New Nation, New Nationalism: Agrarian Theory and Policy in Bulgaria from 1919-1923

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Abstract

There exists a critical gap in the literature between analysis of the regime of Alexander Stamboliski from a basic historical perspective and a broader ideological perspective rooted in nationalism theory. The result of this gap has been a division of research between those who look simply at the policies of the regime and those who attempt to discuss it in a framework of what is almost always Marxist ideology. By examining the policies and historical context of the Stamboliski regime in conjunction with analyzing it through the lens of nationalism theory, the depth and importance of the regime become clearer. Through this framework it becomes possible to view what is often called an anti-national regime as a nationalist regime attempting to re-forge the national identities of Bulgaria and, eventually, the entire Balkans. This comes with implications in how we view nationalism in the Balkans, Agrarianism, and the broader processes of addressing modernization and the region's Ottoman legacy.

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Introduction

The problem in analyzing the modern Balkans has often been that the region does not easily fit into existing paradigms. In her critique of Mary Neuburger's use of Orientalism to analyze Bulgarian perspectives on minority populations, Maria Todorova points out that such things cannot be explained via Said's vision of Orientalism.[1] This Balkan space is neither the Occident nor the Orient. It is a cliché today to speak of a 'mixing' or 'meeting' place of cultures, however, what does seem to be true is that the specificities of the region have not been as laboriously glossed over and homogenized as many others, whether from within or without. It is here that we similarly see the problem with Bulgaria's peculiar brand of inter-war Agrarianism. It does not fit into the existing paradigms. It is not Liberalism, Socialism, or Fascism; it's not what we commonly think of as nationalism, yet it's focused on constructing a new nation; it's not designed to apply only to Bulgaria, yet it's also not a universal ideology. Even grouping it with its own contemporary Agrarian movements in the Balkans is quite problematic. It is simply not easy to discuss this ideology by relying on historical context as a frame of reference. Its discussion is not convenient or easy, so it is either not discussed, or discussed in a problematic way.

Of course some context is necessary, the main one being the idea that the end of the First World War represented a nearly unrivaled revolutionary moment in which disillusionment with the existing order reached an apex and the direction of the future was far from certain. The political battles fought were in many ways over not just policy but on the very meaning of modernization and progress[2]. The questions asked in response to these circumstances were fundamental. What would be the political

1 See Todorova's introduction and in particular page 11, Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

2 When referring to Modernization here, I am reflecting the language which exists in the literature and not referring to modernization theory. When used in this context, the word should be interpreted to refer to the process of economic development and a joining of Europe (in the sense of being taken seriously on the European stage and not being viewed as some quasi-oriental backwater).

boundaries of the state? How would communities orient and run themselves? What would be the composition and purpose of this larger community of the nation? How would self interest be defined in a political context?

The sum of these questions would manifest themselves in conflicting answers to this question of the future. While by this time such questions were far more developed and concrete throughout the United States and Western Europe, the very forms and parameters of this debate were still being settled in the Balkans. Yet there is a strong tendency to view this debate's Balkan manifestation from this more defined perspective. In other words, to impose post hoc perspectives and conclusions upon these debates by starting from a more clearly and narrowly defined notion of modernization. Doing this loses the nuance and detailed of the contemporary perspective.

The fervent rejection of much of what would become the orthodoxy of western-style political and economic development in the aftermath of the First World War itself demonstrates the willingness of voters to gamble on alternative visions of the future.[3] Most radical of all were the visions which did not carry the endorsement of any foreign powers, something far more dangerous and problematic in the Balkans than in most other parts of the world.[4] In this sense the Agrarian movement of Alexander

3 Referring to the Peasants, Mitrany states that "their sense of independence was to find expression after 1919, organized as never before, in a widespread Peasant movement. The movement was active in every country of eastern Europe." David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), 119; also that in terms of spontaneity, 1919 "could be said to have witnessed a revolutionary upheaval more genuine than that of the early years of Sovietization." Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered: Agrarianism and communism in Bulgaria* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1; and that this upsurge in supported extended towards Agrarians, Communists and Socialists alike throughout the Balkans L.S. Stavrianos, "The Balkan Federation Movement: A Neglected Aspect," *The American Historical Review*, 48.1 (1942): 30-51.

4 Bulgaria's international situation during this period is discussed in detail in Kosta Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand: Autobiography of a Rebel, Soldier, and Statesmen* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Pub. Co., 1943); additionally, in an examination of records from the U.S. State Department, Peter F. Sugar concludes that even when U.S. intelligence was based on information from Russian and British sources the mix of policies advocated by Stamboliski were quite baffling to both political and diplomatic circles. Peter F. Sugar, "The Views of the U.S. Department of State of Alexandre Stambolijski*," Balkan*

Stamboliski[5] can be seen as the most daring of these interwar experiments in alternative visions of modernization. It was a vision ultimately destroyed in large part by external political factors which saw most of Europe somewhere in the range of apathetic to outright hostile to its policies and ideas.[6]

However, this destruction should not detract from the importance of this alternative vision of modernization in its own context. The short lived nature of Stamboliski's time in power, combined with its poor fit within what has become the standard scope of modernization theory, have made his movement too easy to discount. One important element of this problem is Stamboliski's relationship to nationalism. While his overt rejection of irredentism in both its ethnic and territorial forms has long led observers to reflexively label him an "anti-nationalist,"[7] this labeling has masked the wider implications of his theories on the history of nation building in Bulgaria.

If nationalism is to be understood in its wider sense, not as a narrowly defined political ideology but simply, as phrased by Ernest Gellner, that it is "a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent,"[8] then it becomes possible to view Stamboliski's movement in a new light. It becomes not simply a movement which happened to encompass anti-nationalist views, but one which less overtly attempted to implement a new definition of nationhood. In this sense

Studies, 2 (1990), 70-77; the effect was important, as Mitrany explains that "No other factor undoubtedly helped to weaken the prospects of the eastern Peasant parties [as] the lack of sympathy from western governments." Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant*, 142.

5 Though commonly transliterated as "Stamboliiski," among some others, I have chosen the spelling which eliminates the second "i" as I believe it makes the name more readable, but still easy to correctly pronounce in English.

6 "From the day Stamboliski turned down Baron Aliotti's offer of a secret military alliance against Yugoslavia, the Italians set out to destroy him. They had three major weapons - bribery, terror, and Bulgarian reparations." Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 151.

7 Groueff explains Stamboliski's opposition to the patriotic national ideal as it was perceived as well as his rejection of irredentism, Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918-1943,* New ed., (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1998), 75-6; Bell is more frank in referring to Stamboliski as an "anti-nationalist" John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union*, 1899-1923 (Princeton,, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 207.

8 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

it becomes a nationalist movement itself, opposing those labeled as 'nationalists' in a narrow political sense while upholding a set of policies and ideas which set to define a new nation and make its congruency with the state a reality.

The implications of this concept are important for both nationalism theory and the history of modernization in the Balkans. By making these arguments this thesis sets out to expand the definition of the nation and to reevaluate Alexander Stamboliski and his Agrarian movement through this new theoretical lens. Additionally, there are more specific implications for Agrarianism as a whole as this new understanding of Stamboliski's particular brand of that ideology points out several issues in attempting to discuss wider Balkan Agrarian movements under this single label. Together these implications spell out a redefined role for Stamboliski within both Agrarianism and wider Balkan modernization. One in which his policies should be seen as unique within the Agrarian movement and taken into consideration as an importance chapter in the history of Nationalism in the Balkans.

To do this I will begin with a review of the relevant historical literature before progressing to a chapter devoted to contextualizing Stamboliski's Agrarianism in the Balkan context. The following two chapters will discuss the domestic and foreign policies of his regime in more detail. Next, a theoretical chapter will discuss the relevant literature in the field of nationalism studies before discussing how I will place Stamboliski's brand of nationalism within this field. Finally, the fifth and final chapter will bring together the conclusions of the preceding four chapters to make the core arguments for this thesis, namely that Stamboliski's Agrarianism is in fact a brand of nationalism. The conclusion will discuss the aims and direction of future research.

Literature Review

The evolution of the literature on the Stamboliski regime has developed very much in historical contexts, beginning with contemporary writings, progressing through several stages within the Bulgarian Communist regime and from the United States, before moving into the post Cold War era. Beginning with contemporary sources, there are several in Bulgarian and French which are available. The first and most important of these are the writings of Alexander Stamboliski himself. Selected numbers of his works were published in 1981. However difficulty in obtaining these works means they will be analyzed in later additions to this research, and other direct quotes will have to suffice.

There also exist a variety of contemporary analyses of Stamboliski's regime found primarily in French publications came in Parisian monthly news journals like "La Revue de France" giving contemporary accounts of the regime. Unfortunately the political leanings of this journal are somewhat unclear. Additionally, several accounts were published in the years following the death of Stamboliski which look at his time in power. For example, "La Drame Bulgare" in the Revue Historique in 1925. A longer term look at the impact of the compulsory labor policies of the Stamboliski government is provided a book published in French in Sofia in 1933. On the whole these contemporary French accounts tend to be quite critical. Most contemporary Bulgarian works also tended to douse the regime in ideological criticism reflecting heavily partisan interpretations, something which only worsened after the 1923 coup.[9]

Two later publications will provide more in depth Bulgarian primary sources. First is the 1943 publication of Kosta Todorov's autobiography. His role as a key political player during the Stamboliski

9 This analysis is taken from John D. Bell, "The Agrarian Movement in Recent Bulgarian Historiography" in *Balkanistica* 8 (1992), 20.

period makes his autobiography an interesting resource. Around the 1950s, de-Stalinization played an important role in opening up scholarship in Bulgaria and leading to a somewhat more sympathetic portrayal of the regime, something which continued into the 1960s as more sympathetic portrayal was offset with little discussion at all. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a backlash had developed into a debate over the nature of the regime in Bulgarian history.

Around Stamboliski's 100th birthday in 1979 the scholarship in Bulgaria had advanced significantly, and now contained substantial debates centered around the nature of the regime, largely free from the ideological perspectives which had harmed previous scholarship. One was Khristo Angelov's biography of Stamboliski himself. The book stands as a competent source which, while containing a superficial Marxist perspective, does indeed provide good analysis. Another such biography was published by Boev, Boris, and Liũben Bozhkov in 1979 and though it was published under similar circumstances, reads much more as Party propaganda.

A later publication from 1983 in English, but based on extensive archival research and personal interviews, is Stephane Groueff's Crown of Thorns. The book focuses on Prince (and later King) Boris III and his perspective on the tumultuous political developments following his father's abdication in 1919. While Boris undoubtedly had his own particular political perspective and strayed from the everyday political life of the country, his discussions with and perspectives on many of the major political figures of the time are an invaluable resource.

At the same time several American authors were publishing quite excellent works with access to archives in Sofia obtained by working with the communist authorities there. Interestingly enough, the precise nature of this relationship and the requirements for access are not discussed in the books themselves, raising questions as to the level of over or covert censorship which may be present in these books, especially as they often discuss topics which are directly relevant to the origins of the

Communist government itself.

The earliest of these publications was Joseph Rothschild's The Communist Party of Bulgaria discussing the developments of the party up to 1936. Many internal political dynamics come to light as Rothschild details the Communist's reaction to specific Stamboliski policies. For his research he makes extensive use of several sources not well utilized in most other works on the period including several French academic articles mentioned previously, as well as detailed foreign newspaper coverage complete with items like quotes of Stamboliski's speeches. Yet the previous question of political influence rests heavy on this work as it is difficult to imagine Rothschild could have conducted his research in Bulgaria on such a topic without some pressure.

In Revolution Administered Nissan Oren discusses the broad problems and successes of the Stamboliski regime while drawing attention to serious problems of historiography. Here Stamboliski's regime is seen as being simultaneously uniquely adept and uniquely flawed. Respect is given to attempts to break both internal and foreign policy related impasses, yet problems in these areas combined with Stamboliski's overriding belief in his own ability to tackle everything at once prevent consolidation of gains, let alone significant progress. Oren also points out gaps in historiography as of 1973 as well as the difficulty of non-official Bulgarian historians in accessing many archival materials in Sofia. So again the question of foreign historians level of academic freedom working during this period is raised but not sufficiently answered.

Frederick Chary's chapter on radical peasant movements in Bulgaria in a larger volume on Peasantry in Eastern Europe, published in 1979, provides a good early example of broader commentary on the Stamboliski regime and its failures. While this chapter deals primarily with the beginnings of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, it also discusses Stamboliski, his theories, and how they related to the organization. Chary ultimately concludes that the party was based more on 'bread and butter' issues

and advocacy as opposed to any abstract ideas of Stamboliski. This importantly set an early tone for evaluating the role of the regime in history, namely that it should be evaluated more on the basis of its policies than its philosophy. Still, while making an argument the chapter certainly does not provide sufficient analysis to do more than make an early claim.

The first major book in the English language which attempted to tackle the broader history of the Bulgarian Agrarian movement in some depth was John D. Bell's Peasants in Power. While this was his first major publication on this subject, Bell would continue to publish articles on the Agrarians for decades to come. Based on research conducted in the US with survivors, around Europe in foreign ministry archives, and in Bulgaria with a variety of Agrarian and non-Agrarian newspapers in addition to an extensive list of scholarly works in Bulgarian, English and French, Bell's book would set the tone for all later scholarly works on the subject.

Bell ultimately sympathizes with the Agrarian movement and its downfall, painting it as a significant attempt towards a 'third way' political development which was doomed more for external than internal factors. In doing so he emphasizes the continued importance of the movement for Bulgarian and European history and points out the lack of attention paid to it. Significantly, despite Bell's emphasis of the uniqueness of the agrarian theory behind the movement he does not discuss the theoretical background or development of this theory. So while Bell's work here provides a well needed foundation of historical research, his conclusions are left without important contextual elements.

While Bell focused on some other research topics for a time, by the 1990s he was adding to his previous work first with an excellent historiography of the Agrarians incorporating discussions of a wider variety of sources than was found in his 1977 book. It seems clear that the reason for this is the overt partisanship of these sources, yet their contributions are fascinating as reflections of the

prevailing political winds of their times. This is especially true of Bell's analysis of some early Russian historians discussion of Agrarian ideology. In 1996 Bell contributed a chapter in Populism In Eastern Europe which consisted of a condensed and slightly updated version of his 1977 book.

In 2009 Crampton published a book on Alexander Stamboliski himself. In it he aims at tackling the same lack of scholarship on Stamboliski and the Agrarians identified 32 years earlier by Bell. Crampton attempts to take a longer view of the rise and fall of Stamboliski and Agrarianism by focusing on the period from 1878 until end of the Second World War. Continuing what has become his style he combines a concise discussion of his subject with a careful use and discussion of sources. The shorter length of the book is offset with a very useful discussion of sources and further reading provided in the back. Thus on the whole the book's analysis itself and its extremely useful discussion of English language sources and translated materials make it a wonderful resource. Though, importantly, his work continues to lack a significant discussion of any theory whether to analyze Agrarianism as a 'third way' or to look at Stamboliski's particular brand of authoritarianism.

While dealing less directly with the Stamboliski period, Mary Neuburger's The Orient Within establishes an important precedent by incorporating significant theoretical elements in her historical analysis. She examines the history of Bulgarian government policies directed towards its minorities, particularly the Pomaks and Turks within the framework of national identity formation. She draws a strong contrast between the minority policies of the Stamboliski government and those of the other governments of this period as well as a contrast between his and others ideas about how to construct a Bulgarian nation relative towards these minorities. While her use of Said's Orientalism is clumsy at times, it none-the-less showed what could be done with such theory.

Marie Todorova develops these basic ideas developed by Neuburger and takes them much farther. Identifying the lack of a sufficient framework for discussing both internal and external

perceptions of the Balkans as being a major problem in many authors such as Neuburger (leading to her at times awkward use of Orientalism in a Balkan context), she develops a variation of Said's work she calls Balkanism. With her more developed framework she moves through a useful discussion of the role the Agrarian party played in Bulgaria and the wider Balkans from her unique theoretical perspective. In doing so she makes the claim that local factors were more influential than a shared Ottoman legacy in crafting the different roles of peasants in early Balkan politics. The conclusion being that Stamboliski's movement was, though in small part a uniquely Balkan phenomenon, in large part a uniquely Bulgarian political development.

Finally, the most recent significant work looking back on broader developments in Bulgarian historiography since the Agrarian period is Roumen Daskalov's The Making of a Nation in the Balkans, published in 2004. While the Agrarian period is not discussed in great detail, the conclusions drawn about the broader developments of historiography under communism can be applied to those writing on nearly any politically relevant subject. Tracing the extent to which Marxist critiques and frameworks played a greater or lesser role in writings on Bulgarian history throughout this period provides a greater insight into understanding both the context in which Bulgarian writers were working as well as the environment which may have been faced by the previously discussed foreign historians working in Sofia during Communism.

Taking a broader look at the historiography of Stamboliski's period of Agrarian rule one sees some degree of fragmentation. It is a fragmentation borne out of linguistic as well as physical/political barriers. While the problem of primary sources being in Bulgarian may not often manifest itself in authors attempting to tackle the subject without sufficient linguistic abilities, I believe it has resulted in the Agrarian period receiving a fraction of the attention it deserves within broader discussions and debates on Eastern European political, and philosophical history. One finds authors without Bulgarian

language skills mentioning Agrarianism in larger volumes dealing with these issues, but never with the attention that authors who do delve into the primary source materials argue it deserves.

The result has been fragmentation. While a small core of solid scholarship exists, it has not developed sufficiently to address the Stamboliski period on both a basic historical and broader theoretical level. The newest scholarship form authors like Todorova points towards great promise for future Balkan histories which attempt to marry history and theory. While leaving the discussion of the relevant literature on nationalism theory for chapter 4, this historical framework leaves a clear opening for some literature which can examine Stamboliski and his theories with a broader perspective.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Stamboliski's Agrarianism

Stamboliski's victory in 1919 occurred amidst a period of great successes among Agrarian parties across Eastern Europe, and especially the Balkans.[10] While the connections between the Agrarian movements of Europe and the Balkans were significant, they also invite some level of homogenization when discussing such movements. In this chapter one will discuss the relevant similarities and differences between the Balkan Agrarian movements leading into more detailed discussions of the policies of Stamboliski's BANU (Bulgarian Agrarian National Union). This discussion is important to avoid any confusion as to what extent the policies and beliefs of Stamboliski's government can be attributed to other contemporary Agrarian parties, as well as to discuss his BANU's relationship with those parties.

When examining Agrarianism in history, a noticeable difference arises relative to many contemporary ideologies like Communism and Fascism. While the latter two ideologies have been separated into significant sub-categories for the purpose of better delineating the internal and external boundaries, Agrarianism has not experienced this process to the same extent. The use of the term to describe a variety of 19th and 20th century ideological and political beliefs, and movements from around Eastern Europe strains the ability of this single term to encompass such variety. Even within a more limited context of Stamboliski's Agrarianism, the term functions only on the macro level and fails to account for the relevant internal diversity which exists. For this reason it is necessary to first place Stamboliski's Agrarianism within some context.

The editor's note of the collected volume on European Ideologies it is stated that Agrarian

10 See footnote 3.

["democratic peasant" in his words[11]] movements were "remarkably alike."[12] Yet in his chapter on Agrarianism in that volume, the former head of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party George M. Dimitrov notes that "being recent, Agrarianism does not yet possess a systematic doctrine of fundamental principles or a coherent philosophical structure of values;"[13] noting only that it "tends to be an ideology of political and economic democracy based on the idea of cooperative syndicalism."[14] So we see a broad category of political movements which can only be grouped within broad as opposed to absolute principles, and which demonstrate a significant level of flexibility.

Of course the initial step must be to establish what is meant by "Agrarianism." The term has numerous historical connotations as well as broader meanings in terms of philosophy and political ideology. In order to analyze and contextualize any instance of Agrarianism, a definition of the term must be agreed upon. However, in the context of Agrarianism in the Balkans during the early 20th century this task represents one of the initial problems with the generic use of "Agrarianism" to describe the three most prominent movements (those of Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania).[15] As Mr. Dimitrov has made clear, such a fundamental definition does not exist and the creation of one is a perilous task coupled with the inevitable risk of pushing these three movements closer or farther away from this definition as a result of its inability to evenly compass them all. Never-the-less, the

11 It should be noted that some authors tend to use 'agrarian' and 'peasant' as interchangeable adjectives to describe the movements being discussed here.

12 This is said, curiously, without elaborating on precisely what makes these similarities so remarkable relative to what can be seen within other umbrella ideological terms. George M. Dimitrov, "Agrarianism" in Feliks Gross, *European ideologies, a survey of 20th century political ideas*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 393.

13 Ibid, 396.

14 Ibid.

15 "The Greek Agrarian Party which was established as late as 1922 was, both in terms of membership and in terms of political impact, an insignificant force in Greek political life." Nicos Mouzelis, "Greek and Bulgarian Peasants: Aspects of Their Sociopolitical Situation during the Interwar Period," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18.1 (Jan., 1976), 90; additionally, no significant Agrarian movement existed in Albania or Yugoslavia, apart from Croatia, as during the inter-war period, the "Serb Agrarian Party... never gathered political strength, while the Slovene peasants remained under clerical influence." Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant*, 138.

comparative evaluation of these movements requires some agreement on at least some central elements of a definition. The best solution then seems to work through the process of reaching such a definition and acknowledge its shortcomings along the way.

The initial question to discuss is the relationship between the perceived social and political aspects of Agrarianism. While what is being discussed here seems at face value to fall clearly within the realm of national politics, this division is more complicated in the case of Agrarianism because of the tendency of Agrarian political movements to see themselves primarily as social and local in nature; often in spite of their overtly political activities on the national level[16]. After all, these were not externally founded or inspired political programs, but internal movements based upon the reflection of some internal social values onto the political system. Often their very impetus was the perception that the political system did not reflect the social values of the agrarian majority. For example: while Communism may have at times flourished in Agrarian societies, Agrarianism certainly never did the same in urban or industrial ones. This divisional aspect manifests itself in its most extreme form in Stamboliski's contention that his BANU was not even to be considered a political party but a social movement in spite of its obvious political nature.[17]

16 When I say social I am referring specifically to activities which exist apart from the political process on the state level. The social side of Agrarianism is the advocation of how individuals and the society should, for example, return to their peasant roots in terms of culture and behavior. The political would be advocating for land redistribution as a political party. Because of the importance of cooperative syndicalism in creating better economic situations in the villages and the occasional emphasis of this aspect of Agrarianism over its importance as an ideology which advocates for itself on the level of the national parliament, I find it useful to create this distinction when discussing modern Agrarianism.

17 The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) used the name union instead of party as a reflection of its broader social goals. In the sense that it operated outside the political realm by establishing local level organizations for not just political mobilization but for agricultural cooperative development it operated in the political realm as only one (if at times the main) way of achieving these wider social goals. Also, this position made sense as opposition to the political parties was central to Stamboliski's platform, it was therefore prudent for him to separate himself from them. R. J. Crampton, *Stamboliski* (London: Haus Publishing 2009), 30.

Originating as they did from the idea of the innate wisdom of the peasant agriculturalist,[18] the manifestation of these ideas as the platform of a political party which must by design exist within the very urban sphere which seemed to oppose this peasant ideology. The dissemination of such ideas requires the tools of mass communication held by the city, any wider exercise of political power meant basing one's self in the city. Additionally, many of the proponents of an anti-urban policy had often not fully experienced the urbanity which they criticized.[19] The result was that Agrarianism had always existed in an awkward predicament. Attempting to represent the social sphere of the countryside, it could not enact broader changes without confronting and finding a place for itself within the social sphere of the city (and by extension, the central government). David Mitrany explains that "perhaps the chief difficulty which faced the Peasant parties... was a tactical one, the burden of a contradiction between their social plans and their political principles."[20] It seemed the social and political sides had to exist side by side, and in doing so attempt to reconcile these problems.

While it is clear that a clean division between social and political sides of Agrarianism is not always possible, there are important ways in which the three Balkan variations described above found themselves straddling that line. As mentioned, the Bulgarian example shows one case in which the aforementioned social/political tension was somewhat downplayed by deemphasizing the romantic notions of peasant wisdom relative to the emphasis on wider economic reform through rational modernizing structural reforms. What is important here is that despite anti-urban rhetoric, Stamboliski put forward a set of programs which were designed to work for the entire country within an

18 A more basic foundation of this element of Agrarian theory is described in Roumen Daskalov, "Ideas About, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans," *East European Quarterly* 31.2 (1997): 161. The more sophisticated and developed form of Balkan Agrarianism which had developed by the 1960s is described in Gross, *European ideologies,* 306-307.

19 "The irony is that the anti-urban and anti-capitalist poetry was most often written by people who had actually lived only in small towns and had little experience with advanced capitalism and urbanization." Daskalov, "Ideas About, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans," 162.

20 Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant*, 141.

overarching notion of modernization and materialism[21]. This can be distinguished from both the Croatian and Romanian cases.

The Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) led by Stjepan Radić played this social/political divide quite differently. Operating on a more political level, the HSS maintained several policies which seemed to place its role as a political party over its role as a more universalistic social organization of peasants. For example, its notable opposition to the founding of Yugoslavia (originally as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) in 1921. Even through the early years of the state, HSS continued to support a higher level of Croatian federal autonomy as an eventual path to independence based upon the idea that "Croats are not part of the Balkans either geographically, politically or culturally... A Balkan Federation might include Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia, but not Croatia."[22]

By viewing its own Agrarian platform as a uniquely Croatian development which did not aspire even to pan-Yugoslav reforms, let alone the wider Balkan federation based on Agrarian principles advocated by Stamboliski,[23] Radić and HSS prioritized the political far more than Stamboliski.[24] The

21 While this term is used often in the literature, I have been unable to find a discussion of precisely what Stamboliski meant by this term. While a further look into Stamboliski's writings planned for future research mentioned in the conclusion of this thesis will certainly addresses this need, we can make some preliminary conclusions. Looking at the background of Stamboliski's education it seems clear he was not referring to materialism in a Marxist or philosophical sense, but rather in an economic sense. Though it seems likely that he used the term not then with its strict economic definition, but rather somewhat loosely to mean that it is our material wealth that matters more than the psychological satisfaction of, say, being reunited with a lost piece of 'national' territory.

22 Pero Moraca, *The League of Communists of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade 1966), 13. Found in Fred Singleton, *Twentieth Century Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia Press, 1976), p. 73-4; yet there is some confusion on this point as an analysis provided by Rumiana Bozhilova of Radić's book "Obnovljena Bugarska" or "Bulgaria Renewed" written in 1913 right after the Balkan Wars explains that Radić at the time "fervently supported the thesis that the desired unity of the Southern Slavs could only be accomplished... only with Bulgarian participation" Rumiana Bozhilova, "The Bulgarians through the Eyes of Stjepan Radić (The Bulgarian Character in His Book 'Obnovljena Bugarska')" Balkan Studies 4 (1993), 7-11; my best guess is that Radić's views evolved after the formation of Yugoslavia, however the issues deserves more study.

23 Indeed, Radić rebuffed overtures by the Agrarian International to move towards a more internationalist form of Agrarianism, Louisa Reviakina, "Le cas Stjepan Radić et l'Internationale Agrarienne," *Balkan Studies* 1.1 (1995): 35-55.

24 It has been noted on several occasions by Kosta Todorov, Stamboliski's foreign minister, that though

Agrarianism of the HSS seems to operate primarily in the realm of federal politics, as it opposes the social aspects of the movement which would necessarily universalize it (at least within a Balkan or Yugoslav context). Thus by focusing purely on obtaining a solid base of political support within Croatia based on an Agrarian platform, political dominance of that component of the Yugoslav Federation would allow less for Agrarian reforms and more for anti-centralizing activities designed to maintain some level of Croatian independence.

Yet, ironically, this preference for seemingly political forms of Agrarianism lay on a foundation of overtly social reasoning. The reasons for the uniquely national elements of the HSS political platform were indeed social in both the rhetoric of Radić and in the political basis for the policies, but must be distinguished from the social aspects of Agrarianism. Indeed, if Stamboliski used the social similarities of peasants as a tool to attempt to overcome national differences then Radić may be seen to be doing precisely the opposite. Using social ideas of national difference as a tool for suppressing or ignoring any potential wider social implications of Agrarianism, Radić was using what he saw as the uniquely Croatian characteristics of the Croatian peasantry as a way of limiting the scope of his political party and in effect dominating Croatian politics.

While the argument could be made that this localization of Agrarianism was in fact recognizing social differences which precluded the kind of universalist projects advocated by Stamboliski. Perhaps the failures of the Green International and the Balkan Federation show that this more localized form of Agrarianism better reflected social reality and attempted to reflect that reality through politics instead

an excellent public speaker and at times a skilled strategist, Stamboliski suffered from a lacking ability to judge personal character and willingness to fire even those who were brazenly corrupt. "What Stamboliski wanted was real democracy, no political but economic. That meant liberating the peasants from the control of the middlemen and usurers who had been robbing them for years. Through the co-operatives he expected to free them permanently from their dependence on speculators in farm products. He was also eager to teach them to fill administrative posts. But his generous nature handicapped him; he was the last to discover who was an adventurer and who a charlatan." Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand,*134-5; It can then be said that Stamboliski clearly did not prioritize the political above all else.

of the other way around. The problem of this alternative perspective points out the fundamental issues of viewing these different Balkan Agrarian movements through the same lens. While it is clear these two Agrarian movements are pursing the opposite ends in terms of policies on wider Balkan Federal states (where a single on or Yugoslavia), it could be reasonably argues that they pursued these policies in pursuit of many of the same Agrarian values, adding a curious dimension to this consideration of the relationship between the social and the political within Agrarianism.

The Romanian variation seemed to take a more romanticized and religious interpretation of Agrarianism which undoubtedly developed initially as a social movement, and only later evolved into a political one.[25] Beginning in the late 19th century in several literary journals, the Romanian agrarian movement drew on ethnic and religious differences to create an agrarian ideology which they claimed to be uniquely and wholly Romanian in character.[26] They emphasized the difference between the romanticized past and the chaotic present.[27] Beyond these early beginnings the mantle of Romanian Agrarianism has been held by a much wider variety of parties and coalitions than in Croatia or Bulgaria. For purposes of clarity here it seems best to refer primarily to the Romanian Peasants Party which represented Agrarian interests at the same time as Radić and Stamboliski. Yet the complex history of Agrarianism itself within Romania is yet another point against the terms overarching use in the Balkans, as well as the movement's historical complexity.

The central goal of the Peasant Party was not the maintenance of a Romanian peasant character but of its regeneration. Thus, despite this central romantic character, Romanian Agrarianism was not a

25 Daskalov, "Ideas About, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans," 164-5.
26 Ibid, 165.
27 This element did exist on some level in all the Balkan manifestations of Agrarianism with the exception of Stamboliski's version, and "in the Balkan states these debates were stimulated by Russian philosophers belonging to the Slavophil and Narodnik schools." Angela Harre, "Between Marxism and Liberal Democracy: Romanian Agrarianism as an Economic Third Way," *Societal change and ideological formation among the rural population of the Baltic area 1880-1939* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola 2008), 57.

regressive ideology possessing a desire to return to some idealized past. Modernization was still key, it was now simply a different kind of modernization. While in a manner similar to Stamboliski, these individuals believed progress could be made by looking towards the Peasants, their interpretations of the lessons to be drawn from those peasants differed significantly from what he was proposing.

The crucial difference which emerges here is an adherence to an ethnically defined form of nationalism. Does Agrarianism exist as a set of uniquely national forms, sharing some goals but ultimately marked as different by ethnicity, language, and religion? Or does it function as more universal (at least in terms of the Balkans) ideology capable of overcoming those very divisions? The answer depends on who you are asking. Stamboliski rejected the former form of particularist Agrarianism both domestically, through far more equal policies for Bulgaria's minority Pomak and Turkish populations[28], and internationally in his advocacy of the Green International and the Balkan Federation.[29] Much as in the wider debates of the inter-war period, it seemed modernization could come through a rejection or such entrenched differences or through a new emphasis of their importance.

Radić and HSS, by comparison, actively undermined attempts at wider federal structures by not only carving out a national political space for themselves within Yugoslavia, but also by creating wider political networks based on Croat ethnicity which transcended the internal borders of the federation.[30] At the same time to Romanians displayed perhaps the most particular form of Agrarianism of them all. The crucial difference here is that these differences which played a significant role in preventing any

28 "Under the Agrarian government of Alexander Stambolijski, who was tolerant toward the country's Muslim minority, the situation of the latter was quite favorable." Ali Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997), 49.

29 Bell reflects the typical stance on Stamboliski's foreign policy by labeling it as “anti-national.” Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 207.

30 While the degree to which anti-Yugoslav policies were pursued by HSS varied, for example when the policy of *narodno jedinstvo* was abandoned in 1918, some important level of croatian nationalism persisted. Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization*, 1904-1928 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 247.

transnational Agrarian movements from achieving success did not stem from personal disagreements amongst their leaders or from differing interpretations of a central set of enumerated core values but rather from fundamentally different interpretations of vague notions of the importance of the peasants in their countries' futures.

Thus in the examination of the relationship between the social and political aspects of Agrarianism we come to the conclusion that all three movements had slightly differing mixtures of these social and political elements. However, more importantly, in blending these aspects each movement came to a different conclusion as to the scale of their own ideas, whether it be sub-state/national (as one could interpret the Croatian case), national (as in the Romanian case), or ideally supra-national (as in the Bulgarian case). So while one can view the questions of how social and political aspects merged as ultimately less important, the questions of scale which developed from them are undoubtedly important markers of difference which, as mentioned, strain the unifying label of Agrarianism to its practical limits.

Having established the problems in this diversity of scales, arising from attempts to define each movement within the realm of political or social Agrarianism, a point mentioned previously in regards to the origination of these various Agrarian theories bears some further development. Looking at Marxism for comparison we see an ideology stemming from a single set of works and developing over time. Here similar backgrounds and experiences with the problems of modernization lead to broadly similar solutions which are modified to fit a variety of political and social circumstances. The result is that it is possible to see Agrarianism as a uniquely home-grown ideology in each of its many manifestations, and that referring to them all under the blanket term of Agrarianism can be useful at some level but at times as problematic as describing the current situations in Cuba and North Korea as somehow both falling under s homogenized vision of 'Communism.'

So indeed, Agrarianism functions quite differently. Instead of stemming from this single source, it reflects many individuals developing related ideas within similar circumstances. The commonality here is not the textual origins of the ideology but in the circumstances which prompted its creation. We can then say that the term has a somewhat selective meaning as it has often been applied post hoc to a variety of ideas where were later determined to fall within its scope. While this point is not in itself a reason to not use the label, it is important in establishing the qualities of the term which have lent themselves to its use as a broad umbrella term for such a variety of movements, both chronologically and geographically.

This raises some questions, if the term is applied this way, could it in fact be justifiably used in a more limited Eastern European or Balkan context but restricted from its wider use encompassing everything from the Russian Narodnik school to the Khmer Rouge. Certainly there are important elements of similarity amongst these three cases. One unifying aspect of Balkan Agrarianism is the "inability of most peasants to identify with the intelligentsia, hitherto the bearer of the national idea."[31] In this sense the timing of the movements and their role in the modernization process creates some important similarities, namely the aforementioned awkward relationship between these ideologues of the peasants and the urban centers in which they must exist to fully propagate their ideas.

However, looking more closely at the issue of the relationship between the peasants and the intelligentsia in terms of Agrarianism, this similar relationship also creates some important differences. Looking at the biographical information on the leaders of these Agrarian movements, there is an important distinction between Radić and Stamboliski on the one hand and some Romanian leaders of the National Peasant's Party like Iuliu Maniu.[32] Maniu's background was one of "a family with long

31 Biondich, *Stjepan Radic*, 246-7.

32 Maniu was Prime Minister of Romania three times during the inter-war period as head of the National Peasant Party and can be considered its most important leader. "Iuliu Maniu." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 28 Mar. 2012.

legal associations."[33] His is the most prominent case of the numerous idealogical and political leaders of the Romanian peasant movement who themselves had backgrounds which were far from the countryside.[34]

Another important figure for early Romanian Agrarian thought is Professor Constantin Stere, the "ideologist of the Peasant Party," and its "invisible head"[35] who came from a family of Boyar origins, and enjoyed privilege mixed with political imprisonment. Eventually, moving beyond Burnstein's reformed Socialism and developing the foundational idea of much of Romania's inter-war Agrarian thought, the idea of "Poporanismm" or Populism loosely translated into Romanian, came to define the movement. The important features elaborated here were those of a belief in a uniquely Romanian vision of the 'peasant spirit' which would revitalize Romania not though capitalism and industrialization but through collective farms and the revitalization of the peasants and the countryside.

Stamboliski himself was of a farming background. His only education had been agricultural and his profession prior to politics was that of a politically and ideologically minded journalist.[36] Radić, the ninth of eleven children, born to illiterate and impoverished parents in a village on the Sava, can (similarly to Stamboliski) be seen as a self made politician and thinker who came directly from the peasants whom he tried to represent.[37] These details mark an important difference on the part of the Romanian Peasant Party, whose chief political leader and ideologue both share essentially bourgeois backgrounds.

The origins of the underlying political and philosophical concepts underlie important distinctions in how we should view these three political parties. The ability to view the Romanian

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/362407/Iuliu-Maniu>.

33 Joseph Slabey Rouček, *Contemporary Roumania and her Problems* (New York: Arno Press & the New York Times, 1971), 87.

34 See footnote 9.

35 Ibid, 85.

36 R.J. Crampton, *Stamboliĭski*, 34.

37 Biondich, *Stjepan Radic*, 28.

Peasant Party as in some way a reflection of self-serving bourgeois glorification of a rural world they could not fully grasp themselves relates to how we should view the party both in a practical political sense and in terms of its relationship towards other Agrarian movements. While one cannot doubt the variety of philosophical influences which inspired Radić and Stamboliski, their ideas were very much their own, influenced as they were by the circumstances of their upbringing.

This relates to the broader issue of viewing Agrarianism as not simply a 'third way' in terms of modernization, but as a locally developed Balkan theory of modernization. While on the state level we can still view the Romanian example in the same way as the Croatian and Bulgarian examples, however on the sub-state level these similarities break down. Here then whether one sees stronger similarities or differences between these variations of Agrarianism depends on the scale of one's perspective. In spite of this, the general point remains, that the Romanian Agrarian movement's roots represent an important difference in how it functioned and how it should be viewed relative to other Agrarian movements.

Having established that each Agrarian movement had a different balance of emphasis on social and political elements, each also had a different scale of activity, that some of their leaders had markedly different backgrounds, and even the differences in how these political parties function on the state and sub-state levels, it is possible to return to the original issue. Where it becomes clear that in order for a definition to sufficiently encompass these differences it must either be vague enough to encompass what can be contradictory political positions or specific enough to have to exclude some elements of each movements, changes must be made in the term and how it can be used. Yet there are important similarities which should be discussed before rendering a final judgment on the usefulness of the broader term.

Returning to the original question, do the advantages of using the single term “Agrarianism”

justify some level of homogenization. Does the use of the term as a blanket encompassing these three diverse movements aide in their collective dismissal or unify them within the context of wider Balkan and European history so they may be seen as a part of a larger, and therefore more important, movement? Would the addition of qualifying adjectives for each individual case simply be a case of the "balkanization" of Balkan Agrarianism?

To the first question, the role of Agrarianism in most histories of the Balkans or its states does indeed fail to reflect the wider importance of Agrarianism in the Balkans during the inter-war period. National histories of Bulgaria,[38] of Croatia,[39] and of Romania.[40] Certainly there are cases both in which particular national Agrarian movements are discussed in an isolation which allows them to be more easily dismissed in a wider historical context, and cases in which an attempted broad discussion of Agrarianism has ended up giving an unrepresentative view of the diversity within that term.[41] Clearly

38 Two popular reference works for general histories of Bulgaria both discuss the Agrarian movement as a purely political force and without mention of other Agrarian movements. In this way the movement is easily downplayed by discussing it in simple political terms as opposed to the terms of an ideological or social movement. See: Ivan Ilchev, *The Rose of the Balkans: A Short History of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Colibri 2005). and R. J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nded 2007).

39 Looking towards two popular histories of Yugoslavia, a similar problem develops. In Lampe's "Yugoslavia as History," there is no discussion of Agrarianism as an idea, simply analysis of the political maneuverings of the HSS. In Drapac's work, while Radić features prominently in elements of the narrative, there is virtually no discussion of what he stood for aside from Yugoslav obstructionism. John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 2000). Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010).

40 In two Romanian texts used here, Agrarianism is not treated as a thing in and of itself but as a label for certain sets of reforms pertaining to agriculture. The romanticism of the many in the Romanian literary tradition which linked Agrarianism to nationalism is downplayed in favor of a more political and economic discussion of the progress of Agrarian reforms, and political parties. Rouček, *Contemporary Roumania and her Problems.* Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania, Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1951, reprinted by Archon Books in 1969).

41 While Jelavich includes some discussion of the problems of the peasants and their inability to address their problems through political or military means, eventually offering something approaching a comparative perspective on Balkan Agrarianism by stating that "Only Stamboliski's Agrarian Union was ever in a position to introduce a positive program, but Stephen Radić's Croatian Peasant Party and the Romanian Peasant Party played major roles in their countries' political lives." before going on to conclude that "measures brought to the forefront Agrarian and Communist parties

then both ways of representing these different Agrarian movements contain the potential for problems.

Could it be then that qualifying adjectives could have the potential to achieve the best of both systems, that is, recognizing the importance of certain underlying Agrarian values amongst all of the parties while also recognizing the important differences in the application of those values within the political and social realms? Certainly authors have displayed a tendency to discuss individual Agrarian movements in isolation from one another even absent a more specific vocabulary. Yet it seems equally clear that when Agrarianism is grouped together and collectively dismissed[42], that this allows for authors to avoid the realities of the diversity of Agrarian policies which existed.

What kinds of solutions then can be imagined. Recognizing that a strong diversity existed amongst the various Agrarian movements, it is still possible to recognize that the intellectuals which backed these movements had at least some level of awareness of what others were doing in the region. Much of the writings of early Agrarian thinkers in the Balkans may have argued in favor of unique circumstances, however the types of arguments they were making were undoubtedly influenced by outside sources.[43] So even if the roots of these movements do not lie in a central set of texts or ideas, is their awareness of each other and use of some imported theories – whether of romanticism, nationalism, or materialism – sufficient to justify some discussion of wider Balkan Agrarianism in conjunction with the use of more specific qualified terms to describe the sub-genres within this wider designation? In more narrow contexts the answer is certainly yes.

It must then be acknowledged that different levels of specificity in such terms are necessary

that challenged the hold of the traditional groups, which were nevertheless able to maintain their power." Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 137 & 191. A similar tone is found in Pavlowitch, where Peasant movements are noted as being weak, regional and poorly timed. He later details the rise and fall of Bulgarian Agrarianism a an exercise in corruption recklessness, not as a serious movement. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans: 1804-1945* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited 1999).

42 See footnote 28

43 See footnote 20.

when discussing them at different levels. Despite their differences the movements of Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania can each be seen as attempts at political, economic, and social reforms taken explicitly for the benefit of the peasant populations (though not necessarily excluding those living in urban areas). On this level, both the labeling of these movements as “Peasant” or “Agrarian” is appropriate barring the use of this label to assume that their goals or methods were the same. Yet when a more details and direct comparison is warranted, the use of a unifying term serves only to gloss over the significant differences which existed in an attempts to collectively dismiss the problems of Agrarianism as a whole.

While the creation of such sub-terms is a task worthy of a thesis of its own, it is pertinent to point out these problems before continuing to discuss Agrarianism in a more narrow sense. Additionally, from this perspective it is possible to appreciate the important similarities and differences of Stamboliski's movement relative to other contemporary Agrarian movements. As will be discussed later in detail, the failure of his attempts at a Green International and a Balkan Federation in part failed because of this diversity within Agrarianism. Each Agrarian movement seemed to have a different idea of its own mission and the overall purpose of Agrarianism.

The result is that it must be concluded that Stamboliski's movement should be discussed primarily as an independent set of ideas and policies and not simply as a component of a wider movement or broad political evolution. The great success of Agrarian movements was not necessarily good for his movement and their ideological relationship is a complex one. Additionally, this relationship offers some further insight into the difficulty in studying these movements, the more fragmented and reliant upon local conditions they are the more difficult it is to study them. Thus some homogenization can be expected. This chapter therefore has sought to counteract that to make it absolutely clear what is and is not meant by 'Agrarianism,' as well as to make it clear that viewing

Stamboliski's version of this ideology as a form of nationalism certainly does not necessitate doing the same for other versions.

Chapter 2: Re-Defining the Nation Internally

Beyond the descriptive aspects which set Alexander Stamboliski and his regime apart there is another important ascriptive trait: that of the "radical."[44] Both historians and contemporaries in Bulgaria and around the world used this term to describe the man and the regime. Why then was this term not used to describe the agrarian movements discussed in the previous chapter? There are two explanations. The first is that the inability of most of the Great Powers to understand and categorize Stamboliski's particular brand of Agrarianism.[45] The second and more important explanation is the genuinely radical character of the Stamboliski regime, manifest in its goals to reshape Bulgarian, and ultimately Balkan, society. Goals which exceeded those set out by any of his contemporaries in the wider agrarian movement.

The interaction between the foreign and domestic policies of the Stamboliski regime is vital in terms of understanding its broader ideology. Prior to discussing this, it is necessary to discuss each individually. With his domestic agenda, Stamboliski sought not simply to implement a new set of policies, but to fundamentally change the structure of Bulgarian society and democracy so as to prevent a repetition of the failures of the past decades of independence which had so recently culminated in the collapse of the front at the end of the First World War and the abdication of Tsar Ferdinand. In many ways the crisis of legitimacy which Democracy and Liberalism faced in the inter-war period began

44 One can find reference to the great powers using the term to describe Stamboliski's regime in Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 125 & 148; both King Boris III and the author himself use the term to describe Stamboliski, Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 75.

45 In a detailed examination of records from the U.S. State Department, Peter F. Sugar concludes that even when U.S. intelligence was based on information from Russian and British sources the mix of policies advocated by Stamboliski were quite baffling to both political and diplomatic circles. Sugar, *The Views of the U.S. Department of State of Alexandre Stambolijski,* 70-77.

earlier in Bulgaria.[46]

In order to understand the contested and radical nature of Bulgarian domestic politics from 1919 onward, it is important to understand the difficulties of the previous decades. From the achievement of partial independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 until the turn of the century Bulgaria actually suffered economic decline resulting from its newfound isolation from Ottoman markets as well as the economic burdens of state building.[47] Yet despite the influx of resources into towns and the difficulties or rural life during this period, the proportion of the population (approximately 4/5) who were peasants was roughly the same in 1920 as it had been in 1878.[48] The great irony was that while this was occurring, Bulgaria, as well as many other Balkan governments, were burrowing huge amounts from the Great Powers to finance wasteful militaries and bureaucracies. Ultimately this debt restricted their ability to make economic and political decisions.[49]

This was occurring alongside the authoritarianism of the iron willed Prime Minister Stafan Stambolov whose suspending of the constitution and ultimate assassination would serve as only a

46 It is important to note that Stamboliski, in spite of his party eventually adopting many of the election manipulation tactics of its predecessors, was a firm believer in democracy. When explaining his opposition to the abandonment of democratic principles which had occurred under Communism in the Soviet Union and the differences between their program and his, he stated that "how can anyone be so blind as not to see the fundamental differences between communism and our program? One means dictatorship and the other means democracy. Our social system is like an old tree. The Bolsheviks say that it has lived too long and would cut it down and plant a sapling in its place. We peasants say that it should not be cut down, for it has taken a long, long time go grow. We merely believe in pruning it and letting in a little more light." Quoted from The Making of America Project, "Bulgarian Backgrounds," *The Living Age*, CCCXIX (1922), 504.

47 George D. Jackson Jr., *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe*, 1919-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 159; also discussed in detail in Mouzelis, "Greek and Bulgarian Peasants: Aspects of Their Sociopolitical Situation during the Interwar Period," 90-91.

48 Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 19; Between 1880 and 1910 the population of towns in Bulgaria even declined slightly, John R. Lampe, "Unifying the Yugoslav Economy, 1918-1921: Misery and Early Misunderstandings," in Dimitrije Djordjevic, ed., *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914-1918* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio Press, 1980), 147-52.

49 An excellent explanation of this phenomenon is found in Nicos Mouzelis, "Greek and Bulgarian Peasants," 86-87.

prequel for later, more bloody political developments.[50] John D. Bell went so far as to label the first two decades after independence "paper democracy" which widened the gap between the haves and have-nots, and in which the role of the peasantry was "reduced to casting ballots in what were more and more frequently rigged or meaningless elections."[51]

The incompetence and authoritarian tendencies of the political class (not to mention the Tsars, Alexander and later Ferdinand) during this period led to disillusionment with the system.[52] The necessity of urban development and the building of a real capital out of the town of Sofia naturally lead to a drain of resources from the countryside, further exacerbating the difficult economic situation of peasants adjusting to the post-Ottoman economic reality.[53] At the same time, a series of disastrous wars from the First and Second Balkan Wars to the First World War culminated in a hunger for radical changes in what was becoming a progressively dysfunctional system. The resulting clash of solutions lead to a situation where "in no other land in contemporary Europe has the clash between agrarianism and communism – Marx against the peasant – been more vividly manifested."[54] In reaction, support for the traditional parties slowly dried up beginning in the elections of 1913 after the Balkan Wars.[55]

As was mentioned in the first chapter, BANU considered itself more of a movement than a

50 Duncan M. Perry, *Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria, 1870-1895* (Durhan and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 234; The early actions of Stambolov also alienated the peasants and increased the gap between them and the political establishment, Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 15.

51 Bell, P*easants in Power*, 5 & 7.

52 "Bulgaria's failure to modernize after the Liberation of 1878-1879 profoundly disturbed many educated Bulgarians who could not understand why their country's development did not follow the path of the advanced Western nations." Ibid, 3.

53 "The government looked upon the Peasants simply as a source of revenue, and collected its steadily rising taxes with no corresponding regard for rural welfare." Ibid, 14.

54 Oren, *Revolution Administered*, (first page of preface).

55 By 1913 the share of the Socialists and BANU was at 41%, increasing to 59% with the Bulgarian Communist party in 1919, and 64.5% by 1920. The remainder was held by a deeply fractured collection of small parties. Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 110, 143, 152.

political party.[56] This both reflected the reality that BANU existed in the form of local cooperation organizations around the country and therefore existed as a much more grassroots organization than any political party which existed at the time,[57] and that it sought to split the difference by participating in power through the democratic process while distancing itself from the failures of that process through this kind of rhetoric. This dual role would manifest itself in the early domestic policies of Stamboliski's government as he attempted to enact social change through both the government and the party/movement. In doing so the Agrarians domestic policies would contrast strongly with those of their predecessors in that they "[viewed] state power not as an end in itself but as a vehicle for one party's restructuring of Bulgarian society."[58]

The immediate domestic political context of BANU reforms was the Treaty of Neuilly sur Seine. The reparations imposed by the treaty meant not simply that a "preposterous sum"[59] was asked of the war weary country, but that the country was to some extent at the mercy of the Great Powers who held the ability to modify the terms of the reparations. In the midst of these financial troubles, the first major policy instituted was a compulsory labor service to replace compulsory military service[60] for both men and unmarried women. "Young men were required to serve one year; older men and women to serve ten days annually. With the resultant labor cops the government built highways, railways,

56 "The Agrarian Union was not to be just another political party, but an educational-economic organization that engaged in politics to bring about a new, more advanced society. Its educational and economic activity was to be directed toward preparing the peasantry for an expanded role in the whole life of the nation and so could not be divorced from political struggle." Ibid, 67; Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 30.

57 For an explanation of the early grassroots development of BANU see Dimitrov, "Agrarianism" in Gross, *European ideologies*, 416-418.

58 John R. Lampe, "Belated Modernization in Comparison: Developments in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to 1948" in Gerasimos Augustinos, ed., *Diverse paths to modernity in southeastern Europe: Essays in National Development* (Ann Arbor: Greenwood Press, 1991), 36.

59 Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 144.

60 During his time in power Stamboliski actually kept the military *below* the very low level (20,000) mandated by the allies, much to the frustration of many former and current military personnel. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 152.

bridges, and schools, introduced sewerage systems into provincial cities, and turned swamps into fertile farm land,"[61] in addition to "[replacing] the nationalistic indoctrination received by military service with practical education, to break down the barriers between town and country."[62]

While BANU saw this as a rational transition away from an economically draining military service requirement towards something which would help to develop the country even in tough economic times, opponents on the right and left labeled it slavery and a return to Ottoman practices.[63] Some today liken it to the U.S. Peace Corps;[64] similarities also exist with some of the programs of the New Deal, though importantly this labor service was not paid. This seemingly non-ideological policy also had an important symbolic component as even the children of the intelligentsia were not exempt.[65] This would prove only the beginning of a stream of policies which would progressively anger the wealthy and educated classes.

Just as the bringing of young members of privileged classes into compulsory labor service proved problematic, so too did attempts to bring peasants into government positions. The result was that "Stamboliski was besieged by a horde of hungry and ambitious office seekers – semi-intellectuals without scruples or political convictions, distinguished only by vulgarity and greed. They took over the thousands of minor administrative positions and formed a bureaucracy no better than the one they had succeeded."[66] The combination of a newly formed inefficient and often corrupt bureaucracy with Stamboliski's reluctance to punish even his most senior ministers in response to incompetence or

61 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 149.
62 Bell, P*easants in Power*, 171.
63 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 149.
64 Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 76; Richard Crampton also views the policy quite favorably, stating that it "no doubt benefited the nation" Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 150.
65 This changed, however, when after 1921 it became possible to purchase an exemption. Another case where it seems pragmatism won out of ideology in the party. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 150.
66 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 134.

outright betrayal[67] meant that Agrarian policies would be relying on shaky governmental foundations from the beginning.

A cornerstone of the BANU platform was fair property redistribution in what Stamboliski termed "labor property." It is important to note here that Stamboliski was an ardent materialist who was strongly against Soviet style collectivization, stating that it would "paralyze agricultural production."[68] Instead he envisioned solving the problems of unproductive accumulation of excessive property as being solved by a combination of redistribution and the creation of public property. The result being that "these two economic forms... would... develop in parallel, protected by the legal system."[69]

Importantly, the ideological component of this policy did not undercut its practical goals and exceptions were made just as in the labor service. If one could prove their land was being productive, or that one had future plans for greater agricultural or industrial development then an exception could be made for the maximum land requirements. In this way "the Agrarians' vision of equality did not blind them to the need for more efficient agriculture and industrial growth."[70] Ultimately, however, the aforementioned problems in bureaucracy created issues with corruption and implementation on the local scale.[71] In spite of this the final component of this policy was passed in 1921 enabling even un-

67 "By now 5 of Stamboliski's ministers opposed his foreign policy because of fear of the Macedonians, with the minister of war acting as a double agent of sorts. Stamboliski feared decisive action against the ministers would fracture the party." In January of 1923 Stamboliski finally overhauls his cabinet. By doing so he created new enemies in the dismissed ministers, "The new ministers were loyal, but many were young and inexperienced." Ibid, 169 & 184.

68 Alexander Stamboliiski, *The Principles of the BAP* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Agrarian Party, 1919), 29.

69 Christo Christov, *Alexander Stamboliiski: His Life, Ideas and Work* (Sofia: BAP Printing House, 1981), 40.

70 Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 165.

71 "The agrarians had hoped to redistribute over a quarter of a million hectares but they were to be disappointed. The process of redistribution was slow and still open to corruption;" Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 148.

farmed monastic holdings to be confiscated and redistributed.[72]

Just as the coup which would overthrow and violently murder Stamboliski was occurring, he was allegedly in the midst of writing legislation which would have allowed factory workers some share in their factories, in effect extending the philosophy of the agrarian reforms to that sector.[73] What these policies showed was that the BANU government was interested in fulfilling an ideological agenda centered around fairness and the role of small to medium sized peasant farms in the economy and society, the government did not allow this to blind them to economic realities. Materialism ruled above all else, the peasant would be at the center of society not for obtuse ideological reasons but because that was the most fair and economic way to do things in their eyes.

In the realm of education, Stamboliski's government once again put forward policies with a mix of practical and ideological content. For the first time in Bulgarian history secondary schooling was made compulsory, with hundreds of new schools built for the task.[74] While at the same time, the content was shifted more towards vocational skills and away from the kinds of bourgeoisie academic pursuits which Stamboliski viewed as being unproductive. True, professional schools by that time were almost entirely directing graduates towards undemanding jobs in the bloated civil service.[75] Additional schools were opened to train the teachers and staff which these new institutions would require. Other professional schools were told to direct their curricula towards foreign languages, natural sciences, and other specializations not necessarily related to agriculture but to what BANU saw as the wider

72 Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 165.
73 Ibid, 168.
74 Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 150.
75 "There were not enough productive jobs available for those who were being trained. Since the government was the only major source of employment, Bulgarian students prepared themselves for bureaucratic careers... Even in institutes set up to provide specialized training in agronomy or commerce, it was found that few graduates actually pursued those careers, the majority ending up as government clerks." John D. Bell, "Modernization Through Secularization in Bulgaria," in Gerasimos Augustinos, ed., *Diverse paths to modernity in southeastern Europe: Essays in National Development* (Ann Arbor: Greenwood Press, 1991), 19-20.

economic necessities of the state going forward.[76]

Alongside this set of domestic policies, the rhetoric and ultimate political goals of Stamboliski involved a fundamental restructuring of democracy to reflect the true composition of the society. By this he meant that because society "was divided not into classes based on ownership and means of production, but into estates or occupational categories, the most important of which [for Bulgaria] was Agrarian."[77] This was to be reflected both in a restructuring of the Subranie (parliament) and through cooperative organizations on the local level. As Kosta Todorov explains, "what Stamboliski wanted was real democracy, no political but economic. That meant liberating the peasants from the control of the middlemen and usurers who had been robbing them for years. Through the co-operatives he expected to free them permanently from their dependence on speculators in farm products."[78]

The result was the development of co-operatives designed to bring the benefits of economies of scale to small and medium sized landholders without having to resort to the Soviet style collectivization that Stamboliski so despised. This policy was eventual expanded into other realms like fishing, forestry, and even the construction of urban apartment buildings.[79] Importantly, the belief in the ability of small and medium sized farms to be economically viable was not underpinned by the kind of Romanticism discussed in chapter 1. It was the result of a firm belief in the ability of co-operatives to create economic viability and competitiveness.[80] Through these organizations Stamboliski believed that rural Bulgaria could develop roads, schools, cinemas, and all of the trappings of modernity without

76 Ibid, 23.

77 The brackets are my own, intended to emphasize that Stamboliski's Agrarian ideology was not intended to be universalist. This aspect of his ideology will have important implications in the next chapter; Ibid, 125.

78 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 135.

79 Zhak Nata et al., *Istoriia na ikonomicheskata misul v Bulgariia*, II (Sofia: 1971), 278-86; B Mateev, *Dvizhenieto za kooperativno zemedelie v Bulgariia pre usloviiata na kapitalizma* (Sofia, 1967), 32-34; cited from Bell, "Modernization Through Secularization in Bulgaria," in Augustinos, ed., *Diverse paths to modernity in southeastern Europe;* Crampton*, Stamboliski, 115.*

80 Christov, *Alexander Stamboliiski*, 12.

sacrificing themselves at the altar of industrialization.

These small local organizations also had a greater national role to play. They were to form the basis of a new political system in which the old political parties would "step aside and make way for the new estate political and economic social organizations. The factional bourgeois palace parties were destined to die away and in their place there wold rise the Agrarian Party, the Day laborers Organization (he did not elaborate on whether he had in ming the workers party or the workers trade unions), the Craftsmen's Union, the Union of Merchants, etc."[81] Here Stamboliski's materialism sees its most radical manifestation within his domestic policies. Stamboliski envisioned these organizations eventually becoming transnational through the Green International[82], something which will be discussed in the second chapter. The ultimate result would be that "the laboring masses will accomplish successfully what the political parties failed to do, i.e. they will stabilize in effect the disputed social and political equality, as their normal existence is impossible without it; and also... they will abolish the economic inequality."[83] For better or for worse, however, the coup of June 9th, 1923 came before Stamboliski and BANU was able to replace the parliament of political parties with a parliament of economic interests.

The final component of Stamboliski's domestic agenda relevant to this thesis' analysis is his government's minority policies. The history of the interactions between the Bulgarian state and its Turkish and Pomak (Bulgarian speaking Muslims) populations since 1878 has generally been one of on and off campaigns of assimilation and harassment.[84] Yet the Stamboliski government broke with this

81 Ibid, 16-17; explained another well as "the assertion that the conditions of modern life demanded the supplanting if political parties by corporative or 'estatist' organizations that would group the major occupational formations in the country in a system of functional representation." Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 60.

82 Ibid, 67

83 Alexander Stamboliski, *Political Parties or Professional Organizations* (Sofia: BANU Printing House, 1909), 14.

84 Undoubtedly the best full history of this interaction from independence until the 1980s (in spite of

legacy and provided instead a quite favorable and tolerant environment for these populations.[85] Because Stamboliski's ideology was internationalist, Muslims in Bulgaria were quite easily incorporated into it. Thus all of the reforms discussed previously applied to them as well.[86] Mary Neuburger notes that Muslims were "never excluded from Stamboliski's vision of Bulgaria as a peasant state. In fact, most sources tout Stamboliski as one of the most tolerant (pre-1989) Bulgarian leaders... in his policies towards Muslims."[87]

How then to view the sum of these policies? While a more thorough analysis will require the discussion of foreign policy in the next chapter, a few basic conclusions can be derived from these policies alone. The first is that "although they refused to play the game with their enemies' rules, they did not reject the concept of 'rules' altogether."[88] That is to say, while it is certainly reasonable to characterize Stamboliski's regime as 'radical,' that does not mean it should be directly compared to later fascist and communist regimes who rejected legal precedents altogether. While corruption and some law breaking certainly existed, it was not particularly different than the previous regimes.

Secondly, that contrary to how the they are often portrayed[89], the reforms of the Stamboliski regime applied to all levels of society, and not simply to narrow Agrarian or Urban elements. The transformation which was sought was designed to be encompassing, extend across a variety of societal cleavages from class to religion. This important element of scaling on the domestic front can then be observed alongside the depth of change which was sought. This significant efforts to fundamentally reform everyday interactions through educational reform, the labor service, and co-operatives at all

some problems in her use of Said's Orientalism in her analysis) is Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

85 Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, 49.
86 Neuburger, *The Orient Within*, 44-45 and 177-178.
87 Ibid, 44.
88 Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 160.
89 Ibid, 154.

levels of society demonstrated a serious attempt to reform and alter society in a deep and lasting way. In this sense Stamboliski's regime stands out relative to both his predecessors and successors (up to the Communist takeover in 1944) in its attempt to made fundamental changes to the Bulgarian society and economy.

As will be explained in the second chapter, Stamboliski's foreign policy interacts with his domestic policy in important, and mutually reinforcing ways. Through his foreign policy, the universalistic and materialist elements of his domestic policy acquire new meanings for the Balkan Peninsula as a whole, as he attempts to construct a new kind of Balkan Federation. This new federal idea is not simply about mutual defense, but also about an extension his these domestic policies to the entire region.

Chapter 3: Expanding the Nation: Stamboliski's Foreign Policy

The period from 1912-1918 had been an abject disaster for Bulgaria. Successive wars had killed tens of thousands of young men,[90] put the country at the mercy of foreign creditors, lost valuable territory, and perhaps most importantly had left the country psychologically saddled with irredentist ideas backed by terrorist elements, as well as the sincere wishes of much of the population.[91] While domestic economic and political forces discussed in the last chapter played a large role in Bulgaria's inability to modernize as quickly as had been hoped, undoubtedly the enormous sums of money spent on the Bulgarian military,[92] the successive wars beginning in 1912, and the economic isolation which occurred as a result of Bulgaria's foreign policy played an equal role.[93]

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90 Combined the casualties were more than 460,000, with around 158,000 deaths, Georgi T. Danaillow, Les effets de la guerre en Bulgarie (Fontenay-aux Roses: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1932), 603.

91 "It could be argued that Bulgarian nationalism as a mass popular force, was more the consequence than the cause of political liberation. The rising of 1876 had not received widespread backing but the losses inflicted by the Treaty of Berlin aroused massive popular resentment. Some of the wrongs of Berlin were to be rectified in 1885 but the pain at the loss of Macedonia was to remain as bitter and powerful a force amongst Bulgarians as the loss of Alsace-Lorraine was for the French." Crampton, *Stamboliski*, 11; "The Second Balkan War had caused more casualties than the first... witnessed horrific crimes against civilians; and it had produced a second partition of San Stefano Bulgaria. It was in every respect a disaster for Bulgaria. The loss of the southern Dobrudja... deprived Bulgaria of its most advanced agricultural areas and the chief source of its grain exports; the territories acquired were by contrast backward and expensive... Furthermore the new masters of Macedonia were not the Ottomans... but aggressive, assertive nationalist states which would impose their own culture on all Macedonians." Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 135.

92 "By the turn of the century, military expenditures and interest payments on the national debt, which was contracted largely for military purposes, accounted for 44 percent of the state budget, a proportion that remained approximately consistent up to the eve of the First Balkan War, when military preparations caused it to increase still further. On a per capita basis, Bulgaria was one of the most thoroughly militarized countries in the world." Lampe, "Unifying the Yugoslav Economy, 1918-1921," in Djordjevic, ed., *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914-1918*, 21-22.

93 An explanation of Bulgaria's financial situation following the wars can be found in Lampe, "Belated Modernization in Comparison" in Augustinos, ed., *Diverse paths to modernity in southeastern Europe*, 35.

Coming out of this period, Stamboliski and his government faced a nearly impossible foreign policy situation, combining these accumulated problems with Bulgaria's status as a defeated state after the First World War. The first step of the Stamboliski government would be to secure peace and international good will by firmly establishing its foreign policy principles on the European stage. These principles were pacifism and anti-irredentism manifest in a longer term drive towards a Balkan Federation. It was in this goal of a Balkan Federation that Stamboliski would place all of his foreign policy efforts and display all of his principles in spite of his country's difficult situation.

The origins of the Balkan Federation movements – as so many political parties argued for such a federal structure on their own grounds, it is impossible to speak of a single movement – lie primarily in the 1870s when Bulgarian and Serbian socialists argued for a federal Balkan state.[94] Entering into the Balkan Wars these groups advocated for a Balkan Federation, which would be based on the "fraternity of all the Balkan races, including the Albanians and Turks."[95] However this vision of a multiethnic Balkan Federation amongst the Socialists would ultimately not survive the First World War. BANU, however, having also been a proponent of the idea, adopted the idea as a central tenant of their foreign policy.

94 Botev, Khristo, and Stefana Stefanova Tarinska. Hristo Botev, *Selected Works* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1976), I52, 208; L. Barbar,"The Early History of the Balkan League", International Review, I (1915), 255-63; G. Bakaloff, "Notre heritage revolutionnaire",la federation balkanique, II (Dec., 1931), 146; Hermann Wendel, *Aus dem südslawischen Risorgimento* (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1921), 137-65; Cited from Stavrianos, The Balkan Federation Movement, 30-51; However there were also many prominent individuals both within the Balkans and wider Europe who advocated for this idea, for example with its mentioning by the prominent Bulgarian minister, Grigor Nachovich, when he recommended a wider Balkan federation in the early years of the Bulgarian state by arguing that "the confederation will transform the small and today despised states into a great power whose friendship will want to have all the other great powers..." БИА-НБКМ, ф. 14, оп. 1, а.е. 4991, л. 3694-3696, here л. 3696; cited in Rumiana Preshlenova, "The Close and the Distant Balkans. Building up Identities in the context of Economic Development, 1878-1912," in *Balkan Studies* 3 (2004), 55-56; the same source goes on to discuss several other advocacies for a Federation of one sort or another which are curiously not mentioned in Stavrianos' history of the idea.

95 Ibid, 32.

Stamboliski proved from the beginning of his administration that he was quite serious about the federation and made peace with Yugoslavia his primary foreign policy goal as a precursor to the establishment of an initial Balkan Federation with that country. There were, however, several important factors working against him. The first was Macedonia. His policy of peace with Yugoslavia required the renunciation of Bulgaria's previous irredentist claims on that region. This was no small decision, it meant making enemies with many political actors within the country as well as the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), a terrorist organization capable of carrying out assassinations and violence as far away as Marseilles[96]. When it came to Bulgaria's claim over Macedonia, "the sentiments which moved the people... were genuine and profound rather than the product of political manipulation."[97] Despite BANU's electoral success and Stamboliski's popularity, this policy represented the greatest hurdle for his entire foreign policy and it's success was far from guaranteed.

The second factor working against him was in fact Mussolini's Italy. Fearing a strong united Balkan federation, Mussolini did everything in his power to prevent this from happening. Beginning by offering Stamboliski an alliance against Yugoslavia (which he, of course, categorically refused)[98], before responding to this refusal by aiding every enemy Stamboliski had. Mussolini's tactics included everything from bribery of officials to financial and military support for the IMRO terrorists.[99] Having such a staunch enemy amidst a sea of indifferent or vaguely hostile great powers[100] made Stamboliski's

96 Frederick B. Chary, *The History of Bulgaria* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood, 2011), p.71.
97 Oren, *Revolution Administered*, 4.
98 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 137-8.
99 "From the day Stamboliski turned down Baron Aliotti's offer of a secret military alliance against Yugoslavia, the Italians set out to destroy him. They had three major weapons - bribery, terror, and Bulgarian reparations." Ibid, 151.
100 John Dyneley Prince, U.S. minister to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes1 (1926-1932), commented that:
"... At the present time a federation of Slavic 'republics' could only be paralleled by a cat convention in the backyards of New York." John Dyneley Prince, Belgrade, to the Department of State, Washington D.C., 8 December 1930, dispatch # 327, 5. Department of State, Records Relating to the

task of crafting a workable foreign policy, let alone creating the federation, nearly impossible. It also exacerbated his domestic situation, ultimately leading to his assassination.

These two barriers towards Stamboliski's goal of a Balkan federation would indeed work together to prevent it. The leaders of Greece, Yugoslavia, and even Romania threatened military intervention if Stamboliski proved unable to control the IMRO.[101] In this way, Italy's financial and military support had a very direct impact in preventing the formation of a Balkan federation. With just a hint of irony, the very irredentist claims which a Balkan federation sought to permanently solve were some of the greatest barriers to the idea. The fanaticism of the IMRO combined with their access to Italian resources created a persistent problem.

In response to the difficulties faced to his program, Stamboliski limited his ambitions for a federation somewhat. Though his earlier more idealistic writings indicated his support for the kind of union advocated by the socialists previously, that is, one which would include not just the South Slav nations but also Romania, Greece, and Albania, politics were changing that. In response to the difficult political situation, especially in regards to the ethnic tensions over Macedonia, Stamboliski took to advocating a more limited South Slavic union consisting only of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.[102] However, with the actions of Italy, even this proved too difficult a task.

An interest aspect of the difficulties found in this rapprochement between Bulgaria and

Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia, 1930-1944 (National Archives Microfilm Publication # 1203, 28 reels), National Archives II, Washington D.C; in response to Stamboliski and his ideas, France on the other hand "acquiesced to sloppy and inappropriate clientalist solutions" (my translation) Yvette-Mathilde Tchoreloff, "Le Gouvernment Agrarien D'Alexandre Stambolijski et La France 1919-1923," *Balkan Studies* 2-3 (2001), 88; though the French press was somewhat sympathetic and "can be considered as a forum for the defense of the Bulgarian national cause to foreign countries," Raïa Zaïmova, "La Presse Francophone Bulgare : Universalisme et Identité Nationale," Balkan Studies 3-4 (2006), 99; additionally, foreign powers had fought against further economic integration from the start, for example when Austria-Hungary prevented a customs union from forming between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1905 for its own economic reasons; Preshlenova, "The Close and the Distant Balkans," 57.

101Ibid, 168.

102Stavrianos, *The Balkan Federation Movement*, 39.

Yugoslavia was the support for federation which existed in Yugoslavia following the war. In spite of their status as a victorious power, the increase in power on the part of leftists from the Socialists to the Communists meant that support for such a move appeared to be high in Yugoslavia.[103] However, soon after dramatic electoral victories in 1921, the government passed the "law for the defense of the state" which limited civil liberties and banned the Communist party. The party went underground as King Alexander began to take full control of the government. In the words of a Professor Stephanove from Sofia University, the debate then shifted to one of "Raditch-Stambolisky versus Pashitch-Davidovitch... united Jugoslavia versus Greater Serbia – these are the issues in the Balkan Slavdom of today."[104] This move seemed to definitely place Greater Serbia ahead of a united pan-Balkan Yugoslavia in favor of a smaller Yugoslavia serving more the interests of a 'Greater Serbia.'

Of course Stamboliski was not advocating just any kind of federation to begin with, his federation was to be modeled on his internal reforms in Bulgaria and tied into a larger international organization of Peasantist states and organizations. This organization, called the Green International, was founded to compete with the Comintern and its Red Peasant International.[105] It immediately faced the difficult task of competing with a universalist doctrine with the set goal of destroying all oppressions with a comparatively light agrarian ideology. Additionally, on a theoretical level it had to reconcile its international ambitions with the typically national content of most agrarian ideologies. While the leaders of the movement downplayed the importance of these elements because of their fundamental link with agrarianism as an ideology, they show almost immediately that they were not prepared to cope with them.

The result was, after Stamboliski founded the group in conjunction with peasant organizations from Czechoslovakia, Serbia, and Poland in 1921, it soon found it difficult to face its own internal

103Ibid, 42.
104C. Stephanove, "Drifting toward a Jugoslav Federation," Current History, XV (1922), 937.
105Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe*, 5.

problems. Different members viewed the organization alternatively as an advocate for Pan-Slavism, or a bulwark against Soviet Expansionism. Others rejected it because it did not explicitly endorse Croatian independence or had too strong a Slavic character.[106] The result was that until events in the mid 1920s led to the realization of how serious the threats to these agrarian movements were, the organization proved unable to overcome these internal difficulties and fulfill any of the visions its founders had for it. As for Stamboliski, his idea to use the Green International to expand his domestic program never had the opportunity to receive very much attention on the part of the BANU government.

It seemed then that from the very start, foreign circumstances in conjunction with domestic ones fueled by foreign powers, doomed Stamboliski's attempt at a Balkan federation as well as a wider role for agrarianism. In 1923 he was assassinated when he was abducted by an Italian agent and handed over to the IMRO in conjunction with a wider military coup. His one time foreign minister writes in his autobiography that "Stamboliski was killed just as his basic foreign policy was about to succeed - the policy of alliance between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, constituting a bloc of twenty million Slavs around which all the Balkan peoples could group for their common defense against outside aggressors."[107] Todorov explains here that as the man who delivered Stamboliski was paid by Mussolini, and that in spite of this end his foreign policy was moving in a positive direction: in the direction of a Balkan Federation.

Nissan Oren offers an excellent summary Stamboliski's foreign policy successes and failures when he explains that:

> "Stamboliiski's answers to Bulgaria's international problems were the most original and, in many ways, the most ambitious. Intellectually or intuitively, he comprehended full well that, as long as Bulgaria's problems in her immediate neighborhood remained unresolved, her dependence on the protection of at least one Great Power would remain an absolute requisite.

106 Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 193.
107 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 193.

> In this manner he hoped to make possible Bulgaria's escape from entanglements with any of the Great Powers. The fact that the temporary eclipse of German and Russian power helped Stamboliiski arrive at his foreign-policy formulations does not detract from the originality of his thoughts or diminish the magnitude of his political courage.
> There were several reasons why his foreign-policy ideas remained unfulfilled. Stamboliiski was a better political strategist than he was a political tactician. As a result, the translation of his ideas into a working diplomacy left much to be desired…. Most important, however, was the brevity of Stamboliiski's tenure, which did not last long enough for his revolutionary approaches to be tested. Still, the basic validity of the Stamboliiski solution and the intrinsic value of his foreign-policy ideas remain as true today as they were fifty years ago."[108]

How then should a historian writing from a 21st century perspective view both Stamboliski's foreign and domestic policies? To begin, the most fundamental point must be to take them seriously. These policies were not insignificant for their time. Indeed it was during these four years in power that, as Stamboliski explained, that "all eyes are turned towards us. Not only in Europe, but all over the world people talk about the Bulgarian Agrarians"[109] To be certain, there is some strong boasting there, however it is true that many a curious eye was turned towards this strange new experiment. Many of the newspapers and journals of Wester Europe of the era wrote opinions about a Balkan Federation, as well as many of Stamboliski's policies.[110] As we study the problems of modernization and the reconciliation of the Balkan's Ottoman legacy, the solution offered by Stamboliski's policies is too often ignored.

After all, here was an idea on how to solve the problems of nationalism borne out of a complex Ottoman legacy of languages and identities. The feasibility of this solution is certainly debatable, however, that is only to say that it deserves to be debated. What Stamboliski sought was a permanent revolution via democracy. Electoral tampering, aside from that which did occur through the party machine,[111] was not a necessary element to Agrarianism. The overwhelming majority of the peasants in

108 Oren, *Revolution Administered*, 172-3.
109 Groueff, Crown of Thorns, 68.
110 See in particular the French journals cited here.
111 Bell explains that "if Stamboliski can be absolved of the charge of personal corruption , the same may not be true for many of his colleagues." Bell, Peasants in Power, 157; he goes on to describe

the population served that function. Democracy, whether it remained party based or estatist, was on the side of Stamboliski and his ideology. In this sense we can differentiate it from other revolutionary movements of its era quite significantly.

Yet beyond these simple facts, the accumulated conclusion is that this was to be a social revolution, an economic revolution, and a political revolution all rolled into one. Yet there was an element of conservatism when compared with what was happening in the Soviet Union at the time. Society would be transformed, not into a brand new society, but into one which better reflected its own existing realities and natural laws. In this sense the existing imported ideas about political democracy and modernization were foreign and ill suited towards society as it existed. For societies which were in many ways still in the process of emerging psychologically, economically, and socially from the Ottoman (and by extension oriental) sphere, their precise relationship with the rest of Europe was not always clear.

Indeed, if the Ottoman past and its oriental character was uniformly bad, then by extension wasn't Western Europe uniformly good? How then could a society reconcile the difficulties in adapting Western European political, economic, and social concepts to their own situation? I will argue here that the theories and policies of Stamboliski constitute an attempt to do just that, to fashion a third way, not simply between Liberalism and Communism but between the Orient and the Occident. Essentially that the only way to do this is to fashion a unique ideology designed specifically for a Balkan context.

Beyond this, that the specific instrument which Stamboliski uses through his policies is nation formation. The difficulty of imposing Western conceptions of ethnic and linguistic nationhood in the Balkan context is a problem which persists to this day. Despite the fact that his programs were not couched in the language of the nation, and indeed were viewed at the time as being explicitly anti-national, their content speak to their aims at fundamentally restricting the ways in which people would

these problems manifest on a local level, ibid, 157-160.

relate to the nation as a larger community. However, in order to make this claim it is first necessary to discuss the relevant nationalism theory before moving on to a discussion of how this theory related to the policies discussed in the previous chapters.

Chapter 4: New Nation, New Nationalism: Theory

There is no shortage of baggage attached to the term "Balkan nationalism." From the branding of the 18th and 19th century movements for independence from the Ottoman Empire through to contemporary right wing political parties and their continued promotion of irredentist ideas, the term's connotation has become broad but narrow. Broad in the breadth of movements which it incorporates but narrow in its rejection (or downplayed relationship) of numerous movements which show a different side of nationalism in the Balkans. Among these are Ottomanism, Yugoslavism, and Stamboliski's brand of trans-state Agrarianism[112]. What I will argue here is that, in particular, this trans-national Agrarianism can be viewed as a form of nationalism, before concluding with a discussion of how this is possible along with the wider implications of this labeling.

Yet why are these movements not reflexively labeled as nationalist movements as so many others have been? Yugoslavism is commonly referred to as a form of nationalism, though in our popular imagination it was in fact destroyed by it.[113] Yet Yugoslavism has been successfully incorporated into the theories of writers like Miroslav Hroch.[114] Though its failures have been well discussed, they have been discussed within the framework of nationalism theory. It is seen as a model,

112 Here I am attempting to avoid the use of the term 'trans-national' when discussing movements which crossed state lines and attempted to incorporate what can be called different 'nations.' Because these movements rejected those very divisions based upon nations, it would be unfair to describe them in terms which affirm those divisions.

113 The problem has been that the narrative of the dissolution of Yugoslavia has been built upon artificially bounded and singular conceptualizations of the various nationalist movements within Yugoslavia, this point alongside an excellent analysis of the different manifestations of interwar Yugoslavism within nationalism theory in Pieter Troch, "Yugoslavism Between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers* 38.2 (2010), 227-244.

114 Hroch's work accurately described the early developments of the 'national revival' of the South Slavs, however it does not explain their later developments. Dennison Rusinow, "The Yugoslav Ideas Before Yugoslavia," in ed. Dejan Djkokic, *Yugoslavism, Histories of a Failed Idea: 1918-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003), 13.

and one which failed because it contained problematic elements, yet one which held great promise none-the-less.[115]

Certainly it is easier to label Yugoslavism as a form of nationalism because it was framed that way by many of its proponents. Yet what is most important is the content of the ideology. Yugoslavism acknowledged that it had to create a singer larger identity out of many smaller ones, but that this larger identity would serve practical purposes in terms of stability and prosperity. This greater nation was framed in terms of common cultural traits, with the idea that some genuine greater community could eventually be forged. What is interesting here is that this ideology which, though its early years does follow many models on nation building, ultimately developed into a complex form of quasi-official federal nationalism way is rather uncontroversially labeled as nationalism today.[116] Yet it seems at times that different rules for such labeling apply to other would-be nationalisms.

Ottomanism, for instance, is usually referred to separately from or in opposition to nationalism. Why is this the case? The short answer is that Ottomanism was a doctrine designed to grant equal status and treatment within the empire in exchange for loyalty in the face of nationalism. Yet many of its proponents advocated for a single Ottoman nationality and for the elimination of the millet system as a precursor for this to occur.[117] Yet some do discuss it in the language of nationalism. Deringil sees Ottomanism as a classic example of what Anderson calls 'official nationalisms,' thereby comparing it to

115 Andrew B Wachtel, "The Synthetic Yugoslav Culture of the Interwar Period," ed. Djkokic, *Yugoslavism*, 251.

116 "Jovo Bakic´, for example, has argued that Yugoslavism should be seen as a form of pan-nationalism, subject to competition between the different ethnic nationalisms that had developed within the South Slav lands" Jovo Bakic´, *Ideologije jugoslovenstva izmedu srpskog i hrvatskog nacionalizma* (Zrenjanin: Zˇarko Zrenjanin, 2004). 49-50; cited in Troch, "Yugoslavism Between the World Wars," *Nationalities Papers,* 228.

117 Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II Reform,Revolution, and Republic, The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 127-8, 132.

similar attempts by the Russian and Austrian Empires to utilize such forms of nationalism.[118]

So Yugoslavism functions as a form of wider nationalism based around what one might term an ethnic and cultural core which exists but must still be significantly modified in order for Yugoslavism to flourish. Ottomanism on the other hand functions around the institutions of the Sultan, the Ottoman state and the fairness of its laws. A reciprocal legitimacy is intended to be derived from this form of nationalism; one which might save the Empire from the various Balkan and Arab national movements which threatened its existence. So while some authors discuss these two movements as forms of nationalism and others simply use the terms without any such reference, it does not appear any authors have attempted to explicitly make the argument that either Yugoslavism or Ottomanism does not constitute a form of nationalism.

The question which then arises is: what then is the difference between Stamboliski's form of Agrarianism on the level of a Balkan Federation and these two movements, in terms of nationalism? Why is it that Yugoslavism and Ottomanism are seen as interesting examples of how nationalism can manifest itself while Agrarianism is simply a failed 'peasant movement?' While an extensive direct comparison would be worthy of a thesis in and of itself, these questions must be kept in mind as I move on to a discussion of why Stamboliski's ideology can function as a form of nationalism.

Moving to the question of definitions, the most fundamental is that of the nation. While it has long been established that "no 'scientific definition' of the nation can be devised,"[119] when discussing the kind of trans-state nationalism it is important to set out the parameters of just what can constitute such a nationalism. To answer this question this thesis will utilize the ideas of the modernization

118 Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35.1 (Jan., 1993), 3-29; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3rd ed (New York: Verso, 2006).

119 Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and states: an enquiry into the origins of nations and the politics of nationalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977), 5.

school of nationalism theory, which sees nations as being modern and constructed. By doing so, the notion that the kind of trans-state nationalism which Stamboliski is advocating is, at least in a basic sense, brought within the realm of possibility. Assuming that nations are somehow timeless, or that they evolve along set patterns throughout history, would preclude this type of nationalism from the start.

From this, the most useful definition of a nation is that of a community. From Renan to Gellner to Anderson and Hroch, definitions of the nation have generally acknowledged several similar points in this regard. Firstly, that as mentioned by Seton-Watson, there can be no firm definition. Many of the authors mention note that their definitions are imperfect.[120] However, important overlaps exist which have the capability to offer us some general points for how to view the nation.

The aspect of community is clearly important. Hroch phrases this aspect as a "large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness."[121] Anderson's more succinct definition puts it simply, that a nation is an "imagined political community... imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[122] From these general principles there are three areas in particular I wish to discuss, that of the traits which bind a nation together, the boundaries of the nation, and the question of a 'core' national doctrine.

What are the attributes which can bind people together into a nation? There is a relationship between those who study the ideology of nationalism and those who proclaim it. "This appeal to the subjective basis of group unity respects the entitivity, assumptions-boundedness, continuity,

120 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6-7;

121 Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe," in Gopal Balakrishnan ed., Mapping the Nation (New York and London: Verso, 1996) 78-97.

122 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

homogeneity that both nationalists and social scientists presuppose in their discussions of the reality of nations. The reality that may be denied by a lack of shared objective traits is reestablished by the subjective sharing of a sense of identity, and the nation or ethnic group can again be proclaimed to exist."[123] Indeed some authors go far enough to recognize that the particular traits we choose for nationhood all serve the same purpose as occasionally interchangeable parts, in contrast with the more conclusive lists of writers like Hroch.

In his seminal work Nations and Nationalism, Gellner points towards the broadly inclusive realm of culture and mutual recognition.[124] Here what matters is the end result, that is a shared culture which allows for individuals to view each other as being part of the same nation. Whether that arises out of a shared language, 'ethnicity,' or working background (like those of farmers across Eastern Europe) only determines what kind of nation and nationalism may be formed, but does not preclude either from forming. Indeed, Yugoslavism is viewed as a nationalism based on some basic cultural and linguistic elements, but which is deigned to gradually draw those elements closer together as it develops. Again, here an 'incomplete' nationalism can still be viewed as such because it contains some basic elements upon which it can build itself in the future, and is referred to as nationalism even if it fails in this endeavor. Critically, Gellner also does not speak of the importance of language as much as the importance of communication, opening the door for national groups to exist which can perhaps overcome linguistic differences through shared experiences and feelings of belonging.

If the criteria which define a nation are somewhat variable but centered around this goal of community and recognition, how then do we define the boundaries of the nation? Anderson lays out the most obvious and broad limits by stating that while national boundaries may not be fixed, they

123 Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 8.
124 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6-7.

cannot possibly encompass the entire human race.[125] Gellner and Handler both discuss the ways in which state boundaries often either correspond to national ones, or at least aspire to.[126] However it seems clear that despite this limitation, there can exist nationalist movements which extend over state boundaries. How then can we view boundaries of various nationalisms?

The clearest criterion seems to be that of the limits of the particular elements which comprise a nation, real or imagined. That is to say, there cannot be European nationalism in a realistic sense because the common elements which could bind that nation together are no salient enough to function in this respect. From this perspective, aside from Anderson's broad outline, the boundaries of nations and nationalisms are entirely flexible, depending on their composition. The limitation then becomes the ability of individuals and or states to take the binding elements of a national movement and make them salient over a large population.

Clearly Yugoslavism and Ottomanism, for example, failed in this regard, yet we still call them nationalisms. This tells us that while the question of boundaries may be highly influential on the ability of a form of nationalism to succeed, it has less to do with whether or not we label it as nationalism. It would appear that the aforementioned compositional elements of a particular example of nationalism play a far greater role in determining whether or not we refer to it as such. The final element of this discuss involves probing the question of whether or not nationalism can be based upon rational materialism and Agrarianism in the way Stamboliski envisioned.

Certainly nationalism has been based in the past on a wide variety of ideologies. From liberalism to fascism, from communism to republicanism, this variety raises the final definitional question for the nation. Put another way, if nationalism can accommodate this variety, can it

125 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

126 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1; Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec,* 7.

accommodate Stamboliski's Agrarianism? Some, like Gellner, look upon this diversity and conclude that "national ideology suffers from pervasive false-consciousness, [and that] precise doctrines are hardly worth analyzing."[127] However, this presents a problem in using the term, if we cannot identify some similarities between various doctrines, how do we identify the limits of its use? As the previous definitional discussion indicates, there do appear to be some similarities, but how then do they relate to the idea of a 'core' doctrine?

Encompassing the idea of a core doctrine and the central ideas of the definitions of 'nation' discussed previously, Tamir explains that "at the core of nationalism lies a cultural rather than political claim, that national movements are motivated by a desire to assure the existence and flourishing of a particular community, to preserve its culture, tradition, and language, rather than merely to seize state power."[128] Smith also sees the cultural element of nationalism as being at its core, from which stems its political side.[129] This perspective seems to give us a solid core for understanding nations, as well as a method of analyzing the relationship of their cultural and political manifestations.

Yet, it is in this very relationship that this perspective brings about problems. As Benner points out, that this "implies that fairly clear-cut, stable cultural identities already exist before nationalists come on the scene, and that the desire to cultivate or maintain those pre-existing identities is what drives nationalist politics."[130] If these cultures have to be homogenized and cultivated to some extent in order to form a nation, this complicates the seemingly simple relationship between political and cultural elements of nation formation. Benner dismisses this perspective as well as the idea that

127 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 124; quoted in Erica Benner, "Is There a Core National Doctrine?" in Marie M. Kovacs ed. & Petr Lom ed., Studies on Nationalism: From CEU (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 62.

128 Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xiii; quoted in Benner, "Is There a Core National Doctrine?" in Kovacs ed. & Lom ed., *Studies on Nationalism*, 63

129 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991).

130 Benner, "Is There a Core National Doctrine?" in Kovacs ed. & Lom ed., *Studies on Nationalism*, 64

popular sovereignty can be at the core of the nation in favor of the idea that "what connects these diverse doctrines is... a constitutive norm; that is, a norm describing in very broad terms the way that any viable community should be constituted, particularly in relation to other political communities."[131]

In doing so, Benner is attempting to split the difference between the various problematic theses described earlier in her chapter. In doing so she allows nationalism its flexibility while more clearly explaining its relationship to other political ideas; namely, that it can incorporate so many of the political ideologies mentioned previously because it actually constitutes a political system on par with religious trans-nationalism, imperialism, globalism, et cetera.[132] From this perspective, focusing on something like culture as a core of nationalism misses the point by focusing too narrowly.

Breuilly attempts to solve the same problem with the opposite solution, crafting a definition of nationalism attached to a core doctrine which revolves around three points, that "a. There exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character.

b. The interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values.

c. The nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires at least the attainment of political sovereignty."[133]

Yet this older idea does unnecessarily limit our understanding of nationalism. Benner is correct in rejecting the idea that a nation must be explicit, and that we must somehow determine its collective interest and values in order to determine whether or not it is a nation. Ultimately these elements are simply not helpful.

Now then we can see nationalism emerging as a flexible meta-system closely tied with culture

131 Ibid, 67.
132 Ibid, 69
133 John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

and modernity, but not very limited in its applications. Critically, while this offers a good explanation for much of the analysis of Yugoslavism and Ottomanism mentioned previously, as well as leaving open questions regarding how we should view other movements which may not have been viewed as national in the past. This lays the groundwork for a discussion of how Stamboliski's ideology can and should be seen as a form of nationalism.

Chapter 5: Agrarianism as Nationalism

> "On the face of it there was something paradoxical in these quick-rising international aspirations. The national element at its most genuine was everywhere represented by the peasants, deep-rooted in their land, as it were, physically, as spiritually they were steeped in its traditions and culture. As one after the other the less developed countries plunged into bleak imitations of western economic and urban organization, their peasants often were the only part of the people that kept to traditional national ways. There is perhaps much to be learned about the nature of nationality from this paradox, for strong as the national roots of the peasants are they seem nowhere to have led to nationalistic rivalries."[134]

Elements of this paradox of sorts continue to comprise enormous parts of the contemporary debate over Balkan nationalism. This discussion is most intense in the debates over the wars of former Yugoslavia and the levels of responsibility which should be attributed to the elites and the average citizens. Though whether discussing the early 20th century or the 1990s, the story of nation formation and nationalism in the Balkans is one of elites and populations. The case of Stamboliski's BANU certainly does not challenge this division, but it does bring about a new perspective on Balkan history and nationalism by demonstrating how a home grown ideology sought to use the tools of nationalism and nation formation to find some solution to the unique problems born out of the political, economic, and cultural circumstances of the post-Ottoman Balkans.

In the previous chapters I have discussed the range of policies implemented or supported by the Stamboliski government as well as the theoretical context allows for the type of nationalism which I will argue for here to exist. Now I will discuss the content of these three chapters together to demonstrate how Stamboliski's government, far from being anti-nationalist, constituted a unique form of nationalism which should be discussed and analyzed in its own right. In doing so I hope to

134 Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant*, 150-151.

simultaneously make the case for a more serious discussion of the Agrarian ideologies of both Stamboliski and his Balkan contemporaries.

"I am neither a Bulgarian nor a Serb, I am a South Slav [Yugoslav]."[135] So went Stamboliski's response to an accusation, made on the floor of the Sobranje [parliament], that his support of Yugoslavia during the First World War made him a Serb, or unpatriotic (the two were of course synonymous at the time). Now if we imagine Nicolas Sarkozy stating that he is neither French, nor Hungarian, but European, even in the contemporary environment of the European Union, where nationality is certainly not as much of an explosive issue as it was in the Balkans during the interwar period, this kind of a statement from a president before, during, or after a term in office would raise eyebrows and ire. That such a statement was made by a political figure in a time of war, and that somehow that political figure became Prime Minister shortly after the war something quite unique, yet curiously absent from many books on Stamboliski.[136]

Importantly, from this statement we can make some conclusions about Stamboliski and his beliefs. First, that this statement goes beyond simply making clear his support for a Balkan Federation. In fact he actively *denies* being a Bulgarian. The difference between saying 'I am a Bulgarian and a Yugoslav' thereby implying that these are layered identities, and affirming Yugoslav as your only identity is quite important. We cannot simply assume the statement was made lightly, it was a public statement made on the floor of the Bulgarian parliament which predictably helped to land Stamboliski in prison for the duration of the war. It is difficult to imagine then that the statement's contents were

135 I have found differing version of this quote but always with the same meaning and slightly different wording, presumably from differing translations, M. D. Stragnakovitch, *Oeuvre du rapprochement et de l'union des Serbes et des Bulgares dans le passé* (Paris: éditions et publications contemporaines Pierre Bossuet, 47, rue de la Gaîté, 1930), 26; Cited from Stavrianos, *The Balkan Federation Movement*, 39; also see J. Swire, *The Bulgarian Conspirac*y (London: R. Hale, 1939), 142.

136 It is not simply that some sources omit this important quote, but that even those which do include it tend to note it and then move on without critical reflection on its importance.

not strongly considered prior to their utterance.

Of course identifying as a Yugoslav is not the same as rejecting an ethnic and linguistic basis for nationhood. However, many of Stamboliski's later policies, both foreign and domestic did point in this direction. For example, his progressive policies towards Bulgaria's religious and ethnic minorities relative to his more harsh policies towards segments of the intelligentsia demonstrated that he took seriously his idea that divisions based on one's occupation mattered more than ethnic, religious or linguistic ones. This in spite of the fact that while there was nothing preventing him from continuing the harsh minority policies of his predecessors, his stance towards the intelligentsia was quite damaging.[137]

Of course, as discussed in chapter 3, Stamboliski saw a South Slavic Balkan Federation as a more attainable first step on the road to a broader multi-ethnic federation encompassing the entire peninsula. But the ethnic character of his statement from the beginning of the First World War should, be additionally overshadowed by the determination of his policies on Macedonia. From these policies also comes the secondary question of how the population viewed the policies and what that can tell us about this nationalism perspective.

It is important to note that Stamboliski did not simply renounce Bulgaria's claim over Macedonia. He stated in no uncertain terms that such a claim was essentially a waste of time and resources.[138] In this sense he not only rejected this single irredentist claim, but in fact rejected rejected all irredentist claims on principle. Or did he? Stamboliski was indeed advocating for territorial expansion, albeit in the form of a federation. This is one example where many historians have failed to delve into the deeper picture of these policies. Stating that Stamboliski rejected territorial expansion is

137 Exemplified by their critical role in supporting the 1923 coup; Groeuff, Crown of Thorns, 89.
138 Spoken to a Yugoslav journalist: “Since you've taken Macedonia, why don't you also take all Macedonians who still remain in Bulgaria... they have only been a nuisance to us;” Ibid, 76.

simply incorrect, he rejected it when it is justified by ethnic conceptions of nation and achieved through warfare. He supported it when backed by economics and a vision of a more prosperous future in material, instead of psychological (referring to the psychological satisfaction of achieving such irredentist aims), terms.

Again the circumstances of these policies seem to demand that their content be taken quite seriously. "The loss of... Macedonia, [is] burnt deep into the Bulgarian national psyche. Most of the great decisions over external policy since 1878 have hinged on the Macedonian issue."[139] The lesson to be drawn here is that the attachment to Macedonia was felt on a genuinely deep emotional level by elites and peasants alike, and that a vast amount of suffering and material expenditures of the past several decades had been dedicated to the task of taking Macedonia. It must be then understood that the only thing more amazing than having a Prime Minister of Bulgaria renounce that country's claim to Macedonia is that he received enormous electoral support in spite of (or perhaps because of) this policy.

Many the peasants who were voting for him had seen their material welfare stagnate or decline as they paid their taxes and served their military service over the previous decades.[140] Their support for Stamboliski seemed to indicate a readiness to abandon the way things had been done previously and begin to move the country in a new direction. This seems evidenced by the fact that as his policies were implemented and as battles were fought over their contents, his electoral support did not decrease, but rather increased.[141] It seems then that the peasants were not fooled into voting for BANU, but had at least some understanding of its policies and their implications. Once again, this evidence points

139 Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria,* 265-6.

140 Lampe, The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), .

141 By 1913 the share of the Socialists and BANU was at 41%, increasing to 59% with the Bulgarian Communist party in 1919, and 64.5% by 1920. The remainder was held by a deeply fractured collection of small parties. Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 110, 143, 152.

towards an understanding of Stamboliski's policies as radical but feasible in the sense that absent the violent opposition of a tiny minority which took his life their implementation was possible. Indeed most authors view the successes he did enjoy as quite amazing in spite of the enormous odds stacked against him.[142]

What we can conclude at this stage is that this radical break from previous notions of nation was manifest in many ways, in the rejection of irredentist claims, favorable minority policies, advocacy of a wider Balkan Federation, and a wider shift in ideology towards economic materialism. Taken individually, none of these policies demonstrate such a strong shift away from previous notions of nation and nationalism, however taken together they present a strong case. However the evidence goes beyond this, Stamboliski's government also implemented a range of policies designed to build up a new kind of national identity. While this latter part of this thesis' conclusions are more preliminary prior to a planned year of more in depth research focused around archival work, some important trends are already evident in this respect.

To be sure, Stamboliski's intention was not something akin to his contemporary Warren G. Harding's "return to normalcy" in the United States. He was intent on "transforming Bulgaria's economic, political and social life."[143] To do this he implemented the policies discussed in Chapter 2. Policies designed to transform the life of Bulgarians on a very basic level and by doing so reorient their identities into something comparable with the future Stamboliski envisioned for the country and the region as a whole. As it was clear that Stamboliski intended to preserve democracy and use it as his main source of legitimacy for the purpose of implementing these policies, and also clear that the population had initially supported the wars and nationalist claims which he was opposing, that his

142 Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand*, 193;

143 Christo Christov & Sofia Jusautor, *Alexander Stamboliiski, his life, ideas and work* (Sofia: BAP Printing House, Sofia Press Agency, 1980), 44.

policies were in part intended to influence the population in a very strong and direct way is not surprising.

The most obvious way in which this was manifest was in education. As discussed previously, education was vastly expanded and made mandatory. At the same time the content of that education now focused more on practical subjects. At the same time, the compulsory labor service became another universal (at least before buy outs became possible) institution which would touch almost every citizen. The result was that the extent of the state's ability to help shape the identities of its people in these direct ways was expanded.

It is important to note in this regard that the compulsory labor service should be viewed as a tool for identity construction and not simply as a method for infrastructure development. The kind of connections which would formed the basis of the kinds of new identities Stamboliski was promoting were ones based on common experiences in work. As a result we cannot view these policies and ideological beliefs in isolation from one another. If what connected the peasants across the Balkans was their common experience working as peasants, then these connections could not only be reinforced through means like education, but also expanded by providing every member of society with some common experience in this kind of work.

The byproduct of rural infrastructure development then also could serve the function of eliminating the perception that work and prosperity lay in the cities, and that the countryside was and would remain an undesirable backwater. It would also bring city dwellers into rural environments, theoretically bringing them closer to sharing some sense of identity bound up in this kind of work. Because while most urban dwellers were somewhat excluded from this new national identity, these policies were clearly designed to bring them at least somewhat into its folds much in the way previous policies had for the Pomak, Roma and Turkish minorities. They may not be full Bulgarians but they

would still receive have some elements to keep them loyal to the state.

The other side to this policy was, of course, the cooperative organizations. These also performed the function of increasing the productivity of the countryside relative to the city, but additionally did serve other purposes. The pro-agrarian activities of the cooperatives meant they also existed as something of an arm of BANU. In this sense, the ability of Stamboliski's government to directly influence the population extended even beyond education and the labor service. Changes also extended to things like currency, as a new set of bills was released in 1922 replacing old images of allegorical female figures and important national buildings with images of rural Bulgarian life.[144]

The final element in these policies was the unrealized vision for a new parliament based on economic interests instead of political ideology. In the existing system political ideology cut across national ideology, dividing the Bulgarian nation between political factions. However, if a nation could somehow coincide with a specific section of parliament, the same forces which had bound together political factions could theoretically be harnessed to additionally bind together this new national group. In this way the agrarian population would achieve some level of prestige as the most important faction in this new parliament. Additionally, the factions within this parliament would be able to seamlessly expand as the prospective Balkan Federation expanded, as every other country in the Balkans had corresponding economic groups.

Though a further discussion of the nature of this parliament will have to follow a more in depth look into the primary sources, especially in terms of translations and meaning. For example, a section taken from the collected works of Stamboliski is quoted in Christov as explaining that "in the coming twenty years, when the Agrarian Party of the nation will rule the country, the rest of the working people

144 Adrian E. Tschoegl, "Change the regime – change the money: Bulgarian banknotes, 1885-2003" in *Balkanologie* 8.2 (2004), 14.

– day laborers and craftsmen will become purely national, Bulgarian... And in twenty years we will invite them to join us and rule with us."[145] The same text in Russian and likely in Bulgarian uses the word "narod," famously ambiguous in terms of nationalism theory, and capable of being translated in many ways.[146]

In general then, in his discussion of this passage, Christov goes out of his way to tie Stamboliski to the particulars of his contemporary Marxist thoughts on economic development, so it is possible the translation of the passage was done for the same end. However questions remain as to the precise context and meaning of these words, pointing towards the need for further study delving into not only the policies of Stamboliski and his regime, but also their words. Undoubtedly, Stamboliski's ideology evolved over a long period, so it remains important to understand just where his ideas may have been changing and where they may have perhaps resulted from, say, an impromptu speech without much thought given to its content beforehand.

Despite these persisting questions, the conclusion to draw from these policies is that the revolutionary change which Stamboliski and BANU attempted to implement in Bulgaria involved a reshaping of identities. To view Stamboliski's policies without this component is to see the trees and not the forest. What he was attempting to build was an identity which emphasized certain elements (work experience, economic self interest), while de-emphasizing others (language, ethnicity). While a more in depth analysis of the rhetorical side of his regime remains necessary, his policies lay out an important framework on their own. The kind of identity promoted by these policies was in fact quite the opposite of how most national identities functioned in Stamboliski's time. However that difference does not diminish the fact that through a systematic set of policies, and in the face of enormous

145 Stamboliski, *Selected Works*, 414; cited in Christov, *Alexander Stamboliski*, 72.

146 The three most common translations into English are "nation," "people," or "population." In this case the difference between "nation" and "people" or "population" is quite important, necessitating a broader look at the context of this statement.

challenges, the Stamboliski government attempted to construct this new kind of nation.

Nationalism comes into play with both his domestic and foreign policy. Manifest in both his attempts to make what he saw as this new nation predominate in domestic politics, and in his attempt to make them predominate in a larger federal state. These constituted attempts to make "the political and the national unit... congruent"[147] on both levels. For if a peasant in Romania and a peasant in Bulgaria did indeed have more in common than a lawyer and a peasant in Bulgaria then it seems to follow that one might attempt to harness those commonalities.

147 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

Conclusion

From what has been written, some firm and not so firm conclusions can be drawn. What seems clear from the start is that there are problems in the ways in which Stamboliski has been discussed. While some of the Bulgarian historiography remains out of my reach apart from Bell's analysis, clear patterns have emerged through an examination of the existing literature and my own analysis. The most pressing conclusion is that Stamboliski and his government are too often simply not taken seriously enough. Even when authors note the remarkable nature of some of his policies they do so in isolation. When whole books are dedicated to analyzing his government and its policies, as was the case with Bell's Peasants in Power, the conclusions are somewhat tentative and mostly based around policies and not the ideology which connects them.

Beyond the limited scope of most authors' conclusions regarding Stamboliski, they neglect to place him within the wider context of modernization, balkanism, and nationalism. Although this thesis represents only a preliminary study into how Stamboliski fits into the paradigms, the conclusions drawn certainly point towards the need for further study in this area. In effect, modern writers reflect the somewhat lacking "paradigm supply" of Stamboliski's era. Mishkova explains how "momentous transformations associated with the advent of modernity were inextricably linked to a specific mind-set: one that took it for granted that there was one pattern of historical evolution, or normative history, and that 'what one was describing was the success or failure of any given society inc climbing the path of progress from backwardness and barbarism to civilization'[148,,149]

Indeed, much as Todorova has explained the ways in which the Balkans have been left

148 Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 15.
149 Diana Mishkova, "The Normative and the Romantic: Evolutionism, Modernity and the National Self in Balkan Construction of Europe," in *Balkan Studies* 3-4 (2006), 180.

somewhere in an unfortunate middle ground between the Orient and the Occident,[150] so too it seems has Stamboliski's Agrarianism too often been left in a neglected place between the broad discourses of Liberalism, Communism, and Fascism; denied a serious look independent of these greater forces. The result has been an overwhelming number of analyses of Stamboliski make no mention of the relationship between his policies and the greater intellectual currents of the time, placing his ideology in a vacuum, or when they do, doing so simply to fit his ideology within an existing framework for the sake of ideological consistency, or political pressure.

The result has been a history which is often mentioned but rarely examined thoroughly. However the importance of understanding the place of Stamboliski's ideology in a wider context both historically and ideologically extends beyond simple posterity. It relates to the notions of Balkanism laid out by Todorova, problems of the Balkans being denied agency in historical writings. It is not a region that acts, it is acted upon. Or if it acts it does so without self control, as a 'powder keg' or something similar. Stamboliski stands out as an instance when a domestically produced ideology stood in stark contrast to those which had been imported and demonstrated the ability of the peoples of the inter-war Balkans to shape their own destiny.

As mentioned, this thesis is only a preliminary examination of these issues. It is lacking a more in depth look at some of Stamboliski's own writings as well as the relevant literature written in Bulgarian. The task of tackling those deficiencies will be undertaken during the 2012-2013 academic year in Sofia, in conjunction with the Sofia University Department of History with a Fulbright research grant. I hope this work will validate these preliminary conclusions and add additionally layers of depth to my analysis of Stamboliski and his ideology.

150 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

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