made their way into other ports as well, though in smaller numbers – to Baltimore (only 338, out of a total who gave either Macedonia or Turkey-in-Europe 4,456 as place of origin) and to Galveston (256 out of 2,731). But according to official US Immigration policy, and counting practices, as well as the national histories of Greece and Bulgaria, they should not exist at all.

Looking more closely at the manifests themselves reveals evidence that this rule-breaking had its own history. In 1904, for example, as the record reproduced below shows (figure 3), the inspector took the time to time to enact, at least in part, official policy, and

reclassified men originally listed as “Macedonians” as “Greek,” “Bulgarian” or “Servian.”

FIGURE 4: Detail from Passenger Manifest of the S.S. Koonland, arriving 15 March 1904 in New York from Antwerp, and showing the Ellis Island Inspector’s overwriting of “Macedonian” with “Bulgarian” and “Servian” under the category “Race or People.”

Nationality. (Country of last permanent residence.)	Race or People.	Last Residence. (Province, City, or Town.)
Turkey	Macedonian Bulgarian	Beuff
"	"	"
Turkey	Macedonian Servian	Beuff
"	"	Beuff
"	"	Sajete

That leaves open the question of how the category “Macedonian” got entered on the manifest in the first place—especially when we remember the interests of the steamship

company, and migrant in making the passage through Ellis Island as smooth as possible. So we might predict that the category would disappear. The news that government inspectors were changing the category of “Macedonian” would filter back to the steamship companies, their agents, and the ticket-sellers and migrants in Macedonia, and would-be entrants to the United States would adapt, tactically. But instead, the opposite occurs. Entrants claiming to be “Macedonian” appear in larger numbers over the next six years, and inspectors stop reclassifying them as something else, but allow the category to stand.

This, I suggest, is surprising—especially when we remember that, as Papailias puts, it archives are “imprints of governance, traces of imperial imaginaries and products of discourses and technologies of documentation... marshaled by the state to describe, manage and rule various ‘problematic’ populations” (Papailias 2005:6). Immigrants and inspectors are meant to be disciplined in different ways by the creation of the archive, yet they are, if you will forgive the pun, manifestly not. What does this mean? It could be sloppy book-keeping by overworked inspectors. We could accept the judgment of “experts” of the time who rejected the appearance of “Macedonian” in this column as either “patriotic misrepresentation” (Folkmar and Folkmar 1911: 27) or “confusing and inaccurate” (Letter from Albert Sonnischen, quoted in Balch 1910: 275). These experts were influential at the time, and in official government statistics, Macedonians were all converted to Bulgarians in the annual summaries presented to Congress each year. But a massive breaking of categorical rules by people expected to abide by them—and here I count both the Inspectors who allow the category to stand, and the immigrants who

generate this category in their own assertions—seems to be more than “patriotic misrepresentation” (except in the sense that any assertion of national identity by anyone is) and seems hard to dismiss as “confusing” to those for whom, on both sides of the inspection table, it made sense of their reality. I therefore take both “expert” responses as signs of exasperation in the face of “non-expert” practice, and thus as confirmation of how great a hold the idea of a distinctive, non-Bulgarian, Macedonian population had become in the process of migration to the United States. And it spread beyond inspectors and the migrants themselves to leave other archival traces.⁶ It makes, then, a source of friction which I find compelling—a clash between a top-down process of classifying immigrants according to a somewhat arbitrary set of government-sponsored, expert-endorsed categories, and a bottom-up self-classification arising out of ordinary people’s voices. We should recall, in this regard, the clear evidence that many of those who came to the US from Macedonia in this period were young men who had been involved with revolutionary activism against Ottoman rule, or who chose the path as an alternative to getting caught up in violence. Their decision to declare themselves as Macedonian at the border—in a context where they had no reason to take such a risk, and where so much else about answers given to the inspectors was deeply pragmatic, and designed to smooth the path into America, rather than introduce friction – remains, for me, a profound sign of something more than widespread error or delusion. In this context, it looks deliberate and purposeful, and maybe even a sign of political consciousness.

⁶ Besides the list included as Figure 4, above, census takers, and investigators for the Dillingham commission report distinguished “Macedonian” from Bulgarian, as did the Louisiana’s Commissioner for Immigration in 1908. The term occurs regularly throughout the archival record—one rather less savory instance being in a 1909 document where immigrant inspector Marcus Braun, investigating prostitution, assigns Macedonians a different code number for use in telegraphic communications to Bulgarians (NARA RG 85, Entry 9: 52363/27)

If the entry “Macedonian” demonstrates some control by these migrants of the terms on which their entry into the United States was recorded in the archive, they could not control how their apparent identity as Macedonians was itself stigmatized. Here, then, I turn to the “yellow peril” of the title, and suggest the value of openness to comparative perspectives in thinking about Macedonian national history, and the place of migration in it. The phrase occurs in a detailed expose of the way in which Macedonian labor migration was in part a product of commercial activity involving steamship agents, the representatives of both certain US states and also industries, money-lenders. The author, an Immigrant Inspector named Frank Garbarino, sought in particular to make a case against local entrepreneurs who made their living from their fellow-countrymen’s migration. In a letter to his superiors dated March 23 1909, Garbarino wrote,

As long as these padrones are permitted to colonize their aliens and hold a heavy hand over them, just so long will they be undesirable aliens. They are unable to bring their families here, and really become the “yellow peril” of the Caucasian race.

(NARA, RG 85 Entry 9: 52447/3/part 1: 79.)

The term he chose—“yellow peril”—was a reflection of particular interest at the time in Chinese immigration. Historian Donna Gabaccia has analyzed how and why Italians—and in particular South Italians – came to be referred to in similar terms, and argues that there were two elements at work—both structured by existing race relations in the United States (Gabaccia 1997). Thirty years after the American Civil War, discourse about labor distinguished between “free” and “unfree” labor in racialized terms, reflecting the

historical experience of “white” and “black” arrivals in the US, respectively. Chinese immigration, at a superficial level of skin-color, posed an anomaly in this discourse. But Gabaccia argues, persuasively, that their “in-between” classification also owed something to the way in which this stream of migrants entered the labor force, often through forms of indenture that were neither fully free nor fully unfree. Indenture is a stretchable concept: it could refer to relations to a particular company or factory, or to a money-lender (often predatory) or to a “big man” or *padrone*, a labor broker, in other words. Gabaccia argues that Italian labor migrants often were willing to navigate different forms of indenture that were stigmatized in a US ideology built on the model of the free, choice-making individual, operating in a “free market” of labor. Mobile, bachelor, so-called “coolie” labor, operating in “work-gangs,” threatened that.⁷

Gabaccia’s analysis helps us make sense of how Macedonians lived, worked and were perceived in the United States. Like Chinese and (South) Italians, these migrants were often continuing patterns of seasonal labor migration—termed *pecalba* in Macedonia—created over generations. There were existing routines of working in groups or gangs, sharing risks and costs as well as profits, often living communally (Palaret 1987; see also Schierup and Alund 1987: 64-6). These arrangements are described in the United States context by labor migrant turned author Stoyan Christowe, as well as one Chicago sociologist documenting Bulgarian practices (Christowe 1976: 264ff; Hunt 1910). Some field investigators noted their particular virtues, comparing in particular Macedonian

⁷ I focus here on Gabaccia’s work on labor relations in particular. Other works that usefully deconstruct racialist theories prevalent among U.S. political leaders, academics and the general public of the time, pointing to the inconsistencies around terms like “race,” “stock” and “nation” include Dyer 1980; Gerstle 2001; Zeidel 2004.

mores favorably with other groups in their cleanliness, sobriety and thrift (see for example Roberts 1912: 314).

This on the ground reality, though, passed ideologues by. One Commissioner in New York, in a 1910 letter to his boss in DC referred to the “backward races” of Southern and Eastern Europe and imputed to them “very low standards of living, ... filthy habits and ... an ignorance which surpasses belief” to Keefe, September 1910 (Commissioner Williams to Keefe, cited in Vought 2004: 82).

Another view from the same year, expressed in correspondence from officials in St. Louis to Washington groups together Italians, Greeks, Bulgarians and Macedonians, as well as generic “Slavs” from the Austrian and Russian empires of the time, as

...exceedingly ignorant classes of common laborers from the southern countries of Europe and the Asiatic border who, as a rule, lack sufficient intelligence to know or understand the plans made for them, or their destinations. Generally speaking, they are of a class who would not dare to undertake a journey to America or to seek employment here without the leadership of the persons responsible for their coming. (NARA, RG 85 Entry 9: 52885/34A)

While an officer based in Portland, Oregon describes them as “herded by bosses who, by intimidation as well as by the natural gregariousness of the men themselves, keep them in subjection.” (NARA, RG 85 Entry 9: 52885/34)

Gabaccia’s analysis, which focuses on patterns of work, helps us makes sense of blinkered and prejudiced top-down perspectives like these. Its racist overtones, though,

also had a scientific alibi. South Italians found their perceived shortcomings were attributed in part to genetic origin, by the more eugenically influenced commentators of the time (who argued, in terms that seem bizarre today, that South Italians had “Saracen” blood). Macedonians and Bulgarians fell victim to a similar stigmatization, which had political, racial and linguistic components. First, their place of origin in Turkey and subjection to Ottoman rule cast doubt on their fitness to rule themselves, and hence on their Europeanness (and “whiteness”). Second, the fact that their language was Slavic tied them to general stereotypes of Slavs as undisciplined, prone to drink. But they were additionally stigmatized through the perception that Bulgarian was itself the most “corrupt” form of Slavic language (Folkmar and Folkmar 1911: 27), and also, by the contention that Bulgarians were an anomaly in that their language was Slavic, but their “stock” was Mongol and therefore, in supposedly objective terms at the time, oriental (and not one of the European branches) (Folkmar and Folkmar 1911: 108). The official view of the time was that “Macedonian” was a dialectal (and therefore less developed) variant of “Bulgarian” in linguistic terms, and a more primitive sub-group in “racial” terms—even more impure and suspect, then, than the already impure and suspect Bulgarians with whom they were always associated.

Macedonian migrants traveling to the United States, then, found their identities overdetermined by a range of structuring factors far beyond their control, and including ideas regarding forms of labor, political borders, racist ideology among so-called scientists, and concerns around the imagined risks of miscegenation and crime. Primarily minding their own business, and pursuing their own family- and community-oriented agendas of

survival, Macedonians were to some degree damned in local eyes, whatever they did. It is true they were not “free” laborers – but nor, arguably, were almost all migrants in this and any period. The idea of the “pioneer” who strikes out for an unknown land simply on faith that a will to work, and a strong back will see him through, has always been a fiction tied in with US self-image. Somehow Macedonian migrants, like South Italians, Chinese, and other laborers of the time, with existing structures of labor organization that flexed to incorporate transoceanic migration, found themselves cast as “other” and also as “backward.” Their tactical, self-interested, and contingent subjection to industrial businesses, labor agents, was classified as a character defect, shared by a whole people.

Where, then, does all this leave us? I conclude by suggesting an analogy between this specific research and the wider task of writing Macedonian national history. I think that the data I have briefly discussed here points toward one specific form of history. I am increasingly concerned with empirical evidence; as I said, I’m interested in other people’s voices and conversations, who experienced things that I haven’t and I consider my main task to try to understand and convey as much of that experience as I can. But I also want to put that evidence to work not to answer the demands of others, but to question the systems of power in which the demands are made. I consider that Macedonian national history has been dominated by efforts to find the irrefutable proof of historical longevity, of a collective, long-suffering people moving through time. But this is an impossible, Sisyphean task; no nation in the world can meet that standard. I began this project thinking I could perhaps prove that people called themselves Macedonians on the way to America in the early twentieth century, long before the establishment of a Macedonian

Republic within Federal Yugoslavia. I still think that they did: But I think the more important finding is to expose the complex structure of economic realities, power relations and embedded racism that shaped people's experience, and to use the data to highlight the contingency of this and all such systems of ranking peoples and the authenticity of their national identities by pseudo-scientific means.

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