

Fixing national subjects in the 1920s southern Balkans:

Also an international practice

ABSTRACT

The momentous transition from empire to nation-state in the early 20th century entailed a challenge for European states to produce "national" subjects—citizens. Scholars examining how diverse populations were incorporated into national projects have typically taken the nation-state's territorial boundaries as analytical boundaries and have rarely considered nation-building comparatively or investigated the creation of national subjects as an international practice. Taking the case of the League of Nation's supervision of the Greco-Bulgarian Convention Concerning Reciprocal and Voluntary Emigration in the 1920s, I explore collaboration between international and national agents in disambiguating multistranded affiliations of certain subjects in pursuit of homogeneous nation-states: [international institutions, nation-building, supervision, subjects, migration, borders, minorities]

On a visit to Bucharest in the early months of 1905, the photographers Milton and Yannaki Manaki learned that, in London, they could buy a fancy machine for making moving pictures:¹ a Bioscope 300 camera. Yannaki became obsessed. He saw the camera in his dreams. He raved about it. He took a ship to England while Milton went home to Monastir (now Bitola, in the Republic of Macedonia). Later that year, after Yannaki's return from England with camera in hand, the brothers visited their natal village, Avdela, high in the Pindus Mountains, located in the Ottoman *vilayet* of Selanik (now in Greece). There they filmed a scene of female peasant weavers, among them, their 117-year-old grandmother—allegedly, the first film ever made in the Balkans.² (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Thus opens Theo Angelopoulos's 1995 film, *Ulysses' Gaze* (*To βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα*). The story of the Manaki brothers inspires the character A, a Greek filmmaker obviously modeled on Angelopoulos himself and played by the U.S. actor Harvey Keitel, to undertake an epic journey across the Balkans as Yugoslavia disintegrates in the 1990s. Chased out of the northern Greek town of Florina, near the Albanian border, by an angry bishop and his umbrella-wielding parishioners, A embarks on a quest to track down the Manaki brothers' three lost and never developed film reels, reels that promise to evince, as he puts it, "the first glance, the lost glance, the lost innocence" of the Balkans at the dawn of the 20th century.³ This quest ends in besieged Sarajevo. A recognizes the parallel between his own historical moment and that of Milton and Yannaki Manaki: Like them, he is witness to the decline of an empire and the birth of a new epoch of nations, with war as its midwife.

The Manaki brothers appointed themselves chroniclers of the transition from empire to nation-state. "They were always on the move," recounts A, riding the train from Skopje to Bucharest with his mysterious female companion, a film scene that reiterates the brothers' peripatetic calling. "They recorded everything: landscapes, weddings, local customs, political changes, village fairs, revolutions, battles, official celebrations, sultans, kings, prime ministers, bishops, rebels. All the ambiguities, the contrasts, the conflicts."

Given the violence of the early 20th century, when national struggles and economic change ripped apart complex local interdependencies and common institutions, decimating living landscapes and causing death and displacement for millions of people, I am struck by the sense of excitement conveyed by the Manaki brothers' film images. They register anticipation of new possibilities, not merely regret at the passing of a way of life. The images record the arrival of railroads and of new technologies of production, media, war, and public health. The Manaki brothers were passionate filmmakers and, in addition to recording their own still and moving images, established and ran a cinema in the cosmopolitan town of Monastir. Their work and involvements convey a celebration of the arrival of "modern" ideals of citizenship: liberty, equality, and fraternity. All of these seemed to promise redemption. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

The transformations that the Manaki brothers recorded in their films and photographs also transformed them. Their very subjectivities were marked by struggles throughout their lifetimes between older identifications and the

demands of new ones—whether embraced or pressed on them. Born in the 1880s as Ottoman subjects, they were the sons of a bourgeois, multilingual Vlach family. Like many in the Vlach community, the Manakia family seems to have identified with Hellenism. However, by the 1860s, long before their birth, the boys' father, Dimitrios, had become attracted to the Romanian national movement; in 1905, the Greek intelligence service identified him as "one of the rather fanatical Romanisers" of the town (Christodoulou 1997:33).⁴ As a young teacher in the early years of the new century, Yannaki also became involved in the Romanian national movement that emerged in Avdela. Milton, by contrast, was photographed several times between 1900 and 1908 with a band of Macedonian fighters; sources disagree on whether he was fighting against the Ottomans in support of the Greeks, the Bulgarians, or for an autonomous "Macedonia for Macedonians" (Christodoulou 1997:68). Both brothers allegedly supported Balkan federation.

For years, they lived peripatetically between Avdela, Yannina, Monastir-Bitola, Phillipoupolis-Plovdiv,

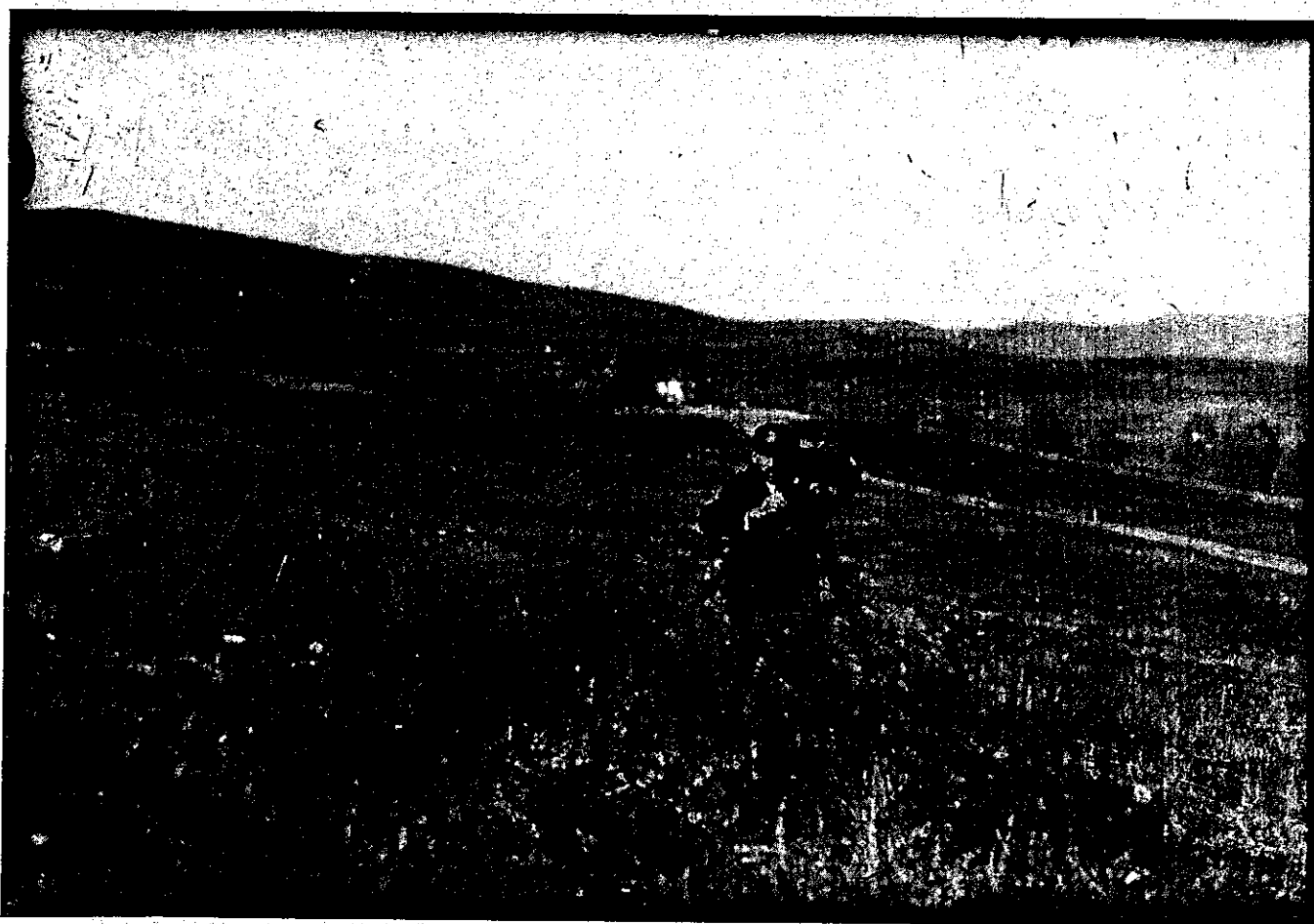


Figure 1. Milton with a camera, Bitola, 1912. Photograph by Janaki Manaki. This and all figures in this article are copies of images produced from the Manaki brothers' original glass plate negatives.

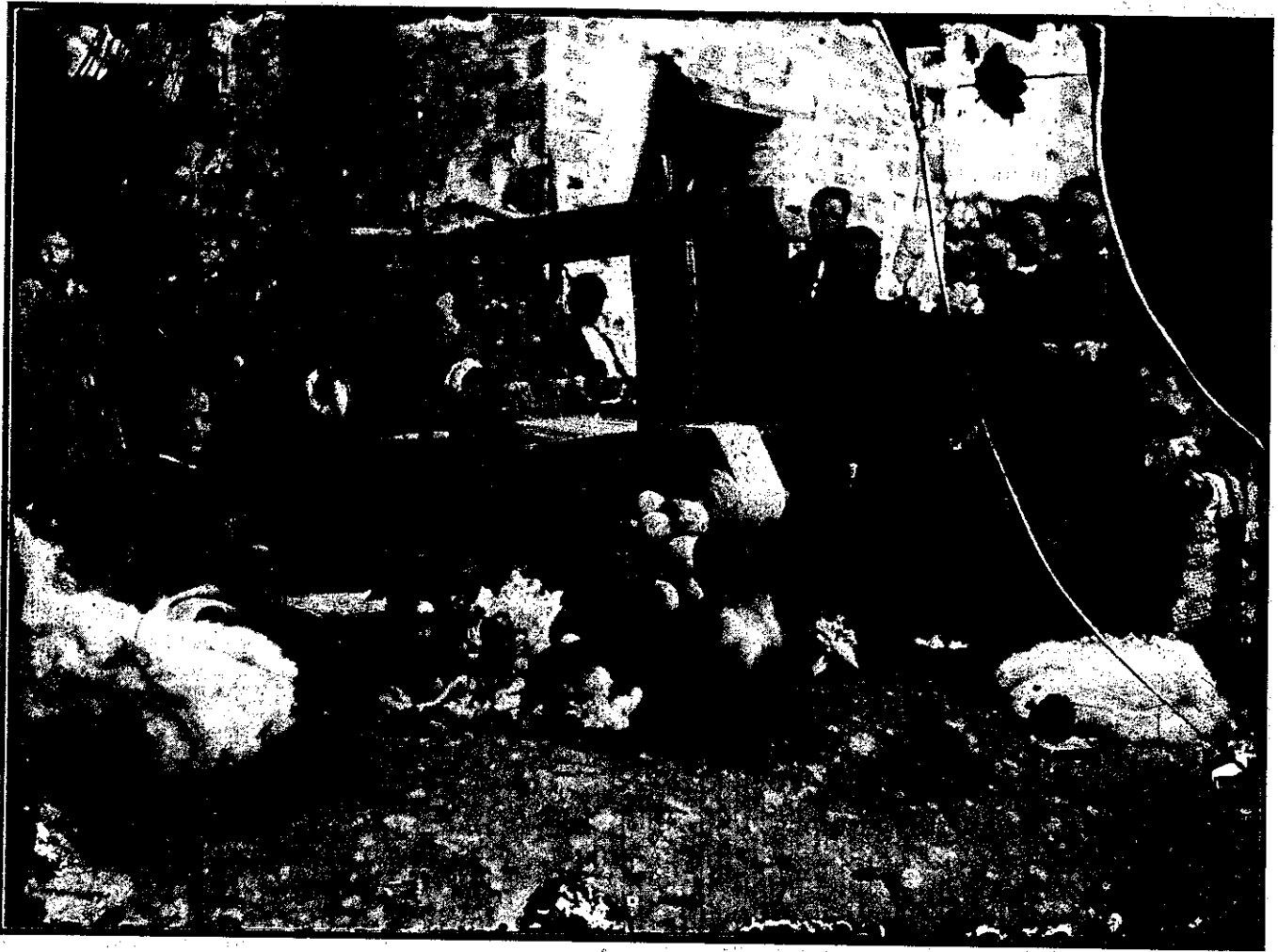


Figure 2. Still photo, scene from 1905 moving picture documentary film *The Weavers*, Avdela.

Bucharest, and London. But, ultimately, national borders rigidified and separated them for good. Yannaki died in Salonika in 1954 a Greek citizen, whereas Milton died in Bitola (the former Monastir) in 1964 a Yugoslav citizen. Since their deaths, their films have been rediscovered. On websites, blogs, and e-mail lists, partisans of one side or another have struggled to define these "first photographers of the Balkans" as "Greek" or "Romanian," "Yugoslav" or "Macedonian," or, with defiant antinationalism, simply as "Balkan citizens." None of these appellations, of course, captures the tangled skein of local, national, and civic affiliations that enmeshed them throughout their lives.

The Manaki brothers are, as Claude Lévi-Strauss would say, "good to think," and for many reasons. To start, they exemplify the multiple affiliations and identifications that Ottoman subjectivities often implied. Through them, one can discern the traces of a prenatal, situationist logic of categories that were not mutually exclusive, in which a man

could be Greek when he traded, Albanian when he married, and Muslim when he prayed (to paraphrase Vereni 1996), without this raising a sense of contradiction for the actors involved—even if it did so for nationalists.⁵ Their stories also reveal the pressures on such persons to submit to increasingly exclusive and totalizing national categories and rigid borders, to make choices, sometimes repeatedly throughout their lives, that would fix their lives and fates to a single nation and a single state.

The resurrection of the Manaki brothers in the present day is no less telling. Competing claims about their "real" identities echo the passionate investments, at the end of the 20th century, in narratives of difference, whether national or cosmopolitan. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the increased international visibility in the 1990s of an ongoing and never fully resolved Macedonian Question, Balkan aficionados witnessed a modest explosion of books, blogs, and e-mail-list claims and counterclaims about the brothers' true nationality.⁶ Conversely, for Angelopoulos, whose



Figure 3. Bulgarian military ambulance. Bitola, 1916. Photograph by Milton Manaki.

films incessantly return to the theme of borders, the Manaki brothers and their work evoke the era before national borders as well as commonalities across borders; their images recollect the forbidden and longed-for multiplicities that borders put out of reach. By contrast, the Yugoslav photographers who gathered in the Manaki brothers' hometown, Bitola, at the 1979 inaugural "Days of Milton Manaki Film Camera" festival, focused on Milton's technical contribution to cinematography. To this day, a striking indifference to questions of nation—which I read as an anti-nationalist stance—characterizes the Manaki Brothers International Cinematographers' Film Festival website (ICFF "Manaki Brothers" 2007), which never identifies the brothers in national terms.

For Angelopoulos, the Manaki brothers are more than pioneers of Balkan cinema to be remembered and honored. Angelopoulos's sympathy for the brothers and fascination with their documentary quest take on an emotional inten-

sity that is closer to identification. When *Ulysses' Gaze* tracks the powerful desire of A—he crosses battle lines, risking shells and sniper fire to track down the lost reels—to see the Balkans through the Manaki brothers' eyes, as if that first gaze will reveal the secret of the Balkans' tragic heart, one feels that this is Angelopoulos's desire, too. Moreover, he makes it the viewer's desire. Even as he shows war's destruction, Angelopoulos appeals to multiculturalist fantasies: Of those who have seen it, who can forget the scene in which the members of the Sarajevo youth orchestra use the cover of fog to defiantly make music together in the ruins of their city? In retrospect, I find it a painful reminder of how much we in the West, for our own reasons, wanted and needed Sarajevo to survive.

Although I can hardly claim innocence of such desires, my aim is different. Beyond signaling the complexities of Ottoman subjectivities and the subjective force of nationalisms, the Manaki brothers are good to think in

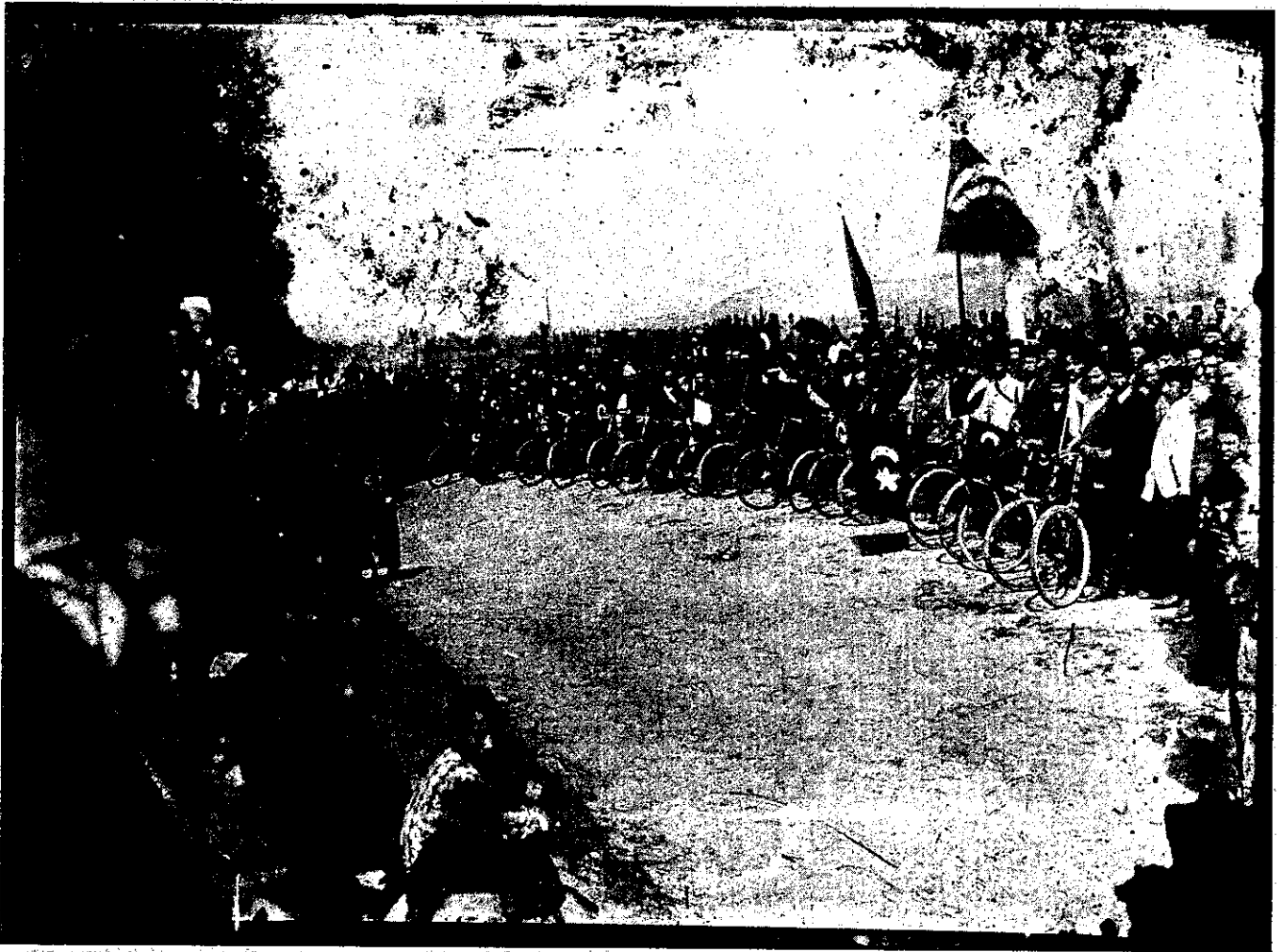


Figure 4. Bicyclists from Bitola in Prilep, 1907. Photograph by Milton Manaki.

another way, as well. The Manaki brothers help me to enter imaginatively into a particular subject position—that of the Turn-of-the-Century organic intellectual (in Antonio Gramsci's sense) from the Balkan periphery. Such a person (normally a man) was frequently educated in Paris, Bucharest, Odessa, or Geneva, saw himself as European, and identified with Europe and the European ideals of liberty, fraternity, equality, the Rights of Nations, and the Rights of Man. This is the position of many who submitted petitions, or letters of complaint, to the League of Nations in the 1920s. Sharing a subject position of comfortable means, education, the opportunity to travel, and a certain cosmopolitan experience, these men did not, for all that, see the world alike. If the Manaki brothers (at least as portrayed by Angelopoulos) seem to have reveled in the contrasts, contradictions, and ambiguities of their times, these League petitioners deployed a language of clarity, certainty, and moral righteousness.

Difference as international practice

So far, for the case of Macedonia and elsewhere, questions of difference and the production of national subjects-subjectivities have been examined primarily within the framework of the nation-state (cf. Foster 1991). Scholars have looked either at nation-building, almost always in a one-at-a-time fashion (e.g., Brown 2003; Handler 1988; Karakasidou 1997; Weber 1976; Wilson 1976), or—sometimes in the same text—at local practices through which people resist, contest, or complicate the homogenizing efforts of the nation-state (e.g., Brown 2003; Das and Poole 2000; Fuller and Beneš 2001; Karakasidou 1997; Li 2005). Recently, anthropologists have recognized that national projects are increasingly conducted transnationally and that new “national” identifications can be constructed in the process (e.g., Danforth 1995). In the past few years, I have been thinking about the ways that defining difference

and constructing national subjects is—and has long been—also an international practice.

When the Paris Peace Conference redrew the map of Europe after WWI, many states—including former enemy states, expanded states, and “new states” but never the Great Powers—were obliged to sign minority treaties offering full political and civil rights, and certain special rights, to “persons belonging to racial, linguistic and religious minorities.”⁷ The League of Nations, a new international body created at the same time by the Versailles diplomats and statesmen, was charged with guaranteeing these treaties through procedures of “supervision,” which were later designed and carried out by the Minorities Section of the League’s Secretariat. My current research investigates this experiment in international supervision (see Cowan 2003, 2007a, 2007b, in press). The post-WWI period was, I believe, a crucial moment for setting the parameters for how people think today about minorities (as discrete, “natural,” and, ultimately, “racial” communities), what they are entitled to (i.e., rights), and, particularly after the 1980s, how they should be managed (i.e., internationally).

A consideration of encounters that occurred within, and practices that emanated from, this international institution compels, I argue, a reframing of scholars’ understanding of the processes of creating national subjects—majorities and minorities—in the southern Balkan region and beyond.⁸ At the same time, such an exercise is genealogical, in Michel Foucault’s sense (1984): It allows us to trace the gradual and contentious realization of concepts and categories—race, kin, nation, nationality, majority, and minority—within the post-Versailles world order, as new relations between states and subjects, between states and the international community, and between the international community and subjects were being forged.

I investigate this process of realization through a focus on one particular case: a population whose “nationality” was not only exceptionally contested but, for many members of that population, was also uncertain, unsettled, ambiguous, and, indeed, much of the time, unimportant. I am concerned with claims and counterclaims around the nationality of the speakers of a range of Slavic language dialects who, in the early 20th century, inhabited the variously defined region of Macedonia, composed mostly of the Ottoman vilayets of Selanik, Uskub, and Monastir. In a series of territorial revisions not fully resolved until 1923, Macedonia was divided among three nation-states: Bulgaria, Greece, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (often called “Serbia”; after 1929, its name was officially changed to Yugoslavia). The Slavic-speakers from Macedonia generally called themselves “Bulgarians,” “Bulgaro-Macedonians,” or “Macedonians”;⁹ from the League’s point of view, they counted as a minority in Greece and Yugoslavia and were protected by the treaties those states had signed. Dossiers concerning their situation were filed in the League

Secretariat under the rubrics of *les minorités bulgares* (Bulgarian minorities), *personnes de race bulgares* (persons of Bulgarian race), or *personnes d’origine bulgares* (persons of Bulgarian origin).

However, the states concerned defined these people in quite different ways. To the Bulgarian state, they were definitely Bulgarians by blood and speech. To the Yugoslav state, they were definitely not Bulgarians; their race and language revealed them to be Southern Serbs. What is more, representatives of the Yugoslav state claimed, those waging a guerrilla campaign against the Yugoslav authorities, ostensibly in pursuit of Bulgarian national rights, were not “oppressed minorities” but “terrorists.” The Greek state’s position was somewhat more ambiguous and shifted over the decade of the 1920s. It tended to use terms such as *Bulgarophones* or *Bulgarophone Greeks* or, with less specificity, *Slavophones* or *Slavophone Greeks*, thus acknowledging linguistic otherness but stressing religious Greekness (via a Patriarchist Orthodox affiliation) and Greek national consciousness. In the context of a reciprocal and voluntary emigration agreement between Greece and Bulgaria that I explore later in the article, such persons could opt to declare themselves “Bulgarian by nationality.” In 1929, in conversation with a League official, the Greek prime minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, admitted to three categories of a population that he called “Slavophones”: those who identified as Bulgarians, those who spoke Bulgarian “but were passionately Greek in national consciousness,” and those who had no national identity at all and just wished to be left alone.

In addition to these three state views, many “Bulgarian” emigrants and refugees from Greece and Yugoslavia, then living in Bulgaria, northern Europe, and North America, claimed they were not merely an oppressed minority but an unfulfilled nation, and they used the minority petition procedure to ask the League’s support in the creation of an autonomous Macedonia. These irresolvable disagreements among states, and between states and the designated minorities, guaranteed that efforts to protect minorities always produced interminable debates. Were the persons involved “really” minorities? If so, what kind? Did their alleged mistreatment have anything to do with their being minorities or not? And, finally, were they acting as “loyal” minorities or as “disloyal” insurgents?

Drawing on bureaucratic records of the Minorities Section housed in the League of Nations Archives in Geneva, as well as other sources, in my larger project I attempt to reconstruct the micropractices of power through which national subjects, as well as such subject positions (what Rogers Brubaker [1996] would call “categories of practice”) as Sovereign States, International Man, and Concerned World Citizens, were actively and dialectically produced through practices of recognizing, refusal to recognize at all, and refusal to recognize on a speaker’s own terms. I trace out human and paper encounters between

international civil servants, representatives of states, and individuals speaking as or on behalf of minorities. I attend to the social, cultural, and linguistic codes, as much as the legal and political understandings, that shaped and constrained the encounters and, especially, that determined how, and even whether, a putative minority "voice" could be heard (Cowan 2003).

A major site at which such encounters occurred was the minority petition procedure. In a petition, a group or individual made claims alleging a state's infraction of its minority treaty; the petitioner(s) made truth claims about people, states, and situations to which international bureaucrats and states then responded. I have read nearly 200 petitions, well over a hundred of them concerning the Bulgarian minorities. The petition procedure raises compelling and complex methodological and interpretive questions, especially around the matter of "reading" minority petitions. It raises questions about how we as scholars could or should read them (as documentary evidence? as rhetorical objects?). Crucial questions also arise about how they were "read" by bureaucrats, states, compatriots, adversaries, and wider publics.

Supervision and subjectification

Like other scholars working on the consequences of modernity, I draw broadly on Max Weber's work on bureaucracy and rationalization (Gerth and Mills 1946) and on Foucault's (interalia, 1979, 1980, 1991) arguments about modern regimes of power/knowledge and subjectification. In addition, I have been influenced by recent research on colonialisms, some of which develops Foucauldian lines of argument (see, esp., Cooper and Stoler 1997; Stoler 1995, 2002). Bernard Cohn's (1987) important empirical work in British colonial archives substantiated the significant role of colonial administrations in "creating" new population units ("tribes") as part and parcel of practices of counting and classification that were undertaken for purposes of control. Subsequent work has extended these insights in other colonial contexts (e.g., Appadurai 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Thomas 1994), as well as in relation to states (e.g., Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Kertzer and Arel 2002), European minority groups (e.g., Urla 1993), and 20th-century societies more broadly (e.g., Cadiot 2000; Hacking 1999; Scott 1999). The literature on colonial administration and population categorization is evocative, in that colonial rule frequently involved forms of—virtually always asymmetrical—cooperation with more localized, "native" administrations. However, international supervision, as such, really became elaborated as a mode of governance in the context of the League of Nations (see Cowan 2007a, 2007b; Giddens 1985).

How was the League of Nations, as an international institution, involved in the production of national and minority subjectivities? The arrangements devised to imple-

ment the Convention concerning Reciprocal and Voluntary Emigration, signed by Greece and Bulgaria and attached to the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919, allow one to trace how members of the "international community"—both international functionaries and concerned world citizens selected by the League—collaborated with state agents in the project of national subject-making.¹⁰ The Greco-Bulgarian Mixed Commission (in French, la Commission Gréco-Bulgare de l'Intermigration or la Commission Mixte) exemplified a novel form of governance, one of several experiments in international administration created in the immediate aftermath of the war (see Monnet 1978). In this case, one Greek and one Bulgarian member worked with two so-called neutral members appointed by the League Council—the president always being a neutral. Nominally autonomous, the Greco-Bulgarian Mixed Commission (which itself oversaw a variety of national and local subcommissions) carried out legislative, administrative, and judiciary functions. In the words of Stephen Ladas, author of the definitive work on this exchange, the commission acted as "an intermediary agency between the governments and the emigrants, [seeing] that the latter should receive no pecuniary damage by reason of their emigration" (1932:51).

Key figures in this arrangement were the neutral members: in principle, private citizens without ties of loyalty to either of the principal parties to the agreement yet normally well connected to political circles. The original neutral members appointed by the League Council on September 20, 1920, were both military officers: Colonel Corfe, a New Zealander, and Major Marcel de Roover, a Belgian. Significantly, there is some ambiguity regarding the nature of their status within, and relationship to, the League. Ladas points out that the League Council saw its responsibility as extending only to the appointment of the two neutral members, after which they were to "act under the control and the responsibility of the High Contracting Powers, viz., Greece and Bulgaria" (1932:54). As Ladas peevishly observes, the two neutral members "took upon themselves, quite unwarrantedly, the title of 'delegates of the League of Nations,' and considered themselves entitled to report to the Secretary General on the work of the Commission" (1932:54–55). And, indeed, there is no doubt that these two individuals liaised frequently between the Mixed Commission and the League. The files document an active interaction involving copious correspondence and regular visits of the neutral members to Geneva and, sometimes, of League personnel to Sofia and Athens.

The Mixed Commission was accorded "practically unlimited powers, so far as the execution of the Convention was concerned" (Ladas 1932:56). Although there were contending interpretations regarding the appropriate balance of power among the four members and the degree to which the neutral members were subject to the authority of the Bulgarian and Greek governments, in practice, the neutral

members held the power of decision, in part because the president, always a neutral, had the right to cast the deciding vote in case of a tie.

The authority of the neutral members was even further extended, albeit briefly, when a protocol, submitted jointly on September 29, 1924, by the Greek representative, Mr. Politis, and the Bulgarian representative, Mr. Kalfoff, and immediately adopted by the League, proposed that Corfe and de Roover be appointed as special representatives of the League "to assist the two governments in their efforts to achieve the protection of minorities" by acting as "an advisory body for Greek and Bulgarian minority questions" (Ladas 1932:110–111). The protocol gave them powers to "undertake an inquiry on the spot into the needs of persons belonging to the minorities, especially in the matter of education and religious worship," on the basis of which they were to submit reports to each government "on the measures to be taken" (Ladas 1932:111). Facing considerable pressure from the Serbian government, furious at the Greek government's official recognition, through the protocol, of the minority in Greek territory as Bulgarian rather than South Serbian, the Greek National Assembly unanimously rejected the protocol on February 3, 1925 (see Michailidis 1995). Greek parliamentarians justified the rejection on the grounds that the protocol was "at variance with the Treaty of Minorities" by instituting a procedure that interfered with the internal affairs of the state and that it would exacerbate friction and conflict (Ladas 1932:112). Although short-lived, the protocol nonetheless demonstrates the willingness of states to collaborate in international supervision.

Thus, the Mixed Commission constituted a decision-making body, devised at the international level, in which internationally selected neutral members worked alongside two national representatives to carry out a bilateral agreement between two states, under the active supervision of the League. Through mechanisms that I reveal in due course, the League of Nations collaborated in state-directed processes of disambiguation and fixing of individuals' nationality, in both senses in which that term was used in League contexts: as describing "racial" belonging and "political" membership (Molony 1934). My case example reveals the difficulty of their task and the ways that at least some of the intended beneficiaries of their bureaucratic unscramblings did not share their purificatory goals.

"The situation in Macedonia"

The instability that had characterized this region since the late 19th century—a theater of nationalist conflicts and Great Power rivalries, the First and Second Balkan Wars, and WWI—had not been resolved by 1920, when League responsibilities commenced. As state boundaries were redrawn or reaffirmed and new states set up administrative structures among populations they often regarded with suspicion as

actually or potentially irredentist, minority issues became a flashpoint in diplomatic relations between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The Convention concerning Reciprocal and Voluntary Emigration between Greece and Bulgaria, which had been agreed at the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919 and came into effect in 1920, had envisaged an orderly, voluntary transfer of minority populations as a "solution" to the minority problem. Yet few "Bulgarians" in Greece seemed inclined to emigrate (see Finney 1995, 1997; Ladas 1932). However, in summer 1922, the Greek military continued its campaign into the Anatolian interior; it was driven back by the Turkish army, and the Christian inhabitants of the region were exposed to "reprisals by Turkish irregulars and the victorious Turkish army, following the atrocities committed earlier by the advancing Greek army" (Hirschon 2003:5). Many of the more than one million refugees created by this violence were directed to Greek Macedonia (see Kontogiorgi 2006).

With the new influx of refugees, the situation for the settled "Bulgarian minorities" in the Greek part of Macedonia worsened dramatically,¹¹ as pressure on land, housing, and employment and conflict between different kin-ethnic groups for scarce resources frequently eventuated in violence and forced expropriation of "Bulgarian" properties, often supported or condoned by local officials (Karakasidou 1997; Kontogiorgi 2006; Ladas 1932; League of Nations 1926). In early 1923, when the possibility of war with Turkey loomed, the displacement process was exacerbated after the Greek military forcibly deported to Thessaly and the islands, "for security reasons," 1,500–2,000 "Bulgarian" families living along the railway line from Gumuljina-Komotini to Dedeagach-Alexandropoulis (Ladas 1932:105). "Bulgarian" inhabitants living along the Maritsa-Evros line and from villages in the districts of Drama, Serres, and Demi-Hissar-Sidirokastro were also deported (Kontogiorgi 2006:206).¹² "Bulgarians" who, until 1923, had expressed no intention of emigrating, were frightened by the deportations; many escaped to Bulgaria to avoid them. When those who were deported returned to their homes in autumn 1923, they frequently found their houses and lands occupied by the new refugees from Anatolia; they were thus forced to become refugees themselves.

With the constant movement of persons in and out of such areas, and the duress of encounters between groups, it is doubtful that much normal life—including education and cultural activities—could be carried out. Even in the regions less affected by the Asia Minor refugee influx, such as the western part of Greek Macedonia and Serbian Macedonia, "Bulgarian minorities" were not able to enjoy the rights to schooling in the mother tongue and other rights that the treaties guaranteed them. To the contrary, they faced indifference, at best, and more typically found themselves suspected of disloyalty by inept, ignorant, and frequently corrupt local authorities.¹³ These kinds of political

pressures had played a role in the high levels of emigration out of the Macedonian region—particularly by young men who wanted not only to work but also to avoid military service—since the turn of the century, when it was still under Ottoman rule, and they continued after 1913, when the “New Lands” became Greek territory (Brown n.d.; Mandatzis 1995). But the terrible economic conditions of the Greek Macedonian countryside, including bad harvests in 1924 and 1925 that nearly led to famine, the demographic pressures on the land (which reached crisis point after the arrival of the refugees), and the lack of a state social welfare system, were even more decisive. They ensured that the emigration of “Bulgarians” northward to Bulgaria in the 1920s continued to be supplemented by the long-established labor migration westward, to the United States and Canada, primarily, but also to Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, the South African Union, and Australia (Koliopoulos 1999:24–48; Mandatzis 1995). This migration was both legal and—given the drastic restriction of emigration in the United States and Australia in the early 1920s—increasingly illegal.

The League’s obligations, dictated by the League Covenant, to “guarantee” the minorities treaties and their role in setting up and administratively supporting the Mixed Commission that would oversee the Greco-Bulgarian emigration scheme resulted in the collection by League officials of much diverse material on Macedonia. As signaled in the title of this section, many bureaucratic files classified under the general rubric of “les minorités bulgares” were entitled simply “The Situation in Macedonia.” The extraordinary vigor of Bulgarian organizational activity further ensured that Macedonia became a major concern for the Minorities Section staff. From the moment the petition procedure was established in 1920, but intensifying during periods of crisis between Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, petitions poured in from Bulgarian organizations of every sort (refugee associations and their confederations, women’s societies, peace societies, choral societies, and religious brotherhoods) and from across the world (local “Bulgarian,” “Bulgaro-Macedonian,” or “Macedonian” brotherhoods or clubs and university student societies in the United States, Canada, and northern Europe).¹⁴ The Bulgarian associations also were effective in mobilizing sister international organizations to reiterate support for their positions or, at least, their concerns.¹⁵

Counting, classifying, and unmixing populations

Although the League of Nations did not itself initiate projects to count and classify populations, it sometimes requested them from states. For instance, most minority treaties were worded in such a way that state obligations toward minorities, such as establishing primary schools “in the mother tongue,” were contingent on the existence of sizable communities. Thus, when the issue was disputed,

the League might seek such statistics to ascertain whether “a considerable number” of persons belonging to a minority inhabited a particular region. Moreover, apart from the minority treaties signed in 1919, the League supervised two agreements whose objectives were quite different from those pertaining to settled minorities. The first was the bilateral convention attached to the 1919 Treaty of Neuilly, outlined in the previous section. The second was the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol, signed at Lausanne in January 1923. The second convention followed the Greek military’s ill-fated incursion into central Turkey in summer 1922 and the reprisals of the Turkish army and its irregulars against, and the resulting flight of, Turkey’s own Orthodox Christian inhabitants.

Whereas the Neuilly convention was explicitly conceived as a voluntary emigration scheme—even if, as refugees began to crowd into both northern Greece and Bulgaria (particularly with the dramatic influx into Greece of summer and autumn 1922) the settled “minorities” felt increasingly forced to depart—the Lausanne convention involved a compulsory “exchange” of Orthodox Christians of Turkish territories to Greece and Muslims of Greek territories to Turkey.¹⁶ Crudely but not inaccurately stated, the bilateral agreements of Neuilly and Lausanne aimed to get rid of the minority problem by getting rid of minorities, albeit as humanely as possible, through “unmixing populations” and state-supervised population transfers.¹⁷

The Lausanne convention formalized a transfer that had already occurred by force in the case of the Christian populations; nonetheless, the Greek and Turkish governments still had to arrange for the transfers of the remaining Christians from Turkey and of Muslims from Greece. Summarizing the complex unfolding of the Greek-Turkish exchange (see Hirschon 2003; Kontogiorgi 2006; Ladas 1932; League of Nations 1926) is beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to note that this second exchange incorporated certain core principles of the Greco-Bulgarian emigration convention, notably the promise that those departing would eventually receive compensation for property left behind.¹⁸

In the prototypical Greco-Bulgarian convention, one sees the juxtaposition of the two senses in which the term *nationality* was deployed within League contexts (cf. Molony 1934). The convention allowed those of “Bulgarian nationality” (nationality in what was often described as the “racial” sense) living in Greece to opt to emigrate to Bulgaria and become Bulgarian nationals or subjects (nationality in the sense of membership in a polity, something akin to citizenship) and vice versa.¹⁹ Such persons would, in turn, give up their houses and lands and receive compensation from the government. Through the ingenious—if ultimately unwieldy—system of mixed commissions to oversee emigration and property compensation, League

personnel sought to make population transfers systematic, orderly, peaceful, and economically feasible.

Admittedly, this scheme of voluntary emigration was exceptional. It contravened the general spirit of minority treaties, which aimed to keep minorities in place and reasonably contented, hoping that, if they were treated well, "national minorities" would learn to become loyal citizens of the state in which they were "alien populations" (Finney 1995, 1997). Within a few years of their establishment, though, it was evident that the treaties, as pertained both to the Macedonian region and elsewhere, were doomed to disappoint both states and minorities. States, whose hopes were impossibly raised by ostensible international support for the nationality principle, resented this emphasis on minorities. Minorities, for their part, dreamed of an impartial international arbiter of justice. Some minorities—among them, Germans, Hungarians, and Bulgarians—looked to the League as potentially sympathetic to their efforts to revise "unjust" borders. But they, too, found little willingness within the League to alter the status quo ante.

In the face of this general sense by Balkan states and minorities that minority treaties were bound to fail, representatives of the League of Nations (northern European, North American, and Antipodean) who served as commissioners or who advised in the process supported voluntary emigration between Greece and Bulgaria. Their reports adopted a language of origins, racial kinship, and "akinness" and of minorities who "belonged to a country." This is striking, because such language was relatively suppressed in other minority supervision contexts; indeed, international supervision aimed precisely to deny to the so-called kin-state any formal recognition or legitimate role in its "minority brethren's" affairs. It is as if these international representatives ultimately believed in the reality of racial nationality (as opposed to the merely formal or legal bond between minority and host state). At any rate, they repeatedly expressed disappointment with the small numbers of applications for emigration submitted. In fact, the numbers were so small that, between 1920 and 1926, the deadline was extended five times (Ladas 1932:90-94). For their part, members of the "Bulgarian" minority showed little inclination to uproot and join kin across the border. In addition to reluctance to leave the land and graves of their ancestors, "Bulgarian" peasants faced pressure from the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization not to emigrate, since the organization's political claims depended on the existence of a significant Bulgarian-speaking population. They tended to leave their homes when forced out by violence or fear of violence. When individuals did leave, they often left behind only partial and misleading information about themselves and their properties. Like canny peasants everywhere, they tended to be suspicious of state authorities and were loath to show their hand.

Under guidance of the League, the commissioners designed bureaucratic procedures through which applications for emigration were made, adjudicated, and sometimes reconsidered. There were separate forms for the two quite different cases of residents (in terms of treaty jurisdiction): those of Bulgarian "racial" nationality who were living in Greek territory and who wished to emigrate to Bulgaria and become Bulgarian nationals, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those who had already settled in Bulgaria as émigrés or refugees and who wanted to formalize that affiliation. The same held for the parallel situations of those of Greek "racial" nationality, either living in or originally from Bulgarian territories, who wished to become Greek nationals.²⁰ To emigrate, the applicant needed an official document confirming his or her political belonging and his or her "racial" nationality; typically, such an application was filed by the male head of household on behalf of himself and his family.²¹ Thus, along with his Declaration of Intention to Emigrate, the applicant had to provide a certificate, authorized by a local official, verifying his membership (and, hence, his family's membership) in the Bulgarian or Greek minority.²² These forms were required if he wished to complete a Request for Liquidation of Goods. Finally, in the eyes of the commission, the formal act of filing a declaration to emigrate "constituted 'a solemn and irrevocable act' expressing the applicant's 'definitive decision' to migrate (Ladas 1932:96). These bureaucratic procedures of verification thus served to solidify and fix, by making them part of official documentary records, what were often contextually variable and manipulable identities.

Such bureaucratic procedures, moreover, began to attach individuals to categories of majority and minority. Required by the very nature of the population transfer, they instigated a significant shift from the rather vague, collective way that categories functioned within the minority treaties. Drawing explicitly on the work of Ernest Gellner, but developing an argument that resonates with theorizations by Foucault and Peter Berger, Piero Vereni (1996) has emphasized the role of nationalism and nation-state formation, particularly the raising of a "frontier," in creating the modern subject. According to his argument, public identity in the social milieu of the Ottoman Empire rested on status and role (the Latin *persona[m]*, borrowed from the Etruscan *phersu*, mask; Vereni 1996:6). There was little interest in the interiority of the subject, not yet conceived as the site of true and authentic being. With the emergence of "the modern idea of nations," Vereni insists (1996:6), persons were "induced, instructed, persuaded to become 'individuals' (from the Latin *individuum*, made up from *in-* negation and *dividere* 'divide,' hence 'that which cannot be divided')." If the "truth" of the person was thought to be in the "mask" or "face" presented to the public—a mask that could appropriately be exchanged for another mask, according to

the context—the “truth” of the individual was deemed to lie “inside” and to endure across contexts.

The Greco-Bulgarian Convention concerning Reciprocal and Voluntary Emigration offers a clear example of procedures, involving coordination between state and international agencies, that instituted this change from person to individual. These procedures realized—in the sense of making real—the dominant vision of architects of nation-states, who preferred a modern subject that was the same from inside to outside, that was consistent in her or his “national” characteristics and practices (she or he was Bulgarian because she or he spoke Bulgarian, did Bulgarian things, and was Bulgarian through and through) and that was stable (she or he was and “did” Bulgarian all the time and in all contexts). The critical issue was not simply whether this nationality was a matter of blood or choice. What mattered was that the national affiliation be, once and for all, irrevocable, whether acquired by descent or freely chosen at a moment of decision.

Formal Declarations of Intent to Emigrate were read, I suggest, as evidence of the national “truth” of the human beings who submitted them (and who submitted to them). Local representatives of the state confirmed this “truth” by providing the minority certificate. By means of this bureaucratic procedure, frequently a desperate last resort for the applicant, an international authority collaborated in fixing the nationality of a subject once and for all. It then facilitated the “return” of that now “national” subject “home,” to the territory of his or her true nation.

“Three passports or none at all”: Problem cases

Although the procedure agreed between Greece and Bulgaria appeared fairly straightforward, the political and material turmoil the region had suffered affected processes of governance. Not only was state power still insecure but subjects also remained undisciplined; they evaded inscription or became overinscribed. I discern exasperation in the tone of the New Zealander, Colonel Corfe, neutral member of the Greco-Bulgarian Mixed Commission, as he explains in a private memorandum in September 1923 to his friend and fellow countryman, Sir James Allen, the High Commissioner for New Zealand in London, the difficult conditions under which his commission attempted to carry out its duties:

The political history of the regions covered by the Emigration Convention made the recognition and definition of the legal status of many of the would-be migrants, especially with regard to the ownership of their property and the determination of their national identity, extremely complicated. Apart from the endless migrations and informal abandon and seizure of properties that have taken place . . . it is no uncommon thing to find candidates for emigration who have served successively in the Turkish, Bulgarian and Greek armies,

speaking at least two of the languages equally fluently, and possess three passports or none at all.²³

Colonel Corfe and his fellow commissioners faced daily the disorderliness of persons whose legal nationality was indeterminate. The problem was not only persons lacking passports but also those who had too many.²⁴ This was an era when dual nationality was thought just as tragic as statelessness: Both legal statuses violated the assumption that a person belonged to one, and only one, state (Arendt 1968; Malkki 1992; Molony 1934; Skran 1995). And when a person “speaks at least two languages equally fluently and possesses three passports, or none at all,” the commissioners were without evidence for her or his “real” nationality.

What could be done in such cases? The Mixed Commission decided that “whenever a doubt should subsist in the Commission or its agents as to whether a person was akin by race, religion or language to the people of a country, this doubt should be resolved in favor of the person in question.” The commission thought that “objective criteria” were “theoretically preferable” but “extremely difficult to apply” (Ladas 1932:77). I summarize from Ladas’s text one such contested application that the Mixed Commission examined in August 1926: Thodor Nicoloff, of a village in Bulgaria, claimed to belong to the Greek minority because he had a “Greek consciousness” and wanted to live in Greece. The Bulgarian member of the Mixed Commission opposed this, saying the man was “of Bulgarian nationality by blood and language.” The Greek member, however, supported the application, saying that Nicoloff had married in the Greek Patriarchal Orthodox church, and baptized his children there. “This,” he said, “was the best proof” that he had ceased to have a Bulgarian consciousness, and that he belonged to the Greek minority. Since the Commission believed that “a doubt existed,” Nicoloff was allowed to emigrate (Ladas 1932:78).²⁵

Another case from the League files shows, nonetheless, that this sort of individual voluntarism about “real” nationality relied on prior inscription within state population records.²⁶ One Jean Mittas submitted a petition to the League in March 1925, citing Article 12 of the Convention concerning Reciprocal and Voluntary Emigration and complaining that his application for property compensation had been turned down by the Mixed Commission. In a note to Minorities Section Director Eric Colban, the section official, Helmer Rosting, described Mittas as “probably a Greek who left Bulgaria before the Convention came into force.” He pointed out, first, that as Mittas’s claim pertained to the convention, it was not, strictly speaking, a minorities matter. Rather, it fell under the jurisdiction of the Mixed Commission. Colban instructed Rosting to contact the commissioners; an undated letter to Rosting signed by Colonel Corfe and Marcel de Roover summarizes their interpretation of the case. They confirmed that Mr Mittas was,