Haunted by the “Enemy” Within: Brigandage, Vlachian/Albanian Greekness, Turkish “Contamination,” and Narratives of Greek Nationhood in the Dilessi/Marathon Affair (1870)

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Abstract

This essay explores Greek and British observations on the phenomenon of brigandage in Greece following a major Anglo-Greek diplomatic episode known as “The Dilessi/Marathon Murders” (1870). Brigandage in Greece was extensively discussed abroad after the foundation of the Greek state in the 1830s. The Dilessi Murders, however, triggered a debate in Britain on Greece’s inability to become a fully modernized state. Other European voices, sympathetic or not, also joined this debate. The unhappy coincidence of this “trial” with the creation of the Neohellenic imagined community produced an internal (Greek) debate that was nicely reflected in the rhetoric of Greek journalism and administration. In this debate brigandage was represented as an “epidemic” phenomenon communicated to Greece from Turkey. The Turks had managed to contaminate the “nation” with the help of the Vlachs and the Albanians who lived within the Greek Kingdom. These populations were subsequently expelled from the “nation” through a series of symbolic actions. This discourse, which was crystallized after the Dilessi Affair, assumed a double function in the Greek imaginary: as a response to British and indeed European accusations of Greek backwardness, and as an expression of the Vlachian/Albanian contribution to the process of Neohellenic self-recognition.

Historical Survey: towards a genealogy of Greek brigandage

The nineteenth century was the era of an agonizing struggle by the “Great Powers” of Europe to discipline small subordinate ethnicities that were striving for emancipation. In principle, the colossal empires of Austria, Russia, and Turkey were powerful enough to hold back this flood of national “awakening”; in practice, the galaxy of these would-be-nations...
constantly threatened the harmonious imperial universe (Jenkins 1961: 3–4).

The Greek γένος (γένος) or race constituted one of these historical communities that strived for liberation from Ottoman rule. The Greeks, who had spent almost three centuries under what they called the Ottoman “yoke,” founded their modern state in 1832 following a bloody revolution (1821–1828). In doing so they had the help of three of the Great Powers of Europe: Britain, France, and Russia. However, the generosity of these powers, which after the institutionalization of Greece assumed the duties of its protector, generated ambivalent feelings among Greeks. The involvement of such external political actors in the new state and their aspiration to take control over Greek political developments suggested that the Greeks had simply replaced one master with another.

In theory, the battle of Navarino (1827) was regarded as an unsubtle sign of European philhellenism, which would help the “newly-born” state to acquire a decent place in the “European family” of nations. But in practice, the Greece the “Protecting” Powers decided to found consisted only of the Peloponnesos, Attica, and some islands, and was deemed by Greek patriots to have become a plaything kingdom, which would serve as an arena for the diplomatic struggles of its protectors. The Bavarian Prince Otho was designated King, but was replaced in 1863 by another foreigner from the royal house of Denmark, who became King George I.

Inevitably, many Greeks began to dream of a bigger and truly independent state, which would include all the so-called “unredeemed” territories: Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace, the Aegean Islands, and the umbilical cord of Byzantium, Constantinople. This project of reconstructing of Byzantium, which was born on the day of the death of Constantinople in 1453, was one of the uniting factors of Hellenism during the difficult times that followed subjection to the Ottomans. But in the nineteenth-century context, it remerged with the name “Great Idea,” led to a series of conflicts with the Turks, and invoked the wrath of the Protecting Powers, who could not accept Greece’s uncontrolled expansion during a period in which she could not impose order within her imposed and restricted borders. Ominously, the Great Idea ignored the national dreams of other emerging Balkan nations who were not disposed to exchange the Turkish “yoke” for a new, Greek one (Stevens 1989; Skopetea 1984).

The concurrence of nationalist and imperial projects in the Greek national imaginary was destined to aggravate the already problematic life of the kingdom. One of the most frequent accusations leveled at Greek governments by the protectors concerned Greek’s inability to
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suppress the criminal elements that infested the mountainous and remote districts and that appeared to overrun the country. These elements constituted what contemporary Greeks called *lestia* (λεστεία) or brigandage—a phenomenon the British patrons of Greece in particular found unacceptable for a country that wanted to claim a European identity.

Of course, things were easier said than done. The harrowing political experience of the post-Independence era made Greek brigandage a perfect form of what Gallant has termed “military entrepreneurship” subsidized and supported by the state itself (Gallant 1999; Dickie 1993; Dickie 1999). The “Bavarization” of the national administrative machine, which ignored the actual social problems of the Kingdom, and the European call for a rapid modernization of the country acted as a catalyst in the Greek body politic and the wider society of Greece. The failure to compensate veterans of the War of Independence (1821–1828), the pending question of land distribution, the use of bands for the intimidation of the electorate by various factions that began to operate within the constitutional framework in the 1840s (Finlay, II, 1973:313,315), and the use of brigands as an irregular army force against the Ottoman empire for the promotion of the Great Idea were some of the underlying reasons for the transformation of the phenomenon of brigandage into an institution (Petropoulos-Koumarianou 1980:38–39; Kallingas 1987:152–154; Koliopoulos 1988:218–219; McGrew 1985:9–11).

Who was to be blamed for this chaos? The role played by brigandage in the process of nation-building was, after all, equivocal. On the one hand, after the creation of Greece, it kept alive the popular belief in the heroic spirit of *klephtism*, the spasmodic form of resistance developed by Greek and Balkan peoples against their rulers—whether these be Turks, Albanians, or indeed Greeks—during the ages of “thralldom” (Damianakos 1987:78; Jenkins 1998; Hobsbawm 1972; Hobsbawm 1959). This romanticization of the *kleph* (κλέφθιστη)-brigand (for the two were inevitably conflated in the Greek mind) was further reinforced by the fact that brigandage was incorporated into the logic of the Great Idea. On the other hand, brigandage subverted the image of modern Greece as the heiress of ancient Greek civilization—the unifying European signifier of order, harmony, democracy, and intellectual rigor. This split response to the socio-political phenomenon of *lestia*, made it stand in the Neohellenic imaginary both as a “scourge” and as a demonstration of Greek irredentist heroism, a dangerous “disease” and an almost innate Greek virtue. The present-day historiography of Greece does not always escape this confusion. It needs to be borne in mind that *lestia* and *klephtism* were not necessarily recognized by the nineteenth-century
commentators as separate and distinct categories; and, when they were, they may have signified different practices from the ones we tend to fit nowadays into these two concepts.

Before setting out to examine nineteenth-century British and Greek debates on Greek brigandage, it is therefore desirable to present the state of affairs before the episode on which we will focus. It is necessary to bear in mind that Greece was economically dependent upon its patrons, among whom Britain appeared to be the most dissatisfied with the course things had taken in the tiny kingdom. Objectively, the kingdom suffered from maladministration. When King George assumed his duties in 1864, the state machine was in ruins. The corruption of the army had its roots in the Ministry of War itself. That slow-moving bureaucracy, whose inefficiency was also due to the incessant changes of government, could not take on the persecution of the brigands (Vitti 1990:210–212). The Greek judicial system, influenced by external factors, was even more inefficient, with courts often releasing criminals because of their powerful backers (Kallingas 1987:83–86). Agricultural work had been violently interrupted by brigand raids and foreign visitors were able to observe that fertile and beautiful valleys in the mountainous districts remained desolate and visited only by goats (The Times 29 April 1870). State records show that from April to August 1865, the government had put a price on the head of at least forty chief brigands and that in many cases it raised this three and four times, looking for informants in vain. Troops were sent everywhere to hunt brigands, but all attempts proved fruitless (Koliopoulos 1988:148).

Bearing all these Greek domestic problems in mind, we can begin to understand why the prospects for immediate solutions of the problem were limited. However, it has to be stated that Greek public insecurity was not a unique phenomenon either in the Mediterranean region or in Europe in general. As Martin Blinkhorn (2000) has explained in a recent article, the third quarter of the nineteenth century was rich in episodes of kidnapping in European countries. British travellers, whose status or wealth attracted profit-making brigands, often became targets for kidnapping and ransoming in Spain, Italy, and the Balkans, long before the episode we investigate.

Even though brigandage and outlawry were not unknown phenomena to Britons, nothing could prepare them for the tragedy that descended upon their country in 1870. In April of that year a group of upper-class Englishmen were kidnapped in Pikermi, a location close to Athens. Despite the efforts of the Greek government (of Alexandros Zaimis) and the British Minister at Athens, Erskine, to negotiate their ransoming, three of them were brutally murdered by the band of the Arvanitakis brothers. A diplomatic episode ensued, and members of the
British liberal government and the Foreign Office, as well as members of the Conservative Opposition, considered war with Greece (Jenkins 1998). This *cause célèbre* of the 1870s, which has remained in the annals of history as the Dilessi/Marathon Murders, had a very marked effect on the Neohellenic mind, especially because Greece was accused by many European philhellenic countries of having utterly failed to keep up with the European, “civilized,” standards of security. The fear that “Europe” was not well-disposed towards Greece after Dilessi troubled the Greeks and made them feel that they had to apologize for their domestic problems. Following Dilessi, Greek apologies were addressed to many different audiences: an internal (Greek) one, a European, and an English.

The present analysis concentrates on the Dilessi affair because the episode served as a nodal point in the Anglo-Greek encounter. It is true that Greek representations of brigandage as a non-Greek phenomenon were not exclusively addressed to Britain. Also, such Greek narratives pre-existed and outlived the Dilessi conflict; but in the Dilessi affair they were mobilized and transformed into a defensive mechanism towards European accusations. The mechanism also activated self-reflections that shed light on processes concerning the formation of modern Greek identity. For this reason, as this analysis proceeds, it is necessary to distinguish carefully the primary sources before and after the Dilessi Murders.

*Negotiating Identities*

The diaries of Sir Thomas Wyse² open this analysis, because the date of publication suggests that they were addressed to an English audience that was familiar with the Dilessi case. The fact that Winifred Wyse, Sir Thomas’s niece and editor of these diaries in 1871, dedicated her long introduction to Wyse’s account to the question of brigandage in Greece makes this connection even clearer. Wyse’s *Impressions* were in fact produced during his travels through the greater part of liberated Greece at the end of the 1850s. The travels aimed at producing reports that would cover all aspects of the economic and social condition of Greece, and that would be used by the Commission constituted by the Great Powers to look into the state of Greek affairs after the end of the Crimean War (1857).

Whether one chooses to see in Wyse a representative of British administration or not, he was a sharp and insightful observer. In one of his ritualistic excursions in Attica, he came across an encampment of Vlachs: “a wild, savage-looking race, but courteous enough when talked to.” “Our Theban friend,” continued Sir Thomas, “looked on them with
less indulgence, saying that they were of those who protected and harboured Daveli and Karabeliki and other brigands, and by their aid and sympathy kept up that state of things in the country” (Wyse 1871:70).

Such fleeting impressions were part of the Greek cultural landscape. One of the things independence brought to the surface was the diversity of cultures and customs in the Greek peninsula that the system of communities had preserved throughout Ottoman rule. Migration of populations to mountainous areas, inaccessible to the Turks, had further transformed the human geography of the Greek space. Thereafter, the demographic legacy of the Ottoman period had been handed down to the Greek state. Social fragmentation was never eliminated, partially due to the existence of mountain peoples who spoke languages other than Greek and who lived separately from the Greek population of the metropolis and the lately formed towns of Attica and the Peloponnesos (McGrew 1985:7–18).

Among the ethnic groups within the Greek Kingdom, the Vlachs and Sarakatsans were the ones most strongly linked to economic activities, such as stock-rearing, that forced them to live in the countryside. In some territories of European Turkey the largest of these groups were Albanians who considered themselves Greek, but there were also instances in which the Albanians’ ethnic designation was confused with that of the Vlachs. In so far as the Vlachs in Eastern Thrace and Western Macedonia were of Albanian origin, there is an historical basis for this association. However, a series of further associations plunged the origin of these groups into obscurity. The Vlachs and Sarakatsans were constantly confused in Bulgarian records, while in those of the early modern Ottoman empire it was the Greeks and the merchant Vlachs of the Balkans who became terminologically interchangeable.

According to Winnifrith (1987), within the framework of modern Greek identity, this blurring formed a historical problematic, because there was a direct correspondence between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Albanian activities (a time when the Ottoman empire was losing its authority) and those during the collapse of Byzantine authority in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a collapse that led to movements by both Vlachs and Albanians into the Greek peninsula. Apart from the hints we have that Albanians were of Illyrian origin (Winnifrith 1992) and Vlachs spoke a Latin language, it would be difficult to trace back the racial links of all these groups; the Greek state in the nineteenth century had serious difficulties as well. In 1836 the government of King Otho had identified at least four such groups of “tent-dwellers,” in whose eyes the Greek state was only an intruder and Greeks a shadowy urban people, scarcely know in their communities.
But the purpose of this study is not to restore some primal truth concerning the origin of the Vlachs and Albanians of Greece—contra the truth of the nineteenth-century Greek state. The “real” origins of Vlachs and Albanians has no place in this analysis, which focuses on what truly mattered for the spokesmen of the Greek imagined community: symbolization of identity. In any case, erudite and specialized researchers found it difficult to arrive at definite conclusions concerning this issue, or they have had recourse to further classification of regional identities (Dima 1994)—a venture that cannot be pursued here.

This research belongs more properly to the historiographical debate initiated by Romilly Jenkins (in the Dilessi Murders) and John Koliopoulos (in Brigands with a Cause and Listés), although its aim is not so much to examine the phenomenon of brigandage per se but rather the implications of brigandage for nineteenth-century questions of Greek identity.

The bitter comment of Wyse’s interlocutor that the Vlachs harbored brigandage has to be examined. There was a grain of truth in that verdict. The Vlach shepherds, being geographically cut off and socially marginal, passed their lives close to brigand hideouts; hence, extortion as well as recruitment of them by brigands was a very common phenomenon. In 1869 Andreas Moskonisios, a Greek second lieutenant, published a treatise under the title Το Κάτοπτρον της Ληστείας εν Ελλάδi (The Mirror of Brigandage in Greece), in which he argued that two-thirds of a brigand band usually consisted of Vlach shepherds and only one third of Greek peasants or deserters (Moskonisios 1869).

But identifying particular social circumstances that encourage or force members of a group to have recourse to crime is not the same as suggesting its complete identification with that crime. Long before Moskonisios the question of brigandage as an “endemic national malady” had been laid before the Greek parliament. As Koliopoulos has explained, the outcome of this ongoing debate eventually led to the appointment of a commission to examine the problem. Interestingly, the reports of the commission repeated the narrative Wyse had recorded in his travel journals: the Vlach shepherds, these “illiterate” and “uncouth” tribes were certainly to be blamed for this “scourge” (Koliopoulos 1987:173). As for the rest of the Greek nation, well, it was innocent.

It becomes apparent that the internal debate concerning the relationship of such tribes with brigandage dates back to the Othonian period. There were some who expressed objections to this argument. For the purpose of this study, one example will suffice, an example in which the chosen voice appears to negotiate rather than affirm such a connection between tribes and brigandage. This protest against this
growing national myth is found in Thanos Vlekas, Pavlos Kallingas’s novel on Greek brigandage, which was published in the mid 1850s. This is an important example because of Kallingas’s involvement in politics and public affairs at that time. In this novel, the Greek brigand Tasos, who is pursued by Greek troops, escapes, crosses the border, and together with some Albanians first works for the Turks, and then resigns his “job” and devastates Greek villages (Kallingas 1987:43–47). The audience for Kallingas’s deconstruction of Greek “truth” was Greek and not British. His “anti-Greek” narrative did not find an imitator within the community of the Greek literati and sank into oblivion; few were prepared to accept that brigandage was a Greek problem.

Hence, the argument that “exorcized” the evil within was ready at hand when the Dilessi episode erupted. It was therefore no big surprise that it was mobilized during the Dilessi crisis, when the Greek state had to re-address and resolve the question of brigandage to the satisfaction of both Greeks and a British government in which extreme voices that echoed Palmerston demanded an occupation of Greece. In addition, the Greek nation had to restore Greek honor in the eyes of a broader, European audience that in the Greek imaginary demanded nothing less than the political and social regeneration of ancient Hellas. It must have been evident to the defenders of Greek national honor that the Arvanitakis did not exactly represent a modern Aristotle to these looking at Greece from abroad.

After the Dilessi murders, the Greek Ministry of the Interior sent Aión (Αἴων), a pro-government newspaper of the day, a report that included the names of the dead and captured brigands. Aión was one of the first Greek newspapers to contribute to the official crystallization of what Jenkins rightly termed “ethnic truth.” For Aión did not just publish the report; it also enhanced it with the argument that most of the brigands “belonged to the tribe of Vlachopoiménes [Βλαχοποιμένες]” or Vlach-shepherds (9 April 1870). According to Palingenesía (Παλιγγενεσία), another Greek (nationalist) newspaper, the Greek nation always denounced such crimes.

This phenomenon would not have been regarded as something disgraceful if we had approached it from the standpoint of those nomads […] but it is a fact that the Greek nation does not consist of this small race, which lives a primitive and savage life. (15 May 1870)

It is necessary to add here that the title of the article was “The English Press” and that it was a response to the bellicose language of the English journalists, who harped on a profound association of brigandage and Greek politics and showed no respect for the “natural rights of the
nations (such as the Greek) . . . consolidated by treaties.” This rhetorical practice had a double aim: on the one hand, Greek journalists tried to discipline their British “accusers” by reminding them of the holy cause of the Greek Revolution and the subsequent treaties of liberation. On the other hand, they generated a discourse in which brigandage was placed within the category of savagery which, in its turn, was associated with Vlach identity. The geometry of the discourse was predicated upon the binary opposition: Vlach tribes-savagery-brigandage vs. Greek society-civilization-order. The same argument was repeated in a more challenging fashion some weeks later.

The question of the origin of brigandage was investigated after the Dilessi murders by the director of the French school at Athens, Émile Burnouf, in a treatise published in the Revue des Deux Mondes, a journal, initially associated with the Orleanist regime, that by 1870 had come to occupy a generally open-minded position and display an attachment to middle-class French culture. The Revue des Deux Mondes was a widely circulated journal and the thesis Burnouf presented hit its mark: for Greeks this “voice” came to (conveniently) represent French opinion. In addition, Burnouf was considered an “up-to-date” observer who knew Greek affairs. There are therefore two reasons for mentioning Burnouf’s article here: first, his treatise supported the Greek journalistic argument, and thus made the latter appear more reliable in Britain; and second, Greek newspapers anxious to attack those British commentators who found the Greek argument concerning the Vlachs unconvincing were able to present Burnouf’s reflections as the voice of “France,” another civilizing protector of Greece. Moreover, Burnouf’s comments somehow counterbalanced the French “satirization” of Greek brigandage by Edmond About, a French novelist whose “anti-Greek” works out sold all novels in the Europe of the 1850s and infuriated the Greek readership.

For Burnouf, the brigands in Greece were not Greeks “properly speaking” but “Albanians or Vlachopoimènes-Vlachs.” His comments were translated and published by the English radical newspaper The Pall Mall Gazette (20 June 1870), which found his views plausible. Not surprisingly, Palingenesía also translated Burnouf’s work and added:

Mr. Burnouf admits and believes, like any man of integrity, that the Greek nation is not guilty of those crimes, but a victim of villains. Another very wise foreigner, who has been a resident in Greece for a number of years, was also forced to draw the same conclusion, but he took the childish initiative at the same time to argue that since we accept in our nation the good and virtuous Vlachs, it is fair to be charged with the crimes of the vicious ones! (15 June 1870)
The “wise foreigner” who was “forced” to submit to Greek discourse was the long-standing philhellene and *The Times* correspondent in Athens, George Finlay.

Passionate though it may have been, the statement that Finlay was persuaded to accept the Greek version of truth was inaccurate. In *The Times of 3 June 1870*, Finlay had produced a detailed analysis of the ways Greek authorities and King Otho himself occasionally cooperated with “brigand Vlachs” for their own interests. It was unfortunate for Greeks that Finlay was in a position to illustrate his point by reference to the example of Takos Arvanitakis. Takos, one of the brigand chiefs of the Dilesi band, although a Vlach, had participated in the revolution which King Otho instigated in Thessaly and Epirus during the Crimean War; thereafter, he was employed by the government to pursue brigands. Although his biographical note touched a raw nerve, it was the second part of Finlay’s skillful analysis that thrust the knife into the heart of the question of national identity. If, Finlay argued, one examined the processes that had taken place in the melting pot of Greek society after the Revolution, Greekness appeared as an arbitrary category, inclusive rather than exclusive.

It must be observed that many of the benefactors who enriched the Greek Kingdom and the city of Athens by their donations of money, by founding charitable and scientific societies, and by erecting some of the principal buildings that adorn Athens had been of *Vallach* and not of Greek nationality. *This non-Hellenic race* furnished Greece with one of its most eminent statesmen in Colettes and one of its best judges in Clonares; and if I am not mistaken the first Greek press in Turkey out of Constantinople was established, *not by men of Greek race*, but by these Vallachs at Moschopoli (emphasis added). (3 June 1870)

This argument was not new in the British circuitry of ideas, and it certainly did not apply to Vlachs only. A similar comment appeared in the 1850s in one volume of a popular and influential series by an anonymous writer who signed his books as “The Roving Englishman.” The popularity of this author’s travel diaries increased when Lord Palmerston acknowledged him as an authority on Eastern Affairs. In the second edition of his volume on Turkey, originally written before the Crimean War, this author praised the “self-denying race of Epirus” (Albania-Vlachs) for its contribution to the foundation of the Greek Kingdom, and its excellence in the civil service and the Chambers of Greece (*The Roving Englishman* 1877:215–216). Finlay was at the very least aware of this passage, since this volume is in his personal library, stored today in the British School at Athens. The interesting part of the story was that in Finlay’s erudite essay the Vlachs, like the Roving
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Englishman’s Albanian-Vlachs, were presented as Greeks, but categorized as “non-Hellenic.” The careful choice between the term “Greek” and the term “Hellene” is suggestive in this instance. Greek from Graecus was the word the Romans used to designate the Hellenes as imperial subjects—an effective twist that divested the latter of any claims on a glorious and admired past, their cultural heritage, which was appropriated by their masters. Among Greeks, Grekós (Γρεκός) was an ambiguous designation that could signify the heterochthonous Greek, but also the “slave” of Turkish values. It is more likely that Finlay’s comment was a reference to the pre-hellenic historical background of the Vlachs—a comment that should be borne in mind.

The way Greeks used Finlay’s commentary is exemplified by the responses to his article in the Greek press. It was translated and published in Clió (30/11 July 1870), whereas the more aggressive Palingenesía attacked Finlay relentlessly because in it he dishonored the names of Klonaris and Kolettis.

“Even if we presume that they were born Vlachs—something yet to be verified—one should not dismiss the fact that they were born in the bosom of Greek [Ελληνική] society, they were fed by its milk [ . . . ] while the brigands are born and nurtured as nomads and receive nothing from our society.” (15 June 1870)

Evidently Palingenesía was suggesting that the nomadic way of living characterized only one category of Vlachs. These particular Vlachs were the “savages” of the Greek narrative on the Dilessi affair.

Under such adverse circumstances the nation desperately needed an object on to which to project its defects; it needed a plot and a setting. Consequently, Greek imagination transformed the Vlach/Albanian brigands of the Greek Kingdom into brigand invaders from the Ottoman empire. Fragments of this suggestion appeared in three pamphlets published after the Dilessi murders. They appeared first in Thoughts on the Suppression of Brigandage (1870:6–7), a pamphlet that circulated in Athens “anonymously” and was praised by Aión in its issue of 13 May 1870. Notwithstanding his supposed anonymity, the author was well known in Athenian circles as Antonios Rikakis, a lawyer and public prosecutor. Suspicions are in order concerning Rikakis’s performance, not only because he “failed” to remain anonymous but also because the circulation of his pamphlet closely coincided with his Association’s sending a protest to Zaimis in response to rumors that Athenian lawyers acted as solicitors for the Arvanitakis band (Aión, 4 May 1870). Rikakis’s pamphlet invited the “nation” (a term used interchangeably in his narrative with “Greek authorities”) to reflect on the situation so as to avoid humiliations similar to that at Dilessi in the
future. The rhetorical patterns he employed in his work are interesting: although he explicitly addressed himself to a Greek audience, the opening and concluding paragraphs reminded his readers that the Greek Kingdom was under British and indeed European surveillance (1870:3–4, 28).

Major Dimitris Antonopoulos, the second and sharper observer, proposed a series of remedies for Greek “disorder” in his pamphlet, Reflections on a Successful Persecution and Elimination of our Country’s Catastrophe, Brigandage. Nevertheless, he started his pamphlet with the verdict that “the brigands have this facility to escape to Turkish territories, in which not only are they not pursued, but they are also harbored” (1870:1). Although the Vlachs did not figure in his work, his analysis was symptomatic of the Greek cast of mind. The identity of the brigands became a secondary issue, thus giving way in his discourse to the connection of the brigands with the historical enemy of the “nation”: Turkey. Unlike Rikakis, Antonopoulos did not mention the Dilessi Murders in his pamphlet; his analysis was explicitly concerned with potential changes in the Greek legal system and with the efficiency of the Greek state machine in matters concerning the pursuit of brigands. Antonopoulos’s study was intended to revisit the question of the official measures that ought to be taken against brigand bands and to rekindle an internal dialogue. Aión, nevertheless, placed the pamphlet within the framework of the impact the massacre had on Anglo-Greek relations and Greek administrative changes (11 June 1870).

Bits and pieces of the question of the Vlachs and the Albanians can be spotted in other sources. Colonel Panos Koroneos proceeded to show that the name Arvanitakis derives from Arvanítovlachoi, “that is, nomads” (1870:8), and exulting over the supposedly defeated English commentators, he concluded:

Is it the opposition’s or the nation’s fault if General Arvanitakis transferred his camp from Turkey, where he prepared his campaign, and marching into Greek territories reached Pikermi? (1870:11)

In Koroneos’s argument, the Vlachs and the Albanians were merged (Arvanítovlachoi) and then associated with Turkish anti-Greek propaganda. Thus the fear of internal threat (coming from a tribe that lives in Greece) was externalized (like other Arvanítovlachoi the Arvanitakis band takes refuge in or comes from Turkey). Koroneos’s work was explicitly addressed to an English audience, as the title of his pamphlet shows.

Central to the Greek response to the Dilessi affair was the work of John Gennadios, Notes on the Recent Murders by Brigands in Greece, which was published some months after the episode. Gennadios was the son of
the great Greek scholar Georgios Gennadios and Artemis Venizelou, a member of a famous Athenian family. At the time of the crisis he was a clerk in the commercial enterprise of the Rallis Brothers in London, but after publication of his diatribe he had to resign his job. However, there is evidence not only that he received financial help from his Greek boss but also that he was in touch with the Greek government for the translation of his book into Greek (a task that was left unfinished in 1871 and can be consulted today in the Gennadion Library in Athens).

In his diaries Gennadios listed the names of several individuals who belonged to the intellectual and ruling elites of Greece and England, all of whom received a free copy of his work. The London Hellenic Society contributed to publication expenses, but some unanswered questions still remain: Where did Gennadios find the rest of the capital for publication? How did he become Secretary of the Greek Embassy at Constantinople? Did he act independently or as an agent of the Greek intelligence services?

Putting aside the gossip concerning the web of political contacts that Gennadios might have established, his rhetorical skills remain impressive. Despite the fact that his argumentation was not intrinsically original, his ability to absorb and classify information from the English and Greek press enabled him to reconstruct the frame of Greek discourse concerning the social and ethnic identity of Vlachs and Albanians in Greece, and their relationship with the essential qualities of the Greek “nation.” Evidently, his argument was primarily addressed to the British—which is why he published his work in English. His statement that the Albanian-Vlach brigands were Turkish agents who wanted to damage Greece's reputation abroad was based on a brilliant combination of argumentative fragments. The first and most important of these (which is examined later in this essay) was that because the accomplices of the Arvanitakis band and the mysterious instigators of the crime had committed high treason, they no longer belonged to the Greek imagined community (Mélion 21 April 1870; Aión 9 April 1870). The second was that the Arvanitakis band consisted of Vlachs. The third was that the Ottoman empire repeatedly refused to cooperate with Greek authorities in the suppression of border crimes. The alchemic outcome of this mixture was the golden theory of the immaculate nation: the murders had not been committed by Greek brigands, but by Vlach/Albanian brigands in Greece.

It is important to follow the logic of this argument, because it provides us with insight into nineteenth-century Greek self-definitions predicated upon history. Gennadios's point of departure was similar to that of Aión: that is, the list of the names of the Arvanitakis band.
Only Nos. 8, 12, and 18 are natives of Greece and Greek subjects; the rest are all from Turkey, and belong to a class of nomadic shepherds [footnote: these are the “Wallach Shepherds” whom Mr. Lloyd mentions in his diary (No. 5, p. 4)] who exist both in Greece and Turkey, and who form a nationality of themselves. They are known by the name of Koutzo-Vallachs, a tribe who immigrated from the borders of Danube into Greece during the twelfth century. They have a dialect of their own, but most speak Greek. The brigand bands that infest Greece and Turkey are composed and are recruited almost exclusively from this tribe. [ . . . ] That these men were not of Greek but of Slav origin it would be evident to all who have glanced at the ghastly photograph of the heads of the seven brigands shot during the engagement [ . . . ] Their names are also sure indications of their nationality. “Arvanitaki” means “little Albanian,” and is not a surname, properly so called, but a kind of distinct epithet, such as most of these men are known by, so as to contradistinguish them from others of the same Christian name. (1870:117–119, emphasis added)

Gennadios cited Lloyd, one of the victims in the Dilessi episode, because he wanted to make his argument plausible in the eyes of an English readership. In his discourse, nonetheless, the Arvanitakis men were Albanian-Vlachs and most members of the band of Dilessi belonged to the Vlach communities of shepherds. What is interesting in Gennadios’s argument is his ambiguity concerning the identity of the brigands that infest Greece as he variously says: (a) the vast majority of the members of the Dilessi band are of Slav origin, (b) brigands in Greece often come from Turkey; and (c) sometimes they speak Greek. What is left outside Gennadios’s argument is also important: not only was he not concerned with his Albanians/Vlachs’ self-designation, he avoided the question altogether.

Gennadios did, however, explicitly condemn Finlay for his article, thereby following Palingenesia’s policy. The Times correspondent, he declared, “has evidently confounded the Greeks of Epirus, who have undoubtedly shown themselves the greatest benefactors of our common fatherland, with these Vallach nomads, who, far from having ever produced anything but good soldiers, are proverbial for their inaptitude to intellectual culture and civilization” (1870:118). At one point Gennadios even claimed that the brigands appealed for amnesty both in Greece and in Turkey, because they were “Turks-Albanians” (Τουρκαλβανοί). Gennadios followed the journalistic argument: “civilization and culture” become intrinsic Greek qualities that the Vlach tribes of Greece (not to mention those of Turkey) did not possess.

Gennadios’s narrative of Greek identity is fascinating because it uses the principle of negation, that is, it defined what was not Greek. Later, Greek politicians embraced this argument and used it to defend
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Greece against European criticisms (Milisis 1871:20; Hadjiskos 1871:11). With hindsight, it could be said that the whole argument was unfair. Jenkin’s melancholy reflection that the Vlach-Albanians, whom all these commentators wanted to expel from the Greek nation, were, if not Greek-speaking, at least Orthodox Christians, “who formed a part of exactly that persecuted population which Greece was claiming the right to ‘free’ from Ottoman ‘oppression’ and annex to herself” (1998, 1961:125) is accurate. Some of those Vlachs could claim a share in the Greek struggle for independence—perhaps the lion’s share, if matters were examined carefully! But this hardly mattered. It is not because the Greeks ignored the truth; it is rather that, in general, truth should not be thought as being in a consistent or identical relationship with the “real” world (Žižek 1992:243–244). Different societies have different regimes of truth, or what Foucault called “general politics of truth, the types of discourse which they accept and make function as true” (Foucault 1980:131; Van Dijk 1993:96). However, contra Foucault one of the things that must be investigated here is not only how, but also why this particular “truthful” discourse had come to have such a hold on Greek thought.

In the second half of the 1860s, there was an anxious repetition of this association between Vlach shepherds, Albanians, and brigandage in Greece. This is not surprising, given that the Greek nation was responding to the demands of the Cretan Insurrection against the Turks (1866–1869), which was seen by Greek governments as a moment of realization for the Great Idea, and which was secretly supported by them. Greek governments used brigand bands for the Cretan revolution, a measure deemed unacceptable by the Great Powers of Europe. The unstable political situation during the Interregnum period of 1862–1863 had allowed crime to flourish and led many political fugitives to join brigand bands. In order to sever the attachment of political fugitives to these bands, the Alexandros Koumoundouros government of 1866 was left with no choice other than to grant amnesty to them.

In the Greek debates on brigandage, certain Greek newspapers examined the lack of Turkish cooperation in suppressing brigandage and the role of the Vlachs together. In articles published in 1864, 1866, and 1867 *Palingenesía* presented this situation to the Greek readership as a “miasma” (1 June 1864; 11 June 1866; 22 July 1866; 26 June 1867). The notion of “miasma” was predicated upon a series of argumentative combinations. These combinations represented the brigands in Greece (a) as Albanians originally from Turkey; (b) as Vlachs from Turkey; (c) as “uncivilized” Vlachs and Albanians resident in Greece; and (d) as Albanian-Vlachs of Slav origin. The attempt to implicate Turkey and the suggestion of a Slavic element figured in most of these articles. Interestingly, *Palingenesía*’s narrative of 1867 was recorded by the Reverend
Bagdon in *The Brigands of the Morea* (1868:9–10) and thereby disseminated to an English-speaking readership. Bagdon’s two-volume work was the translation of an account by Sotiris Sotiropoulos, MP for Tríflia in the Peloponnese, who had been kidnapped by the notorious band of Kitsos Lafazanis in the summer of 1866. Sotiropoulos produced and published this account of his kidnapping in November 1866 following his release. Two years later Bagdon, an Anglican clergyman in Zante, published the English version of Sotiropoulos’s story and the article by *Palingenesía*.

Perhaps we should examine these narratives together with another source, published over the same period, which aimed at “educating” the Greek readership. In 1867, when the Greek nation was still looking for some help from the European Powers for the Cretan Insurrection, the anonymous Greek author of this book commented on the “obscurantism” of the Turks, as opposed to the love of knowledge that characterized the Greek nation. For “Anonymous,” Turkish lack of civilization transformed brigandage in Turkey into an “industry.” His observations included all the essential pieces that Gennadios and other Greek commentators put together three years later:

Brigandage in Turkey is a normal state of things [ . . . ] and because it devastates the country, the state [i.e., the Turkish state] organizes attacks across the Greek borders [ . . . ] One of the worse, probably the worst, accusations ignorant foreigners address to Greece, is that it is a brigand country and that it harbours brigandage [ . . . ] If only all these ‘prosecutors’ knew that Greece’s social situation is better [than the Turkish] . . . the constitution and the laws of the country [i.e., Greece] are grounded upon liberal and civilized principles [ . . . ] This is a concrete proof that brigandage can neither be generated nor be sheltered in Greece; brigandage in the frontier areas of Fthiotis and Acarnania is the result of intrusions of lestric bands from Turkey [ . . . ] If in the interior of Greece we come across lestric bands of *Vlachopoiiménés* who live a semi-civilized nomadic life we should never forget that the appearance of brigand bands is not an unusual phenomenon even in powerful European countries, in which isolated cases of robbery take place quite often (emphasis added). (1867:16–19)

What constitutes civilization for “Anonymous” is a set of technologies of power and governance designed to survey Greek subjects and make them useful citizens. Those elements that do not comply with the rules of the power apparatus stay beyond the pale of civilization, which is identified with the Greek state. Note also that the Vlachs appear as accomplices or agents of Turkey, which is defined as beyond civilization. “Anonymous’s” commentary has a “performative” element: his addressee is the Greek “nation,” but his ultimate desire is to communicate
his thoughts to an imaginary European interlocutor, who is civilized yet still has to deal with internal disorder and anarchy.

Stigmata and scourges: Vlachs, Albanians, and the politics of Neohellenic identity

Of course this does not explain why Greek anxiety was directed against the Vlachs and the Albanians. This chain of interchangeable terms (brigand, nomad, Vlach, Albanian, Turk, Slav) was often followed by the fear that brigandage/disorder was a “pest,” a “scourge” on Greece, a sin that had to be swept away. Blinkhorn noted that the language of dirt constituted a pattern in Greek and English discourses on brigandage during the nineteenth century (2000:43). In the Greek Kingdom the argument went like this: the “miasma” was imported from Turkey and, like a flu epidemic, attacked the body of the Hellenic Kingdom.

Greek hysteria concerning contamination was acted out in a suggestive way within the context of the nineteenth-century debate on brigandage. The Greek language of separation/exclusion that accompanied it was that of the edicts issued by the Holy Synod for the excommunication of brigands from the Greek body social. As Koliopoulos has shown in his study, the Holy Synod had taken similar action on the question of fraternization—a very common “heathen” practice in the brigand communities (1988:224). In 1855 an encyclical directed Greek priests to preach against brigandage so as to unite the faithful against brigands and their collaborators. Koliopoulos notes that in this instance the priests had to “explain” to their audience that brigandage was “both a ‘sin’ and a ‘betrayal’ of one’s neighbour” (1987:173). If one bears in mind that Greek Orthodoxy entails and imposes a series of practices that enable the operation of Greek communal life, then one realizes how drastic that step was. On a symbolic level, these edicts might have been designed under a logic which would stress the importance of religion as a purifying power. The edict issued after the Marathon murders was along these lines, because it denied the brigands and their accomplices the right to belong to the Orthodox (i.e., Greek) community (Aiôn, 2 and 4 May 1870). The measure was the outcome of British threats against the Greek government that, unless Greece managed to root out brigandage, Britain would have to take over the Greek Kingdom. Such threats concerning the future of Greek sovereignty and a temporary British occupation of Greece combined with the general European “outcry” to create the preconditions for Greek self-reflection.

One must not disregard the profound connection between dirt and social disorder in Greek discourse. If we are to believe Mary Douglas, any structure, any “order,” is extremely vulnerable at its
margins, when identity definition falters and presents cracks. Dirt, in this case, was a by-product of the systematic ordering and classification that Greeks had to present to their European interlocutors in order to be recognized as part of the civilized/ordered European world. To achieve this, they took some precautions against those who had no fixed place in the ordered Greek social system—and those were the Vlach/Albanian nomads of Greece. Since the crimes of outlaws were likely not only to go unpunished but also to disgrace Greece abroad, the Greeks called in “pollution beliefs to supplement the lack of other sanctions” (Douglas 1993:132). This is the reason why the correlation of marginalization and crime was used extensively by the Greek state after Dilessi. State propaganda addressed to the British readership was nicely reflected in the Greek press, which advertised massive arrests of Vlachs and the introduction of restrictions in their roving movements (Aiôn, 13 May 1870; Palingenesía 26 May 1870). Finally, it cannot be a coincidence that shortly after the episode, a parliamentary debate took place on laws to deal with the question (Kofos 1980:308–309).

It is suggestive that, although the Slav origin of those Vlach/Albanian tribes in Greece was mentioned in the Dilessi sources, the main target of the Greek discourse was Turkey. While the Vlachs and the Albanians of Greece were by no means considered foreigners in the Greek Kingdom, their inferior social status was nonetheless indisputable. Herzfeld notes that in official discourse at least the term Vlákhoς signified the Koutsovlast-speaking shepherd whose identity was Greek but whose primary mark of difference was language, or dialect. As opposed to state discourse, in everyday parlance “the term [became] one of moral exclusion” (Herzfeld 1987:132). Even nowadays Vlákhoς signifies the illiterate or the unintelligent, one who lacks civilized manners. It also has to be born in mind that the state did not manage to stabilize the meaning of Greek identity until the beginning of the twentieth century. To compensate for this frailty, the Greeks defined their identity by social analogy and relativity: those who were designated as outsiders “were the people [the Greeks] ‘knew less’—a clear relationship between social distance and knowledge” (Herzfeld 1987:154).

The relationship between social exclusion and knowledge was a common topos in Greek commentary on Dilessi also, but with a significant difference. In Greek observations during and before the Dilessi crisis, a third pair of opposites, namely Greece versus Turkey, accompanied the binarisms between civilization and lack of civilization, Greek society and Vlach/Albanians. Here we observe an initial internalization and eventual exorcism of a Western discourse of Greek identity. In this Western discourse Neohellenic culture had appeared to be infected by “Oriental barbarism” after the conquest of Byzantium by the Turks. Greek
“regeneration” was concomitant with the restoration of order, which in the modern state vocabulary signified public security and competent administration. When the Greek state was accused of uncivilized contact, brigandage, the defect recognized by British politicians and journalists, was presented as “foreign.” Consequently, the Vlach and Albanian shepherds who had been linked to it also became “foreigners.”

Another foreign element of some importance in the identities ascribed to Vlachs and Albanians was the Slav. This is no minor point and an offshoot of the discussion concerning the Hellenic identity of modern Greeks. This debate was instigated by the obscure Tyrolean historian Jacob Fallmerayer (1790–1861)—the figure who embodied mishellenism or hatred directed against Greeks in post-independence Greek culture. Although Fallmerayer was a classicist by education, his main interest became the continuity of Hellenic civilization in the Byzantine era. Fallmerayer’s reading of Byzantine sources led him to the conclusion that the modern Greeks were a Slavic race that had emerged during the fifth and the sixth centuries out of a racial intermixing of Slavs who settled in the Greek-Byzantine peninsula and its Greek inhabitants.13

Fallmerayer, who was seen by Bulgarians as the agent of Panslavism, was not interested in producing anti-Greek propaganda. His theory was the result of a terror of the degeneration that Panslavic elements—stubbornly backed by Russia—might introduce in Germanic/European culture (Skopetea 1999:100). Indisputably, his whole argument rested on a confusion of “continuity and origin, of race and culture” (Gourgouris 1996:144). But the unhappy coincidence of his theory with the institutionalization of modern Greece in the 1830s thrust upon him the status of a “Satanic figure” bent on destroying the “nation.” It was ironic that such a controversy, which dictated to Greeks the absolute necessity of consigning this “impostor” to the fires of hell, made Fallmerayer a first-rate star in Europe.

Now it is easier to understand why both Albanians and Vlachs were represented as an Ur-hellenic and Oriental element in the Dilessi affair. The Greek narrative, which presented brigandage as an epidemic phenomenon during the Dilessi episode, led to the re-contextualization and repetition of a pre-existing idea. The discourse that Greeks directed to Britain, Europe, and themselves after Dilessi succeeded in correlating the Vlachs and the Albanians of Greece, an “internal limit,” with an “external border,” the Turkish/Slav evil “others,” thus transforming them into “a surplus” of Greek identity. According to Etienne Balibar, internal limits “[refer] to a problematic of purity, or better, of purification, which is to say that they indicate the uncertainty of the identity, the way in which the ‘inside’ can be penetrated or adulterated by its relation
with the ‘outside,’ [that is] the foreign” (1994:63). Not only were the Vlach/Albanian brigands symbolized as foreigners (Slavs), but they also became accomplices or agents of the main Greek national enemy, Turks. In this way political “disorder,” the Greek Kingdom’s defect, would cease to be regarded as a domestic problem. The narrative had two functions to fulfil in Greek reflections on Dilessi: to enable the Greek “nation” to recognize itself as a pure unity, and to seek recognition from its admired protectors, Britain and the rest of Europe.

The aftermath: reception and rejection of the Greek discourse

The phenomenon of border crime in both Greece and Turkey continued to be discussed by British officialdom long after the Dilessi Murders. In a Parliamentary Report of 1874, the Queen’s Secretary of Legation in Athens, Malet, recorded a passage from a dispatch of the British Consul at Thessaloniki to Sir Henry Elliot, the British Ambassador at Constantinople. Although the dispatch referred to the flourishing of brigandage on the Turkish-Greek border, the sender “very much apprehended” that “brigandage [would] revive at no distant date on the border of Greece and Albania, especially if all these surrendered brigands [were] kept on parole in localities where they [had] so many confederates and harbourers” (The Times, 6 July 1875). The geographically marginal location and the terror of contamination, which is communicated to the reader through the repeated use of the concept of “scourge” in the report, reminds us of the vocabulary the Greek newspapers used after the Dilessi Murders.

Other British visitors to Greece quoted this report later. James Foster Young, an Oxford student, used it as a compass during his tour to the Greek Kingdom. Young’s diary also included a letter from “a British resident in Athens,” who may have been George Finlay. “At present,” wrote Young’s friend, “this country is free from this scourge, partly in consequence of the severely repressive measures taken by the Government after the Dilessi massacre, and partly from the cordial understanding [ . . . ] between the Hellenic and Ottoman authorities [ . . . ] although the race of Albanian Wallachs (or Vlacks), amongst whom these bands are raised, still exist to the number of about 30,000 in Greece” (Young 1876:ix). The letter contains Finlay’s estimations and illustrates the climate of Greek debates. Young himself was convinced that the Vlachs he had come across conformed to the description of “banditti” (Young 1876:25–226), but he did not explicitly comment on the truthfulness of the Greek argument that these Vlachs, because they brought shame upon Greece, were no longer considered part of the Greek imagined community.
As was mentioned above, after the unfortunate Anglo-Greek diplomatic episode of Dilessi, Greeks were anxious to convince Europe, and Britain in particular, that their version of truth was the correct one; Burnouf had served as an intermediary for this purpose. However, there were other, more important, authorities whose statements were appropriated so as to support the Greek discourse of Oriental contamination. I refer here to the U.S. Minister at Athens, Charles Tuckerman, who, despite his incisive comments on Greek culture, initially found the Greek suggestion that brigands in Greece were Turks/Albanians convincing. Tuckerman’s work on brigandage, which first appeared after the Dilessi Murders in the form of a report (1870), was republished in his travel diaries two years later (1872) and enjoyed immense popularity in Britain. The Greek translation of his travel book, which followed five years later (1877), re-imported the narrative into Greece and bestowed legitimacy upon it. Tuckerman had no illusions about the enthusiasm for his report in Greece, and he did not miss the chance to record it in his travel diary. I translate from the Greek diary (because it is more colorful):

My diatribe caused great sensation in the East, a reaction that was initially irrational for me. I later managed to explain that: my work explored an issue not much reflected upon [by Greeks]. I bore witness to almost a dozen translations and reprints of that report and the Greek newspapers reproduced it with thousands of praises. But I was not so blind as not to see that the main reason of so much gratitude had to do with those passages in which I put the whole blame for the existence of brigandage in Greece on Turkey. (1877:206)

Tuckerman’s comment did not daunt his Greek translator who ignored any negative insinuations and praised Tuckerman. Furthermore, few Greeks felt that the many Britons and Americans who had purchased Tuckerman’s book took time to read his reflections. The fact that Tuckerman had supported the Greek official thesis was more important than his reflections and made Greeks think that in the final analysis foreigners had been forced to acknowledge the “truth.”

The “nation” was innocent: brigandage, Turkish/Slav legacy, and Greek self-recognition

Behind the general label of “truth” can be found various forms of political truth. Narrations of identity incorporate defense mechanisms to attack centrifugal powers developed in the imagined community and to prevent the components of the nation from acknowledging that there is in fact no center, no core of the “nation.” It is the ritual of defense and
constant re-selection of the nation’s components that makes the nation “real”—or, rather, brings the nation into life. In the modern world of the nineteenth century, the interests of Greeks were represented by the Greek state—a not yet fully formed power apparatus, which was looking for ways to consolidate itself and achieve recognition from both Greeks and its European protectors. The immediate problem the state had to overcome was the diversity and richness of cultural experience (diasporic Greeks, unredeemed Greeks, and liberated Greeks). Even within the Kingdom, there were different scales of experience (local and social). And then, there were the problems that accompanied the process of state-emergence. Brigandage was a by-product of this process, but also a “slur” on national honor abroad. In a sense, the Dilessi Murders realized the worse of Greek nightmares: in a period in which Greeks were seeking ways to define themselves as a “civilized European nation,” they became the object of derision abroad. In the expression of anti-Greek sentiments, Britain, one of the leading Great Powers and a “civilized protector” of “small Greece,” had a leading role. When in the British journalistic discourse of Dilessi, Greece became an uncivilized country, the “nation’s” spokesmen tried to find a way to redefine Greek national qualities. It was obvious that the defects the foreign, and especially British, observers identified in the Greek nation had to be excluded from it—they had, in other words, to be identified as alien.

The defect named brigandage was transferred (in Freudian terms) to the Vlach nomads and the Albanians brigands who were in a marginal social position in the Greek Kingdom. These ethnic groups were symbolized as aliens, although they were in fact populations that often regarded themselves as Greek and that the Greek state sometimes wanted to claim as part of the Greek imagined community. But in the imagined life trajectory of the Greek “nation” their social difference had already become a threat to unity that had to be obliterated at all costs. Subsequently, in the Greek national imaginary the “scourge of brigandage” despised abroad became a non-Greek quality that defined the “Arvanitóvlachoi.” The allegedly Slav historical origin of the Albanians—or Albanian-Vlachs—of the Greek Kingdom was an additional characteristic the Greek commentators on Dilessi took into account. For nineteenth-century Greeks, to act out the fear of contamination from alien elements became equivalent to what Žižek called “the future’s primacy” (1999:18): repetition of this ritual of re-selection of “national qualities” testified to their collective engagement in the preservation of their identity. A historical past also haunted this narration of Greek identity. In order to identify this past, we may reconsider what was said in the introduction to this essay about the role of brigandage in the pre-revolutionary period. This phenomenon was a form of ethnic resistance
in the close “Oriental past” of most Greeks, but after institution of the Greek state it became a despised defect that was projected onto the “enemy” against which it had been used: Turkey. Thus, official discourse on Dilessi became a discourse of separation and purification from the filthy Ottoman elements that adulterated Neohellenic culture. The attempt fell wide of the mark: for the British there was simply too much history in the Greek practice of brigandage—a history that most would not let the Greeks disavow.

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NOTES

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1 The term “imaginary” (imaginaire) comprises part of the Lacanian theory of the triadic order imaginary-symbolic-real. Lacan’s reading of Freud suggested that the substantial Cartesian self exists only through a system of symbolic functions. Hence, Lacan’s symbolic became equivalent to the Lévi-Straussian order of culture—a primordial law that exists prior to the individual subject and which the subject has to acknowledge and obey in order to assume its social identity. The symbolic order is the prerequisite for the social, since the latter is predicated upon a set of pre-agreed laws and regulations that actualize it (Miller 1998). I use the term symbolic in a very specific way in this article to designate the performative relationship the Greeks developed with their powerful imagined “interlocutors,” Britain and Europe. The Greek symbolic is constituted, therefore, as a Neohellenic attempt to join the European imagined community by accepting the law of “political order” that regulated nineteenth-century European societies.

The Lacanian imaginary co-exists with the symbolic, but it is not transcended by it. While the subject has to enter/be inscribed in the symbolic order, no subject lives only on the symbolic plane, that of language and communication: a series of unconscious imageries always coexist with it. In this essay, I try to capture the Neohellenic repository of nationhood imageries (the “national imaginary”) by investigating a set of not fully conscious rituals of (Vlachian and Albanian) exclusion from the Greek imagined community. My hypothesis is that Greek stereotyping of Vlachs and Albanians belongs to the imaginary plane (Bhabha 1994:74–79), though in the context of the Dilessi Murders it ends up assuming the symbolic function I explained above.

The real is not identical to what we call reality; for Lacan the real is what escapes and resists symbolization: in our case, who the Vlachs and the Albanians of the Greek Kingdom truly were and where they came from.
2 Wyse was an Irish Catholic who managed to enter Trinity College at Dublin because the penal law that excluded Catholics from the College had been repealed by the Irish Parliament in 1793. He was married to Laeticia, the eldest daughter of Lucien Bonaparte by his second wife, and thus he had very strong links to the French imperial royal house. In the struggle for Irish emancipation, he cooperated with and indeed ranked close to Daniel O’Connell. He voted for the Reform Bill in 1832, the abolition of slavery, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the extension of popular education in Ireland. However, the views he expressed in his published diaries as the British Minister at Athens at that time do not always differ from those of members of the British state apparatus.

5 Kallingas was a jurist, Professor of Law at the University of Athens, MP, and Minister of Justice in 1854 (Vitti 1991:29).

4 Edmond About’s The King of the Mountains, a French satire of the late 1850s on modern Greek brigandage, was discussed in the British press extensively after the murders at Dilesi (see for example The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 May 1870). About had visited Athens when he was still a student, and he experienced the usual shock of a philhellene who dreamt of a Greece identical to the world of the classical texts. It is said that it was About’s disappointment at Greek political behavior that gave birth in his fertile mind to the personality of Chadji-Stavros, the Greek brigand with the peculiar Turkish name, the bank accounts in England, and the various protégés in the Greek National Assembly (About 1990). The novel tells the story of an abduction of two English ladies and the botanist Schultz by the Greek brigand chief Chadji-Stavros. It is a witty satire of the nineteenth-century Greek cast of mind presented through the eyes of Schultz—About’s fictional alter ego.

The accurate translation of the term into English would be “Albanian” (Arvanites or Άρβανίτες) “Vlachs” (Βλάχοι). Panos Koroneos was appointed in 1869 to extirpate brigandage in Acarnania. The report he produced on the results of his venture was published the same year under the title Σκέψεις περί της Εμπεδώσεως της Τάξεως (Reflections on the Establishment of Order). It was a very perceptive work, in which we detect allusions to the political extensions of brigandage (Koliopoulos 1980:176–177). In 1870 he wrote an article on the Dilesi affair that infuriated both the Greek and the British sides, because in it he presented Greece as the political puppet of Britain. The very same article was published as a pamphlet (under the title Προς το Αγγλικόν Δημόσιο).

6 Rallis bought many copies of the Notes for £100.

7 The names of these persons are in the archive of cuttings at the Gennadion Library (Tricha 1991:17).

8 Gennadios attracted the attention of the American ambassador at Athens, Charles Tuckerman, who suggested to the Greek Prime Minister, Deligiorgis, that he exploit his talents. That is probably why he was first proposed as a second secretary in the Greek embassy at the United States (Tricha 1991:19).

9 Jenkins (1961:113) attributed the paternity of the argument to Gennadios, but careful research in the years prior to the Dilesi incident proves his theory wrong. The argument can be traced in the Greek press before the publication of the Notes.

10 Edward Lloyd was an English lawyer resident at Athens; he and his family joined the party that visited Marathon on the day they were kidnapped by the brigands. His family was released together with Lord Muncaster, one of the captives who negotiated a ransom for those who were detained by the band, but Lloyd was not released and was murdered. The widow demanded compensation from the Greek government, which she eventually received.

11 The same measures had been taken in 1867 (Palingenesia 12 January 1867).

12 An analogue, though not identical, to this nineteenth-century discourse can be witnessed in Greece nowadays. Recently, the idea of “leaking (Greek-Albanian) borders”
was reintroduced in the Greek media, after the massive migration of Albanians and Epirote Greeks to Greece. These populations formed part of the Greek imagined community as long as they stood outside the Greek borderland, and during the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries were part of the unredeemed Greek populations. The collapse of the old regime in Albania, and the massive migration to Greece awoke the old uncontrolled fear of boundary transgression. Nowadays, those who cross the border to Greece, be they Albanians or Greek Epirotes, are presented in the journalistic discourse as dirty, criminal, and uncivilized aliens (Seremetakis 1996:488–491; Lazaridis and Wickens 1999:632–655).

13 A further association could be made here between Fallmerayer’s theory that Athens became an Albanian city at the end of antiquity, and the Neohellenic persistence that brigands in Greece are Albanians; but this opens a major historiographical question, which cannot be pursued here.

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