Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies Vol. 37 No. 1 (2013) 111–129

'Peasantist nationalism' in inter-war Greece (1927–41)

Spyridon Ploumidis
University of Athens

'Peasantist nationalism' was a new radical nationalist discourse in the twentieth century. The crisis in agriculture in the 1920s, urbanism and the perceived overpopulation of the cities were important social factors that instigated the intellectual construction of the 'peasantist nation'. Peasantist nationalism was by and large constructed by agronomists, a new stratum of technocrats who used nationalism as a vehicle for social mobility and their entry into the strata of the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. Peasantist nationalist ideas, set forth earlier by the agronomists, were adopted by Metaxas' quasi-fascist regime and upgraded to the level of the state's hegemonic ideology.

Introduction

In this article, I will argue that 'peasantist nationalism' (a term coined in 1995 by Irina Livezeanu for the relevant case of Romania, see below) was a novel discourse of Greek nationalism that made its appearance and flourished in the inter-war period. Peasantist nationalism primarily drew on radical agrarianism and neo-romanticism. Agrarianism[1] was disseminated along with the rise of the forces of peasant populism. Since the late nineteenth century, agrarian parties, which intended to elevate the peasantry to a determinant socio-political position, were established throughout Central and Eastern Europe. After World War I, radical land reform and the emancipation of the peasantry became part of the modernizing government programmes even of highly conservative regimes in the area.[2] The emergence of the peasant as an active factor in the political and social life of Europe, particularly in the agrarian East, was a striking phenomenon in

1 The underlying notion of agrarianism is the idea that agriculture and those whose occupation involves agriculture are especially important and valuable elements of society; see J. A. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture* (Moscow, ID 1989) viii. For a definition of the left-of-centre agrarianist ideology, see entry for the Bulgarian agrarian leader G. M. ('Gemeto') Dimitrov in F. Gross (ed.), *European Ideologies: A Survey of 20th Century Political Ideas* (New York 1948) 44–53. For the principles of agrarianism on the right of the political spectrum, see M. McNaylor, 'Agrarianism', in R. P. Carlisle (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Politics*, II (*The Right*) (Thousand Oaks, CA, London and New Delhi 2005) 504–6.

2 I. T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2001 [1998]) 76, 287–9, 292.

© 2013 Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham
DOI: 10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the social history of the continent between the two World Wars.[3] In Greece, an Agrarian Party was founded in 1923. However, factionalist misgivings, the petit-bourgeois aspirations of the Greek peasant masses as well as the clientelist networks of the established bourgeois parties left very limited ground for its success.[4] Yet, agrarianism exerted a far greater intellectual influence on the hegemonic ideology of inter-war Greece than the fluctuating electoral influence of the Agrarian Party of Greece (which actually seldom exceeded 6%).[5]

This was certainly not the first time that the peasantry entered the discourse of ideological developments and practical politics in modern Greece. From 1830 onwards, Greek scholars centred their concept of the cultural continuity of Hellenism around the rural population; they saw folklore as the great repository of the true Greek character. Greek folklorists, historians and philologists particularly shaped nineteenth-century notions of romantic nationalism, such as the Herderian 'national spirit' (*Volksgeist*), and the tenets of Greek national identity along peasantist lines: if it could be shown that the peasants, the largest demographic element, retained clear cultural traces of their ancient heritage, a link between the modern Greeks and the glory that was ancient Greece would be demonstrated. Within this context of nation-building, the 'primordial unity' of the Greek nation was testified in collections of folk songs, proverbs, legends, traditions, etc.[6] However, peasantist nationalism constituted, I believe, a radical departure from the past romantic discourse, which was more concerned with ideals and portrayals of an imagined past rather than with the economic and sociological realities of the present.[7] In the 'short twentieth century' (1914–91), neo-romantic perceptions of the reality exceeded the mere veneration of nature and the simple life, a key characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticism:[8] they developed into a new irrationalistic philosophy centred upon an actual cult of the peasant.[9] Most remarkably, the scope of agrarianist populism was not confined to folk culture but expanded to a fundamentally politicized view of the farmers as a social class, represented genuine rural interests, and aimed at establishing the peasantry as an independent sociopolitical force with an increasing sense of its own standing, interests and purpose of

3 D. Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (New York 1961) 31.

4 A. Rigos, *Η Β' Ελληνική Δημοκρατία 1924–1935: Κοινωνικές διαστάσεις της πολιτικής σκηνής* (Athens 1992) 151, 156–7; D. G. Panagiotopoulos, *Αγροτικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος: Όψεις του αγροτικού κινήματος στην Ελλάδα* (Athens 2010) 50–9, 136–9.

5 Panagiotopoulos, *Αγροτικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος*, 132.

6 M. Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin, TX 1982) 6–7, 13, 40, 52–3, 60–1; A. Politis, *Ρομαντικά χρόνια: Ιδεολογίες και νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα του 1830-1880*, 3rd edn (Athens 2008) 48–50, 55–6, 60; P. Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece 1766–1976* (Oxford 2009) 1–2, 18–19.

7 Cf. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism*, 183–4, 214–16.

8 Cf. I. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (London 2000) 17, 134; D. Stevens, *Romanticism* (Cambridge 2004) 16, 20.

9 G. L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York 1980) 196–200; Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 292.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

action.[10] Social changes definitely had a deep effect on neo-romantic peasantist thinking. Similarly to western European Romantics of the first half of the nineteenth century, who became attracted to nature as a result of the rapid growth of the population of their metropolises,[11] twentieth-century neo-romantic thinkers saw the accelerating growth of the Moloch-like industrial cities as an imminent threat to social stability and 'moral hygiene'. This influenced explicit policies of the radical Right (and of early National Socialism) towards plans for the reagrarianization of society.[12] At the same time, agrarianist ideology came to the fore in the 1920s as a practical answer to real socio-economic exigencies.

The rural crisis of the 1920s

The inter-war period was generally characterized by a worldwide agricultural crisis, which hit European agriculture particularly hard. The Depression of the 1930s was preceded by a slump in agricultural prices because of increasing surplus productivity, particularly in the Americas. Recurring global crises in the rural economy, peaking in 1924 and in 1928, were severe and contributed to the downward spiral in the early 1930s. As output rose, prices declined and farmers clamoured for protection. Worst affected in Europe were the producers of staple commodities such as wheat.[13] In 1925–29, the international index price of wheat decreased by 28%.[14] The downswing in agriculture hit the Balkan national economies badly, since agricultural products were their main export commodities.[15] In Greece, between 1927 and 1931, the index price of wheat fell from 151 to 117.[16] The income of Greek farmers contracted accordingly to below the national average, reaching the limits of poverty. In 1927, the average income per 'agro-pastoralist' family in Greece was $282.40, while the median household

10 Cf. Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant*, 32; N. Oren, *Revolution Administered: Agrarianism and Communism in Bulgaria* (Baltimore and London 1973) 5–6, 9–10, 12, 14; Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism*, 228; Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 83.

11 Stevens, *Romanticism*, 24.

12 Radical schemes for rural resettlement of town labourers and for turning Germany into a country of peasants lurked in the Nazis' early economic platform of 1932, drafted by the economist Gottfried Feder; see R. Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (Harmondsworth 1977) 197, 200–1, 208; A. Barkai, *Nazi Economics: Ideology, Theory, and Policy* (New Haven and London 1990) 59, 148, 154.

13 C. Evelpidis, *Η γεωργική κρίσις ιδία εν Ελλάδι* (Athens 1931) 8, 10, 21–3; F. B. Tipton and R. Aldrich, *An Economic and Social History of Europe, 1890–1939* (Basingstoke and London 1988) 165–6; G. Ambrosius and W. H. Hubbard, *A Social and Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA 1989) 169.

14 G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. IX (*Il fascismo e le sue guerre*) (Milan 1990) 121.

15 J. R. Lampe and M. R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington 1982) 434–5, 466–7.

16 K. Kostis, *Αγροτική οικονομία και Γεωργική Τράπεζα: Όψεις της ελληνικής οικονομίας στο Μεσοπόλεμο (1919–1928): Τα τεκμήρια* (Athens 1990) 43, Table 14.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

income of the entire Greek population amounted to $377.90.[17] The decrease in agricultural income was also coupled with a fall in average productivity (until 1931), as well as with the indebtedness of the farmers to banks and money lenders. The indebtedness of Greek peasants deepened in the 1930s. In 1937, agricultural debts reached 43.3% of the gross agricultural income and involved 70% of Greek farmers.[18]

Farmers in Greece responded to the economic crisis by forsaking their plots and emigrating to the towns. Undoubtedly, urbanism was not a novel phenomenon in Greece. In the 'long nineteenth century', a steady stream of migration to the towns (or to the Americas up to 1922) offered an outlet for the overflow of labour from the countryside.[19] In the inter-war period this migratory stream widened. The agrarian reform of 1917, which turned the landless peasantry and the refugees settled in the countryside into independent smallholders, did not put an end to, or reverse this demographic trend. The new smallholders did not succeed in turning themselves into successful entrepreneurs, while the economic slump worsened the commercial environment in agriculture. Thus, seeing no future prospects in agriculture, Greek farmers themselves migrated or encouraged their (male) offspring to move to the towns.

The perceived overpopulation of Greece's capital, which sharpened the divide between rich and poor, was mainly a consequence of the urban settlement of approximately half of the 1.2 million Asia Minor refugees in its suburbs after 1923.[20] Nevertheless, internal migration expanded the dimensions of this demographic overflow. Grigorios Chatzivasileiou, a professor of statistics at the School of Hygiene at the University of Athens, was the first person to point out in 1925 a 'problem of overpopulation' in Greece. He connected this problem first and foremost with the 'refugee issue', but also with the urbanism of the farmers.[21] Between 1928 and 1940, the population of the 'capital complex' (i.e. Athens and Piraeus) increased by 40.2%, increasing from 802,000 to 1,124,109.[22] Around 200,000 of these urban new settlers were internal migrants from the rural areas.[23] The migratory flow was strongest (in descending order) from the islands of the Aegean and the Ionian, from the Peloponnese, from Epirus, from Crete, from Sterea Hellas, and from Thrace, whereas in Thessaly and in Macedonia this outflow was minimal.[24] Around one quarter of the annual

17 C. Evelpidis, 'Η γεωργία εις τα Βαλκάνια', *Εργασία* 1 (11 Jan. 1930) 27.

18 K. Kostis, *Αγροτική οικονομία και Γεωργική Τράπεζα: Όψεις της ελληνικής οικονομίας στο Μεσοπόλεμο (1919–1928)* (Athens 1987) 48–9, 58, 137–8; S. Petmezas, 'Αγροτική οικονομία', in C. Hadziiossif (ed.), *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα*, II, part 1 (Athens 2002) 215.

19 G. B. Dertilis, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού κράτους 1830–1920*, 3rd edn, I (Athens 2005) 238–45.

20 L. Leontidou, *Πόλεις της σιωπής: Εργατικός εποικισμός της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά, 1909–1940* (Athens 1989) 189.

21 G. P. Chatzivasileiou, 'Το πρόβλημα του πληθυσμού εν Ελλάδι', *Αρχείον Οικονομικών και Κοινωνικών Επιστημών* 5/3 (July–Sept. 1925) 257, 260, 262–4.

22 N. C. Settas, *Το δημογραφικόν και το κοινωνικο-οικονομικόν πρόβλημα της Ελλάδος* (Athens 1964) 23.

23 A. Delendas and I. Magioros, *Πώς τίθεται το Ελληνικόν πρόβλημα* (Athens 1946) 30–1.

24 Ibid., 32.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

growth rate of the population of the countryside (15.47% in 1931–35) was lost to the towns. Between 1928 and 1940, the real growth of the population of the capital complex (27 per thousand) was more than five times its natural growth (5 per thousand).[25]

By the mid-1920s, the soaring volume of internal migration and its social repercussions had alarmed state officials and the bourgeois establishment. By 1926 agronomists and the Ministry of Agriculture entered the public discussion, expressing their concern about the social dangers of the 'plethoric increase' in the population of the capital and suggesting that only a 'return to agricultural work' could save the urban centres from 'dangerous elements', i.e. the disaffected migrants who were attracted to communism.[26] Living and working conditions in the urban areas deteriorated, as Greece's anaemic labour market could not possibly absorb the newcomers.[27] Despite the seemingly high rates of the country's industrial development of 8% on average between 1933 and 1939,[28] employment in industry increased by merely 10%, while the absolute number of industrial workers rose from 280,311 in 1930 to just over 350,000 in 1938.[29] Harsh working conditions and low wages deepened the disaffection of the working classes and rendered communist ideas more appealing.[30] The peasant migrants, however, ignored the widespread unemployment in the towns and the fact that there was no margin for subsistence as there was in the villages.[31]

The arguments of the agronomists eventually found a receptive audience in the ruling political circles. State intervention in agriculture became more energetic after the eruption of the world economic crisis in October 1929, which worsened the situation for the farmers and intensified their migratory trend. In the early 1930s, proposed measures for retaining the farmers in the countryside and/or for the (re)turn of the 'parasitic' urban population to agriculture entered the epicentre of the public political debate.[32] In 1930, the Liberal party Senator for the Rhodope prefecture, Achilles Kalevras, argued that

> those petit bourgeois settlements that surround the towns, these miserable hovels that are erected around the old towns will become, in a decade's time, sooner or later, the nucleus of the leftist trends; briefly speaking, they will form the nucleus

25 Ibid.

26 V. Ganossis, 'Προς τους αγρούς', *Οικονομικός Ταχυδρόμος* 17 (1 Aug. 1926) 1.

27 C. Evelpidis, *Θεωρία και πράξις αγροτικής πολιτικής και οικονομίας*, I (Athens 1939) 207.

28 M. Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis* (Oxford 1991) 237, 250–1.

29 P. Pizanias, *Οι φτωχοί των πόλεων: Η τεχνογνωσία της επιβίωσης στην Ελλάδα το Μεσοπόλεμο* (Athens 1993) 25–6.

30 A. Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου: Το Διεθνές Γραφείο Εργασίας και η ανάδυση των κοινωνικών θεσμών* (Athens 1993) 452.

31 Mazower, *Greece*, 241.

32 M. M. Psalidopoulos, *Η κρίση του 1929 και οι Έλληνες οικονομολόγοι: Συμβολή στην ιστορία της οικονομικής σκέψης στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου* (Athens 1989) 353–6.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of revolutionary Greece. These people are now struggling in order to make a living. What about when they will not be able to do even that?

Kalevras maintained that the flight of the peasants ('the deserters from the most honest human labour') could only be addressed by the 'new agrarian ideal of Greece'. By this he meant a 'systematic crusade for the Greek village' and the Venizelist 'pro-agrarian campaign'.[33] In March 1930, the general secretary of the Ministry of National Economy identified the Greek problem of urbanism with the German term *Landflucht* (meaning the desertion of peasants from the fields and their flight into the towns), and accordingly argued that Greece was facing a 'crisis of overpopulation' in its urban areas.[34] In fact, *Landflucht* was a rather general phenomenon that afflicted a wide range of societies in Europe (France, Italy, Germany, Norway, Finland, et al.) at the time, although not Britain.[35] In Greece, however, the urbanization of agriculturalists was still far from assuming the dimensions of a rural exodus, but was alarming because of its social repercussions.

The rural settlement of the refugees from 1923 onwards was the first and most important measure that was implemented at the time to prevent the overcrowding of the cities and their job market, and to inhibit social upheaval[36] (or, in Babis Alivizatos' words, to forestall 'a social and economic catastrophe').[37] Another significant programme for curbing urbanization was the rigorous and progressive agrarian policy set out by the Liberal government between 1928 and 1932, which aimed (within the wider agenda of achieving sustainable growth in the agricultural sector) to increase agricultural income and to improve living conditions in the countryside. In 1928, a second Advanced School of Agriculture was established in Thessaloniki, while the one in Athens was upgraded to university level. In 1929, the Agricultural Bank of Greece was founded, the Ministry of Agriculture was restructured, the Agricultural Funds and Chambers were decentralized, and six Agricultural Preparatory Schools were established throughout the country.[38] To this end, in October 1931, the Venizelos government passed a five-year moratorium on repayment of the farmers' private loans, a pro-agrarian

33 A. Kalevras, *Αστυφιλία, παρασιτισμός και μικροαστική εγκατάστασις* (Thessaloniki 1930) 11, 14, 41–2, 44.

34 P. E. Garoufalias, 'Ο υπερπληθυσμός των πόλεων', *Εργασία* 8 (1 March 1930) 17.

35 Tipton and Aldrich, *An Economic and Social History*, 241–2, 245; Ambrosius and Hubbard, *A Social and Economic History*, 56–60.

36 M. Dritsa, *Βιομηχανία και τράπεζες στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου* (Athens 1990) 304–6; E. Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: The Rural Settlement of Refugees 1922–1930* (Oxford 2006) 125–6.

37 B. Alivizatos, 'Δημοκρατία και γεωργία: Ο απολογισμός μίας δεκαετίας (1924–1934)', *Εργασία* 230 (27 May 1934) 667–8.

38 P. Petridis (ed.), *Το έργο της κυβερνήσεως Βενιζέλου κατά την τετραετία 1928–1932: Τι υπεσχέθη προεκλογικώς και τι επραγματοποίησε* (Thessaloniki 2000) 150–3, 183–6, 228–36; D. G. Panagiotopoulos, *Γεωργική εκπαίδευση και ανάπτυξη. Η Ανωτάτη Γεωπονική Σχολή Αθηνών στην ελληνική κοινωνία 1920–1960* (Athens 2004) 66–7, 69–71.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

gesture that was repeated by the Metaxas government in 1937 on a more generous (twelve-year) basis.[39] Nevertheless, the most drastic interventionist measure for strengthening the agrarian income and discouraging the farmers from migrating was the concentration of cereals in 1927 and the passing of law 3598 'for the protection of the native wheat production' in 1928.[40] Law 3598 served a crucial social and political purpose. On 25 November 1930, the Liberal MP for Florina, Georgios Modis, explained in parliament that the artificial increase in the price of native wheat alleviated the 'most serious fear for the solidity of our social regime', because otherwise the destitution of the Greek wheat-growers would have led to a class revolution of the 'Russian type'. Another Liberal MP added that the protectionist measures satisfied the 'sense of self-preservation of the bourgeois camp', since 'the foundations of the Greek State lie deep in the soil, in agriculture'.[41] Furthermore, this law marked the strategic orientation of Greece towards autarky in wheat and other nutritional products,[42] while at the same time it became a powerful institutional lever for the dynamic entry of the agronomists into the forefront of the country's public and intellectual life.

Urbanism and the Greek agronomists

The arrival of the professional agronomists onto the scene materialized in 1927, the year in which, according to the economist Aristotelis Sideris, a rigorous 'centrally-directed' state intervention in agriculture began on the initiative of Alexandros Papanastasiou, the Minister of Agriculture in Zaimis' 'ecumenical' government.[43] Dimitrios Zographos, a historiographer of Greek agriculture, notes that before the last decade of the nineteenth century agronomists, along with 'every other person devoted to agriculture and the agricultural regeneration of Greece', were looked down upon with contempt, and the agronomists' 'great national-cum-social mission' had not yet been recognized. Due to the overwhelming social drive towards state employment, the still few (and mostly self-employed) agronomists were considered as 'socially backward' and were not allowed 'to have pretensions to the top of the social pyramid'. Before the early 1890s, the profession of agronomist was 'on the periphery of social life' and those young men who decided to follow it had to be real 'heroes'.[44] The situation changed substantially once

39 K. Vergopoulos, *Το αγροτικό ζήτημα στην Ελλάδα: Το πρόβλημα της κοινωνικής ενσωμάτωσης της γεωργίας* (Athens 1975) 161; Mazower, *Greece*, 133, 248–9, 291.

40 A. D. Sideris, *Η γεωργική πολιτική της Ελλάδος κατά την λήξασαν εκατονταετίαν (1833–1933)* (Athens 1934) 278, 280, 320–1. The concentration of cereals means the collection, at times of agricultural crisis, of the whole or part of the native cereal production by the state, with the consent of the producers, at 'security prices', i.e. prices which are rather higher than the market prices, in order to secure a sufficient agricultural income.

41 *Εφημερίς των Συζητήσεων της Βουλής* (15 Nov. 1930–13 July 1931) 92–5.

42 C. Agriantoni, 'Venizelos and economic policy', in P. M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship* (Edinburgh 2006) 303–4.

43 Cf. Sideris, *Η γεωργική πολιτική*, 10, 263–4.

44 D. L. Zographos, *Ιστορία της ελληνικής γεωργίας*, I (Athens 1976) 342–4.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spyros Chasiotis, the 'father of Greek agriculture' and an agronomist by trade, came to the fore and publicized the scope of his professional group. He did this through his periodicals *Georgiki Proodos*, 1892–96, and *Nea Geoponika*, 1900–27, and more particularly after the establishment of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1917, where Chasiotis served as General Director, and of the Advanced School of Agronomy at Athens in 1920, which was directed by Chasiotis until 1925. The establishment of the pertinent Ministry and of the School offered public employment to dozens of young graduate agronomists (from abroad, mostly from France), whose number significantly increased from 39 in 1919 to 486 in 1937, and a sense of mission in the members of their group. In the minds of many professors at the School, agronomy was not a mere technical application (a 'practical science'), but rather (in Panagiotis Anagnostopoulos' words, published in *Αγροτική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* in 1934) 'a wider Economic Science that deals with the realization of the greatest possible profits by means of complex combinations with the earth'.[45]

In 1927, Greek agronomists commenced promoting the return 'towards Mother Earth',[46] and the 'gradual securing of the country's self-sufficiency in foodstuffs'.[47] The technocratic endeavours towards Greece's autarky in grain and other nourishing agricultural products served two essential purposes: a) the improvement of the country's trade deficit and conserving foreign currency and gold reserves;[48] b) the restriction of urbanization and the *Landflucht* phenomenon. As for the former aim, it should be taken into account that the trade deficit, and the consequent valuable exchange flowing out of the country, was mostly due to the shortfall in wheat production.[49] In 1926, the value of grain and flour imported by Greece reached £10,000,000, while the total budget deficit amounted to £18,000,000.[50] In 1927, wheat and flour imports covered 41.9% of the country's trade deficit.[51] The Liberal government claimed that by decreasing the amount of wheat imports in 1929–31 it had managed to save more than £2,000,000.[52] The increase in native wheat production became even more vital after the country's bankruptcy in April 1932, which brought foreign imports to a standstill.[53] Thus, in 1932, the country's 'agricultural autarky' became a national issue of prime importance, tantamount to the feeding and the survival of the native

45 B. Alivizatos, *Κράτος και γεωργική πολιτική* (Athens 1938) 61; Panagiotopoulos, *Γεωργική εκπαίδευση και ανάπτυξη*, 32–3, 55, 78, 114, 118–19 (fn. 201), 171, 250; D. P. Sotiropoulos and D. Panagiotopoulos, 'Ειδικοί διανοούμενοι και θύλακες χειραφέτησης στο Μεσοπόλεμο: Μεταρρυθμιστές γεωπόνοι και μηχανικοί στην ύπαιθρο και στο άστυ', *Μνήμων* 29 (2008) 134.

46 E. A. Nikolaidis, 'Το πρόγραμμά μας', *Αγροτική Ζωή* 1 (Feb. 1927) 1.

47 S. Iasemidis, 'Η ελληνική γεωργία και η σημασία της', *Οικονομικός Ταχυδρόμος* 76 (27 Sept. 1927) 6.

48 Anotaton Oikonomikon Symvoulion (AOS), *Τα μέτρα προς επαύξησιν της εγχωρίου σιτοπαραγωγής*, I (Athens 1934) 46.

49 A. K. Mylonas, 'Ας εμπνευσθώμεν από την πνοήν των αγρών', *Αγροτική Ζωή* 1 (Feb. 1927) 2; *Αγροτική Ζωή* 8 (Sept. 1927) 1, 4.

50 *Γεωργικόν Δελτίον* (of the Greek Agrarian Society) 204 (Nov. 1928) 1904.

51 N. H. Anagnostopoulos, *Σιτοκαλλιέργεια και σιτάρκεια εν Ελλάδι* (Athens 1930) 6.

52 Petridis (ed.), *Το έργο της κυβερνήσεως Βενιζέλου*, 190.

53 Mazower, *Greece*, 88–91, 276.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

population.[54] The Greek effort towards nutritional independence, the so-called 'wheat battle' (*μάχη του σίτου*), admittedly (clearly and openly acknowledged by most commentators who recognize the intervention of the state in agriculture) drew on Mussolini's *Battaglia del Grano*, which had been inaugurated in Italy in 1925.[55] However, before 1936, Greek self-sufficiency policies in agriculture had followed the Italian example along technical rather than ideological lines. Mussolini's Italy was certainly a powerful symbol in the minds of several interventionist-minded Greek civil servants, as a largely successful way of winning the battle for agricultural self-sufficiency.[56]

This innovative policy of rigorous state intervention in the rural economy naturally enhanced the role and raised the profile of the agronomists. From the late 1920s onwards, agronomists publicized the issue of urbanism (*αστυφιλία*) and deplored the economic adversity of the peasants. In 1927, the agronomist Nikolaos Anagnostopoulos identified urbanism, i.e. 'the noticeable concentration of people in the towns and the reduction of the population of the countryside', as one of the country's major problems.[57] In 1929, the League of Athens Scientific Agronomists, personified by Stavros Papandreou, Chrysos Evelpidis, Nikolaos Anagnostopoulos and Panagiotis Dekazos, submitted a public memorandum to the Venizelos government, in which they stressed that 'the strengthening of agriculture is essential from a social point of view, since only in this way can we combat urbanism, which has increased dangerously in our country'.[58] On 10 December 1930, Senator Panagiotis Dekazos, an agronomist by profession and chairman of the Greek Agrarian Society (*Ελληνική Γεωργική Εταιρεία*), warned that the low revenue from agriculture inflated urbanism at a time when Greece, because of the insufficient development of its commerce and industry, could not sustain a plethora of urban dwellers. For that matter, he stressed that it was in the best interests of the national economy, as well as of society, that farmers remained in the countryside 'by all possible means'.[59] In 1931, the general secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ioannis Karamanos, opined that the migration of rural dwellers to the cities would most likely bring them in touch with 'extremist elements' and would possibly endanger the social equilibrium of the country.[60] That same year, Chrysos Evelpidis, another illustrious agronomist, warned of the imminent peril of an 'untreatable social crisis which would be the natural

54 Evelpidis, *Θεωρία και πράξις*, I, 299.

55 K. D. Karavidas, *Αγροτικά. Έρευνα επί της οικονομικής και κοινωνικής μορφολογίας εν Ελλάδι και εν ταις γειτονικαίς σλαυϊκαίς χώραις. Μελέτη συγκριτική* (Athens 1931) 138, n. 1; G. Ch. Modis, 'Η σιτάρκεια', *Εργασία* 200 (29 Oct. 1933) 1542. See also Kostis, *Αγροτική οικονομία* (Athens 1987) 42; Mazower, *Greece*, 241.

56 Cf. Mazower, *Greece*, 241.

57 N. H. Anagnostopoulos, 'Ουρμπανισμός και η ερήμωσις της υπαίθρου', in P. Dekazos (ed.), *Η πύκνωσις των αγροτικών μας πληθυσμών και τα μέσα της επιτυχίας αυτής* (Athens 1927) 44.

58 Syndesmos ton en Athinais Epistimonon Geoponon, *Πώς θα επιτύχη η γεωργική πρόοδος του τόπου: Υπόμνημα προς την κυβέρνησιν* (Athens 1929) 1.

59 P. A. Dekazos, *Αγορεύσεις εν τη Γερουσία των Ελλήνων (1929–1931)* (Athens 1932) 152, 155, 158.

60 Mazower, *Greece*, 133–4.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

outcome of the abandonment of the fields by superfluous farmers'.[61] The main concern of the agronomists, in parallel with the country's political elite, was not only the danger of political radicalization of the 'superfluous' or 'unemployed' peasants per se, but also the prevention of an uncontrollable rural exodus that would most certainly 'asphyxiate' the labour market and exacerbate social and political disaffection in the major towns.[62]

After the introduction of state intervention in agriculture, the main printed vehicles for the propagation of the agronomists' concerns were the illustrated magazines *Agrotiki Zoi* and *Nea Agrotiki Zoi* (February 1927–March 1935),[63] *Agrotikos Tachydromos* (1912–61),[64] *Agrotiki Engyklopaideia* (1934–35),[65] and the *Deltion* (Bulletin), as well as the 'popular pamphlets' of the Greek Agrarian Society (established in 1901). These journals, which were the most eloquent and expressive of a peasantist nationalist discourse, were written in the vernacular (demotic) and aimed to address a peasant audience. The influence of these propagandist works on the rural population cannot be definitively assessed. However, the Greek Agrarian Society claimed that between 1926 and 1936 it published 147 pamphlets and sold, or distributed without payment, 420,000 copies of them.[66] The editor of *Agrotiki Zoi* maintained in mid-1927 that her journal was selling 10,000 copies monthly, 9,000 of which to farmers.[67]

The common agenda of these journals was 'agricultural enlightenment; the popularization of knowledge from all the branches of agriculture; and the elevation of the cultural level of the agrarian folk'.[68] The agrarianist discourse of these publications, which were edited in their entirety by professional agronomists, was, from the very beginning, over-politicized and assumed overt nationalist connotations. The ideological backdrop of their over-political rhetoric may be defined as radical agrarianism. The narrative of this radical agrarianist propaganda quickly developed into a novel type of nationalist ideology, which may be identified as peasantist nationalism. This radical agrarianist and nationalist preaching, which (naively) aimed at persuading the peasants to remain in their profession, was in accord with the 'stable and well-thought-out agrarian programme'

61 Evelpidis, *Η γεωργική κρίσις*, 54.

62 Dritsa, *Βιομηχανία και τράπεζες*, 54.

63 *Agrotiki Zoi* was a private venture published by a woman scholar, Eleni Politaki. It was edited by Nikolaos H. Anagnostopoulos, an agronomist and founder of the Advanced School of Agriculture in Thessaloniki (est. 1927). In April 1930, the journal was renamed *Nea Agrotiki Zoi*.

64 *Agrotikos Tachydromos* was issued by Greek Chemical Products and Fertilizers (A.E.), which belonged to the industrialist Nikolaos Kanellopoulos. It was edited by the agronomist Aristeidis Th. Mouratoglous.

65 *Agrotiki Engyklopaideia* was a publication of the Agrarian Democratic Party led by Alexandros Mylonas, a lawyer by profession. Its editorial board comprised the following distinguished agronomists: Spyros Chasiotis, Chrysos Evelpidis, Panagiotis Anagnostopoulos, Vasileios Ganosis, Emmanouil Anasis and P. Koutsomitsopoulos.

66 P. A. Dekazos, *Η υπό την προεδρίαν της Α.Μ. του Βασιλέως Ελληνική Γεωργική Εταιρεία 1901–1937: Η ιστορία της, η δράσις της* (Athens 1937) 56, 58.

67 H. Politaki, 'Αγροτισμός', *Αγροτική Ζωή* 6 (July 1927) 3.

68 *Αγροτική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* 10 (May 1935) 243.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the 'radical measures' (as the League of the Athens agronomists themselves depicted them) taken in the late 1920s by the Venizelos government for the sake of agriculture.[69]

In addition to calling for a 'return to the land', these agrarianist intellectuals idealized the peasants as 'the most vital agents of the State's economic prosperity' and 'the liveliest contributors to the continuation and the preservation of the population of the nation'.[70] The director of *Agrotiki Zoi* in particular argued that 'the basis of the Nation's very existence is a prosperous agrarian class, which is the inexhaustible reservoir of the wealth-producing, the moral and the military resources of the nation'; for this reason she contended that agrarianism should become 'the agenda and the direction of those who nourish and are interested in national ideals'.[71] Actually, in inter-war Europe conservative agrarianists, along with reactionary and fascist movements, wooed the peasants and set the trend for an almost mystical glorification of the agricultural labourer.[72] Agrarianism, in its conservative form, harked back to a more stable social order of reciprocal bonds that existed before the rise of cities and machines, and called for a return to a traditional economic and moral order.[73] Unsurprisingly, as the historian of ideas Roger Griffin correctly notes, Nazism welded radical agrarianism's anti-urbanism and reagrarianization policies into its discourse, exalting the peasantry as the nucleus of a new aristocracy of 'blood and earth'.[74]

Nevertheless, similarities with the radical narrative of fascism and the Nazi ruralist extreme of *völkisch* thinking should not obscure or negate the individuality of agrarianism as a distinct stream of thought. Therefore, I am convinced that the novel peasantist nationalist narrative, originally moulded by agronomists, was an offshoot of right-wing agrarianist discourse and was definitely different in kind from fascist and Nazi discourse. Agronomists took an active part in the founding of the Agrarian Party of Greece, which included in its ranks both conservative and more leftist agrarianist politicians and intellectuals. For instance, the journalist Dimitris Pournaras and the teacher Kostas Gavrielidis leaned toward a 'socialist' and 'communist' version of agrarianism respectively. Whereas the agronomists argued for close cooperation with the bourgeois national state in the modernization of agriculture, the leftist agrarians opted for the regeneration of the countryside 'on the basis of popular solutions'. After the break-up of the party in the summer of 1924, the agronomists, as a state-employed professional group, collectively followed the right-wing National Agrarian Party of Spyros Chasiotis and, from 1932 onwards, the Agrarian Democratic Party, led by Alexandros Mylonas.[75]

69 Syndesmos ton en Athinais Epistimonon Geoponon, *Πώς θα επιτύχη η γεωργική πρόοδος του τόπου*, 1–3.

70 H. Politaki, 'Το χωρικό σπίτι', *Αγροτική Ζωή* 17 (June 1928) 26.

71 H. Politaki, 'Αγροτισμός', *Αγροτική Ζωή* 6 (July 1927) 1–3.

72 Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant*, 157–61.

73 McNaylor, 'Agrarianism', 504–6.

74 R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York 1996 [1991]) 98–100.

75 D. Pournaras, *Σοσιαλισμός, κομμουνισμός και αγροτισμός: Το κοινωνικόν ζήτημα εις την Ελλάδα* (Athens 1933) 22–7, 35; Panagiotopoulos, *Αγροτικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος*, 50–3, 58–9, 71–3; S. G. Ploumidis, *Έδαφος και*

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Within this manifest narrative, agricultural land was identified with the national territory and the class of smallholders with the nation. In this context, the tilling of the land was imaginatively seen as the exercise of national sovereignty vis-à-vis the nation's external enemies. For instance, *Agrotiki Zoi*, *Agrotikos Tachydromos* and the Bulletin of the Ministry of Agriculture asserted that

> Today we think that our national duties are limited to the safeguarding of the frontiers, the purchase of guns, etc., and yet we have not realized that the foundation of our frontiers lies somewhere else, deep down, deeper down [i.e. in the ground]. Our neighbours have realized this, and so, by means of their internal agro-farming organization [i.e. the Slavic *zadruga*] and their contact with the fields, they build their most unassailable national frontier. [...] Our neighbours, and especially Bulgaria, have paid a great deal of attention to this matter. [...] Our northern frontiers will be secured only by means of a fertile and productive organization. [...] By digging our land as much and as best we can, by enriching it with various and [genetically] improved animals, we build the best and most impregnable foundations of our National frontiers.[76]

> Love the Greek Land [...] Love it not just as a piece of earth that covers the relics of your ancestors, but like the Greek Flag that inspires us and raises our morale and under whose folds we are all accustomed to sacrifice ourselves.[77]

> The Greeks' craze for 'becoming humans' in the towns is a severe and chronic illness that afflicts our country. It is an illness that might threaten even the very existence of our Nation. A Nation without agricultural life, without deeply-rooted agricultural foundations, without big, densely-populated and happy villages, is unthinkable. Not just because, in order to feel your Homeland as something palpable and vivid, you have to be able to see it [...] its nature, its scenery, namely the countryside of the Homeland. But also because the material existence of the Nation cannot even be imagined without agriculture.[78]

For this reason, peasantist nationalism should not be confused with economic nationalism, which made its first appearance in Greece at around the same time (in 1923 during the agrarian crisis), and was instituted immediately after the country's bankruptcy in 1932.[79] Peasantist nationalism was not focused on the economy per se but, more particularly, was primarily aimed at: a) attracting and persuading (rather

Continued

μνήμη στα Βαλκάνια: Ο «γεωργικός εθνικισμός» στην Ελλάδα και στη Βουλγαρία (1927–46) (Athens 2011) 55, 150–2.

76 G. Papavasilis, 'Τα μεταπολεμικά εθνικά μας σύνορα', *Νέα Αγροτική Ζωή* 70 (12 July 1931) 7–9.

77 D. L. Zographos, 'Γεωργικά κηρύγματα: Ε'. Οι εκπαιδευτικοί παράγοντες και η γεωργία', *Γεωργικόν Δελτίον* (of the Ministry of Agriculture) 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1930) 42.

78 S. K., 'Το χωριό και η εθνική ανόρθωσις', *Αγροτικός Ταχυδρόμος* 262 (15 March 1934) 41.

79 Cf. E. D. Prontzas, *Οικονομικός εθνικισμός: Δοκίμιο στη νεοελληνική ιστορία* (Thessaloniki 1999) 121, 188, 192.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

naively) the farmers to remain on the land; b) enhancing their endeavours towards achieving the country's nutritional self-sufficiency; and c) strengthening their loyalty towards the bourgeois state and the socio-political establishment (a nexus first established in the far-reaching 1917 land reform).

Radical agrarianism, transformed into peasantist nationalism, also influenced the way historians, sociologists, agronomists and other scholars structured the past: the political and military setbacks of the Greek nation were deterministically attributed to its alienation from its (imagined) agricultural tradition. Most decisive for the construction of this historiographical perception were the explanations proposed by Charles Diehl (1859–1944) for the decline of Byzantium. In a work first published in 1919, the renowned French historian regarded the decay of agriculture, the destitution of the countryside and the abandonment of the fields by the peasants, together with the commercial expansion of the Italian cities and the financial distress of the imperial government, as being among the main causes of the economic decline of the Eastern Roman Empire.[80] Diehl's historical comments on the role of agriculture were selectively used and expanded by Greek agrarianist intellectuals into a peasantist nationalist doctrine in order to substantiate their arguments against urbanism. In 1926, Konstantinos Karavidas, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for rural settlement in northern Greece, framed the contemporary Greco-Bulgarian nationalist rivalry within the context of an 'agro-economic culture' and construed it in the light of the medieval (Byzantine) past. He considered the bourgeois culture of the Greeks as inferior to the agrarian culture of the Slavs, arguing that agriculture was a mightier weapon for national predominance than commerce or industry. In particular, he asserted that

> during the time when the Empire of Byzantium was conquering the Slavic conscience and was gradually integrating the latter into its civilization – the greatest in medieval times – at that time the Slavic element was seizing material supremacy with the plough in the lands where it had spread and was absorbing linguistically the native populations that were living there.

Karavidas concluded that the northern provinces of Byzantium were lost to the Slavs because the Greek nation turned to commercial and mercantile professions that were practised on 'narrow strips of land' (i.e. in towns on the coastline), and thus the nation lost its 'roots' in the vast countryside. He offered the same explanation for the recent disastrous defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor (1922): the 'over-urbanization' of the Greek nation and its 'fatal decision' to 'trade only' and to 'amass riches' and not 'to work, to plant roots in the earth and to acquire new plots from it' brought about its further 'coagulation' and its 'uprooting' from the Near East.[81] In 1931, Karavidas

80 C. Diehl, *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline* (New Brunswick 1957) 90–3, 188–99.

81 K. D. Karavidas, 'Η μακεδονοσλαβική αγροτική κοινότης και η πατριαρχική γεωργική οικογένεια εις την περιφέρειαν Μοναστηρίου: Γενικόν μέρος', *Αρχείον Οικονομικών και Κοινωνικών Ερευνών* 6/4 (Oct.–Dec. 1926) 227, 232, 241, 245–6, 256, 295, 303.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

repeated that 'the stubborn attachment of the Slavs to their land was their best weapon, because in this way they spread and demographically prevailed in the countryside'. This agrarianist intellectual followed up his argument by exhorting his fellow-Greeks to 'strengthen the continental sources of Greece and its agricultural and land hearths' so that 'great masses of Greece's excess population remain on them'.[82]

The social anxiety resulting from urbanism was obviously intensified by the quest for ethnic homogenization in Greece's ethnically diverse northern provinces. First in 1923 and most thoroughly in 1927, the historian Konstantinos Amantos (1870–1960) had argued that the 'issue of the development of agriculture' was of 'great importance for the mere existence and the future of Hellenism'; and he had warned that 'unless the agrarian population was reinforced, the constantly expanding Slavism would blow Hellenism into the sea'.[83] The eminent historian asserted that 'throughout the centuries of Greek history, the Greek loved to have recourse to the towns'. He noted that this 'age-old hereditary tendency', i.e. 'the abandonment of the countryside and the concentration of the Greeks in Athens and Piraeus', was continuing at that time to an alarmingly greater extent, especially after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. In 1927, Amantos explicitly drew the attention of the state authorities to 'the most crucial point of the Pindus range, its northern edge, where foreign-speaking, especially Slavic-speaking, populations are also residing; to populations that are targeted by alien propaganda'.[84] The state-run project of ethnic homogenization of these provinces was clearly linked (in Karavidas' and Amantos' discourse) to the preservation of the ethnically Greek rural population. This project and subsequently Greece's national security were undermined by the tendency of the Greeks to flee the countryside and the intransigent propensity of the members of Slavic ethnic minorities to remain on the land.

The ideological mutation of Diehl's historical interpretation into a peasantist nationalist dogma was by no means limited to Karavidas and Amantos. In 1931, the press baron Antonios Chamoudopoulos and the Senator for Thessaloniki Michael Mavrogordatos deplored the urbanist tendency of the farmers of modern Greece in similar terms: 'It is widely known that our Nation has not been a peasant nation [*γεωργικόν έθνος*] in the last few centuries of its life. Since Byzantine times it had started to abandon the fields. This was the main reason behind the decadence of our Medieval Empire'.[85] In 1934,

82 Karavidas, *Αγροτικά*, 17, 125, 140. For Karavidas' peasantist analytical framework for the Greco-Slavic nationalist rivalry, see also K. P. Kostis, 'Ο Καραβίδας και η "ανακάλυψη" των χωρικών στη μεσοπολεμική Ελλάδα', in M. Komninou and E. Papataxiarchis (eds), *Κοινότητα, κοινωνία και ιδεολογία: Ο Κωνσταντίνος Καραβίδας και η προβληματική των κοινωνικών επιστημών* (Athens 1990) 75.

83 K. I. Amantos, *Οι βόρειοι γείτονες της Ελλάδος* (Athens 1923) 328; E. Kontogiorgi, 'Ο Κωνσταντίνος Άμαντος και οι απόψεις του για τη σημασία και τον εκσυγχρονισμό της υπαίθρου', *Δελτίο του Κέντρου Ερεύνης της Ιστορίας του Νεωτέρου Ελληνισμού* 1 (1998) 155, 162–9.

84 K. Amantos, 'Οι γεωργικοί πληθυσμοί και το μέλλον του ελληνισμού', in P. Dekazos (ed.), *Η πύκνωσις των αγροτικών μας πληθυσμών και τα μέσα της επιτυχίας αυτής* (Athens 1927) 8–9.

85 M. I. Mavrogordatos and A. Ch. Chamoudopoulos, *Η Μακεδονία: Μελέτη δημογραφική και οικονομική* (Thessaloniki 1931) 45.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the sociologist Demosthenes Danielidis regretted the loss of the 'traditional agrarian craft' of the Greeks and their 'tendency to desert the land', and condemned the 'anti-agrarian mentality, a preponderant Byzantine legacy which passed into modern Greek ideals; found favourable ground in the spirituality of the modern Greek national character; blended in with the spirit of urbanism of modern times; and created a negative situation, generating many deplorable phenomena and fatal complications in our economic and social life'.[86] In 1935, the agronomist Vasileios Ganosis argued that Slavs and Turks, 'young peoples with greater vitality and more of an agrarian character than the Greeks, flooded the countryside of Byzantium, and repulsed the sparse Greek population to the towns'. This agronomist/publicist concluded that 'the existence of a solid and economically prosperous agrarian population was and always is a necessity of prime importance for our country and an uppermost duty of our governments'.[87]

Peasantist nationalism as a hegemonic ideology

These peasantist nationalist perceptions were fully adopted by the Metaxas regime (1936–41), which – like any other related fascist or quasi-fascist regime – elevated 'mythical thought to power' (as the historian Emilio Gentile expressed it), i.e. raised neo-romanticism to the status of a dominant ideology, rendering it the highest form of political expression of the masses and the ethical basis for their mobilization.[88] In this case, urbanism was negatively tainted and (semi-officially) considered equivalent to high treason. In 1937, Babis Alivizatos, the secretary-general of the Ministry of Agriculture and vice-director of the Agricultural Bank of Greece, declared that 'the tilling of the land is a high social function, which is entrusted to the hands of the farmer, yet it does not concern him alone, but the entirety of Society'.[89] This neo-romantic view was actually in line with official policies. A stated position of the dictatorial regime (established on 4 August 1936) was that 'the attachment of the tiller to the native and nurturing motherland is the basis of patriotism, the foundation of the citizen's loyalty to the Homeland'.[90] The reversal of urbanization was clearly on the long-term agenda of the regime (although it never materialized), and the regime's propagandists called upon the migrant farmer to 'make his way back to his home village, like the prodigal son of the Scriptures'. To this end, the arable land and the farmer's trade were idealized by the regime's organic intellectuals into moral values interconnected to the nation and indispensable for 'the preservation of the national traditions', as well as for 'the maintenance and the augmentation of

86 D. Danielidis, *Η Νεολληνική κοινωνία και οικονομία*, I (*Προϋποθέσεις*) (Athens 1934) 64–6, 254–5.

87 V. Ganossis, *Δοκίμια και μελέται* (Athens 1936) 45–7.

88 Cf. E. Gentile, *Fascismo: Storia e interpretazione* (Rome 2002) 147–9.

89 B. Alivizatos, *Η Νέα Γεωργική Πολιτική* (Athens 1937) 19.

90 Editorial, 'The country's new agrarian law, foundation of our future agricultural progress', *Εργασία* 489 (14 May 1939) 464.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the nation's dynamism'.[91] In June 1939, the official organ of the regime's youth organization proclaimed that in order to survive 'a people must be tightly knit with its primordial civilization, that is the farming of the ancestral soil'.[92]

More importantly, the agenda of the peasantist nationalist discourse of Greece's quasi-fascist dictatorship exceeded mere flattery of the peasants and the intensification of farming. A persistent government policy of Metaxas' New State was the consolidation of the conservative stratum of smallholders, which had been created earlier by the Venizelist land reform of 1917,[93] and its metamorphosis into a 'sincere supporter and watchful guard of the national State',[94] meaning the semi-fascist regime and the monarchy. In the regime's dominant narrative, the class of farmers was manifestly identified with the nation. Therefore, the envisaged gradual disintegration of this class was perceived as a 'terrible attrition of the National forces',[95] because the peasants ('the workers of the Greek land') were publicly extolled as 'a pillar of Greece's bourgeois edifice'.[96] Metaxas' government willingly embraced the pre-existing agrarianist doctrine that 'the farmers are the soul of the nation'[97] and placed it on a pedestal. The Fourth of August regime idealized agriculture as a 'national ideal' and professed the 'economic and social restructuring of Greece on the basis of a broader agrarianization'.[98] The 'creation of an overwhelmingly agrarian Greece' was solemnly sanctified as 'the greatest contemporary political ideal'.[99]

In January 1937, peasantist nationalism eventually assumed institutional dimensions and literally became the hegemonic ideology of the Greek state. The new state ideology was formalized by the Minister of Agriculture and academician Georgios Kyriakos, who was an agronomist by profession. In his address to the annual plenary meeting of the Academy of Athens, Kyriakos read a paper prepared by a fellow agronomist, Konstantinos Nevros (a regular columnist of *Agrotikos Tachydromos*). In it, Kyriakos stated that 'the nation has its roots in the fields' and advised that

91 G. Chr. Lilis, 'Ιστορίες του χωριού. Ο ξενητεμένος', *Αγροτικός Ταχυδρόμος* 318 (15 Dec. 1938) 232–4; cf. *Εστία* 17,111 (27 May 1938) 1; D. Vernardakis, 'Η ηθική αξία του γεωργικού βίου', *Η Νεολαία* (published by the Εθνική Οργάνωση Νεολαίας) 14 (6 Jan. 1940) 420.

92 *Η Νεολαία* 37 (24 June 1939) 1204.

93 S. G. Ploumidis, 'Το καθεστώς Μεταξά, 1936–1940', in E. Hatzivassiliou (ed.), *Η δικτατορία του Ιωάννη Μεταξά 1936–1941* (Athens 2010) 80–1. Cf. G. Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1983) 161.

94 A. Theodosopoulos, 'Ποία η θέσις του αγρότου εις το Νέον Κράτος', *Το Νέον Κράτος* 1 (September 1937) 55; Z. I. Kagalidou, *Εκπαίδευση και πολιτική: Η περίπτωση του καθεστώτος της 4ης Αυγούστου* (Thessaloniki 1999) 37.

95 [A. Th. Mouratoglous], 'Γύρω από μίαν συζήτησιν', *Αγροτικός Ταχυδρόμος* 312 (15 June 1938) 102.

96 *Η Νεολαία* 41 (92) (13 July 1940) 1300.

97 Cf. K. N. Philippidis, *Ο Αγροτισμός ως λύσις του οικονομικού προβλήματος* (Athens 1932) 78.

98 Yphypourgeion Typou kai Tourismou, *Τέσσερα χρόνια διακυβερνήσεως Ι. Μεταξά 4 Αυγούστου 1936–4 Αυγούστου 1940*, I (*Γεωργική και κοινωνική μεταρρύθμισις*) (Athens 1940) 70, 112.

99 Ibid., 70.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Especially for the sake of the new generation of Greeks, which has been deprived of its widespread agricultural bases in the East because of the historical developments of the past decade, it is most imperative now, more than ever before in the past, to root our nation in the remaining national territories and to intensify, to the greatest possible extent, the use of our agricultural resources, with the aim not only of enhancing the livelihood of the people and to achieve economic autarky, but also, and more importantly, since we are surrounded by peoples who have a long agricultural tradition and a developed agrarian conscience, and who are closely attached to their land, we should not consider our sovereignty over our national territories to be secure unless we reinforce our agricultural bases.[100]

Within this peasantist nationalist narrative, the nation was formally identified with the farmers; the national territory was considered identical to the agricultural land; and the cultivation of the land was clearly equated with the exercise of national sovereignty.

To this end, the so-called 'Third Greek Civilization' (the regime's main ideological tenet) was meant to have an agrarian basis and be inspired by rustic life; therefore, the regime officially aimed at the creation of a newfangled 'Agrarian Civilization'.[101] After World War II, Theologos Nikoloudis, the Deputy Minister of Press and Tourism (the official in charge of the propaganda machine), clarified that the 'national and social idealism' of the Third Greek Civilization was centred on 'the cultivation of the land'.[102] In his speeches, Metaxas presented himself as 'a man of the land' who had the 'soul of a farmer'.[103] Addressing rallies of agrarian organizations in 1937–38, he imagined the Greek peasantist nation as follows:

> Moral civilization in our country is based on the farmers [...] If you [i.e. the farmers] have, as you do actually have, the real merits of the Greek, then the Nation is civilized. [...] I imagine Greek society or rather the Greek Nation, because for us society and Nation are identical, as a pyramid [...] The agrarian class, namely the peasant people, is the lower stratum of the pyramid, from which the rest of the pyramid derives. [...] The route of Greek society starts from the lower strata and climbs up

100 K. I. Nevros, 'Η σκαλιστική σιτοκαλλιέργεια εν Ελλάδι κατά το έτος 1935–1936', *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 12 (1937) 12; E. Karouzou, 'Ο εθνικισμός των αγρών: Αγρότες, αγροτικά προϊόντα και εθνικισμός στο Μεσοπόλεμο', in D. Panagiotopoulos and D. P. Sotiropoulos (eds), *Η ελληνική αγροτική κοινωνία και οικονομία κατά τη βενιζελική περίοδο* (Athens 2007) 211–14, 220–1. For Kyriakos' suggestions on wheat self-sufficiency, see K. V. Krimbas, 'Η συζήτηση για τη γεωργική πολιτική στην Ακαδημία Αθηνών το 1933 και το πρόβλημα της σιτάρκειας', in Panagiotopoulos and Sotiropoulos (eds), *op. cit.*, 232–6. For a further discussion on the peasantist nationalist discourse in Metaxas' Greece, see Ploumidis, *Έδαφος και μνήμη*, 99–112.

101 *Η Νεολαία* 18 (11 February 1939) 589; 52 (7 October 1939) 6; *Αγροτικό Μέλλον* 36 (29 July 1939) 1; 69 (16 March 1940) 1; 77 (11 May 1940) 2; I. Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις 1936–1941*, I (Athens 1969) 305.

102 T. Nikoloudis, *Η ελληνική κρίσις* 2nd edn (Cairo 1945) 140.

103 M. Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (London and New York 2006) 54.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the uppermost level. It is like a brook that springs from a source, from inside the earth, and flows and irrigates.[104]

Metaxas placed himself at the top of the peasantist national pyramid on 1 July 1937, the day he was solemnly proclaimed the 'First Farmer' (*Πρώτος Αγρότης*) by the representatives of the country's Chambers of Agriculture.[105] This populist position was repeatedly echoed in the regime's propaganda in which the farmers were similarly characterized as 'the healthiest mass of the Nation', 'the foundation of National life', 'the foundation of the National Body Politic', 'the source of every action of the Nation', etc.[106]

The Greek case can certainly be placed within a broader ideological picture. Metaxas was evidently inspired by Hitler's *Reichsbauernführer*, i.e. 'National Peasant Leader', and a radical agrarianist ideologue Walther Darré, whose theories about farmers being the 'source of life' (*Lebensquellen*) for the German nation, became the cornerstone of the Nazi *Blut und Boden* precept.[107] Last but not least, radical agrarianist ideas loaded with nationalist overtones, either standing independently or, more frequently, fused into a fascist ideological context, were a common frame of reference in the Balkans. In Romania in particular, the peasantist nation had overt racist and anti-Semitic overtones. Irina Livezeanu has described how the definition of the Romanian nation as fundamentally rural was translated practically into the mobilization of the peasant strata in an endeavour to reduce the political and cultural influence of an 'alien' urban society and culture. The mass entry of the Romanian peasants into political life – mainly through the expansion of education – and their concentration in the towns facilitated the emergence of a new generation of Romanian nationalists, who generally deplored the 'disparate' presence of non-Romanians (ethnic Magyars, Saxons, and especially Jews) in the bourgeois elites of the new lands of Transylvania and Bukovina.[108] In a pertinent symbolic manner, the Leader (*Căpitanul*) of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, appeared in the legionary rallies wearing peasant attire.[109]

Conclusion

In the case of Greece, the gradual construction of the peasantist nationalist discourse began in 1927, the year in which state intervention in the rural economy began, and in

104 Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις*, I, 427–8.

105 Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth*, 55.

106 Alivizatos, *Κράτος και γεωργική πολιτική*, 528; *Αγροτικό Μέλλον* 1 (26 Nov. 1938) 3; 8 (14 Jan. 1939) 6; 65 (17 Feb. 1940) 1; 66 (24 Feb. 1940) 7.

107 Cf. D. Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London and New York 1995) 66–7; M. Neocleous, *Fascism* (Buckingham 1997) 76–7.

108 I. Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca, NY 1995) 299, 302–3, 311.

109 S. G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, WI 1995) 277, 285.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which *Agrotiki Zoi*, the first and foremost radical agrarianist periodical, was first published, and was firmly completed a decade later, during the Metaxas period. Peasantist nationalism can be interpreted as a radical form of what Anthony Smith calls 'ethnic nationalism', i.e. a populist and folkish conception of the nation, in which the route to nationhood proceeded through popular mobilization.[110] It drew mainly on radical agrarianism, which came about as a response to acute social problems, namely the depression in agriculture during the 1920s and the migratory drift from the countryside (the so-called *Landflucht*), as well as on neo-romanticism. This discourse developed because of the constant fear that this migratory drift would possibly assume the dimensions of a rural exodus, and that the overcrowded poor urban areas would become a hotbed of social revolution. The peasantist nationalist ideology was largely conceived of by an emerging social group of professional agronomists, who were called in by the state to solve the crisis in the rural economy and to achieve Greece's self-sufficiency in grain and other nutritional products. Radical agrarianism and peasantist nationalism were used by the agronomists as a lever for their own upward social mobility and their entry into the category of the organic intellectuals of bourgeois society. Analogous peasantist nationalist ideas also appeared in the neighbouring Balkan societies, particularly in Romania. In Greece, the downfall of the Metaxas regime in April 1941 brought with it the demise of this particular nationalist discourse.

110 A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and New York 1987 [1986]) 137–8.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013112Z.00000000022 Published online by Cambridge University Press