

AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND THE FORMATION OF MODERN BULGARIAN NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

Following Ernest Gellner, this paper asserts that national consciousness is a modern phenomenon which arose in response to certain structural preconditions that came together differently in different national contexts. Furthermore, it suggests that this crystallization process is complex, involving the attainment of a tipping point at which time discrete semi-dormant processes merge into a dominant movement. It argues that in Bulgaria, one of the most influential factors in establishing these preconditions and the final tipping point was the publishing and educational work done throughout the nineteenth century by American Protestant missionaries. Six factors are identified as significant in this process: (1) the volume of print generated, (2) the massive distribution network for print materials, (3) the pricing strategy for these materials, (4) the establishment and management of modern schools, (5) the role played by the Americans in the process of orthographic standardization of modern Bulgarian, and (6) the creation through regular periodical publications of what Benedict Anderson describes as “unbound seriality”, a necessary component in forming modern national consciousness.

Keywords: Bulgaria, national consciousness, printing, Complexity Theory

Introduction

The topic of “national consciousness” is fraught with confusion and controversy. As aptly described by Selim Deringil (2015, p. 1) “Nationalism is like mercury. You put a drop in your palm, it has mass, weight, and colour; yet when you try to seize it, it seeps out between your fingers...”. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that nationalism and national identity are not natural phenomena and that in the particular case of Bulgaria, its shape was determined to a large

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extent by the activities of American missionaries. Though it has not been studied widely in Western historiography, American Protestant missionaries were a prominent presence in the Ottoman Empire and are seen as contributing to the rise of ethno-national consciousness among Ottoman Christian minorities (see especially the work of James Franklin Clarke). In what then was referred to as “European Turkey” (i.e., the Balkans), these missionaries were active only in Bulgaria, where they had direct contact with a mixed diasporic/geocentric nationalist movement (while they were active also among Armenians, they were active only with diasporic Armenians, not with those still residing in Caucasian Armenia). In her recent study of the impact that American Protestant missionaries had on Bulgaria, Barbara Reeves-Ellington (2013, p. 11) points out that most Bulgarian scholars downplay any impact the missionaries may have had, citing historian Tatyana Nestorova’s observation that the missionaries “did much in Bulgaria but accomplished little.” Throughout her *American Missionaries among the Bulgarians, 1858-1912*, Nestorova emphasizes the lack of success the Americans had in trying to win Bulgarians over to American-style Protestantism, observing (1987, p. 37) that even the missionaries themselves “did not view their evangelizing efforts as successful”.

However, Nestorova does admit that despite this failure in their primary objective, the missionaries had some impact nonetheless. Specifically, it was their role in “the preparation and publishing of books and other literature in Bulgarian” that in her mind (1987, p. 96) cemented the Americans’ legacy in the Balkans. She concludes, however, that with regard to the Bulgarian *Vŭzazhdane* (renaissance) and the consequent rise of Bulgarian national consciousness, the missionaries were beneficiaries but certainly not causative agents, stating (1987, p. 86) that “the Bulgarian Revival made possible the very existence of the American mission.” Looking at this from a somewhat different perspective, one springing from Modernization Theory and Complexity Theory, the opposite appears to be the case: that the American mission, especially its literary activities, made possible the very existence of the Bulgarian renaissance; and without the Bulgarian renaissance, Bulgarian national consciousness would have been literally unthinkable.

Theoretical Considerations Concerning Balkan National Identity

Before the impact of specific historical actions taken by the American Protestants can be assessed in respect to the Bulgarian renaissance and the ensuing solidification of Bulgarian national identity, it is first necessary to address the somewhat controversial topic of what “national identity” is and how it is established. It is safe to say that formal notions about national identity emerged as part of the rise of romanticism in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries. Thinkers such as Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) posited the notion that nationhood is a natural part of human existence traceable to primordial times. As Fichte explained in 1808, “Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins...” (Fichte 1922 (1908), pp. 223-224). As noted by Paschalis M. Kitromilides (1989, p. 150), such thinking had a profound impact on how nationhood came to be understood in the Balkans during the early to mid-nineteenth century, a sentiment expressed much earlier by pioneer American-based Balkan scholar James Franklin Clarke (Clarke 1988 (1960), p. 35). And historian MariĀ Nikolaeva Todorova (1997, p.129) explains that in the Balkans specifically, this led to a fixation on the antiquity of ethnic roots through the study of language and folklore “in search of the specific Balkan *Volksgeist*(s).”

However, as Ernest Gellner, a pioneer in the application of Modernization Theory to the rise of nations, has pointed out (1983, p. 119), this appeal to a primordial nation is a case of “false consciousness”: “It must be repeated that nationalism is a phenomenon of *Gesellschaft* using the idiom of *Gemeinschaft*,” (Gellner 1997, p. 74);

Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society. ... Nationalism tends to treat itself as a manifest and self-evident principle, accessible as such to all men, and violated only through some perverse blindness, when in fact it owes its plausibility and compelling nature only to a very special set of circumstances, which do indeed obtain now, but which were alien to most of humanity and history. It preaches and defends continuity, but owes everything to a decisive and unutterably profound break in human history. (Gellner 1983, pp. 119-20).

Gellner has, of course, been challenged on several grounds, most specifically by his former student A. D. Smith, who, as Gellner explains (1996, p. 366), continues to believe that “nations were there all the time or some of them were anyway, and that the past matters a great deal.” To this Gellner posed his now famous tongue-in-cheek question: “Do nations have navels?” As explained by C. A. Bayly (2004, p. 219), the point of Gellner’s essay is that nations “did not need to have been born out of some earlier patriotic solidarity” and that some nations may be “clones with false navels; some were designer-babies with no navels at all.” Seeking to break the deadlock, Bayly went on to suggest a compromise: it is indeed true that nations do not need navels, but that does not mean that they categorically lack them. “For historians,” Bayly (*Ibid.*) insists, “the existence or

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otherwise of such navels is important, because they helped form the political sensibilities of national leaderships and common people.”

As this summary of the debate over nationhood suggests, the question of national identity and its origins is a complicated one, most particularly in the Balkan context. Part of the problem stems from whether scholars consider the formalization of national identity as a top-down or a bottom-up phenomenon. Primordialists such as Smith see the nation as pre-existing in the people who then craft for themselves a structured state in line with that nationality. Gellner, on the other hand, sees it as more of a top-down process guided by an intelligentsia or, in his word, “clerisy” (Gellner 1999, p. 14). More recent scholarship has tried to avoid this dichotomy by positing the origins of nationalism in much more complex terms. In a very recent article, Eric Kaufmann (2017, p. 6-7) suggests that “Complexity Theory—the notion that complex social phenomena may emerge from seemingly uncoordinated individual acts—can enhance our understanding of national identity, nationalism and ethnic conflict.” He goes on to explain:

The familiar modernist-ethnosymbolist (or constructivist-perennialist) theoretical axis is crosscut by a vertical (‘top-down’) vs. horizontal (‘bottom-up’) dimension. While this is not a new insight, the properties and network dynamics of ‘horizontal’ processes of nationalism are not well understood. Complexity theory sheds light on the importance of such dynamics in explaining the spread of national constructs and nationalism. It illuminates and links a series of puzzling phenomena in the study of nationalism, notably variation in the content and interpretation of national identity between people, groups and places; sudden, apparently inexplicable increases in nationalist fervour over time; and why certain national constructions and movements succeed while others fail to reach a critical mass. It generates new questions and explanatory frameworks for empirical researchers to advance the field. (Ibid.)

Without getting too much into the intricate mechanics involved in the social science applications of Complexity Theory, the key point here is that national navels are and remain irrelevant until such time as a series of separate, seemingly unrelated tendencies reach a tipping point and coherence between these isolated socio/economic and cultural phenomena in society come together to forge a new identity structure. Kaufmann gives many illustrative examples of this process in different cultural and historical situations, but the one most relevant to a discussion of the Balkans is the case of Hungarians and Romanians in Cluj, who “simply by ‘unconsciously’ attending different churches and hiring among those they trust in intimate familiar and friendship networks help reproduce ethnicity. The causes of this behaviour are not ethnic, but the effect

reproduce structures that abet ethnic consciousness” (Ibid., p. 13). And in a time of stress, such “unconscious” or dormant-ethnicity—what Michael Billing (2014) calls “Banal Nationalism”—would only come to a conscious level when those boundaries are challenged in one way or another. Serbs and Bosniaks could get along just fine in their unconscious ethnicities until the breakup of Yugoslavia, which challenged the boundaries and brought ethnicity into consciousness with horrific consequences (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015, pp. 115-116). Kaufmann (2017, p. 17) points similarly at “the troubles” in Northern Ireland and civil war in Rwanda.

The rejection of inherited romantic conceptions of a tie between language and national identity, whether through Gellner’s modernizing argument or Kaufmann’s Complexity Theory, does not, however, invalidate such connections altogether. Turning back to Bayly’s commentary on Gellner’s “navel” analogy, it is indeed true that nations do not need navels, but as Bayly pointed out, that does not mean that they do not exist: “Navels have unintended, unexpected, and sometimes deep consequences” (Bayly 2004, p. 219). Here, language comes to the fore in a very different way from that assumed by romantic patriots; here the very synthetic nature of nation-making demands acts of imagination in which language plays a central role.

The essence of the connection between language and national consciousness is deftly captured in the title of Benedict Anderson’s paradigm-setting 1983 book: *Imagined Communities*. For Anderson (2006, p. 6), a nation consists of a network of people who imagine themselves to be living as a community. This is so because, as he points out, “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” In order for such strangers to imagine themselves as connected, there must be some element through which the commonalities that bind them together, and which differentiate them from others, can be enunciated. That, Anderson stresses, is the role of language and print. In this sense, then, Anderson turns Herder and other romantic theorists on their head: rather than seeing language as a marker of a pre-existing nationhood, Anderson sees language as a vehicle for the creation of nationhood.

These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually

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became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community. (Anderson 1983, p. 44; emphasis in the original)

Returning, then, to the American Protestant missionaries in Bulgaria, it is true, as Nestorova claims, that their objectives vis-à-vis mass conversion to Protestantism were not realized, however important unintended consequences arose from their actions that have gone largely under the radar insofar as the analysis of those consequences. Key among the unintended consequences was the formation of modern Bulgarian national consciousness.¹ This paper seeks to straighten out those activities and how they contributed to a tipping point that would lead to the emergence of modern Bulgaria as a nation.

Protestant Print Culture in the Ottoman Empire

As noted above, Nestorova (1987, p. 96) credits “the preparation and publishing of books and other literature in Bulgarian” as being the greatest contribution by the missionaries to Bulgarian society. In order to understand the publishing activities of the American missionaries, it is necessary to explain the incredible power that nineteenth-century Protestants, both American and British, attributed to print. The association between print and evangelization can, of course, be traced to the very inception of Protestantism. As noted by historian/anthropologist Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 39; emphasis in the original):

Before the age of print, Rome easily won every war against heresy in Western Europe because it always had better internal lines of communication than its challengers. But when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel-door in Wittenberg, they were printed up in German translation, and “within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country.” In the two decades 1520-1540 three times as many books were published in German as in the period 1500-1520, an astonishing transformation to which Luther was absolutely central. His works represented no less than one third of *all* German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525. Between 1522 and 1546, a total of 430 editions (whole or partial) of his Biblical translations appeared.

¹ This stands in contrast to the historiographical trend among some scholars in Turkey who have argued that the inculcation of national consciousness among Christian minorities was a primary conscious objective for Americans. For example, see (Öke, 1988, p. 156).

This gave rise to a massive propaganda war in which multiple species of Protestants sought to overwhelm not only the Roman Catholic establishment, but also the “heresies” being advanced by each other. Despite divergences between different Protestant groups over specific matters of doctrine, one point on which there was no dissent was the primacy of Bible-reading as being fundamental to piety. This remained a basic tenet in Protestantism which only increased over time. Although some scholars, following the lead of Hans W. Frei (1974), have argued that by some time in the eighteenth century belief in the mystical qualities of Scripture had gone by the wayside, it is clear that strong reliance on the Bible as a self-interpreting and literally true narrative of human salvation remained strong, at least in some Protestant circles, well into the nineteenth century.² As noted by Dickson D. Bruce (2013, p. 91), in nineteenth century America>

There were several dimensions to the Bible’s authoritative status during the antebellum period. The Biblicism that moved in the direction of treating the Sacred Book as a Sacred Object was one dimension of the Bible’s acceptance in this regard, but it was only one dimension. What made the Bible sacred was a general understanding that the Bible was God’s word, and a credible record of both God’s work in the world and His ultimate and final revelation to humanity.

Thus as American Protestants undertook to spread their religion around the world during the nineteenth century, they “placed great emphasis on literacy and familiarity with the Bible” (Reeves-Ellington 2013, p. 56).

The printing operations conducted by American missionaries in the Ottoman lands began in 1822 when the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) dispatched missionary Daniel Temple with a printing press. The press was initially set up in Malta, a place already under British missionary influence and therefore considered safer than other potential locations, and was focused primarily on the Board’s missionary activities in Greece and other areas in the Mediterranean (R. Anderson 1872, I, pp. 73-74). Over the course of the next ten years the operation grew, running three presses and printing thousands of Scriptures and religious tracts in multiple Mediterranean languages (the press was supplied with type for printing in English, Italian, Modern Greek, Armeno-Turkish, and Arabic, Anderson 1872, I, p. 75).

² For commentary on Frei’s interpretation see, for instance, Stein 1988; Placher 1989; Woolverton 1997; and Knight 2015.

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In 1833, however, the Board decided to expand its operations more deeply into the Ottoman lands and the press was relocated to Smyrna (Izmir). This move was met with stiff opposition by pretty much all of the religious communities in that area and the Ottoman authorities ordered that it be removed. In a compromise, the missionaries agreed to relocate one of the three presses, the one set up for publishing Arabic texts, to their mission station in Beirut and were allowed to keep the other two, which were focused on printing material in various of the languages common to Ottoman Christian communities (Clarke 1971, pp.239-40). The non-Arabic-language press remained in Smyrna until 1853, when operations were shifted to the heart of the empire in Constantinople (Istanbul), where the press remained in continuous operation until 1914 (Hall 1938, p. 7). From this central location, the presses controlled by the American Board became central to the publishing enterprises by other missionary organizations including those of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the American Tract Society, and the American Bible Society which, in turn, had ties to various British Protestant organizations.

Three things about the American Board's printing operations in the Ottoman lands are remarkable and bear directly on the impact that these activities had on nationality development among Christian minority populations within the empire. The first of these is the sheer volume of output that the mission press produced. According to ABCFM Foreign Secretary Rufus Anderson in his two-volume *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to the Oriental Churches*, while it was still located in Malta the mission press cranked out 350 thousand volumes consisting of 21 million pages of print (1872, I, p. 75). In its next two locations, output just continued to increase. A summary of all of the publications issued by the American Board's Ottoman press between the years 1821 and 1871 was compiled by Board archivist John A. Vinton and was appended to the second volume of Anderson's *History*. Tabulating the numbers given in Vinton's narrative, which does not include page counts for many of the books, pamphlets, handbills, and other print items that the press cranked out, yields a total of 252,013,709 pages of print that were produced (Vinton 1872).³

³ This number is given solely to convey how massive this undertaking was and is far short of the actual total. Some sense how much this figure is below the actual number of pages printed may be gained from the fact that copies of New and Old Testaments are mentioned as having been printed in each of the different Ottoman minority languages, but only the total numbers of volumes were reported, not the number of pages per volume. So, for example, Vinton notes that 8,000 copies of a New Testament in the Eastern Dialect of Modern Armenian were printed but does not report how many pages

The second factor that contributed to the Board's printing operation's impact in the Ottoman lands during the nineteenth century was its impressive network for actually distributing the materials they printed. One important aspect in the distribution of books was the mission stations themselves. Over the course of the nineteenth century the American Board established mission stations in every district of the Ottoman domain; there were, by the century's end, "seventeen principal stations and 256 substations with 174 American missionaries" (Todorova 1997, p.105). Regular communications were maintained between all of the mission stations allowing the free passage of printed material from location to location. From the mission stations, materials were then distributed to local populations through missionary visitations.⁴ As reported by historian James Franklin Clarke (1971, p.280), beginning in 1842 American Board missionary H. A. Homes was put in charge of book distribution and, following the example of the US religious publishing giant, the American Tract Society, set up a colporteur system through which "mission colporteurs, who were usually Armenians, ... travelled all over European Turkey in pairs, like the apostles of old, or the Franciscans of later times, taking with them books in all languages."⁵

These itinerant distributors of printed matter were paid relatively small sums by the Board to visit market fairs and other public gatherings where they could set up temporary shops at which to sell the Board's various publications. The Board also solicited regular subscriptions to their publications, which were delivered either through the mission stations, by traveling colporteurs, or through several permanent book stores that the Board maintained in partnership with other Christian publishing groups such as the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Bible Society (Reeves-Ellington 2013, pp.83-4). According to historian Joseph L. Grabill (1971, p. 21), by 1914 the Board's Ottoman press had distributed

each volume consisted of. If these volumes were about the same length as other versions of the New Testament that the Board printed, which averaged about 750 pages, then just this one item would raise the estimate by 6 million pages. Similarly, Vinton notes publication of a New Testament with "marginal references and parallel passages," also in modern Armenian, which ran to 948 pages, but does not report the number of copies that were printed.

⁴ References to exchanges and visitations between mission stations are so frequent in the various reports and publications put out by the ABCFM that it would be impossible to document them all. A quick review of the Board's monthly magazine, *The Missionary Herald*, will verify the regularity of such contacts and exchanges.

⁵ The strategic operation of the colporteur system in the United States by the American Tract Society is laid out in full in American Tract Society 1836.

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an estimated 8 million books, 4 million of which were Bibles, and this does not account for magazines, tracts, and other ephemera.

The third factor was the Board's pricing strategy for sales of their publications. Again, following the lead of religious presses in the United States, the ABCFM saw the printing and distribution of materials as part of their larger evangelical mission and so did not seek to profit from book sales. As Barbara Reeves-Ellington (2013, p. 83) explains, "Providing inexpensive Bibles, books, tracts, and periodicals was the goal of the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and British and American missionaries worldwide." Freed from the pressures of having to please consumer tastes by the need to make a profit, the missionaries had a great degree of latitude in terms of what they published and the volume of the output. Tatyana Nestorova, for example, reports (1987, pp. 89-90) that in 1902 the American Board disposed of 4 million pages of printed material as waste paper—apparently without batting an eye—certainly something that a printer dependent on sales for survival could never have afforded to do.

All three of these factors taken together lead to one more highly salient point about the impact of the missionary press: its very existence and success tended to dampen any competition. The difficulties that plagued indigenous publishing operations in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire were explained by historian Thomas A. Meininger (1987, pp. 108-109):

The actual printing of a book was but one stage of a publishing process filled with troubles for the revivalist writer. He had to take it upon himself to find funding for his publication (which he did by rounding up subscriptions); he had to travel abroad to locate a printer; and he had to carry the printed books to his readers. As he took on the role of an itinerant bookdealer, the writer could now expect at least the satisfaction that accompanies the delivery of a literary creation to its audience. Instead, and to his great dismay, the writer discovered that many subscribers refused to honour their pledges. They had changed their minds, or, as was often the case, they objected that the published book cost more than the subscription price.

Adding to these burdens was the fact that Ottoman authorities would not permit the establishment of any printing presses in many of its realms (Clarke 1988a, p. 104). Of course none of these difficulties were of the least concern to the American Board's publishing enterprise. In order for such a massive enterprise to function, a matter that a modern audience might never think about had to be dealt with: in order to produce such incredible amounts of print necessitated having uniform standards for such basic linguistic features as

spelling, punctuation, syntax, and character fonts. No publisher, not even one that was indifferent to profits, could afford to put out massive print runs of materials that no one could read or that would be antiquated before they could have their desired impact. It was in this realm—orthography—that the American missionaries had their earliest and greatest influence on the development of national identities among the Ottoman Empire’s numerous minority populations. For generations, the Christian minorities in the Ottoman lands had seen their ancient languages deteriorate under pressure from both Turkish, the official language of the empire’s bureaucracy, and ecclesiastical Greek, the language of the official Christian religious community (*millet*) (Genchev 1977, p. 119). Both ancient Armenian and Church Slavonic had fallen into disuse and were understood by ever decreasing numbers in their associated ethnic communities. Drawing from a nineteenth century pamphlet, in his account of the linguistic situation in the Balkans, Denis Vovchenko (2016, pp. 111-112) provides the following: “What they spoke at home was a ‘dialect which was not pure Greek but a shapeless and locally varying blend of ancient and modern Greek, old Slavonic, Latin, and what not.’”

During the early nineteenth century leading intellectuals undertook the task of attempting to revive ancient languages in new, more immediately relevant and comprehensible forms through the crafting of grammars, alphabetical standardization, and formal vocabularies. In Serbia, work by Doisitej Obradović and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić helped to establish a modern literary language. Similarly in Romania, Samuel Clain-Micu, Enachita Vacarescu, and Gheorghe Lazăr sought to Latinize the language in order to remove Slavic and Turkic elements. Croatian Ljudevit Gaj engaged in similar standardization (Kitromilides 1983, pp. 56-57; Stoianovich 1994). Among the Bulgarians and the Armenians, as well as to some extent among the Attic Greeks, the American missionary publishing operations played a significant role in this modernizing process.

Missionary Publishing and Proliferating Activities in Bulgaria: Reaching the Tipping Point

Narrowing in on the Bulgarian case, which as noted was the only Balkan language with which the Americans were concerned, Marin V. Pundeff (1969, p. 109) stressed the linguistic problems that needed to be overcome:

The problem of the national language—always crucial in the processes of nation-building—had become particularly difficult in the first half of the nineteenth century. The language of education and literature, Church Slavic, was a hindrance rather than an effective vehicle although it had been invaded by the spoken language, because it remained stilted, bore a Russian imprint, and was removed

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from the people. The spoken language, on the other hand, was split into several dialects, had become heavily mixed with Turkisms, and had failed to develop native terms for the civilization of the nineteenth century. Its total vocabulary was unknown, its grammar and spelling undefined. As the founder of the first Bulgarian newspaper, Dr. Ivan Bogorov, pointed out, “at the present time, it is the easiest and the most difficult thing to write in Bulgarian.”

Pundeff then emphasizes the significance of creating a semi-standardized literary version of Bulgarian in order to facilitate communication within a Bulgarian ethnic community spread throughout the Balkans. More recent studies by Todorova (1995) and by Roger Gyllin (1991) have told the story of the emergence of that literary language in great detail. As summarized by Todorova (1995, p. 75), three distinct schools of thought emerged among the Bulgarians during the opening decades of the nineteenth century: “the Modern Bulgarian school, which stressed the vernacular; the Slavo-Bulgarian school, which insisted on the medieval linguistic legacy; and the Church Slavonic school, which was based on the language used by the church.” Gyllin (1991, p. 106) details how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century damascenes, edifying texts composed and copied in manuscript by monks for use by common lay audiences, pointed the way toward victory for the “Modern school” by demonstrating how the vernacular could be incorporated into formal texts and appeal to a broad reading public. In this process, the role of the American missionaries was somewhat doubtful: neither Todorova nor Gyllin make any mention of them and most other secondary sources are ambiguous on the subject. But, as Anderson demonstrated, the creation of a unifying literary language is necessary but not sufficient for establishing imagined communities. In order for a merged and standardized print vernacular to do its work of establishing connections between strangers, products in that language must be widely disseminated and systems for instructing the preliterate population in reading it must be instituted.⁶

Here we may return to Eric Kaufmann’s theoretical discussion of Complexity Theory. The three contending movements sketched by Gyllin and Todorova can be viewed as seemingly uncoordinated, and indeed conflicting, individual phenomena from which a consensus involving the collapse of uncertainty and formation of a unifying movement must be traced to a triggering mechanism or “tipping point”, which Kaufmann describes as follows:

⁶ B. Anderson (2006) discusses this extensively, especially in Chapter 5, “Old Languages, New Models”.

sometimes long periods of stasis are punctuated by sudden changes, which cannot be readily explained as the outcome of discrete causes. When water boils with the addition of one degree of heat at 99° C, or a final sand grain causes a mound to collapse, a small cause, which could not be predicted, leads to a dramatic effect.

This is the sort of role that the missionaries played in this process. Without doubt, the three names most associated with the final formulation of the modern Bulgarian literary language are Neofit Rilski (1793-1881), Konstantin Fotinov (1785-1858), and Petko Slaveikov (1827-1895) (Clarke 1971, p. 28). Of these three, Rilski, originally a seminarian, teetered between the Church Slavonic and Modern Bulgarian schools, translating scripture into a form more similar to the dialect of vernacular Bulgarian spoken in the southwestern region of greater Bulgaria (Southern Rumelia, Macedonia) (Tashkov 2009, p. 282). For their part, Fotinov and Slaveikov were both advocates of the Modern Bulgarian school and emphasized the northeastern vernacular as the basis for a popular literary language, especially Slaveikov, who was a native of Turnovo (Genchev 1977, p. 104; Clarke 1971, pp. 253-254). But what is worth noting here is that while Rilski had some passing acquaintance with the American missionaries, mostly through his connection with a joint Russian/British venture to translate the Bible from Greek to Bulgarian, he was not fully associated with them and they played little role in his 1840 translation (Clarke 1971; Clark 1988d). Fontinov and Slaveikov were both integral to the missionaries' translating and publishing operations for Bulgaria and had a significant influence on the orthographic standardization that would make the mass circulation of Bulgarian texts possible.⁷ In the process, the missionaries had a significant influence on Fontinov's and especially Slaveikov's understandings of modernization and coloured their literary output significantly (Reeves-Ellington 2011).

Certainly the role of the missionaries in disseminating literature within the Ottoman domains has already been adequately demonstrated. What was true of Christian minority Ottoman literature more generally was also true of the newly-stabilized modern Bulgarian vernacular literature, as well. Vinton's (1872) catalogue of print output from the missionary press indicates that at least 81,851,000 pages were printed in modern Bulgarian and Clarke (1968) reports

⁷ Konstantin Fotinov went to work for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the 1840s as part of their effort to translate the New Testament, working with that organization's chief linguist in Constantinople, Elias Riggs. Petko Slaveikov did not enter the picture until the 1860s, working with Riggs and Methodist Episcopal missionary Albert Long on a new translation of the New Testament among a large number of other publications. (Reeves-Ellington 2013, pp. 79-80; see also Clarke 1971, pp. 298-301).

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that the press churned out 3,332,000 pages in Bulgarian in the year 1860 alone. The most important single product to come out of this collaboration was the publication in 1871 of an entirely re-translated version of the New Testament in the modern Bulgarian vernacular. The significance of this event cannot be overstated. As nationalist poet Pencho Slaveikov (1866-1912) summarized the event,

And that which took place elsewhere—for example in Germany—happened here also: the translation of the Bible put an end to the linguistic disorder and established the literary language. After the appearance of the Bible (1871), the conflicts among the various Bulgarian dialects cease—the eastern Bulgarian becomes general for all fighters for intellectual and national consciousness.... (quoted in Clarke 1988c, p. 297.⁸)

This would seem to indicate that the tipping point in the formation of a unified Bulgarian nationality was reached in 1871 and that the American missionaries were quite influential in pushing it forward.

But their influence did not stop there: they also took a leading role in instructing the preliterate population in reading the famous Bible and other literature in the new vernacular. Two full chapters in Rufus Anderson's (1872, II, pp. 174-210) two-volume *History* focusing on "The Bulgarians of European Turkey" are devoted to the establishment of schools as well as its publishing enterprises.⁹ Todorova notes (1997, p. 105) that by the late nineteenth century the mission to Turkey had "stimulated the founding of schools, which after the turn of the century numbered 426 attended by 25,000 students." Of course it must be noted that the missionaries were not alone in instituting an educational revolution in Bulgaria. Many early Bulgarian reformers and proto-nationalists, most notably Vasil Aprilov (1749-1847) and Neofit Rilski, were instrumental in the systematic founding of schools (e.g., Clarke 1971, p. 200), however even these were largely dependent on the missionaries for the educational materials and equipment that was used in them. It is interesting to note, for example, how many schoolbooks are to be found in Vinton's inventory of mission press publications.¹⁰ This process

⁸ It should be noted that Pencho Slaveikov was the son of Petko Slaveikov, however this does not seem to have been the reason for his assessment of the significance of the Bible that his father had helped produce. Editor Dennis Hupchick notes in reference to this quotation that he was unable to locate the exact source, personal correspondence with the author, July 2, 2015).

⁹ Discussion of the New Testament translation may be found on pages II, 207-210.

¹⁰ In that context it is particularly interesting to note that "Lancastrian" cards are also listed in Vinton's inventory, though not specifically in modern Bulgarian.

of universalizing education, what Gellner (1983, pp. 31-3) terms “exo-education,” established jointly by both leaders of the Vŭzazhdane and American missionaries constitutes one of the chief mechanisms for the imagining of Bulgarian nationhood that took place during the late nineteenth century.

While great strides were clearly being made toward producing a literate population in Bulgaria, it should be noted that in 1881, only about 3.3% of the population could actually read (Mishkova 1994, p. 86, Table 2.1).¹¹ This fact, however, should not diminish the importance of mass print generation and distribution on the formation of a Bulgarian imagined community. While teachers, whether in the missionary schools or those being operated by towns and villages throughout Bulgaria, could reach only so many students, historian Thomas A. Meininger points out that they frequently extended their reach outside the schools and into the community. Two specific institutions established largely by teachers had the greatest impact on pushing the new standardized Bulgarian vernacular out to even illiterate people: school libraries and community readings rooms (Meininger 1987, p. 273). The library at the school in Gabrovo, for example, maintained a huge collection of books in “Bulgarian, Greek, Russian, Serbian, French, German, and Italian” and the one at Bolgrad “subscribed to thirty-five journals and newspapers” (Meininger 1987, pp. 165-6). It should be noted that the library at Gabrovo was founded personally by Vasil Aprilov, who bequeathed his 2,000 volume personal book collection under the condition that it be maintained as a “school-public library” accessible to all (Nikolova 1986, p. 699).

At these libraries, students often read out loud to visitors, a way of broadening their own reading exposure and also carrying knowledge to their illiterate elders (Meininger 1987, p. 273).¹² The reading rooms, called *chitalishta* in Bulgarian, are described by Meininger (1987, p. 273) as “combination clubs and libraries” which maintained stocks of books, but which more importantly maintained

¹¹ Mishkova’s tables indicate that this is the figure from official census data. She notes, however, that a more sophisticated analysis undertaken by K. Popov in 1905 indicates a significantly higher rate (11.5%), though this was still quite low by Western standards. Mishkova, 88, Table 3.1. The same table shows a steep increase in literacy, from 11.5% in 1887 to 32.3% in 1905, which Mishkova credits to Bulgarian state-sponsored educational strategies.

¹² It is interesting to note here that this process of spreading nationally-conscious literature by reading aloud to illiterate or semi-literate audiences echoes the process by which vernacular language was spread in early modern Europe, a process that is so fundamental to Benedict Anderson’s theory of nation-making. In this regard, see Houston 2014; Thomas 1986; Auerbach 1965; Crosby 1936; and Saenger 1982.

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subscriptions to key periodicals such as *Zornista* (Nikolova 1986, p. 696). At both libraries and chitalishtas, as well as at taverns, coffee houses, and other venues in an evolving public sphere, those who were able to read often read aloud to those who could not, exposing them to the news of the day and also to the new vernacular (Meininger 1987, pp. 273-74). As noted by Nestorova (1987, p. 95), “If a household received a newspaper, this meant that relatives and neighbors read it, too. If a reading room or school subscribed, as was practiced in those days, the number of actual readers increased even more dramatically.” And, according to Nan Nikolova (1986, p. 702), this had a direct impact on the forging of an imagined community, asserting that:

Reading aloud was a widespread and popular activity of the reading clubs. It encouraged a love of learning while it satisfied the Bulgarian hunger for news of Western Europe and its new ideas. It aroused a self-awareness among ordinary people as they heard reports of their compatriots’ efforts to spread the Bulgarian language and literature throughout their native land.

Most of the public venues that served to carry the new language out to the people were closed to women and thus they were largely excluded from open contact with the new print culture.¹³ However, as Reeves-Ellington (2013, p. 75) points out, the missionaries addressed this issue by creating a corps of “Bible women,” young unmarried women who could visit other women in their homes and read to them both from the mission press’s religious literature, but also from *Zornista* and other periodical publications.

Another key element in imagining communities is adopting a “modern” conception of time, one that is fundamentally antithetical to the primordial timelessness assumed by romantic theorists. That is being able to imagine not only that one is a member of a community from which one is generally physically detached, in which one “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them” (Anderson 2006, p. 6), but must also be able to imagine them as being simultaneous in time; i.e., they must be imagined as being contemporaneous. In later theorizing about this, Anderson (1998, p. 29) articulated a concept that he called “*unbound seriality*,” which, he claims, “has its origins in the print market, especially in newspapers.” This is a “modern” conception inasmuch as “newspapers everywhere take ‘this world of mankind’ as their domain no matter how partially they read it” (B. Anderson 1998, p. 33). In this way, newspapers and other periodical literature grounds readers in a

¹³ It should be noted here that the literacy rate for women in 1881 was only 1.5 percent; this rose to 4.1 percent by 1887. Mishkova 1994, p. 86, Table 2.1.

secular world in which things happen at the same time no matter where they may be happening in space. This process binds strangers of one imagined nation together and differentiates them from strangers of other nations at the same time. And it should be noted that delivering periodical content aloud in chitalishtas and other public spaces only added to this simultaneity by allowing the hearer to clearly imagine that others spread across the countryside were hearing exactly the same news being read in the same vernacular at precisely the same time.

Here again, the missionary press played a key role in establishing this sort of seriality by being the most successful producer and distributor of periodical literature in nineteenth-century Bulgaria. As noted earlier, indigenous would-be journalists could not easily overcome the hurdles that stood in the way of publishing newspapers. Clarke (1988b, p. 324), for example, notes that what is often referred to as Bulgaria's first modern newspaper, Ivan Bogorov's *Bŭlgarski Orel* (*Bulgarian Eagle*), appeared only three times in eight months before being relegated to oblivion and that another attempt at a national organ, *Bŭlgarski Knizhitsi* (*Bulgarian Papers*), founded in Constantinople in 1857, folded in 1862 "for lack of paid subscriptions" (Clarke 1988a, p.104).

As a result, Reeves-Ellington observes (2013, pp. 84-85) that the mission-published Bulgarian-language secular general interest magazine *Zornista* (*Morning Star*) pushed competing periodicals out of the market, noting that for-profit magazines similar in size and content to *Zornista*, but which had to rely on sales for their survival, had to be sold for between eight and sixteen times the price of *Zornista* in order to break even. And, like Meininger, she points to the extraordinary advantage *Zornista* had in terms of distribution through the missionaries' contact networks.

Conclusion

As should now be fairly clear, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and other more advanced advocates for rethinking the nature and process of nationality formation demand that we turn away from the Herderian vision of suppressed primordial nationhood that is itself a product of the romantic imaginings of nineteenth-century nationalists, and instead look to modernization itself as the mechanism by which nations were imagined during the previous two centuries. But as noted above, it was Anderson's contention that establishing a unified vernacular language was a necessary but not necessarily a sufficient explanation. The American missionaries inserted themselves in a critical way through sponsoring the project of orthographic standardization for the Bulgarian vernacular as well as through mass publication and distribution of

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vernacular literature, sponsorship and collaboration in the establishment of uniform schools, and introducing a sense of secular worldly simultaneity through regular periodical publications. Going beyond Gellner and mediating between bottom-up and top-down theories of national consciousness formation, this paper has argued that this process is more complex than that. Diverse and often conflicting identity movements may exist for some time before reaching a “tipping point” or critical mass from which an imagined nation emerges. As noted above, that tipping point was reached in 1871 with the universal acceptance of the New Testament translation into modern Bulgarian. From that point on, the top-down process of inventing and fixing in place a Bulgarian national culture could proceed.¹⁴ This is illustrated by radical growth in literacy levels as the result of government intervention through public education initiatives which taught much more than just reading (Mishkova 1994, p. 80).

The significance of this analysis goes far beyond explaining this process in Bulgaria, suggesting that future research on the development of national consciousness needs to address the often small, amorphous, and sometimes conflicting forces that underlie that formation which can reveal roles in that process that otherwise go unnoticed. Nestorova’s (1987, p. 86) assertion that American missionaries made no contribution to the Bulgarian *Vŭzazhdane* provides an excellent case in point illustrating such oversights. On the contrary, the American missionaries must be seen as critical agents in furthering the complex process of formalization of a Bulgarian national consciousness and an imagined Bulgarian nation.

¹⁴ On this broader process of creating national cultures, see Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983.

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