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Language, religion and national identity in Europe and the Middle East: A historical study (review)

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challenges facing the field of contact linguistics today. First, we should heed Bakker's call for a comprehensive taxonomy of BMLs and other contact languages, since, as he argues, this is 'a necessary step in an advancement of a theoretical discussion of mixed languages' (142). Second, we need to build on previous research that has explored the linguistic processes involved in the creation of BMLs, and investigate further how they parallel those involved in other cases of contact-induced change, or for that matter, in change due to internal motivation. Finally, there is pressing need for further insight into the social forces and processes that shaped the creation and course of development of BMLs. This book certainly offers a sound foundation for such future exploration.

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Linguists tend to view language as an important component of individual and group identity, and in general are sympathetic to the claims of marginal or minority languages to official recognition, cultural respect, and cultivation and preservation through education. Myhill is no exception to this generalization, and his opening remarks make clear a strong sympathy for classic European nationalist movements based on language, an idea whose theoretical underpinnings were elaborated in particular by Johann Herder (1744–1803). In the case of the Czechs, the Greeks, and the Finns, M argues, 'it cannot be realistically denied that the exercise of nationalism was a good thing' (1). One way to understand M's fascinating, exhaustively researched, and challenging book is as a defense of small nationalism, and as an attempt to understand why some nationalist movements and nation states become toxic, and others not. The argument rests on a rejection of the commonly held view that 'civic nationalism' is less pathological than 'ethnic nationalism' (277). For M, the key to this is the distinction between 'big' and 'small' nationalities. German and Pan-Turkish nationalism produced 'two world wars, the Armenian genocide, and the Holocaust', while the national liberation movements of the Czechs, the Slovenes, and the Norwegians 'have had clearly positive results' (3). We should note that a 'big' language (*Dachsprache*) is not necessarily one spoken by large numbers of speakers (12). For M, the relevant criterion is

the amount of dialectal variation, so in this sense Russian is a small language. Another fault line in modern states is represented by the divide between groups that define their identity in relation to sacred/ancestral languages, and those whose identities are primarily derived from the spoken, vernacular language.

Underlying the argument that 'big' language-based nationalities are pathological is the implication that small nations are relatively natural units of human political organization. From this point of view Germany and Italy were artificial creations, involving the forcible integration of linguistically and culturally highly diverse populations into what are effectively quasi-empires masquerading as ethnic states. In the case of Germany this was exacerbated by the confessional divide between North and South. M points to the fact that Jews were a people with a premodern sacred language, Hebrew. Within European post-Enlightenment modernity, the mother tongue was not for Jews generally definitive as a marker of identity, as their loyalty to Hebrew was retained. By contrast, German nationalism, following Herder's model, was based on an attempt at unifying all German speakers within a single state. German nationalism was imbued with a messianic quality inherited from what M terms a 'Roman European' ideology based on a search for a fundamental underlying unity or 'societal oneness'. Late nineteenth-century German nationalism was focused single-mindedly on either the total assimilation or elimination of the Jews, and by a fundamental failure to grasp the distinct basis of Jewish identity, except through a characterization of Jews as pathological: 'The German, Italian, pan-Turkish, and Arab nationalist movements were all characterized by general delusionality' (146). It took the traumas of twentieth-century history to reduce Germany and Italy to more civic-minded polities. In the case of Turkey, the current crisis in Iraq has potentially serious ramifications, in relation to Turkish policy toward the Kurdish quasi-autonomous polity in Northern Iraq.

This book breaks new ground in offering a sometimes profound and always thoughtful analysis of the tensions between states and different formations of ethnic identity within modernity. This goes far beyond the sometimes simplistic discussions of ethnolinguistic identity construction found in sociolinguistic textbooks, and takes seriously the models and assumptions that underlie diverse forms of ethnic and national identity. M does not focus narrowly on Germany and Italy, but offers the reader a close analysis of the formation and evolution of identities in Europe and the Middle East, offering a diagnosis of the history and structural fault-lines of states such as Yugoslavia and Lebanon. One has the impression at times, however, that M's strong theoretical position creates the temptation to reclassify uncomfortable facts. Thus the Croatian war-time commitment to fascism and ethnic cleansing, an expression of small nationalism, is explained rather circularly as the adoption of a Roman European rather than a Balkan model (218). One might also argue that the cleansing of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe from 1945–1949, however one assigns ultimate moral responsibility, illustrates the potentially violent logic of small ethnic nationalism when faced with a significant minority from a neighboring (aggressive) big nation, within the context of a major historical upheaval. The same logic was applied against ethnic Chinese in Vietnam in the run-up to the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979.

From my vantage point in Hong Kong I found the temptation to look at Asian linguistic politics from the perspective of M's model irresistible. It is evident, for example, that the Chinese language fits perfectly M's criteria of a 'big' language. Not only does it have a very high degree of internal or dialectal variation, but the territory of China, like that of Germany, can be understood as having inherited a vision of cultural greatness from its imperial past. Although the People's Republic of China is officially a multinational state, which recognizes fifty-six ethnic-national groups, and while the constitution explicitly accords minority groups administrative, linguistic, and other rights, China is a unitary not a federal state, which means that power is merely delegated, not ceded, from the center. Applying M's framework, one might argue that the upheavals of modern post-1949 Chinese history (including a large-scale famine, several border wars, and the Cultural Revolution) can be traced to the problems and internal contradictions of 'big' language nationalism. An alternative view would point to the effect of Leninist ideology on a massive

and poorly integrated state with borders and internal diversity defined by the boundaries of a collapsed feudal empire. These are not, however, mutually contradictory analyses. In China, linguistic centralization has led to hostility to the use of Chinese regional varieties in official contexts and to the use of nonstandard vernacular writing systems. In Taiwan, official recognition of the Taiwanese language variety is an index of the rejection of the 'one-China' ideology. M diagnoses the resistance to regional or vernacular written varieties in the Arabic world as a symptom of a generally bellicose cultural stance (280), and could point to China's suspicion of the partial vernacularization of Taiwan's linguistic culture as an example of big nationalism bullying small.

Herder's model arrived in Asia through the importation of Western language ideologies and colonial state-building. Subsequently, Stalin's four criteria for ethnic identity (territory, language, economic basis, and mentality), a Marxist transformation of Herder's *Volk* model, became and remain highly influential in China and Vietnam. While Korea (though politically divided) and Japan (the Okinawan regional variety aside) might fit the small language model, most large Asian states would qualify as quasi-empires, in the sense that many have implicit or explicit normative ethnic identities or dominant ethnically defined groups (see mutatis mutandis China, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma, Laos, Indonesia, etc.) alongside many small nationalities, both latent and self-conscious. Many of these linguistically defined minority groups occupy territories that cut across existing state boundaries. China has Putonghua as a lingua franca; Indonesia has Bahasa Indonesia. Both of these are artificially created state-building languages, with varying degrees of distance from the 'natural' language varieties. Looking at this situation in broad outline, one might reach the conclusion that no ideology could be better designed to create chaos and violence in Asia than small linguistic nationalism.

It might also be argued that the small nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe retain toxic potential, and the tensions between Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia today reflect familiar historical, territorial grievances and issues of cross-border linguistic minorities. Switzerland (and Singapore) as small multiethnic states have little to gain by aggression against neighbors, since their internal diversity is mirrored at least in part in their external ethnolinguistic context. By contrast, monoethnic states with minorities in neighboring states always have the potential to gain from political agitation in relation to cross-border minorities or by means of military aggression against neighbors. Meanwhile Western European nations such as Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—the first two classic small nations, the third a federal coalition of small, linguistically defined national groups—are divided and conflicted over immigration, particularly from the Islamic world.

My own view is that there is no particular value to Herder's model beyond its potential expression of a general civic principle of freedom of association and the rights of groups to determine their own forms of life. While one can accept that small nationalisms are more likely to be stable than large nationalisms, the fundamental problems of Herder's model are common to both. The model has no intrinsic value over and above any other form of civic, religious, social, or arbitrary political grouping, and I would argue for the primacy of pragmatic factors in determining language policy and state identity, with a focus on social compromise and empathetic reasoning. Leaving to one side my disagreement with M's fundamental premise, however, it should be stressed that this is an important work. M compels us to look in a multidimensional way at the great identity conflicts and genocidal disasters of modernity, providing a challenging and provocative close reading of the evolution and interaction of a large number of ethnic and national groups.

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