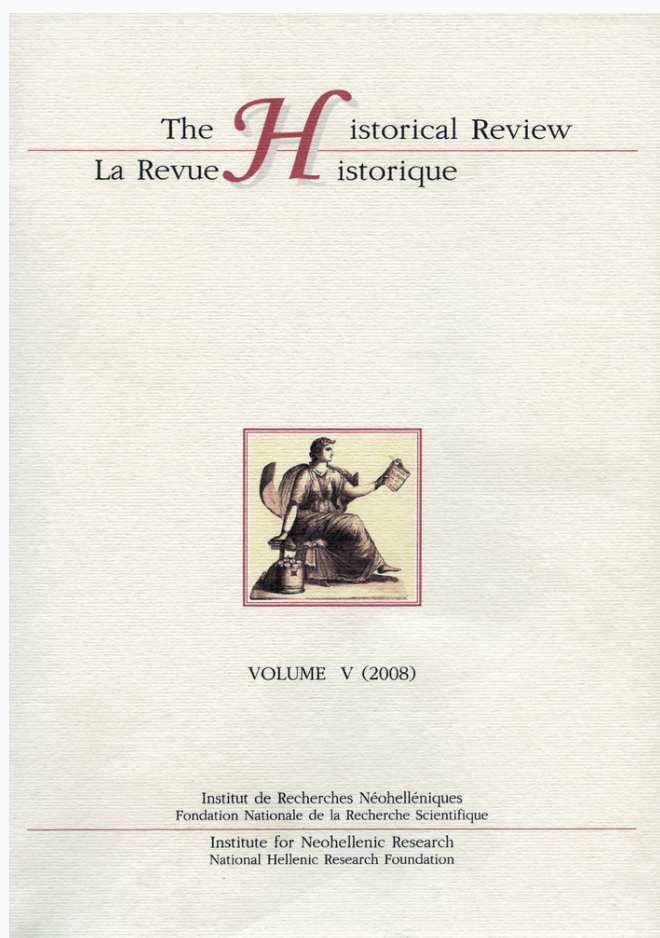


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THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM

Yannis Kakridis

ABSTRACT: This paper consists of two parts. In the first part, nationalism is analysed as a kind of gnostic religion (in the sense given to this term by E. Voegelin). In the mind of their adherents, nations are ultimate realities in which the objective (fatalistic) and the subjective (voluntaristic) side of the historical process coincide. In the second part, it is argued that language, by its dialectical character, appears as the very incarnation of the nationalist ideal. The ensuing paradoxes of nationalist language policy are listed and briefly analysed: the equation of the language of culture with the language of everyday life; the equation of norm with use; the equation of object language with metalanguage; the equation of modernity with authenticity; and the equation of the national with the universal.

In his book on *Language and Identity in the Balkans*, Robert D. Greenberg speaks of a “basic rule that seemed to pervade the psyche of Slavic peoples, whereby any group with national pretensions was somehow incomplete without its own language”.¹ The rule is indeed basic, but the psyche of Slavic peoples has nothing to do with it: after all, the belief that language and nation coincide was articulated by the German Romantics before it became the credo of philologists throughout the Slavic world. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the spread of linguistic nationalism solely to German influence. The ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Wilhelm von Humboldt – to mention but the most important names – would not have had such an impact on the peoples of Eastern and South-East Europe if they did not answer some fundamental demand of their burgeoning national movements. In this paper, I will attempt to show that the importance linguistic issues acquire in the context of nationalist discourse can best be explained by the religious nature of modern nationalism.

The religious core of the nationalist phenomenon has not gone unnoticed. As Émile Durkheim was asking already in 1912:

Quelle différence essentielle y a-t-il entre une assemblée de chrétiens célébrant les principales dates de la vie du Christ, ou de juifs fêtant soit la sortie d'Égypte soit la promulgation du décalogue, et une réunion de

¹ R. D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its disintegration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 10.

citoyens commémorant l'institution d'une nouvelle charte morale ou quelque grand événement de la vie nationale?²

Nationalist movements cannot live without symbols and rituals; they are propagated by apostles and defended by martyrs, whose relics sometimes evoke the same feelings of veneration as the relics of the saints of the church; the soul of the nation may be embodied in a corpus of sacred texts, its credo put down in form of a catechism, etc.³ The religious nature of nationalism is further confirmed by the fact that it can appear as a direct alternative to traditional religious belief. The spiritual biography of Petko R. Slavejkov, a Bulgarian writer of the 19th century, is a good example of this. The first book his father gave him to read was the *Vita of Alexius Homo Dei*. Under its influence, young Petko resolves to become a monk. He escapes from home and hides in a monastery, but his father finds him and brings him back. His next reading is the *Istoriija slavjanobolgarskaja* by Paisij Chilendarski – one of the key texts of the Bulgarian national revival. This book gives a completely new direction to the thoughts of Slavejkov: “Up to then, I was thinking solely about the salvation of my soul, but after reading this book, I started thinking about the salvation of my people, i.e. how to instil patriotic feelings into their minds.”⁴

The relationship between nationalism and traditional religion need not be one of open antagonism. More often, it is a search for some sort of compromise formula which creates the illusion that the values of the past are still valid. The amalgamation of Hellenism and Christianity into the “Helleno-Christian” (ελληνοχριστιανικός) synthesis is a characteristic attempt to reconcile elements that were earlier thought of as being diametrically opposite.⁵ One may also ask

² É. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*, 4th edition, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960, p. 610, first edition 1912.

³ The literature on this subject is vast and rapidly growing. Recent publications include the book of A. D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, and M. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Great War*, London: Harper Collins, 2005. A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, emphasises the role of the Bible in providing the Christian world with “the original model of the nation” (p. 4). For a depiction of nationalist religion that has lost nothing of its vividness up to this day, see Carlton Joseph Huntley Hayes, “Nationalism as Religion”, in C. J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1966, first edition 1926.

⁴ P. R. Slavejkov, *Săčinenija, Tom tretj: Avtobiografični tvorbi, biografii i istoričeski očierki*, Sofia: Izdatelstvona BAN, 1969, p. 113 [my translation].

⁵ For a brief but incisive analysis of the antinomy between Orthodoxy and nationalism, see P. M. Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question

which of the two – Christianity or Serbian nationalism – is stronger in the case of *Svetosavlje*.⁶ A full treatment of this problem would require discussing also the intricate connection between the proto-nationalism of early modern times and religious reform.⁷ Of course, this is not the place to engage in such a vast enterprise. We shall focus instead on the central pillar of the nationalist faith: its tendency to endow the object of its veneration, the ethnic group, with attributes of the Absolute in the sense that this term acquired in German idealistic philosophy. (It is by becoming objects of nationalist veneration that the – usually pre-existing – ethnic groups are being transformed into modern nations; if it is understood properly, the claim that it is nationalism that creates the nation and not the other way round does not entail the negation of the existence of ethnic groups prior to the nationalist era.)

A definition which is found in the early writings of G. W. F. Hegel can serve as a good starting point for our exposition of nationalist doctrine: “Wo Subjekt und Objekt oder Freiheit und Natur so vereinigt gedacht wird, dass Natur Freiheit ist, dass Subjekt und Objekt nicht zu trennen sind, da ist Göttliches – ein solches Ideal ist das Objekt jeder Religion.”⁸ If it is thought of as the subject

in the Balkans”, *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989), pp. 177 ff. Cf. also the recent article of Dimitris Livanios in this journal: “The Quest for Hellenism: Religion, Nationalism and Collective Identities in Greece (1453-1913)”, *The Historical Revue / La Revue Historique* 3 (2006), pp. 33-70.

⁶ See C. R. Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus und Europa bei Bischof Velimirović († 1956)*, St Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1998, pp. 58-62. The author’s conclusion: “durch die Zentrierung aller nationalen Ideen, durch die Weglassung aller negativen Phänomene im serbischen Volk, [wird] mit Svetosavlje ein Begriff entwickelt, der die christlichen Aussagen von Erlösung und Heil durch Jesus Christus in den Schatten stellt und damit abwertet” (p. 62). Christos Mylonas sees Orthodoxy as “the sacralisation of Serbian national identity” (p. xii), but makes no mention of *Svetosavlje* in the index of his monograph: Ch. Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals: The Quest for an Eternal Identity*, Budapest and New York: Central University Press, 2003.

⁷ In the Slavic world, the Hussite movement with its nationalist overtones is the best illustration of this connection; see the comprehensive treatments by Seibt and Šmahel. F. Seibt, *Hussitica. Zur Struktur einer Revolution*, Cologne and Graz: Böhlau, 1965; František Šmahel, “The Idea of the ‘Nation’ in Hussite Bohemia: An Analytical Study of the Ideological and Political Aspects of the National Question in Hussite Bohemia from the End of the 14th to the Eighties of the 15th Cent.”, *Historica* 16 (1969), pp. 143-247; 17 (1969), pp. 93-197. Cf. C. C. O’Brien, *God Land: Reflections on Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften* (Werke 1), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969, p. 242.

of the historical process, the nation takes the guise of a political project; if it is thought of as its object, it appears to be the heritage of the past. The first of these components corresponds to a constructivist (voluntaristic), the second to an essentialist (fatalistic) view of nationhood. There is an ongoing dispute between historians as to which of these two components is the stronger; but if the Nation is to occupy the place of the Divine, they must be fused into one. For the nationalist, nations are both real and constructed – but not just in the trivial sense in which every social phenomenon amalgamates inherited and invented elements.⁹ Nations – or, to be more precise, the nationalist's favourite nation – are both real and constructed, because they represent a historical force which is fated (and willed) to abolish the difference between reality and construction altogether. In a similar vein, the nationalist thinks of himself as a member of the nation *and* as a partisan of the national movement, while refusing to make a distinction between the two.¹⁰ When he joins forces with all those who work for the benefit of the people, he feels God-like: he enjoys freedom without arbitrariness and necessity without constraint.

In other words, the future for which the nationalist is ready to sacrifice himself is an answer to the questions of the past; but which questions the past has asked will appear clearly only in the light of the future that is being added to it. History is a book whose interpretation changes with every new chapter, and the nation is both its first and its last word. This position has serious consequences for historiography: the historian of the nation appears as “a prophet who is

⁹ This is the position of Hroch, see Miroslav Hroch, “Real and Constructed: The Nature of the Nation” in J. A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 91-106. Cf. the recent dispute between the “constructivist” and the “perennialist” view of the nation in Umut Özkırımlı and Steven Grosby, “Nationalism Theory Debate: The Antiquity of Nations?”, *Nations and Nationalism* 13 (2007), pp. 523-537. The constructivist position has been defended fervently by Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm: see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. For a more balanced view, see A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

¹⁰ When the gap between these two roles is too wide, the individual's project of forming a national identity fails. This was the tragedy of Grigor Pärličev (Γρηγόριος Σταυρίδης), a 19th-century intellectual from Ohrid who eventually switched his allegiance from the Greek to the Bulgarian cause; cf. his defence against the accusation of being Bulgarian quoted by Dorothea Kadach, “Die Polemik Orphanidis – Pärličev anlässlich des Athener Dichterwettbewerbs 1860”, *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 8 (1971-1972), p. 99.

looking backwards”,¹¹ his work is nothing less (and nothing more) than the “invention of tradition”.¹²

There is a linguistic formula that corresponds exactly to this kind of reasoning: the tautology. Tautologies of the type “war is war” surface frequently in everyday speech. In nationalist discourse, they are most frequently formed on the basis of ethnonyms and appear to be the only adequate way to define the essence of the nation. Psichari, an astute observer of Greek nationalism in spite of being an ardent nationalist himself, satirises the use of tautologies in nationalist discourse in his travelogue *Το ταξίδι μου*. These are his remarks on reading the Greek newspapers of Constantinople:

From time to time, they were writing about the Bulgarians who are children, about the Slavs who are a bunch of barbarians, about the Greeks who are Greeks [για τους Έλληνες που είναι Έλληνες], about our ancient language, that foreigners visit us [i.e. the Greeks] with the express purpose of studying it.¹³

This is a caricature, but one that captures the main trait of nationalism better than many a serious analysis. It is not accidental that to the negative characterisations of other people correspond not just a positive characterisation of one’s own, but a tautology. The ethnonym appears in it twice: once as subject and once as part of the predicate. The different syntactic positions correspond to a subtle, but significant change in meaning: in the predicate position, the ethnonym functions as an adjective. This corresponds to the “objective” (“essentialist”) side of nationalism: membership of the nation is defined by a certain quality that can be asserted (or denied) of an individual regardless of his

¹¹ According to the well-known formulation of Friedrich Schlegel: “Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet”, see Friedrich Schlegel, “Athenäums-Fragment Nr. 80”, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Vol. II: *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I*, ed., intr. by Hans Eichner, Munich, Paderborn and Vienna: Schöningh, Zurich: Thomas-Verlag, 1967, p. 176.

¹² E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; cf. the similar notion of “active atavism” coined by R. B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality*, Budapest, London and New York: Central European University Press, 1994, p. 59.

¹³ [Yannis] Psichari: *Το ταξίδι μου* [My journey], ed. A. Angelou, Athens: Ermis, 2000 (first edition 1888), p. 76 [my translation]. For some more examples, see Yannis Kakridis, “The Role of Tautologies in Nationalist Discourse (Preliminary Remarks)”, in *Nacionalni identitet i suverenitet u jugoistočnoj evropi. Međunarodni naučni skup 8.-10. decembar 1999*, Belgrade: Istorijski Institut SANU, 2002, pp. 313-322. The analysis presented there should be corrected in the light of the following observations.

will. In the subject position, the ethnonym functions as a proper name: the “Greeks” are here the people who “we” (i.e. the speaker and the hearer) call Greeks. This corresponds to the “subjective” (“constructivist”) side of nationalism: a proper name defies definition and refers only by virtue of its use in a certain community. (Strictly speaking, the source of subjectivity is the speaker of the tautological utterance and not the national community. But if, as in our case, the speaker is referring to his own nation, the two coincide.) The use of one and the same expression in the subject and in the predicate position masks this semantic difference and creates a semblance of logical necessity where there is none: it is as if in the case of the Greeks, (historical) essence and (political) existence could not fall apart.

Where should we put nationalism in the history of religions? The theological equivalent of national pluralism is polytheism. But modern nationalism is only superficially pluralistic: every single one of the greater European nations has seen itself, at least at some point of its development, as a solution to the problems of mankind as a whole. This universalist, messianic trait resembles Judaism. If we could take for granted that in the guise of Yahweh the Israelites were worshipping just their own ethnic (national) community, then there would indeed be no way denying that “[t]he Age of Nationalism [...] is about every nation becoming Jewish”.¹⁴ This, however, is itself a nationalistic and highly questionable interpretation of the religion of ancient Israel. The central tautology in the Jewish Bible is not “Israel is Israel”, but “I am who I am” (Exod. 3:14).¹⁵ Nationalism is neither a revival of paganism nor an imitation of Judaism (although it borrows elements from both), but comes closest to what Eric Voegelin labelled the “gnostic” temptation of modernity. A gnostic, according to Voegelin’s interpretation, is somebody who disregards the eschatological reservation formulated in the New Testament and seeks salvation not beyond human history, but within it.¹⁶ This “immanentisation of the

¹⁴ Y. Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Tillich, *Christentum und soziale Gestaltung. Frühe Schriften zum Religiösen Sozialismus* (Gesammelte Werke, 2), Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1962, p. 243: “Darum und nur darum ist das Alte Testament Menschheitsbuch, weil das Besondere, Raum- und Bluts-Gebundene, Nationale als Bekämpftes in ihm vorkommt.”

¹⁶ See E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987 (first edition 1952). Voegelin’s interpretation of Gnosis as the abandonment of the eschatological reservation is confirmed by Barbara Aland, “Was ist Gnosis? Wie wurde sie überwunden? Versuch einer Kurzdefinition”, in *Religionstheologie und Politische Theologie*, Vol. II: *Gnosis und Politik*, ed. J. Taubes, Munich, Paderborn,

Eschaton”, which is the essence of modern political religions, lies also at the heart of nationalism. The nationalist takes a particular ethnic group, which is, after all, nothing more than a finite historical entity, and projects onto it the attributes of the Absolute.

The gnostic core of the nationalist religion is the source of linguistic nationalism. Due to its dialectical character, language appears as the ideal embodiment of the nationalist’s aspiration to fuse the subjective (voluntaristic, constructivist) and the objective (fatalistic, essentialist) side of history into one. The gnostic aspiration is specifically modern. This is why, under the conditions of modernity, the process of language standardisation leads invariably to the creation of national languages; and this is why the ancient world knew language pride, but not linguistic nationalism in the proper sense of the word. As an embodiment of the gnostic dream, the national language is called upon to reconcile the tensions inherent in every linguistic system. It must be at the same time elastic and stable, spontaneous and well-formed, firmly rooted in the past and apt for the challenges of the future. From this result a whole series of paradoxical equations: 1. The equation of the language of culture with the language of everyday life; 2. The equation of norm with use; 3. The equation of object language with metalanguage; 4. The equation of modernity with authenticity; 5. The equation of the national with the universal. Let us examine each of these equations in more detail.

1. *The language of culture vs. the language of everyday life.* Pre-modern societies are characterised by an opposition between the spontaneous activity of everyday life and the ritualised forms of behaviour that are required at particular occasions. This opposition creates within the cultural whole (culture₁) a realm of culture proper (culture₂). (From the point of view of culture₂, the rest of culture₁ that makes up the everyday life of society belongs to nature – an illusion that is dispelled only from the position of an outside observer: for the tourist, even the working clothes of the local peasant merit attention.) In matters of language, this opposition corresponds to the distinction between the traditional languages of culture (in South-East Europe: Ecclesiastical Greek, Church Slavonic, Latin, Classical Arabic) and the various

Vienna and Zurich: Schöningh, 1984, pp. 54-65. See also Thomas Konrad Kuhn, “Das neuzeitliche Christentum und die Genese des Nationalismus als ‘politischer Religion’”, in *Politische Religion. Geschichte und Gegenwart eines Problemfeldes*, ed. G. Pfeleiderer and E. W. Stegemann, Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004, pp. 131-157.

local dialects. As the head of a Slavic *zadruga* from a village in the vicinity of Florina (Lerin) put it: Greek was for him the language of holiday, (Slavic) Macedonian the language of work.¹⁷

The language policy of the nationalist era aims not only at grammatical and lexical standardisation of a given language (be this the hitherto used language of culture₂ or some previously uncultivated idiom), but also at making this language the standard means of communication within society, to be used in all situations – from the mundane matters of family life to speeches in parliament and church offices. In other words, it aims at abolishing the opposition between the language of culture₂ and the language of everyday life altogether. The language policy of the French Revolution set here a model that was imitated by many governments throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Already in 1790, Abbé Henri Grégoire was leading an inquiry with the explicit aim to find “les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française”. The political dimension of this project was stated by him very clearly in a discourse held at the Convention Nationale in 1793:

Car, je ne puis trop le répéter, il est plus important qu’on ne pense en politique d’extirper cette diversité d’idiomes grossiers, qui prolongent l’enfance de la raison et la vieillesse des préjugés. Leur anéantissement sera plus prochain encore, si, comme je l’espère, vingt millions de catholiques se décident à ne plus parler à Dieu sans savoir ce qu’ils lui disent, mais à célébrer l’office divin en langue vulgaire.¹⁸

To return to our Macedonian peasant: the Greek state tried not only to teach the local population its official language, but also to make them renounce the use of the Slavic vernacular, i.e. to make the “language of holiday” and the “language of work” coincide. One gets almost the impression of a language policy that is moved not only by a real concern about the loyalty of the Slavic-speaking population but also by the utopian (“gnostic”) ideal of fusing work and holiday into one; or, to be more precise, linguistic diversity would not count as a symptom of political disloyalty without the nation-state claiming

¹⁷ K. Karavidas, *Αγροτικά. Έρευνα επί της οικονομικής και κοινωνικής μορφολογίας εν Ελλάδι και εν ταις γειτονικαίς σλαβικάς χώραις. Μελέτη συγκριτική* [The agrarian question: inquiries into the economic and social morphology of Greece and neighbouring Slavic countries: comparative study], Athens: National Printing Office, 1931 (reprinted in Athens: Papazisis, [1978]), p. 410.

¹⁸ J. Guillaume (ed.), *Procès-verbaux du Comité de l’instruction publique de la Convention Nationale*, Vol. II, Paris 1894, p. 177.

not only the body, but also the soul of its citizens. The best example, however, for a language that was used for centuries solely as a language of culture₂, to be subsequently revived by nationalism as a language of everyday life, is Hebrew. The founding father of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, rejected the use of Hebrew on the grounds that nobody could order a railway ticket in that language.¹⁹ Isn't the revival of Hebrew in our age the linguistic equivalent of the immanentisation of Jewish Messianism inherent in the project of a Jewish national state?

2. *Norm vs. use.* This point is intimately connected with the preceding one. The languages of culture₂ are acquired through conscious effort; they become from early on objects of grammatical normalisation and codification. The language of everyday life is the mother tongue, the language which we learn "without rule (i.e. rule-book), by imitating our nurse" – to quote the famous formulation of Dante.²⁰ The language policy of nationalism demands – paradoxically – that the mother tongue should become an object of formal teaching: "The mother tongue, especially ours, should be learnt from books", as Dimitrije Demeter, a member of the Illyrian movement that shaped the fates of the Croatian literary language in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, put it.²¹ Since then, millions of pupils have made their first encounter with grammar in books bearing the title "mother tongue", only to discover that the language codified in these books was a far cry from the language they had learnt from their nurse.

The unconscious and ultimately futile wish to fuse the descriptive and the normative side of linguistics into one only makes their conflict emerge more forcefully. An interesting and also highly amusing example of a conflict of this kind is the controversy that ensued from the publication of the *Srpski rječnik* by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in 1818. In accordance with the principle of strict descriptivism that he had learnt from his mentor, Jernej Kopitar,²² Karadžić

¹⁹ T. Herzl, *Der Judenstaat: Text und Materialien 1896 bis heute*, ed. Ernst Piper, Berlin and Vienna: Philo, 2004, p. 79.

²⁰ "Vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus." Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed., transl. by Steven Botterill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 2 (I, 1, 2). Botterill translates: "I declare that vernacular language is that which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses." (p. 3).

²¹ M. Šicel (ed.), *Programski spisi hrvatskog narodnog preporoda*, Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1997, p. 174.

²² Barth. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften sprachwissenschaftlichen, geschichtlichen, ethnographischen und rechtshistorischen Inhalts*, Vienna: Friedrich Beck's Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1857. The thesis that grammarians are only "statisticians" (*Statistiker*), not lawmakers (*Gesetzgeber*) of the language (p. 187) crops up frequently throughout the volume.

had not hesitated to include in this dictionary a whole array of obscene words and expressions that he knew to be in use among the Serbian peasants of his day. But his dictionary should also form the basis for the creation of a standard language, i.e. serve normative ends. To Karadžić's readers, the inclusion of obscene language in the dictionary must have seemed like a recommendation to make free use of it.²³

3. *Object language vs. metalanguage.* This point is also connected with the first one. The pre-modern languages of culture₂ may be mono- or plurifunctional, but they are always *functionally specified*. They are applied on specific occasions and for particular purposes, the language of everyday life being used in all other cases by default. The standard language of the nationalist era is *omnifunctional*: ideally, it covers all functional spheres of society. The omnifunctionality of the national language means that it must also fulfil the metalinguistic function in regard to itself, i.e. be its own metalanguage. The most pertinent example for this is again furnished by lexicography. Traditional lexicography is glossographic: it is concerned only with difficult (archaic, foreign, etc.) words (*glossai*), i.e. it presupposes a gap between metalanguage and object language and sets out to bridge it. Monolingual dictionaries implicitly deny this gap. Their authors set for themselves the utopian goal of giving a full description of the lexicon of a given language *by means of the very language that is being described*. As is well known in lexicographical theory, this goal can be achieved only at the cost of creating circular definitions. It is not a historical accident that the new type of the monolingual dictionary emerges only in modern times and in the most advanced societies of Western Europe. In the Serbo-Croatian case (to give an example from South-East Europe), this stage is reached in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the dictionary of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences, whose first author, Đuro Daničić, explicitly proclaimed his intention to use in the explanations the language of the dictionary itself.²⁴

²³ About this controversy, see Ljub. Stojanović, *Život i rad Vuka Stef. Karadžića*, Belgrade and Zemun: "Makarije", 1924, pp. 162-171.

²⁴ Đ. Daničić, *Ogled* [1878], in *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika XXIII. Dodatak – Materijali o rječniku*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1976, pp. 5-9. This dictionary, with its combination of the historical (descriptive) and the normative principle, offers also a good illustration of the preceding point. On this, consult V. Bockholt, *Sprachmaterialkonzeptionen und ihre Realisierung in der kroatischen und serbischen Lexikographie*, Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1990, pp. 570-578.

4. *Modernity vs. authenticity.* The necessity for national language to be both an authentic expression of the nation's history and a vehicle for modern civilisation has been stressed many times.²⁵ Linguistic purism is an attempt to reconcile the tension between these two demands; it is not, as one might be inclined to think, an outright rejection of modernity. The purist does not deny the necessity to modernise, i.e. enlarge the vocabulary of the language. He just wants this enlargement to be realised by indigenous means. He prefers thus calques (loan translations) to loan words. Needless to say that loan translations create only a semblance of authenticity, since the foreign source is still visible in the morphological structure of the new expression. The example of Modern Greek shows that the tension between modernity and authenticity cannot be resolved even by the revival of words that belong to an earlier stage of the language. One of the main figures of the Greek *questione della lingua*, Psichari, asked for these words to be adapted to contemporary phonetic laws. So, to give just one example, he wanted the form *επόπτης* ("overseer") to be written and pronounced as *επόφτης*, according to a law that changed the clusters /pt/, /kt/ to /ft/, /xt/ (cf. *κλέπτης* > *κλέφτης*).²⁶ He extended his demand even to words that did not violate some synchronic phonetic law, like *μεταχειρίζομαι* (instead of *μεταχειρίζομαι*) or *πλεροφορώ* (instead of *πληροφορώ*). If there was ever such a thing as an invented tradition, here it is: words like *επόφτης*, *μεταχειρίζομαι*, *πλεροφορώ* are loanwords from earlier stages of Greek, but their phonetic adaptation *post festum* creates the wrong impression that they have always lived in the mouth of the people. One might term this the paradox of "inherited neologisms". In a similar vein, the Serbian reformer Karadžić proposed to "serbianise" (*po Serblävatī*) Church Slavonic loanwords, so that they do not stand amidst the Serbian ones "like cattle among sheep".²⁷ The

²⁵ See, for example, Joshua Aaron Fishman, "The impact of Nationalism on Language Planning", in *Language in Sociocultural Change: Essays by Joshua A. Fishman*, ed. A. S. Dil, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972, pp. 224-243.

²⁶ [Yannis] Psichari, *Μεγάλη ρωμαίικη επιστημονική γραμματική* [A comprehensive scientific grammar of Modern Greek], Vol. I, Athens: Eleftheroudakis, 1929, pp. 113 ff. For a useful list of such words, see M. Triantaphyllidis, *Νεοελληνική γραμματική. Ιστορική εισαγωγή* (1938). *Ανατύπωση με διορθώσεις* [Modern Greek grammar: historical introduction (1938): corrected reprint], Thessaloniki: Institute of Neohellenic Studies, 1981, pp. 124-127. The question has continued to haunt the conscience of Greek linguists; see, for example, G. D. Paganos, "Ο Ψυχάρης και ο γλωσσικός συμβιβασμός ή Το εσωτερικό δράμα του δημοτικισμού" [Psichari and the language compromise or The inner drama of demoticism], *Νεοελληνικός Λόγος* 27 (1980), pp. 28-37.

²⁷ V. St. Karadžić, *O jeziku i književnosti*, Vol. I, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1969, p. 17. For a fuller comparison of Karadžić with Psichari, see Yannis Kakridis, "Jezička reforma kao sinteza

Serbian case, however, is slightly different, since many of the “inherited neologisms” allegedly created by Karadžić were already attested in Croatian lexicography.²⁸

5. *National vs. universal.* This point is connected with the previous one. The defenders of the national language (the “mother tongue”) use two sets of mutually contradictory arguments. On one side, they say that their language merits preservation and development because it offers a unique view of reality, a way of expressing things that is entirely its own.²⁹ On the other, they contend that their language is as capable as any other to serve as a means of communication and thinking; in particular, it can render any thought hitherto couched in terms of another language.³⁰ The tension between uniqueness and universality is sometimes resolved by an ingenious dialectical move: the affirmation that the specific character of one’s own language lies in its very ability to imitate others. In the foreword of his grammar, Michail Lomonosov, one of the key figures of eighteenth-century linguistic thought in Russia, quotes the anecdote of Charles V, who used to say that it is fit to speak Spanish with God, French with one’s friends, German with one’s enemies, and Italian with women. He then proceeds to explain that the Russian language can serve all these purposes on its own, since it combines the “magnificence of Spanish, the vividness of French, the strength of German, the tenderness of Italian, and above all this, the wealth and the conciseness (sil’ nuiu v izobrazheniakh

normativnog i deskriptivnog pristupa: Vuk Karadžić i Janis Psiharis”, *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane* 37/1 (2008), pp. 351-359.

²⁸ See Bockholt, *Sprachmaterialkonzeptionen*, pp. 94-108.

²⁹ According to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s famous formulation: “So liegt in jeder Sprache eine eigenthümliche Weltansicht.”, see W. von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Werke*, Vol. VI, ed. Albert Leitzmann, Berlin: B. Behr’s Verlag, 1907, p. 179. An important forerunner of Wilhelm von Humboldt in this respect is Étienne de Condillac with his notion of “génie des langues”, see É. de Condillac, *Œuvres complètes, Tome I: Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* [1746], Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970, pp. 322-341.

³⁰ Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue* [1542], ed., transl., intr. by Helene Harth, Munich: Fink, 1975, pp. 116 [193] et seq., esp. p. 116 [193]: “ma sì far debbiamo per l’avvenire, che d’ogni cosa pre tutto’l mondo possa parlare ogni lingua”. In Russia, the same idea was expressed for the first time by N. N. Popovskij; see H. Keipert, “Geschichte der russischen Literatursprache”, *Handbuch der sprachwissenschaftlichen RUSSISTIK und ihrer Grenzdisziplinen*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999, p. 744. Cf. Kopitar, *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 236: “So lange nicht alle über alles in der Muttersprache zu schreiben anfangen, kann kein Volk auf Cultur Anspruch machen.”

kratkost') of the Greek and the Latin language".³¹ What we have here is the embryonic form of an argument that was later applied by Fyodor Dostoevsky to the Russian national character as a whole. According to Dostoevsky, the distinguishing trait of the Russian nation is cosmopolitanism (vsemirnost', vsechelovechnost'), i.e. the ability to approach and understand all other nations without national prejudice.³²

We have examined briefly some of the paradoxical equations of nationalist language policy. What remains to be stressed is that these equations are not empty projections, but have a real basis in the antinomies of natural language, as they were first discovered by Wilhelm von Humboldt and analysed by his followers. (Of course, it is no coincidence that the main theoretician of linguistic nationalism was also the founding father of nineteenth-century philosophy of language.) In the dialectic character of language lies nationalism's decisive advantage against Marxism, the other great gnostic religion of the 19th century.³³ In spite of young Marx's daring postulates,³⁴ the object of worship of that religion, the proletariat, was far less well-equipped than the nation to play the role of the gnostic Eschaton. The results are still with us: in Eastern and South-East Europe at least, nationalism survived Marxism and shows, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, no signs of exhaustion.

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³¹ M. V. Lomonosov, *Rossijskaja grammatika*, Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1972, p. 6 f., first edition 1755.

³² The idea is expressed most clearly in the author's famous Pushkin speech (1880). See F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v tridcati tomach*, Vol. XXVI, Leningrad: Nauka, 1984, pp. 129-148. For an interesting parallel in German romantic nationalism, see H. Kohn, "Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism", *The Review of Politics* 12 (1950), p. 467.

³³ I am following here the interpretation of Georg Lukács. See G. Lukács, *Frühschriften II. Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Werke, 2), Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1968 [1923], pp. 164 ff. [pp. 331 ff].

³⁴ H.-J. Lieber and P. Furth (eds), *Karl Marx. Frühe Schriften. Erster Band*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962, pp. 488-505 ("Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie"), esp. pp. 503 et seq.