“Bizim PAOK”: Refugees, Sports and Venizelism in Interwar Thessaloniki

“Bizim PAOK” [“Our PAOK” in Turkish] may well have been PAOK’s first slogan in the Interwar period, evidencing a wide Turkish-speaking fraction among many of its fans. PAOK (Panthessalonian Sports Club of Constantinopolitans) was founded in April 1926, after a split with AEK Thessaloniki (Sports Union of Constantinopolitans), formed in 1925 as the Sport club of the Union of the Constantinopolitans. This Union was the place where the liberal société bourgeoise of Istanbul was gathering in Thessaloniki, as a cercle, for a teïon (tea) at 5.30pm, but also as a political lobby in the venizelist world. These Constantinopolitans, as hundreds of thousands of Rums of the Ottoman Empire, had fled to Greece after the defeat of the Greek army against the Kemalist forces, and the fall of Smyrna in 1922. Even today, the club continues to proclaim its links with Asia Minor and its refugees. Whether for identity reasons or as a marketing strategy, PAOK asserts/vindicates its status of “refugee team” as AEK Athens, Panionios, Apollo Smyrna or Apollo Kalamarias also do. All of them were sports clubs founded in Greece after the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the population exchange organized by the Lausanne Convention in 1923. These clubs played then a role in giving rise to a narrative of remembrance on the “lost homelands”, making their stadium a place of memory for Asia Minor Hellenism, that became a refugee Hellenism.

Between 1914 and the end of the compulsory exchange process, 117,041 refugees brutally arrived in Thessaloniki, representing 47.8% of the city’s population. While 551,936 refugees were durably resettled in rural areas as early as 1926 (90% in Macedonia and in Thrace), those who were in cities were facing very different conditions. In 1952, 35,248 urban refugees were still waiting to be resettled. The housing of refugees was one of the main issues in Greek urban centers, alongside the struggle against misery due to the extreme precariousness of most of these new populations. This social context is also burdened by the political instability following the military defeat in Asia Minor. The Venizelist coup that occurred in 1922 lead to the fall of the monarchy.

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3 *Rum* or Roman [Ρούμος/Ρωμαίος] is a way to characterize the Greek-Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire under the authority of the Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in the frame of the Millet of the Rums. By this way they can be differentiated from the Hellenes (Greeks from the Greek State), commonly called “Greeks” in this paper.
4 Antonis LIAKOS, “Το 1922 και οι πρόσφυγες” [“1922 and us”] in *To 1922 και οι πρόσφυγες. Μια νέα πατρίδα [1922 and the Refugees. A New Point of View]*, Athens, Nefeli, 2011, pp. 11-23
5 About 1,200,000 Rums were displaced to Greece during this period: either as refugees or as exchanged. However, for both cases the word “refugee” [πρόσφυγας] was commonly used in Greece, instead of “migrant” [μιματζί] in Turkey. Cf. Evangelia BALTA, *The Exchange of Populations: Historiography and Refugee Memory*, Istanbul, İstos, 2014, p. 24.
one year later in 1923. We can therefore interpret the Greek Interwar as a continuation of the National Schism that started in 1915. Two forces were politically opposed during this schism: The pro-German royalists’ fraction, struggling for the kingdom’s neutrality, against the Liberals of Venizelos, looking towards the British side for a Greek expansionism. The latter formed the Provisional Government of National Defence in Thessaloniki in October 1916, dividing the country into two parts hitherto the Allies forced King Constantin into exile.

During the Interwar, this cleavage was not anymore operated on diplomatic issues, nor on the voluntarist achievement of the “Great Idea” (Megali Idea), but on the nation-building of Greece in the frame of its new frontiers. Indeed, after the defeat against the Kemalist forces, the political cleavage moved on the integration process of the “New Lands” (Epirus, Macedonia and Western Thrace), that Greece obtained after the Balkan Wars. In addition, the same cleavage inherited of the National Schism could be analyzed on the refugee issue and the integration of these new populations in the nation State. These refugees were mostly identifying themselves in Venizelism (the Liberal Party being the principal structure of this multifaceted movement) and in the Messianic figure of Eleftherios Venizelos. A large majority of these refugees considered indeed that he saved them from the Catastrophe. As they automatically got the Greek citizenship, they became a crucial asset in Venizelist electoral campaigns. According to G. Mavrogordatos, 91% of the refugees voted for Venizelist parties in 1928. The vote of the refugees allowed the Venizelists to establish their republican project of a non-royal regime, while the monarchy was still perceived as hostile to the refugees and responsible for the Catastrophe. On the other hand, the royalists tried to maintain themselves in Northern Greece by seeking the support of locals (often called “natives” or “indigenous” [γηγενής]) and minorities (Slavic-speaking, Jewish, Aromanians, etc.), against the refugees.

In this Macedonian context, where the demography and social conditions were more than anywhere else totally transformed, refugees took part in the Hellenization process of the region. Thessaloniki, despite the plans of some Salonian Jews for its internationalization, was Greek since 1912. The Sephardic Jewish community was the most important group of the city for centuries but became for the first time a real minority. Not only did the Jews become a minority in

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8 Giorgos Mavrogordatos, Metà to 1922. Η παράταση του Διχασμού [The Continuation of the Schism], Athens, Patakis, 2017.
11 Ibid. p. 231.
a nation-State, but they were also perceived as an Ottoman rest, and suspected of disloyalty towards the Greek State. Therefore, the history of the refugees in Thessaloniki could not be separated from the process of marginalization of the Salonician Jews and the use of a political antisemitism. In addition, we shall consider the process of integration of the Asia Minor refugees in the nation-State at the same time as the integration of the whole region in the nation-State. In a way, we may understand the history of Thessaloniki after 1912 as a process of conquest and the establishment of a new hegemony that must be linked with the Venizelist plan of “universal bourgeois modernization” [“καθολικός αστικός ευσυγχρονισμός”]. For the Venizelists who had these ambitions for the Greek Macedonia and Thessaloniki, the political support of the refugees must be structured. But the integration of these new populations from the Ottoman Empire depended first on their survival, on the success of their bureaucratic request (for the recognition of their refugee status), and then finally on their insertion in sociability networks that led to an effective politicization. If the international humanitarian campaigns14 -especially American- saved and took care of thousands of Asia Minor refugees, the multiplication of refugee associations after their arrival could solve collectively the bureaucratic issues of their resettlement.15

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to study a form of socialization and of politicization of refugees through sports, but also through the actions of the Constantinopolitan newcomers. If they lived in Istanbul before the 30th of October 1918, they were exchangeable according to the Lausanne convention, they could remain there as “établis”. However, many(s) of the Constantinopolitans had left the City to Thessaloniki even before 1912, during the industrialization of the Ottoman Macedonia. But most of the Constantinopolitans of our study were the so called “absents” [απόντες]. They were these who fled Istanbul in 1922 in fear of retaliation from the Kemalists forces because of their political activities. About 30,000 Constantinopolitan Rums left Istanbul for Greece between September and October 1922 (15,000 of them during the month of October). A total of 40,000 “étalbés” fled to Greece between September 1922 and 1924.16 As the works of D. Kamouzis depicted them, these “absents” were mostly a nationalist and Venizelist elite in Istanbul that was particularly active as a political lobby of the Greek interests during the Entente occupation (1918-1923).17 Once they arrived in Greece, they usually kept their contacts

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13 Giorgos MAVROGORDATOS et Christos CHATZICOS (Eds.), Βενιζελισμός και αστικός ευσυγχρονισμός [Venizelism and Bourgeois Modernization], Athens, University of Crete Press, 1992.
17 Dimitris KAMOUZIS, “Από ‘Σωτήρας της φυλῆς’, ευγενετής των Τούρκων: Ο Βενιζέλος και η εθνοοικονομική γενετική ομάδα των Ρομά της Κωνσταντινούπολης, 1918-1930” [“From ‘Saviour of the Nation’ to ‘Benefactor of the Turks’:
and interests in Greece so as in Istanbul. Many of them immediately started a political career in their new nation-State. Those Constantinopolitans were originally the founders of AEK in Athens and in Thessaloniki, and then of PAOK in 1926.

Taking PAOK as a research object permitted us to enter a precise social context and observe through it the Venizelist politicization of the refugees of Thessaloniki. At the same time, it revealed the ideological discourses that were making a certain refugee identity, but also the individual and collective strategies of the Constantinopolitans for their ambitions of domination on the local and national political field. Considering the lack of archives of the club itself, this work was mainly based on a wide prosopography of this Constantinopolitan elite. Various archives and documents were used: from the regional archives of Macedonia to Venizelos private archives, but also considering the press or the municipal archives of Thessaloniki. By this way, revealing the Venizelist networks made us draw a whole social history of Thessaloniki.

Recent historiography, after Renée Hirschon’s work on Piraeus in particular,18 gradually showed interest in the conditions of refugees in Greece. These prompted works on poverty,19 humanitarian actions20 or on drug consumption in Interwar Greece,21 offered an analysis on an expanding marginal society. In fact, the influx of extremely precarious populations of refugees considerably altered the Greek society, at a time when the Greek State was already weakened (if not bled dry) by ten years of wars and the defeat of 1922, just before being brutally affected by the crisis of 1929. Thessaloniki was at the forefront both during the Balkan wars and later the First World War, while undergoing a fire that burned down its historical center in 1917. Considered as the “capital of refugees”, according to the eponymous book written by Giorgos Ioannou22 – and this, despite the houses that were left empty after the exchange of Thessalonician Muslims - Thessaloniki did not have the means to decently resettle the flocking mass of refugees. According to reports of the Macedonian Gendarmerie, crime rates per capita were 1 in 44.222 in August 1922,

In the bourgeois logic maintained by the elite of the Greek community of Constantinople, sports were seen as a way to spread hygienist virtues and promote healthy leisure for a healthy nation. Just as sports activities had followed the development of the bourgeoisie and its nationalist and liberal aspirations in Greece at the end of the 19th century, such a development had also taken place - in a much broader dimension - in Istanbul at the same time. The sports of Istanbul had benefited from the strong internationalization of the Ottoman capital, influenced by British sports practices in the Eastern Mediterranean and by major educational institutions such as Robert College. The remix community had invested in the sports of Constantinople since 1877 with the founding of the club “Hermes”, the first of nearly 35 Greek Orthodox clubs that had been formed between that date and the early 1920s. The occupation of Istanbul by the Entente forces between 1918 and 1923 intensified the sporting activities of the City and especially soccer, with a high number of tournaments (a total of 80 games) organized between the local clubs and the European forces. Thus, the Pan-Constantinopolitan Games, inaugurated for the first time in 1910, were organized for the third time in 1920, with the notable participation of Pantelis Kalpaktsoglou, founder and president of PAOK. In 1921, a fourth version of the games with no less than 34 teams and 1,447 athletes took place in Istanbul again. If those competitions reinforced the Turkish nationalism, they had the same effect on the Greek teams, already promoting a shared sense of

23 Konstantinos G. Tziasas, “Δε μας τρομάζει ο θάνατος, μας τρομάζει η πείνα. Η “κίνηση της εγκληματικότητος” στη Θεσσαλονίκη κατά την περίοδο της έλευσης των μικρασιατών προσφύγων του 1922” [“We are not fearing death, we are fearing hunger. Evolutions of criminality in Thessaloniki during the period of the arrival of the Asia Minor refugees of 1922”], in (Eds.) Efi Avdelia et al., Η Ελλάδα στο Μεσοπόλεμο. Μετασχηματισμοί και διακυβέρνηση [Greece in the Interwar. Transformations and Issues], Athens, Alexandreia, 2017, p. 228.


Greek nationalism and of the *Megali Idea*. The Constantinopolitans who emigrated or fled to Thessaloniki not only operated by this way a transfer of their practices, but also of their representations of the sports values.

The status of the organizations often defined their objective as recreating “the Constantinopolitan spiritual environment” through physical education, to benefit the greatest number of sports and leisure activities. The “transmission of sportsmanship and ideas” is also PAOK’s argument for convincing Prime Minister Venizelos to finance the club in a long memorandum of December 11, 1929. Even more clearly, PAOK’s Ephorus, N. Kavoundis, in charge of the Sports Department, demonstrated and promoted the social virtues of sports in an article of October 25, 1931:

[…] I will write on sports in order to show its superiority, either physically, spiritually or psychically for the discover of the human ego of our sports youth. And naturally, nobody shall contest that one of the strongest arguments that suddenly emerges in favor of classical athletics is that it is the safest antidote for morality and against the social decomposition that is the biggest threat of our time. In the clean sportive populations, the dangers of drugs do not appear in horizon. Each athlete is isolated in a clean and moral environment, in a safe and balanced world that is essential for the tranquillity of his development. But the biggest danger of days, communism, is also neutralized thanks to the world athletic brotherhood. In every sports association we see real miracles that the greatest communists could not achieve. A Lord Barklet or a Viscount Laudat are totally crushed on sports fields by garbage men and porters of London and Paris.

This reflected the perceptions that actors had of their own practices. The foundation of sports clubs is certainly a collective initiative, but mostly private, which was presented as of public utility. In the speeches that reconstituted these initiatives, sport in Thessaloniki stemmed from the good will of notables, who offer the city and the poor (in this case refugees) a way to rise - spiritually at first - through sport, perceived as an “essential instrument of mental health”. In this way, they overcame social tensions related to class realities, in order to counteract the growing influence of the Communist Party on refugee populations. Sport allowed, in a liberal spirit, to spread the *gentry* values of competition, of equality of opportunity, merit, but also fair play, discipline and hygiene, which were disseminated among the mass of refugees. It was shown as a solution to solve the misery issues in the peripheric slums of the city. In the logic of the “process of civilization” as

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28 *Idem.*

29 Historical Archives of Macedonia – General Archives of the State, Archives of the Court of First Instance of Thessaloniki, Associations Archives, Folders 321, 385, 1338, 1352, 1376, 1457.

30 Nikos KAVOUNIDIS, “For the Youth. Classic Athletics, a Contemporary Social Need”, *Makedonia*, Thessaloniki, October 25th, 1931, p. 3.

described by Norbert Elias, the Thessalonian society could pacify itself through sport, curbing the passions of a mass of refugees, whose exile or exchange destroyed their traditional life in the Ottoman Empire. The bourgeois and modernizing values transmitted by sport, by controlling their free time, would thus prevent them from falling into crime and drugs, or prostitution for the hundreds of women, single for the first time in their lives, often without husband, father or brothers, lost or dead. Sports associations, among others, would thus cover the anomy of a marginalized refugee society, set up in precarious camps on the outskirts of the city (in Kalamaria, Neapoli, Toumba, etc.) with a new fabric of sociabilities.

In addition, the private initiatives of the Constantinopolitan notables were described as useful for the general interest: they provided a solution to the refugee crisis but were also a modernizing impetus for the city itself. Thus, in the last paragraph of the memorandum to Venizelos, PAOK leaders wrote:

The fencing of the river and the earthworks around it contributed to the hygiene of the city. The earthworks of two stadiums and the transformation of them into places for sports, the construction of galleries, of playgrounds necessary for the athletes and the school pupils, the construction of locker rooms, and the formation of a club where athletes and pupils will study avoiding so the kafeneia and other similar places, the construction of stadium wall, the metallic fence of the athletics field, are requiring different quotations that are reaching one million drachmas according to our accountant. PAOK, relying on the philo-sportive feelings of the sports supporter and Great Governing Lord Eleftherios Venizelos and his valuable advisors, sincerely believes that he will concede it to the Honorable Government.

These initiatives for the establishment of a bourgeois social order on a Western model that pursued drugs and behaviors identified as marginal were consistent with the hygienist perspective found in modernization plans of the city and have to be linked to the Venizelist national policy of “universal bourgeois modernization”. The Constantinopolitans of Thessaloniki still asked for support of the State for their sports businesses, which would be added to the aids for the rum community left in Istanbul (with for example Pera Club that sent high level players like Raymond Etienne, a French of Constantinople), in order to be able to fully impose itself in the Thessalonician environment.

The constraint of sources (too often sports archives disappeared), made it necessary to focus on this group that was the Constantinopolitan elite, at the head of associations like the Union

32 Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum, Eleftherios Venizelos Archives, Folder 166-35-36, “Memorandum of Petros Levantis, President of PAOK and Representant of Thessaloniki at the Parliament to Venizelos”.
33 Vilma HASTAOGLOU, “Η ανάδυση της νεοελληνικής πόλης: Η σύλληψη της μοντέρνας πόλης και ο εκσυγχρονισμός του αστικού χώρου” [“The Emergence of the Neo-Hellenic City: The Conception of the Modern City and the Modernization of the Urban Space”] in G. MAVROGORDATOS et C. CHATZIOHIF, Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός... op. cit., pp. 93-112.
of the Constantinopolitans or PAOK. This social history “from above” of an elite could still reveal the links between the personal strategies of these Constantinopolitans and the national strategies of the Venizelists. It was generally the press that identified these actions and especially *Makedonia*, which in a way became the organ of the Venizelists in Thessaloniki, led by a Constantinopolitan, Petros Levantis, president of PAOK. Sports and associations, creators of sociabilities, were inevitably places of politicization. There, networks were created, especially these *weak ties*, essential for the survival and then the establishment, or even the rise, of those who were in a very precarious position, but also for the constitution of clienteles for the more affluent, for the purpose of their own political careers. These “fathers of refugees”, as they were called, took some young refugees under their protection, offering them a place in a team if they were judged good sportmen, giving them a place of study (the statutes of the associations often gave a great importance to the reading rooms of the clubs), but also offering them assistance with the administrative procedures for the payment of the compensation due to refugees. The Union of Constantinopolitans, considering itself as the elite of the Greek refugees, published the following project in its rules in April 22, 1923:

**Article 1**
The goal of the Union of the Constantinopolitans is:
a) Communication and narrow solidarity of the Constantinopolitans and the refugees of the suburbs, and the care of those who faced the injustice of faith.
b) The leisure of the members through the moral education and the national conscience by the reconstitution of the cultural life of Constantinople.
c) The consolidation of the refugee world in the national and human path that was traced by the Revolution of 1922.
d) The repatriation of the refugees in their homes.

**Article 2:**
The goals of the Union may be achieved:
a) By the agreement with the other associations of refugees in Thessaloniki for the constitution of a Common Federation of the Irredentists.
b) By the appropriate procedures with the institutions in charge in order to protect the interests of the members and to satisfy as much as possible their different needs.
c) By the creation of a library, a reading room, the organization of lectures, open classes, etc.
d) By the research or the construction, with the agreement of the other irredentist associations of an appropriate building to use it as a club of the Union or of the Federation.

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e) By every other mean that the Union would consider as appropriate.  

The Union of Constantinopolitans is hence openly part of the Venizelist movement that returned to power in a coup (called a “Revolution” here) after the military defeat of 1922. The association hereby linked the conditions of the refugee world with a national policy of Venizelist reconstruction of the Greek nation-state. Moreover, as an elite of the Rums, the Constantinopolitans had the project to set up a “Common Federation of the Irredentists”, of which they would probably be the vanguard. The Union acted here as a collective entity providing a buffer between the State and the mass of refugees, in order to facilitate the insertion of these populations into the nation-State. The association counted mainly notables: among the dozen people who made up the first board of directors, three were doctors (including a lieutenant-colonel army physician), three were architects, two were pharmacists. Very promptly set up in downtown Thessaloniki, with shops and offices, and known for having often exercised public responsibilities in Istanbul, they were generally able to master the codes of administration and Greek political life.

However, being a Constantinopolitan was firstly a very fluid identity. It was usually more about representative a social status rather than a belonging or a real link to an aristocratic Byzantine or Phanariot dynasty. The first President of the Union, Theofylaktos Theofylaktos, was a Pontic doctor, famous for his commitment in the struggle for a Pontic independent Republic.  

Although he only spent two years in Istanbul between 1920 and 1922, he invested in the Constantinopolitan identity for his political career when he arrived in Thessaloniki and then became a Venizelist Minister-Governor of Thrace. The Emeritus President of PAOK, Leonidas Iassonidis, a Pontic lawyer, had followed the same path of his fellow Theofylaktos before he became Member of the Parliament and then Minister of Welfare. But being identified as a Constantinopolitan once in Greece conferred a great symbolic value that could be mobilized and reinvested in the political field. Indeed, in a context where the dreams of a Greek Empire were still current, the Constantinopolitan values were still those of the capitol of the genos. That led to a certain orientalism towards the native Greeks, considered as backward. Thus, Athens in the imperial representations of the Constantinopolitans was still a provincial city of an Empire that they should naturally rule.

35 Historical Archives of Macedonia – General Archives of the State, Archives of the Court of First Instance of Thessaloniki, Associations Archives, Folder 321: “Union of the Constantinopolitans”, Rules of the Union of the Constantinopolitans, Thessaloniki, 1923.
36 Theofylaktos THEOFYLAKTOS, Γύρω στην άσβεστη φλόγα, βιογραφικές αναμνήσεις. Αγώνες για την ανεξαρτησία του Πόντου [Around the Unextinguished Flame, Biographic Memories. Struggles for the Independence of Pontus], Thessaloniki, Kyriakidis Brothers, 1958.
37 We can see this orientalist prism in the case of Constantin Musurus, a Rum sent to Athens as Ambassador of the Ottoman Empire, cf. Olivier BOUQUET, « Un Rum aux pays des Hellènes. Constantin Musurus, premier représentant
If these Constantinopolitans were an identified elite for the refugees, their investment in sports gave to these “fathers of the refugees” the opportunity to be considered as *paragontes* [παράγοντες], in other words dignitaries and protectors of a club. In a situation comparable with the *collateralismo* of After war Italy, the Constantinopolitan elite was investing itself and its capitals into the sportive field and its passions, in order to link its own achievements as the achievements of the whole club and its *imagined community* of fans. So, in order to broaden their *weak ties* and to affirm their legitimacy as elite of all the refugees, the Constantinopolitans entered ambitiously in the world of sports. Their goals were to conquer the sportive field as much as the political field by ensuring a strong connection between both. By presenting themselves as able to be sacrificed for the team, they were ensuring the personal loyalty of thousands of refugee fans as there was a process of massification of sports (and especially soccer). When in 1932, E. Theodoridis, a PAOK official, said to the press that for the victory of his team he was ready to whip Iraklis without contesting the allegations that he was followed by “stick-carriers”, “knifers” and “killers” [“μαγκουροφόρους, μαχαιροβγάλτας και δολοφόνους”]. As a *paragontas*, he was defending the honour of his club, even if he had to be illegal, and by this way receiving the confidence of the fans, in the frame of sportive antagonisms.

The Constantinopolitans were not facing any housing issue. Therefore, they were living in downtown Thessaloniki, where a large part of the Jewish community was still established. But most of the refugees were resettled in the periphery of the city in new districts built by the Ministry of Welfare. In order to enter their daily life, the Constantinopolitans founded in addition to PAOK, many smaller teams in every refugee neighborhood as it was explained in the memorandum to Venizelos:

**Actions of the association:**
The Panthessalonician Sports Club of the Constantinopolitans wishes to enlarge its actions to all Thessaloniki and its districts. Therefore, despite all its financial difficulties, [PAOK] has always acted for the foundation of new sports associations. In Thessaloniki: The Byzantine Sports Club (BAO); At St. Demetrius district and Kassandra: The Refugee Union. In the districts: Toumba: Aetideus and Aetos; Tsinar: Kanaris; Kalamaria: Apollon; Depot: Pan-Macedonian; Kouri: Marathon. All these associations are recognized and registered at the Greek Football Federation and some of them are registered at the Hellenic Athletics Federation. In addition to them, the Panthessalonician supports the formation of many non-official associations

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40 *Athlitika Chronika*, September 5th, 1932.
for the transmission of the spirit and sportive ideals. For all these reasons, the Panhellenizer, according to its means, is never stopping helping materially and morally these associations.\footnote{Historical Archives of the Benaki Museum, Eleftherios Venizelos Archives, Folder 166-35-36, “Memorandum of Petros Levantis, President of PAOK and Representant of Thessaloniki at the Parliament to Venizelos”.}

Quite every district had a team controlled by the Constantinopolitans, but also in every refugee neighborhood, there were scoulers of PAOK observing the young refugee playing in their unformal team. This network of smaller teams was providing PAOK of young promising players, but it was also making it a Panhellenizer team for all the refugees and not the Constantinopolitans only. It was concurring with the ideological speeches of the Constantinopolitan elite of a common reality of being a refugee, although these Constantinopolitan were not “exchangeable” and had a totally different living condition.

By this way, PAOK was a mean of identity making. An identity that was refugee from Asia Minor and that was what made it Greek and even more Greek than the locals. In Thessaloniki’s National Schism political configuration, being a refugee was a proof of Greekness whereas being a local (or “indigenous”) was usually referring to the Jews. In this perspective we could consider this network of smaller team, following the disposition of the new refugee districts as a process of encirclement of Thessaloniki’s downtown, kept in a large part (despite the great fire of 1917) by the Jewish community. In fact, this sportive network that they created in the periphery was sportively putting the whole city under siege of a refugee and Venizelist pressure. This phenomenon was perhaps represented by the choice of building PAOK stadium in the heart of the city: at Sintrivani place. Thus, every weekend, thousands of refugees were coming from their suburbs and were symbolizing the penetration of these new inhabitants into the environment of the established locals.

This phenomenon must be also linked to the process of marginalization of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki in the Greek State, especially after the fire of 1917\footnote{Cf. The recent works of Paris Papamichos Chronakis and especially his dissertation: Paris PAPAMICHOS CHRONAKIS, Οι οικιστές, εθνικοί, μουσουλμάνοι και ντόνμε έμποροι της Θεσσαλονίκης, 1882-1919. Ταξικοί και εθνοτικοί μετασχηματισμοί σε προχώρηση εξελληνισµού [Greek, Jewish and Dönme Merchants in Thessaloniki, 1882-1919. Class and Ethnic Transformations in the Process of Hellenization], Rethymnon, PhD dissertation at the University of Crete, 2011; See also: Paris PAPAMICHOS CHRONAKIS, “De-Judaizing a Class, Hellenizing a City: Jewish Merchants and the Future of Salonica in Greek Public Discourse, 1913-1914”, \textit{Jewish History}, vol. 28, 3/4, 2014, p. 373-403.}. In a certain way, this community was a rest of the Ottoman past whereas the Venizelist governments wanted to create a modern nation-State with western models of centralization and citizenship. Opposed to this process, most of the Jewish community was supporting by pragmatism the anti-venizelist side, as a way to preserve their autonomy that the modern nation-State would narrow. In the context of
Thessaloniki, the Jews became the main opponents of the Venizelists during the Interwar. Therefore, there was a political use of a kind of traditional antijudaism that existed in the Rum communities of Asia Minor in the configuration of the National Schism. That led the Venizelists of Thessaloniki to build close ties with the far-right organization E.E.E., but also to spread antisemitic propaganda through their main newspaper Makedonia, whose director was still Petros Levantis, Venizelist member of the Parliament and President of PAOK. In addition, the liberal elite used the underground world of Bara, the district of prostitution, of the magkes, and the daïdes, like Alkis Petsas, devoted to Venizelos. PAOK appeared to be in the middle of this venizelist network of violence. The team was a kind of catalyst of this political violence that was transformed in sportive violence due to the passionate nature of sports and especially football, which became massively popular during the Greek Interwar. When the EEE was founded in 1927, PAOK gave its office to the far-right organization. Many PAOK officials were directly linked with EEE leaders. For instance, Leonidas Iassonidis, great political figure of the refugee world, Minister of Welfare and Emeritus President of PAOK was present at the inauguration of the office of the EEE in January 1931, and had a speech, together with the venizelist mayor Vamvakas and Gonatas.

Finally, PAOK stadium became the meeting point of the EEE organization when they were going to attack either unionists or Jews, or when they organized a journey of protestation to Athens in 1933.

The famous pogrom of the Jewish district of Campbell in 1931 was also directly linked to sports by many aspects. The first reason why Makedonia started its antisemitic campaign in 1930 was because of the presence of a representative of the team Maccabi Thessaloniki in Bulgaria, for the 25th anniversary of Maccabi Sofia. During this event, the Great Rabbi had a speech which was thanking the VMRO, the Macedonian nationalist organization. The Salonician Jew claimed that he had left before the speech and that in any case he could not understand Bulgarian. It took nothing more for Makedonia to start a long and aggressive antisemitic campaign that mixed classic European antisemitic rhetoric of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion with the nationalist Greek fear of Bulgarian irredentism in Macedonia, linked with the positions of the Komintern on an independent

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43 Cf. Michalis Tremopoulos, Το τρία Ε (ΕΕΕ) και ο εμπρησμός του Κάμπελ [The Three E (EEE) and the Burning of Campbell], Thessaloniki, Antigone, 2018.
44 This antisemitic trend of Makedonia could be perceived even from 1912, but it took a way bigger dimension during the Interwar. Cf. Katherine E. Fleming, Greece: A Jewish History, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 70.
46 Cf. The article about the assassination of Petsas in Makedonia, February 9th, 1932.
47 Reports of the Board of EEE, 1929-1932, Thessaloniki, p. 5.
48 Makedonia, January 5th, 1932.
49 Ρέζαπης, June 25th, 1933.
50 Kathrine E. Fleming, op. cit. p. 97.
Macedonia. The liberal newspaper Makedonia called openly for violence, for an “end”, and for the interdiction of Maccabi. This campaign led to the attack of the office of the Jewish team the 23rd of June 1931. Then, was followed the pogrom of Campbell the 26th that burned the whole district. After that, the government took the measures that the Jewish community was asking for months before. If there was a trial of the EEE, neither the organization, nor their venizelist supports were never really worried by justice. Right after these events, Iassonidis said at the Parliament:

“The Protocols of the Elders of Zion as Node of the Greek Antisemitism

“Some years ago, when I travelled in Western Macedonia, I could see everywhere sickles and hammers. This year, in the same journey, everywhere were dominating the three EEE. Honourable and working men who created an organization in 1927, because communism devastates the country. Men full of patriotism and nationalism could not be characterized as criminals.”

Neither him, nor Levantis, director of Macedonia had to face any difficulty after that. They were thanked by the EEE, Iassonidis remained minister, and Levantis became in charge of the elections of 1933 for the Liberal Party and even minister many times.

In this context, sportive violence cannot be only due to barbarity or an inherent phenomenon of football. If we can admit a progressive autonomy of football institutions during the Interwar, teams in the other hand were reflecting strong social and political identities that were transformed in the carnivalesque frame of stadium. Thus, there can always be an interpretation for every event of violence that implies masses, especially in the configuration of Thessaloniki in the Interwar. How can we not see the link between moments of harsh political tension between the factions (even in the Liberal Party) for the municipal elections of 1929 for instance and the antagonism between PAOK, Aris and Iraklis? At a moment when (even though they were in power) the Venizelists were hardly divided, we could observe an ethnicization of the political debates. Shocked, Konstantinos Aggelakis wrote to Venizelos in September 1929 that Levantis entered a meeting of the Liberal Party shouting in Turkish: “Muhacir istiyorum”, [Here: “I want a refugee candidate”], while there were flyers in the city arguing that “Aggelakis is going to be elected by

51 Ibid., pp. 95-96; Dimitris Psarras, “Τα Πρωτόκολλα των Σοφών της Σιων ως κόμβος του ελληνικού αντισημιτισμού” [“The Protocols of the Elders of Zion as Node of the Greek Antisemitism”], in Efi Avdelia (dir.), Dimitris Arvanitakis (dir.), Eliza Anna Delveroudi (dir.), Evgenios Matthiopoulos (dir.), Sokratis Petmezas (dir.) et Sakellaropoulos (Eds.), Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα [Racial Theories in Greece], Heraklion, University of Crete Press, 2017, pp. 475-492.
52 Makedonia, June 29th, 1931.
54 Makedonia, December 12th, 1931.
autoclochthones and Jews only" and that refugees needed to unite around Kyrkos. By this way we may understand a part of the conflictual relation between PAOK and Aris. The first represented the refugee tendency of venizelism which was contesting the domination of Aris in the refugee districts of Western Thessaloniki. The latter was also at that time a Venizelist team, founded in 1914 and dominating in the football championship of Macedonia, but without any specific affiliation with the refugee identity, in a more national position, led mostly by local Greeks. However, the relationship between the two clubs (and their officials) became even worse after the Venizelist defeat of 1932-1933. So, in October 1934, the President of PAOK Kalpaktsoglou, entered in the field during a PAOK-Aris game, complaining against the referee and threatening him physically. On the other hand, Iraklis was openly the monarchist team of the old Thessalonician. The antagonism between PAOK and the oldest team of the city was clearer. Its president between 1920 and 1945 was Apostolos Kosmopoulos, member of the Laiko Komma and elected at the City Council with Nikolaos Manos, the monarchist mayor of 1929. Many of PAOK officials were also at the City Council and the club was linked with Kyrkos first, and Vamvakas then in 1930, who promised to build a stadium for PAOK. This direct opposition for the control of the City council through sports had also to do with the sponsoring of the city to the teams. Thus, it represented a classical clientelist system where the club exchanged its influence for subsidies.

So, by many aspects PAOK was a part of a specific venizelist network as a tool for the political conquest of Thessaloniki. But it became a major element when it came about the construction of the stadium. As we can see in the map the Constantinopolitans chose to build their stadium in the heart of the city. This heart was next to what was considered as a huge empty zone of Thessaloniki: the Jewish cemeteries. Indeed, AEK Thessaloniki had a field just next to them and when it reunited with PAOK again in 1929, they decided to use it for the football stadium that they were in need. But this field was too tiny, they had therefore to grab some land of the cemeteries. More precisely, there were the dönme cemeteries. Even though the dönme were exchanged in 1923 as Muslims, their graveyards seemed to be still particularly important for the Jewish community.

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57 Athlitika Chronika, October 1st, 1934.
59 Makedonia, December 13th, 1930 and June 28th, 1931.
60 Defined by G. Mavrogordatos, clientelism was: “dyadic and personal”, “contractual and achieved”, “informal”, “instrumental”, was “predicated on “reciprocity” and was “above all asymmetrical and vertical”, in Giorgos Mavrogordatos, Stillborn Republic… op. cit., pp. 5-6.
61 Devin E. Naar, Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 242
The tensions between the PAOKtsides and the community were likely to be violent at this point of 1930. Many decades after the events, a former PAOK official Zouboulidis remembered:

“One day madness took me. I could not believe that PAOK was not going to have its stadium. I went with the daïdes and I took possession of the road and a part of the cemetery. The Jews were angry. “Guys, it will not be possible, we need to build our stadium”, I told them. Finally, we found a compromise and we took a corner. Then, we started to work. The morning, people were seeing us in the bank with the costumes, the evening we were working with a pickaxe.”

Previously in the same interview, Zouboulidis said that he brought all the Constantinopolitan daïdes of the kafeneia to be protected against Aris and Iraklis fans who were attacking them while they were working on the construction. But here, we can see that they activated their network in the underground world of the city against the Jewish community, and certainly in a more violent way than it is described. D. E. Naar in his chapter on the Jewish cemetery showed that grabbing lands or marbles of the graveyards was something quite common for the refugees of the Interwar without any further action by the authorities. PAOK was a part of this long process of reduction of the size of this “empty center” that began really after the fire of 1917 and the plans of Hébrard of transforming it in a park that would host the university (that eventually was built) with this liberal will of westernizing and rationalizing the city. However, the construction of PAOK stadium at the place of the dönme cemetery represents also symbolically the conquest of the old Ottoman city by a new elite.

CONCLUSION

The case of PAOK and its Constantinopolitan founders in the Interwar helped us to understand the social conditions of the massive arrival of the Asia Minor refugees. Moreover, it revealed the fundamental transformations that it created on a political scale. Sports appeared as one of the answers for the social issues of the refugee crisis. A crisis that in an urban context, led to anomia, out of control (sometimes in purpose) of any governmental policy. The Constantinopolitan elite in Thessaloniki made the choice to invest the refugee environment by their clientelist networks in order to find electoral support and thus achieve their political goals in their new nation-State. The reinforcement of the Constantinopolitans reinforced also the club that quickly became massive. Once it massified, PAOK became vector of the Venizelist ideological speeches in order to catch a crucial refugee vote at a time in the 1930’s when it was easily toggling to communism. Hence, was mobilized the social conditions of the refugees and thus became an

64 Jacques ANCEL, La Macédoine, étude de colonisation contemporaine, Paris, Delagrave, 1930, pp. 303-313.
identity criterion that established a cleavage in the city between refugees and “indigenous”. A cleavage that was transferred on sports fields between the “refugee” team and the “indigenous” teams. The issue for the newcomers was to win their place in the city, be the new established (sportively, spatially or politically) at the risk of using violence and antisemitism. Thus, in Thessaloniki’s Interwar context, we may consider that there was an inversion of the classical *eliasian configuration*. Indeed, the refugees became (ideologically at least) established, while the locals were politically outsiders. These practices and these discourses that maintained cleavages in Thessaloniki created identification processes that may be still perceptible nowadays, but they found their genesis in the Interwar period. PAOK was then a refugee and Venizelist team, against royalists and “indigenous”. Since, another main cleavage appeared. Indeed, PAOK also considers itself as the Macedonian team: the club of the Northern Greeks, sportively and politically marginalized by the “State of Athens” and its clubs, always considered as unjustly dominant.