

Language and Nationalism: The Creation of Greek National Identity

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## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTON</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>NATIONALISM</b> .....	<b>6</b>
THE NATION, THE STATE, AND THE NATION-STATE.....	7
NATIONAL IDENTITY .....	8
LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM .....	9
<b>NATIONALISM: THE GREEK CASE</b> .....	<b>11</b>
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE .....	11
NEO-HELLENIC ENLIGHTENMENT & THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE .....	12
<b>GREEK LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM</b> .....	<b>14</b>
THE STATE AND LANGUAGE – FUNCTIONALITY AND LEGITIMACY .....	15
CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY .....	17
NATIONALISM AND LANGUAGE – FUNCTIONALITY AND LEGITIMACY.....	18
THE CONTINUITY IDEAL & LANGUAGE .....	20
<b>THE DIGLOSSA DEBATE</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<i>KATHAREVOUSA</i> – THE ‘CLEANSED’ GREEK .....	23
DEMOTIC GREEK – THE POPULAR GREEK .....	25
<b>LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN GREECE</b> .....	<b>29</b>
LANGUAGE & EDUCATION .....	30
DOMESTIC POLICY .....	30
FOREIGN POLICY – <i>IRREDENTISM</i> .....	31
<b>THE LASTING EFFECTS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY</b> .....	<b>32</b>
AFTER THE DIGLOSSA DEBATE .....	32
WHO IS GREEK?.....	35
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>41</b>

## Abstract

*“All men speaking the same language were alleged to belong to the same race”  
-Francis Delaisi, 1925*

The modern nation-state of Greece is one that is rooted in classical antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. Meeting the demands of modernity, the young nation-state laid claim to the rich cultural heritage of two mighty empires in order to secure a salient national identity for its citizens. This paper analyzes how the Greek national identity came into being within the context of nationalism, framed by the continuity ideal. More specifically, it is an attempt to understand how language became one of the cornerstones of Greek national identity by looking at the historical and social context in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the *diglossa* language debate one can see the significance of language in Greece and how it facilitated a national identity to be rooted in language. We will turn to additional aspects of society affected during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that highlight the importance of language in Greek nationalism. Our discussion will end with the repercussions of this “Greekness” being rooted in the language.

## Language and Nationalism: The Creation of Greek National Identity

### **Introducton**

The Hellenic Republic: established March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1821. Younger than many other modern nation-states (including the United States of America), the new political entity of modern Greece entered the world stage with historical prestige and legitimacy dating back thousands of years. But this legitimacy was not assumed – the new nation-state was transitioning from centuries of multi-ethnic, multi-religious empires, including the Ottoman Empire, and needed to reconnect its ties with the Hellenic world. In order to set the new modern Greek state apart from the Ottoman legacy, a new, unified, European-centric identity needed to be established for its citizens to ensure the political success of the new country.

In the era of enlightenment and the beckoning of modernity, the forefathers of Modern Greece utilized the ideology of nationalism as it provided justification for the creation and existence of the state (Kelman, 1997). Within this ideology, cultural homogenization could take place in the new state by defining Greece and establishing a national consciousness and national identity rooted in classical antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. The existence of the state would hinge on the success of legitimizing both time periods (Mackridge, 2009b).

Additionally, the success of the state would also be determined by the cohesion created amongst the individual citizens in it. National identity, perpetuated by the state, would be incorporated into one's own individual identity (Kelman, 1997), solidifying the individual participation in the new state. In order to do this, the idea of "Greekness" needed to be institutionalized and reproduced. And thus, to be Greek became defined; specifically, one is Greek if they speak the Greek language and are a member of the Orthodox church (Kitromilides, 1989; Mackridge, 2009b). State-involved processes, including mass education, would be utilized to convey this national identity to the people.

While it can be said the state was a success, it has not been without crisis and conflict surrounding the defined and deeply internalized national identity (Roudometof, 2000; Yagou, 2007). Of particular interest here is one of the two cornerstones of the Greek identity: language. Since the establishment of the state, language has been used as the central tool in conveying a collective Greek history, and in turn a collective Greek national identity. It is within this cornerstone that conflict has historically been associated. Specifically, an ongoing debate on what *is* the Greek language, otherwise known as the *diglossa* debate, was ongoing for nearly 150 years (Charalambopoulos, 1996). Understood in the historical context of the modern state and in the framework of nationalism, one can understand that the conflict over language was masking a general ideological struggle (Frangoudaki, 1996), and thus the *diglossa* debate is at the basis of the conflict embedded in Greek national identity.

The purpose of this paper is to understand how language became one of the cornerstones of Greek national identity. Focusing on the time period from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I will investigate the multifaceted nature of the development of the Greek state and Greek nationalism, framed in terms of the role Greek language played in creating a salient, unified Greek national identity. The *diglossa* issue will be discussed as it pertains to the establishment of the unified modern Greek national identity. Furthermore, I will turn to the effects language continued to have on the development of the Greek nation and identity through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As it is a complicated issue, I am not looking to oversimplify things; rather, my goal is to highlight the development of one specific area of nationalism that led to the creation of the modern Greek national identity. The role religion has played as the second cornerstone of the modern state is not to be overlooked, but rather is outside the scope of this paper.

### **Nationalism**

To investigate the role that language has played in creating Greek national identity, we must first look at the general movement that brings nations into being: nationalism. But what do we mean when we use the word nationalism? As an ever-changing, fluid phenomena that is perceived as being static, it is not so easily definable. No single definition appears to be satisfactory given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of this ideological and political movement (Mackridge, 2009b; Triandafyllidou, 1998). Simultaneously obvious and obscure (Billig, 1995), a basic understanding of nationalism is that it simply provides justification for the existence or creation of a state by defining a particular population (Billig, 1995; Kelman, 1997). It is an effort to instill in a certain community of people (the nation), a sense of nationhood (Mackridge, 2009b).

As one attempts to understand the ideology of nationalism and provide a single, catch-all definition, it becomes clear that this is nearly impossible. One thing we can be certain of are the two basic ideological components to the nationalist doctrine: one, the world is divided into nations and each nation is a unique entity; and two, every individual belongs to a nation (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Within this there are certain traditions and principles held in common by members of every national group, and an awareness that an individual belonging to a certain nation is an essential part of nationalism itself (Allport, 1933). This then brings us to the concept of a common culture and national identity, which we will look at shortly.

In terms of nationalism and the topic of this paper, it should be noted that it is nearly impossible to separate oneself from the world of nationalism, as it is considered incomprehensible to understand the world theoretically outside of the nation-state structure. It has deeply affected contemporary ways of thinking, and thus is not easily studied. As Yagou (2007) describes it, “one cannot step outside the world of nations, nor rid oneself of the

assumptions and common-sense habits which come from living within that world.” It is with this knowledge that we move forward.

### **The Nation, the State, and the Nation-State**

Before delving into a specific nation, we need to scale out and answer the question: what is a nation? On a basic level, Searle-White (2001) defines the nation as a group of people who “share a number of characteristics such as common history, language, culture or territory.” Druckman (1994) goes a step further and defines the actual entity of the nation as existing because it fulfils “economic, sociocultural, and political needs, giving individuals a sense of security, a feeling of belonging, and prestige.” Fishman (1968) proposes that a group becomes a nation once it begins to ideologize its customs and ways of life; there is a step further beyond “this is the way we do things” to the “there is something unique, special, and valuable about our way of doing things.” Sometimes the common myths and historical memories are also necessary for a nation to be defined (Smith, 1991), and others add in the commonality of language, tradition, and religion (Kelman, 1997). One can see the attempt to use objective criteria in order to give structure to a phenomenon so engrained in our way of thinking and understanding the world, and yet no definition is ever 100% correct.

Understanding that no single definition will be met without criticism, one must still set some standardization in an effort to allow for the continued development of knowledge and understanding of the topic. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will utilize the definition put forth by Peter Mackridge (2009b), pulling originally from Anderson’s theory nationalism (1983), defining the nation as an “imagined community whose members believe they are linked by a shared culture.”

The state, on the other hand, is less contested. Most view the state as a political entity; as the system that oversees the bureaucratic processes of a group of people. In the context of nationalism, the idea of a nation-state is much more important to define. The nation-state is

the political entity that coincides with the ideological nation, however that may be defined. In some cases, the nation precedes the state, in others the state is defined and then the nation follows. All nationalist movements are centered around this concept: they aim to both “build a state around the existence or idea of a nation and to build a nation around the existence or idea of a state” (Kelman, 1997). The concept of a nation-state, additionally, only exists in the modern world where other nation-states exist (Giddens, 1987), and it is the term nation-state that we will use to define modern Greece.

### **National Identity**

Now that we have a better grasp on what nationalism means in terms of the nation, state, and nation-state, we can dive into the collective product of this ideology and how it shapes the individual or citizen. One of the main facilitators of nationalism is the idea of a collective product or shared culture: a system of shared beliefs and values common among group members (in this case fellow nation-state citizens) (Kelman, 1997) through the course of socialization (Billig, 1995). Within these components is the concept of us-and-them; it is what makes one a part of a group, defines one as a particular nationality, and thus distinguishes one as not belonging to another group (Mackridge, 2009b; Triandafyllidou, 1998). All of the components, it should be noted, are subjective and vary between nations (Majumdar, 2007).

This shared culture within nationalism, the idea that makes one a part of a unique entity, can also be described as a bond between fellow nationals and is at the essence of national identity (Connor, 1978). So then, what is national identity? It is the “perception of the individual belonging to a common group with shared values, behaviors, history, and habits of social life” (Billig, 1995). Majumdar (2007) put it succinctly in saying “identity is not who or what people are in essence, but who or what they *think* they are, who or what they *say* they are, and who or what they *aspire* to be.” This way of viewing national identity

highlights the subjectivity of what one may view as an inherent part of their self-identity. There are psychological needs to the individual that are satisfied by national identification (Brock & Atkinson, 2008), which play into the success and pervasiveness of nationalism today.

What we must note is that nation identity is not something inherently natural to an individual; rather, it is learned. Inherent parts of the nationalist rhetoric and ideology of nationalism, in turn, teach its citizens what it means to be a part of a national group. One of the ways that the nation-state does this is by restructuring the perception of time (history) and utilizes the tools of the state to convey the over-encompassing idea of a singular, natural trajectory of any given nation (Billig, 1995; Liakos, 2001), helping provide a comprehensible story to the people. Once established, national identity, according to Anderson (1983), is readily perpetuated, further solidifying the success of the nation-state.

Since national identity is created, both with benefits for the individual and of the state, it is important to investigate how this is done. One of the many tools a nation-state may use to perpetuate a specific national identity is language (Billig, 1995). Language allows individuals to understand their own distinctive attributes that define them as members of a specific nation (Doob, 1964) in the greater context of a multi-lingual, diverse world.

### **Language and Nationalism**

As we now understand it, nationalism as an ideology is rooted in the idea that nations exist and are unique, and that individuals belong to a specific nation. The nation-state, the combination of the political and ethno-historical entity, is how the present-day world is organized. Propagated within the nation-state is the idea of a shared culture, which in turn instills in the individual a sense of national identity.

The concept of national identity is shaped significantly by one thing apparent in nearly all aspects of nationalism: language. Language is the means by which one understands

one's own culture and expresses belonging to a specific community (Mackridge, 2009b); it is key in the formation of social identities (Gumperz 1971; Gumperz 1982), and it is the means by which we build our social groups (Wright, 2004).

Within the concept of nationalism, language has played a crucial role in the mobilization of ethnic groups in order to create the nation; some have even stated that the definition of a nation is through the existence of a common ground for communication (Deutsch, 1952), usually developing as a single language shared by every citizen (Anderson, 1983). Whether it is a single language that defines a nation or not, the concept of language is present in the majority of nationalisms around the world today (Doob, 1964).

Furthermore, one can take an additional step in stating that it is not only the presence of a singular shared language that has been at the root of many nationalist movements, but it was also the key to the social, cultural, and national transformations of local populations and has allowed the success of nationalist ideologies of today (Liakos, 1996). Thus, it is understandable that it would be seen as one of the most significant, if not the most significant, aspects to one's national identity.

The general process of mobilizing an ethnic group and turning it into a nation is not easy, but in every successful case, language is noted as a real change that helps build a sense of community, group consciousness, and a shared history that creates the nation (Kelman, 1997). The other interesting side to this is that the language may not always exist in its present-day form; nationalists, in an attempt to create a separate nation, often help construct a national language as a distinct language, in order to provide justification to the nation on the basis of it (Billig, 1995).

## **Nationalism: The Greek Case**

### **The Ottoman Empire**

Now moving forward with the basic toolkit for understanding the ideology of nationalism, the development of the nation-state, and the importance language plays in the formation of both ideologies, we can turn our investigative eye towards the case of the modern nation-state of Greece. To understand this, one must turn back to the Ottoman Empire to establish the context that would allow the country known today as Greece to develop from the traditional society of the time.

The history of Greeks within the Ottoman Empire officially spans from 1453-1821. During these four centuries, the empire was known as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious empire, allowing groups to be divided by religion versus the present-day division of the world by nationality. As such, the Orthodox Church served as the primary social organizer for all Christian subjects in the empire, including what we consider today to be Greeks. It is within this context that we see the foundations for the Greek national movement taking root in the *rum millet*, or the Orthodox segment of Ottoman society.

In this societal system, any Christian would be categorized within the *rum millet*. It is not surprising, therefore that the “contemporary Greeks” at the time would call themselves Romans, *romanoi*, or Christians; there was a conflation of Greek ethnic identity with that of the *rum millet* (Roudometof, 2000). To be Christian was to be Greek, or at least that idea moved forward outside of the Ottoman Empire and carried through into the creation of the Greek state.

Simultaneously, the empire had its own educated or privileged class working outside the millet system: the merchants and intellectuals. These individuals tended to work in Greek, as it was the language of education, commerce, and represented ‘high culture’ (Burke, 1988) at the time. Gaining further importance as the language of the holy texts of the Orthodox church, it is not come as a surprise that this language was adopted by the educated class as an

appropriate *lingua franca* of the time. The Greek language had prestige within the Ottoman Empire, and this would influence the development of the Greek state.

Moving outside of the Ottoman Empire, one can see that the state of world affairs at the time also played a role in the creation of the Greek nation-state. The Western Enlightenment had begun in Europe, influencing intellectuals around the continent. Many of the eventual forefathers of the Greek Enlightenment and Greek national movement were educated in Western Europe, where the base of the Enlightenment focused heavily on the powerful myth of Greek antiquity. At the time, the ancestral lands of these stories resided within the Ottoman Empire (Gallant, 2001; Liakos, 1996; Mackridge, 2009b), playing into the Western intellectuals interests in possibly consolidating these lands into a free state to provide legitimacy to their own nationalistic campaigns.

Additionally, the common language spoken among many of the European intellectuals was a version of Greek (archaic or vernacular) (Roudometof, 2000), adding further value to the idea of an ethnic Greek-speaking nation-state. Ultimately, a focus on the Greek language to solidify a Greek national identity would become clear, but we need to continue on through the Greek War of Independence and the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment to understand the full implication why.

### **Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment & the Greek War of Independence**

As we continue into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes clear that the myth of an ancient Greece had become powerful outside of the Greek-speaking society of the Ottoman Empire (Gallant, 2001; Liakos, 2001), and that the Enlightenment movement among these intellectuals was pushing forward the idea of an independent Greek state. It also was apparent that the multi-ethnic and multi-religious state of the Ottoman Empire would prove an obstacle to the new political entity's success. There was a well-defined and yet vague understanding

of who these Greeks would be and where these lands needed to be defined, but there was much work to be done to establish the specifics.

So the Balkan intellectuals set to work, needing to deal with long historical periods of time and differing cultures (Liakos, 2001), they adapted a core set of ideas from the Western Enlightenment (Gallant, 2015) and started to move forward with the idea of an independent Greek state. It was necessary to disseminate the Greek culture to the mass populations, however that would be defined in terms of a Greek sense of common memory and ethnicity, as a prerequisite for political independence (Kritikos, 2013).

According to the educated minority, creating a perceived continuity from classical antiquity through the present day would be the most important factor, and necessary, to establish a new Greek state (Frangoudaki, 1996; Herzfeld, 1986). The difficulty would be in convincing the world that the citizens of the modern nation-state held this continuity and were indeed the long-lost inhabitants of the land (Herzfeld, 1986).

So the challenge was understood: how does one bring a diverse, multi-ethnic group of people into singular ethnic entity worthy of their our nation and state? According to the educated minority who thought in terms of classical culture, if it could be shown that the peasants retained clear traces of their ancient heritage, then the fundamental requirement for the creation of a Greek state would be satisfied (Herzfeld, 1986). Thus, ethnic customs, linguistic ties and religious beliefs started being transformed into national sentiments that highlighted the connection with classical antiquity (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

This would come to be known as the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment. Developing nearly overnight in the Western world and within the Greek diaspora, it believed that there was a Greek nation trapped within the Ottoman Empire and as per the ideals of the time, the Greek people deserved their own homeland. Unfortunately, the belief of a common cultural element was not enough for this belief to be actualized; the individuals within the state needed to have

a shared consciousness and believe that they had special bonds that tied them to their other statesmen (Kelman, 1997). The national heritage needed to be rich enough that the people would acquire the pride needed to support the Greek nation-state (Doob, 1964), and the key to this was a strong national identity.

Moving into the Greek War of Independence, the war officially lasted for nine years, with the first modern Greek state being established in 1830. Once there was a formal state and borders, the issues of establishing a salient Greek national identity became much more urgent. The nation-building became a dynamic process of creating a sense of community essential for the social cohesion of the new nation-state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kitromilides, 1989), and language would be at the heart and center of this.

### **Greek Language and Nationalism**

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pre-and-post Greek nation-state, one can see the workings of the intellectuals at creating a salient national identity, and this can be understood through the focus on the Greek language. The story begins with a shift within the Ottoman Empire, where various intellectuals began promoting the Greek language as the language not only of the educated, but a route to becoming Greek.

Focusing on the Orthodox Christian millet as the audience, the intellectuals had a broad base that was already unified within the Ottoman Empire. One notable intellectual who reached out to this base was Daniel of Moschopolis. Notable in history for producing a dictionary in 1802, his glossary written in Greek, Vlach, Bulgarian, and Albanian opened with an invitation to all non-Greek speaking Orthodox citizens to become Greek. All those who did not speak Greek could Hellenize themselves if first they learned the Greek language, which would allow them to become culturally Greek and see upward social mobility (Kitromilides, 1989). The idea of speaking Greek to become culturally Greek would only

become more intensified as time would go on; so much so that speaking Greek would become the standard for some definitions of Greek citizenship in the new state.

After the Greek War of Independence and further fracturing of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkan nation-states, one can see the new, modernly defined nations were being separated by linguistic means (Kitromilides, 1989). The conflation between linguistic and ethnic identities being one in the same was being further rooted in the national rhetoric of the time.

The focus of the intellectuals at the time to linguistically homogenize the Orthodox Christians speaks to a larger problem the new nation-state would had to solve: a need to convince people of the legitimacy of the state (Klein et.al, 2000), and once established as a state, to create coherence through a linguistically and ethnically diverse nation (Delivoria, 2009). The Greek language would be called on as the solution to both of these problems, and it is because of this that the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment would become known for its focus on the language rather than the people (Gallant, 2015).

### **The State and Language – Functionality and Legitimacy**

In order to understand the success of language as a tool for Greek nationalism, one must look at the needs of the fledgling state that focused on the use of language to solve the inherent problems of a developing state, which in turn ultimately impacted the role of language within Greek national identity.

First off, the new Greek state had much work to do to create a unified nation, and linguistic tools were called on to help create this. The base of Greece was one much more similar to the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Ottoman Empire: many foreign languages were spoken in addition to varying dialects of Modern Greek. From Turkish and Vlach to Ladino (spoken in the Jewish community of Thessaloniki), and Macedonian Slav, the new state needed to be able to communicate with the speakers of these languages (Tsitsipis &

Elmendorf, 1983). Additionally, the dialects of Greek were also numerous and usually hard to understand between different speakers (Liakos, 1996). The functionality of the state would rely on the ability to communicate, and that would not be possible with a variety of different languages. It was viewed that any diversity within the Greek state, including linguistic diversity, had to be removed through a policy of systematic Hellenization of the state's citizens (Triandafyllidou, 1998), and thus the teaching of Greek to non-native speakers became a matter of national urgency (Mackridge, 2009b) in order to facilitate the success of the state.

Another aspect of the modern state of Greece, outside of a diverse catalogue of languages and dialects, was its demographic makeup: Greece's population was a mostly rural and illiterate (Hertzfeld, 1986; Roudometof, 2000b). This further inhibited the state from functioning as a standardized language was necessary for state mechanisms such as the military, administration, education, the courts, newspapers, etc. to function. Additionally, a common language would allow its citizens to have access to the state, to higher education, and to a professional workforce (Liakos, 1996). A singular, state-standardized language, therefore, would help bring the rural, multi-lingual population together and it would guarantee a priority of the national center over the regions, reliance on the city over the village and allow the state to hold on to its legitimacy in governing its people (Liakos, 1996; Tziouvas, 1994).

Many, if not all, of the societal developments of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century demanded a more efficient education system in order to meet the needs of the state (Gallant, 2015), including the issues stated above. Much of the backwardness and failing of the Greek state was attributed to the inadequate education of its people (Liakos, 1996), and thus education became a priority for the Greek state to help decrease the illiteracy rates, increase

state participation, and help the state function more smoothly. In order to do this, one had to decide on what Greek was to be taught.

Stating one needs a standardized language and then actually standardizing it are two different things; the standardization of Greek came with a host of linguistic and metaphorical issues. Logistically, the language at the time was lacking necessary complexity, similar to many languages as they become the national language for a new state. Greek was no exception – there was a need for vocabulary expansion, both internal (borrowing from older phases of the language) and external (from European languages) (Christidis, 1996), in addition to a standardized written form. The national language needed to be suitable for the expression of all aspects of political and cultural life in a modern European nation (Mackridge, 2009b).

There was much work to be done to create a functional, standardized Greek language, and it wasn't just due to the sheer amount of effort needed to revitalize and refresh an already-existing spoken language. In the case of Greece, it became a larger issue that spanned over 150 years due, in part, to the national agenda regarding a unified Greek history. We will investigate further on the standardization of the language, otherwise known as the *diglossa* debate, but first we will look at the relationship between nationalism and language in Greece in order to understand the debate fully.

### **Citizenship and Nationality**

Before we dive into the *diglossa* debate, it is worthwhile to highlight another area where the state and nation intersect: citizenship and nationality. One of the roles of the state is to define who their citizens are, and in the particular case of Modern Greece, this was heavily defined by language. The state was being defined in terms of culture rather than geography, which is noticeable compared to other nationalisms at the time (Liakos, 1996).

The first level of this was defining Greek nationality on the basis of ethnic descent and language (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). Anyone could become Greek in the eyes of many Balkan intellectuals, including one of the forefathers of the Greek state Rigas (Gallant, 2015; Livianos, 2007) as long as they learned the language of the Romanoï (Greek). This was enough for the Christian groups to become Greek (Liakos, 1996). This categorization continued into the development of the state entity in the form of citizenship. The ultimate goal of the state and national movement was to transform the peasant subjects of the fledgling state to full-fledged citizens of a unified liberal state (Veremis, 1989).

In the new state, citizenship was the primary concern of the government, and that too was defined in terms of language, religion, and education (of Greek history). It was of primary concern of the Greek national agenda to include these three components in defining membership to the modern state (Skopetea 1986, Hertzfeld, 1986, Gounaris, 2009). It is no accident that language would become such a prominent player in Greek national identity – as a prerequisite, either formally or in mainstream culture, of Greek citizenship *and* nationalism, it would affect how people would see the role of language in their lives and their self-identification.

### **Nationalism and Language – Functionality and Legitimacy**

One of the main reasons that language became such a huge part of the Greek national identity was the success and ease in which the national agenda and state agenda overlapped on it – the use of language would work together and solve the problems for both groups. The Greek state needed standardization in education and Greek nationalism needed a unifying symbol for its survival, and the Greek language became the solution for both groups (Tsitsipis & Elmendorf, 1983).

The main issue that nationalism in Greece had to face was the competing visions of the historical legitimacy of the state: the Hellenic lineage tied to the classical age and the

Romaic tied to the Byzantine Empire (Gallant, 2001). These competing ideologies seemingly could not be reconciled and divided the population of Greeks, and language was turned in order to solve this dilemma. There was a need to fill the historical gaps that spanned from the time of Alexander the Great, the Hellenistic and Roman period, the Byzantine era, and the Venetian and Ottoman rule of the people (Liakos, 2001). It was of fundamental importance to show the continuity between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” (Roudometof, 2000a), known today as the continuity ideal.

Outside of the nationalist agenda, the state recognized the need to create a nation within the broader program of political modernization (Roudometof, 2000a), and thus employed state resources to begin establishing those connections. For the survival of the state, in addition to the nationalist agenda, the continuity ideal needed to be achieved within the national rhetoric.

In an effort to close those gaps, various academic fields were created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the history of literature and language, archaeology, and folklore studies (Liakos, 2001). The origins of modern Hellenism can be found in these fields as they produced symbolic capital for the new state (Gallant, 2001; Hertzfeld, 1986), sometimes in tandem with foreign interests and other times facilitated internal growth. Intellectuals scoured the countryside looking for evidence of ancient customs, practices, stories, and beliefs that were also noted in ancient texts (Gallant, 2001), all in order to provide a justification and storyline for the new nation-state.

This knowledge did not remain published in articles only for other academics to study; rather, it was incorporated into the public educational system as education was a major vehicle for transmitting national identity (Gallant, 2001). As an obvious mechanism through which national identity could be cultivated (Kitromilides, 1989), the education system could teach the Greek language and history, as well as basic literacy, and would create a

linguistically homogenized society (Kitromilides, 1989), serving both the state and national agenda.

One influential example of this intersection of the success of the state and nationalist agenda in terms of academic scholarship and Greek history is in relation to the publication by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos in 1853 entitled *History of the Greek Nation*. As a professor of the history of ancient nations at Athens University since 1851 (Mackridge, 2009b), Paparrigopoulos is cited as establishing the first work that proved the continuity ideal – that Greeks could be both descendants of classical antiquity and the Byzantine empire. In his introduction, Paparrigopoulos' book states “all those who speak Greek as their own language are called the Greek nation.” (Livianos, 2007; Mackridge, 2009b), further stressing the significance of the Greek language in determining the Greek nation-state. Paparrigopoulos' publication was so monumental at its time for producing the continuity the Greek state and nationalist movement were looking for that it would be reproduced as a simplified history in textbooks across the country (Gallant, 2001), helping spread the Greek culture (Hertzfeld, 1986) and making him a household name still today. We will see the continuity ideal that Paparrigopoulos establishes as a continued aspect of the *diglossa* debate.

### **The Continuity Ideal & Language**

The Continuity Ideal – one of the core features of the Greek national movement, it establishes the unequivocal continuity between classical antiquity, the Byzantine Empire, and the modern Greek state. It was so crucial to the Greek national movement not only for the success internally as a state, but for the world stage. Greece needed to affirm both the European and Greek identity of the Modern Greeks (Christidis, 1996) for the Western world, which had focused its own Enlightenment so heavily on the powerful myth of Greek antiquity (Gallant, 2001). Thus, Greek nationalism had, at the core of it, an emphasis on the classical origins of its national language (Mason, 2002), as it was becoming ever-apparent

that the possession of the Greek language in a form that highlighted this connection was a prerequisite for the survival and prosperity of the Greek nation (Beaton & Ricks, 2009). What that language would look like would become the issue.

The Modern Greek state thus was created on the perception of the unity of the Greek nation, which suddenly turned to the adopted official language to prove (Liakos, 1996). The theory of the unity of Greek history was transferred from the field of political history to the field of language (Liakos, 2001), and thus language was inherent in the role of nation-building. Somewhere along the way, intellectuals decided that the national identity should align with the national language, and that the national language, in turn, would reflect the essence of the national identity (Mackridge, 2009b). It is through this mentality that the relentless political and ideological battle to prove the inherent nature of the Greek nation-state would come about and continue for nearly 150 years (Charalambopoulos, 1996).

This ideological struggle would come to be known as the *diglossa* debate. At its core, it was the struggle of the Greek state to develop a national written language, which would in turn embody and project the ideal image of the modern Greeks that the Western world wanted – a continual relationship with the ancients (Mackridge, 2009b). It is through the latter years of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Greek state that we can see this controversy take root and grow to encompass the majority of the existence of Modern Greece.

### **The *Diglossa* Debate**

The development of the modern Greek state, from the historical context of the Ottoman Empire and the ideals of the Western Enlightenment to the reality of the population demographic of the new state and heightened focus on a natural historical continuity, created the perfect storm for the language debate that would dominate the world of Modern Greece for nearly 150 years, and would in turn affect the Greek national identity. While it was clear

that a standard language needed to be established for the success of both the new state and nation, what language that would be was at the heart of the *diglossa* debate and national identity.

The language debate was focused on the standardization of a single Greek language, more specifically the development and codification of a single norm of a language across registers and dialects in addition to modernization (expansion of vocabulary and development of new style and forms of discourse) (Mackridge, 2009b). The term *diglossa* itself refers to the coexistence in a given society of two varieties of the same national language (Frangoudaki, 1996), in this case Greek (Mackridge, 2009b). According to American linguist Ferguson (1959), the two languages would be divided between one classified as ‘low’ and the other as ‘high;’ both would be considered divergent forms of the same language (close enough to not be considered separate dialects). Characteristically, the ‘high’ version of the language would never be used in everyday conversation in Ferguson’s theory

While the Greek version of Ferguson’s diglossia concept was not as simple (Mackridge, 2009b), his theory gives a structure in which to understand the *diglossa* debate in the new nation-state of Greece. In this simplified summary of the debate, there are two main versions of the Greek language that become the focus of intense political and social debate: *katharevousa* and demotic Greek. *Katharevousa*, literally meaning the “pure” or “cleansed” Greek, would be rooted in ancient Greek and an artificial version of the language. Demotic is known as the popular language, or language of the people; it was the language spoken every day and would need a written language to be associated with it. Officially, linguistics would distinguish between *katharevousa* and demotic within their scientific field at three levels; 1. the level of morphology; 2. the level of phonology; and 3. the level of vocabulary (Mackridge, 2009b). Within contemporary, ordinary speakers, the differences would be noticed more by feel (Mackridge, 2009b).

Before we dive into the historical development of the *diglossa* debate, let us make clear that both *katharevousa* and demotic were promoted and written by members of the bourgeois elite of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment (Mackridge, 2009b), highlighting the importance of language to the development of the Greek state prior to its independence from the Ottoman Empire. As a function of language within nationalism, both languages needed to establish legitimacy for the newly founded Greek state (Frangoudaki, 2002), and thus had shared goals that made them not mutually exclusive, but necessary to exist in tandem.

### ***Katharevousa* – The ‘Cleansed’ Greek**

The historical president for *katharevousa*, or the “cleansed” Greek, is understood when one looks at the context of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment. Language was seen as a point of distinction and cultural capital in the Ottoman Empire (Liakos, 1996). The Western Enlightenment needed legitimacy in order to support the idea of an independent Greek state. And thus, one of the forefathers of the modern Greek state, attempted to establish legitimacy through language reform.

This intellectual is known as Adiamantios Korais (1748-1833) and he is credited with being the father of *katharevousa*. In Korais’ mind, since the history of the “Greek” nation would go back to antiquity, it was only logical that the language would also go back to antiquity (Liakos, 1996). Recognizing that the popular dialects spoken at the time were not sufficient for such goals, he set forth to construct a new language suitable for the new nation (Roudometof, 2000a) in an effort to promote, consciously or unconsciously, the national ideal of national coherence in time and space (Delivoria, 2009).

The new, cleaned version of Greek would purge the non-Greek words from the spoken vernacular and replace them with ancient Greek words (Roudometof, 2000a), highlighting the continuity from the times of classical antiquity through the daily use of the modified Greek (Hertzfeld, 1986). Over history, Greek had come in contact with a number of

languages and had absorbed various words and other linguistic characteristics from them (Christidis, 1996). Thus, it was necessary to cleanse the words and phrases derived from languages such as Turkish, Italian, Slavic, and Arvanitika (Liakos, 1996) in order to show the “survival” of linguistic and social traits from the classical era. This would provide the nation the legitimacy that the intellectuals and Western world demanded of a state seen as the inheritors of an ancient civilization; it would help “transform the modern Greeks into beings worthy of Pericles and Socrates” (Hertzfeld, 1986; Kedourie, 1970; Kritikos, 2013). By using *katharevousa*, it would be undeniable that the liberated Greeks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were connected with the Hellenic world proven by their language alone (Gallant, 2001; Hertzfeld, 1986).

Korais also played to the hearts of the Western Enlightenment by calling on aspects of language curation used in Europe in the creation of the new Greek vernacular (Hertzfeld, 1986). In this role, Korais would be seen as the protagonist in the movement to transform the role of the Classical Greek heritage to fit the Greek-Orthodox millet under the Ottoman Empire (Roudometof, 2000a) by creating the hybrid language of *koine* (New Testament) Greek and demotic Greek (Gallant, 2001) for the new nation-state.

*Katharevousa* can be understood as a language compromise for the state. Having to decide between Ancient Greek or create a version linking Ancient Greece with the modern spoken tongue, the state opted for a language that would still have ties to the modern world (Frangoudaki, 2002). The downside in the creation, however, is that it took place empirically and unsystematically at the hands of non-linguists (Mackridge, 2009b), creating an incredibly formal language that would be considered a “high” language and used in all formal contexts (Frangoudaki, 2002), leading to the *diglossa* conflict with the demotic Greek.

And such, the language of the state unofficially became *katharevousa*; dominating public administration, the church, politics, education (Christidis, 1996; Frangoudaki, 2002;

Kritikos, 2013), it was institutionalized from the establishment of the Greek state (Kritikos, 2013). Scholars and intellectuals were in favor of this version of Greek, as it continued the use of language as cultural capital that they were used to from the Ottoman Empire (Kritikos, 2013; Liakos, 1996). It also solved the problem of literacy and unified various spoken dialects of Greek in addition to foreign languages; all students would need to learn *katharevousa*, a “new” language, creating an even playing field that the citizens and state could communicate in. Additionally, it did not restrict Hellenism to only those who spoke Greek as their mother tongue, as Hellenism was still regarded as something open to all Orthodox Christians in the Balkans (Petmezas, 2009).

It wasn't until the Constitution of 1911 that *katharevousa* was granted protection as the state's official language (Kritikos, 2013), coming about as a need as the *diglossa* debate had picked up speed and the fight for the state language was taking hold of the nation (Frangoudaki, 2002).

### **Demotic Greek – The Popular Greek**

Through the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment and the establishment of the Greek state, one can find opposition to the creation and use of *katharevousa*; for the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the demotic campaign that took hold in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The romantic movement in Greece in the United States of the Ionian Islands (at that time not a part of the Greek state) took the position of demotic Greek (opposed to the capital of Athens choosing *katharevousa*) (Mackridge, 2009b). As the homeland of Solomos, the influential Greek poet that wrote a moving piece about demotic Greek entitled “Dialogue,” it is not surprising that the support for the demotic language began here. Solomos in his writings focused heavily on the expressive qualities of the Greek vernacular that made it the only language that would be a true representation of the Greeks (Mackridge, 2009b). The first collection of Greek folk songs published by a Greek in Greece was published in the Ionian

Islands (Mackridge, 2009b), highlighting the support and influence of the demotic language there.

The language debate then carried over to Athens, the national political and cultural power. We will jump to when the crucial period of the language controversy began: specifically with the publication of Psycharis' book *My Journey* in 1888 (Mackridge, 2009b). Prior to this, there were numerous publications regarding the Greek language, both in support of *katharevousa* and demotic Greek. But it was only with this publication that it became normal for Greeks to take opposing sides and view the language in two more-or-less well-defined alternatives (Kritikos, 2013). The reason being the accessibility of the argument presented in the novel; it was both the first novel-length book written entirely in demotic Greek and it captured the rhetoric used to support *katharevousa* and applied it to the demotic cause (Mackridge, 2009b).

Psycharis believed, like many others within the language controversy, that the language question was not just about the language, but also about identity and the destiny of the Greek nation (Mackridge, 2009b). He was not alone in this belief. Georgios Tertseris (1800-1874), another major name in conjunction with the base of demotic Greek, was adamant that the national identity is inextricably linked to the folk spirit and vernacular, common language spoken by the people (Delivoria, 2009). The Greek nation-state needed further definition, and the demotic cause was there to help define it.

And so the demotic cause started gaining ground, with intellectuals, linguists, and literary writers giving their support to the use of demotic as an official language. Which meant the demotic language needed to be standardized; it represented the language of the people, which we know at the time contained many dialects across the state. In order for the state to use a language, there was a need for regulation and standardization of the popular

vernacular (Liakos, 1996), and Psycharis was one of the first to attempt to devise a grammar for the demotic language (Kritikos, 2013).

From here on out, the demotic language was known not actually as the spoken language, but rather the “codified and normalized form of the ‘natural’ language” (Frangoudaki, 1992). In a systematic manner, usually in collaboration with the state (Mackridge, 2009b), linguists, literary writers, and other intellectuals went to work to create an official codification for the language. Folk songs and literature, modes of communicating Greek culture, were the first place they looked to set the standard (Kritikos, 2013); they turned to familiar, childhood stories from the common population and used language phenomena from there to set the standard. It is from those findings that Triantafyllidis based the first official ‘state’ grammar book of demotic Modern Greek (Charalambopoulos, 1996; Mackridge, 2009b), which due to its success is still in use today (Liakos, 1996).

We must address, however, the issue with demotic – by connecting with the cultural present of Modern Greeks, it lacked the connection with classical antiquity that *katharevousa* provided, and in the minds of some, detracted from its legitimacy gained from the continuity ideal established by Europe and internally. How would the state-drafted standardization of the common lay person’s language allow for the glory of antiquity to be recognized?

In short, the supporters of the demotic cause did not want to stress the connection with antiquity in the same way. Due to a crisis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an ideological shift in Greece to blaming of “traditional values that had led the country to bankruptcy, failure, [etc.]” that incorporated a desire for a lesser reliance on Europe (Kritikos, 2013). There were also new needs of the state that needed to be addressed; a consolidation of the middle class and an increase in urban population had led the state to having different needs within education and language (Liakos, 1996) and a strong desire to assimilate foreign-speaking populations. In response, demoticists called on their own nationalistic ideals and

rejected the supremacy of classical antiquity and *katharevousa* and used language as a way to help make the changes modern society needed (Kritikos, 2013), all while providing a similar level of legitimacy to the system.

What legitimacy did the demotic campaign strive for then? The intellectuals and proponents of demotic Greek chose to focus not classical antiquity, but rather on the importance of the Byzantine Empire. The survival of the Greek language, they argued, was due to the holy texts being written in *koine* Greek under the Byzantine Empire, allowing for the survival of the modern tongue being spoken in the Orthodox households (Mackridge, 2009b). This was a purposeful reframing of the connection with the classical past. The modern language had survived thousands of years and still used the alphabet and similar grammar phenomena present in antiquity; the legitimacy of the Greek state was through the continual presence of Greeks in the classical lands as shown by a linguistically similar language to that of the ancient Greeks and Byzantium. This would become considered one of the most important intellectual movements of the time (Liakos, 2001).

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century went on, the language debate continued to take center stage at various points of political history. People were invested in the *diglossa* debate outside of the intellectual sphere. Various societies were founded to promote the demotic language and push for education reform, including the National Language Society and *Ekpedeftikos Omilos* (Educational Society) (Kritikos, 2013). Political stability was threatened with the social divisions caused by the debate (Kritikos, 2013) and it was not unheard of for violence to be the response to disagreement between the opposing groups (e.g. the Gospel Riots in 1901, the incident in the Athens' Royal Theater in 1903, and the textbook burning in 1920) (Kritikos, 2013; Mackridge, 2009b). Language was a powerful tool used by the state to create a national identity, and the people responded with passion.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the language debate ebb and flow. Factions developed within the supporters of both *katharevousa* and demotic, the state officially used both languages simultaneously as various stages, and each side took on different political affiliations. While we cannot say that everything disappeared overnight, the divide officially came to an end in 1976 when demotic was formally recognized as the “sole linguistic medium for purposes of government and education” (Christidis, 1996). A stipulation was added to the 1975 constitution (which, ironically, was written in *katharevousa*), stating that “Modern Greek is defined as the Demotic that has been developed into a Panhellenic instrument of expression by the Greek People and the acknowledged writers of the Nation, properly constructed, without regional and extreme forms” (Mackridge, 2009b). The linguistic war was coming to a political end, and the nation was unified under one official language.

### **Language and National Identity in Greece**

Throughout this paper, we have looked at the development of nationalism and the nation-state, the role language plays in these phenomena, and the development of Greek nationalism and nation-state. In the case of Greek nationalism, language was a crucial part of the development of the state and national identity. The *diglossa* debate highlights the importance of language and how the general ideological struggle between competing definitions of modern Greeks was represented in the two versions of the language, each one promoting a different version of “Greekness” (Frangoudaki, 1996; Kritikos, 2013). It also illustrates how the Greek national identity is a construct created by the Greek national language (Mackridge, 2009b), and the one would support the other.

To further understand this importance, one must look at the additional effects of nationalism and language on other aspects within Greek society and what further perpetuated the Greek national identity in relation to language.

### **Language & Education**

One of the main areas we can see the effects of the language debate and the definition of “Greekness” established by the debate is in education. It is in the classroom that national identity can be “instilled and cultivated” (Kitromilides, 1989), as history in narrative form “replaces the history which has been collectively experienced” (Liakos, 2001). Much of the *diglossa* discourse became incorporated into the school teaching, unsurprisingly, and influenced how many people in Greece came to think and talk about their language (Gallant, 2015).

Realizing that the nation is constructed on the language “resulted in the history of the language acquiring the shape of the history of the nation” (Liakos, 1996) allowed students to further internalize the new national Hellenic identity of both the classical world and Orthodox Christian one (Gallant, 2001). It is unique in the case of Greece that the language itself embodies the national ideals and perpetuates the national identity through its use.

### **Domestic Policy**

Another portion of Greek society that saw the ramifications of Greek national identity being set around language is within domestic policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, the nation-state actively worked on “Hellenizing” the Christian or foreign-speaking populations in the new state (Mackridge, 2009b) by creating a homogenous, monolingual nation. Any discontinuities that marked the history of Greece to not fit the continuity idea had to be reinterpreted so that the nation could be represented as a single, homogeneous unit (Triandafyllidou, 1998), and so to be Greek was to speak Greek.

After 1913, the Greek nation allowed only the “national” language, as minority languages were considered a threat to the nation (Livanios, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, we will look at one example: the Macedonian Slav population in Northern Greece. In 1936, an issue was ordered for the “restoration of the uniform language,” banning the use of

Macedonian Slav in both public and private (Karatsareas, 2018). This was not an uncommon story in the history of Greece, as many, if not all, linguistic minority groups in Greece faced similar persecution. Linguistic diversity was decidedly not to become an accepted part of the diversity in Greece (Tsitsipis & Elmendorf, 1983), and the effort of state authorities to force language assimilation was mostly successful ((Billig, 1995; Karatsareas, 2018).

### **Foreign Policy – *Irredentism***

The state, while taking care of the people within its borders, now had the issue of dealing with its citizens outside of its borders. As language became rooted in the heart of Greek national identity, it stood to reason that any individual that spoke Greek was Greek. This left a multitude of Greek “citizens” outside the original borders of the new state, and thus the *irredenta* policy was born. Also known under the name *Megali Idea*, it sought to have all Greeks within a single state (Livanios, 2007), which meant the state needed to expand its territory to include these Greek-speaking citizens (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002).

While the *Megali Idea* is a long and tumultuous portion of Greek political history, we will focus on one aspect of the *irredenta* policy for the purposes of this paper: the establishment of national education beyond the borders of the Greek state. In a symbolic way, the Greek state expanded its borders and could reach social groups that, by virtue of their language or religion alone, could be taught to identify with the Greek nation (Kitromilides, 1989). These schools would teach the Greek language outside the barriers of Greece, and within one to two generations a revival of the Greek language was seen. Orthodox populations were effectively socialized to see the Greek state as their homeland (Kitromilides, 1989), and non-Greek speakers were seen to learn Greek and self-define themselves as Greek (Kitromilides, 1989).

### **The Lasting Effects on National Identity**

As we were discussing above, it is clear that language as a cornerstone of Greek nationalism had numerous effects, including defining Greek national identity. It influenced the educational system and was the main tool utilized to teach the national identity through history and the use of the language itself. Domestic policy was created and directed in an effort to produce a homogenous, monolingual society, and thus minority languages were prosecuted. It even influenced the *irredenta* policy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, where education of Greek in lands outside the formal borders of Greece at the time was taking place and individuals were becoming to identify as Greeks through this process.

But was language truly an effective tool for Greek nationalism? I would argue that it was one of the most effective tools the fledgling state had to establish itself as a nation-state. It was so successful that the sense of national identity being invented in Greece has essentially been lost; the Greek national identity is currently perceived as being timeless and primordial (Gallant, 2001). Language was the tool that successfully helped allow people to forget they had ever been anything but Greek (Hertzfeld, 1986; Mackridge, 2009b). It unified a traditional and internally divided society and created a nation-state that extended in both time and space (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). It facilitated exactly what nationalism wanted it to: it allowed for people to “feel an ethnic identity, politicized ancient memories, and transformed traditional religious loyalties into national loyalties” (Kitromilides, 1989).

### **After the Diglossa Debate**

The *diglossa* debate was instrumental in the formation of the Greek national identity. because it was the tool that justified the continuity ideal and played into both the needs of the state and the nationalist ideals. We looked into the specifics of both sides earlier in this paper; what is important to discuss now are the impacts on national identity from of the *diglossa* debate that lived on past the official end of the language controversy. Language did not stop

playing a role in national identity when the state officially declared a single-language state. While it ceased to be one of the main points in wider political and social conflicts, it continued to have an affect over the intellectuals, politicians, and everyday people in Greece through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the present-day (Mackridge, 2009b).

As we remember from earlier, the 1975 constitution brought democracy back to Greece and included a stipulation in 1976 that established demotic as the language of the state. Because of this there was incredible pushback towards the state for their intervention, yet again, on the language system, and intellectuals continued to battle over the language through the '80s. Language was still defining individual citizens political and ideological allegiances (Mackridge, 2009b). Similar to the turn of the century, a language association was founded entitled *Ellinikós Glossikós Ómilos* (Greek Language Association) in response to the government's overstep. While the association didn't last for many years, the important takeaway is that issue of language invoked such a response; it clearly still held an influential part in Greek society. It is evident that the language debate was not dead, but rather had effectively transposed itself a singular issue within the mainstream consciousness.

The dualism of the Greek national identity embodied and perpetuated by the language debate had been consolidated into one single issue. But, one can still see the language divide in the lexical dualism embedded in the modern usage of the language. After so many years of language construction, inevitably two words would exist for any given object or concept. In use, the vernacular word would be present in common, everyday life and *katharevousa* would be used in the formal or scientific context (Mackridge, 2009b). In this unified language use, one can see the influence that the language debate had on national identity and continues to do so inherently through its existence alone.

The unified language of Standard Modern Greek officially in use from 1976 onward achieved what both the demotic and *katharevousa* versions aimed to do: it provided the

people with a perceived continuity from the time of antiquity through the Byzantine Empire, kept alive through the Ottoman Empire and in use in the present-day (Mackridge, 2009b). The desire of all intellectuals, founding fathers of the state, and Greek nationalists was to establish a direct connection with classical antiquity and today, and the language output was a sign of this success (Mackridge, 2009b). Best of all, the modern Greeks were able to have the best of both worlds; their present language would offer them the “most expressive and productive features of both demotic and *katharevousa*” (Mackridge, 2009b).

This new state mandate which allowed Greeks to use the most flexible language to communicate on an everyday basis, perpetuated the continuity ideal set forth in Greek nationalism; it is through the lexical dualism that the belief in an unbroken connection between classical antiquity, the Byzantine Christian world, and the modern nation-state was further solidified. The modern Greeks did not need to claim to be Hellenes, but rather by the sheer fact they spoke vernacular Modern Greek they were Hellenes (Mackridge, 2009b). It was apparent that there was a continued need for language to validate the Greek existence and national identity, and this has notable consequences.

Firstly, it has been noted that there is a widespread assumption in Greece that “modern Greeks are somehow superior to other people because of their direct connection with the language and culture of classical antiquity” (Mackridge, 2009b). As the “true protectors” of the Greek language stretching from the time of Homer to present-day (Mackridge, 2009b), there is an assumed responsibility of protecting the Greek language, which is perceived to be “in crisis” (Mackridge, 2009b). We can see that in the incredible pushback towards the state in their management of the language, and the implications for the Greek people and their perceived identity.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many educated Greeks were complaining about the “sloppy” language use by the contemporary youth and media; there was an “invasion” of indeclinable

words from American English and this was a threat to the Greek nation (Mackridge, 2009b). A social commentator at the time, Babiniotis, summarizes the issue best in his statement that “the unjustified, irresponsible, and unrestrained introduction of foreign words, which alters the character of our language, adulterates its structure and impoverishes its expressive power, constitutes yet another source for the erosion of our ‘Greekness’” (Mackridge, 2009b). This issue became formally recognized as the “language decline myth” (Frangoudaki, 2002) and books were published warning against the “linguistic de-Hellenization” of the time (Mackridge, 2009b) because of it. Any issue of language was an issue of national identity and what the definition of “Greekness” would be.

Inversely, any issue that threatened the national identity would in turn bring up the language controversy (Frangoudaki, 2002). One example of this is the fear of European integration. At the same time the “language decline myth” was formally defined, groups pushed for mandatory teaching of Ancient Greek to be reintroduced to the schools in fear of the decline of the Greek language (Frangoudaki, 2002; Mackridge, 2009b). The minister of education at the time defended this proposal by using the continuity ideal by stating that Greeks cannot “speak” their language properly without knowledge of Ancient Greek, since the language has developed continually since antiquity (Frangoudaki, 2002).

### **Who is Greek?**

Essentially, the language debate had taken a turn from the battle of two sides to a battle of a nuanced, unified language (Mackridge, 2009b). Greek national identity had been defined by language, and it is through the language people would fight for the national identity. This strict definition of Greek identity – to speak Greek is to be Greek – ushered the Greek people into the present day and straight into a difficult position in the diverse, everchanging social landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through present day has seen mass global migration, with Greece dealing with a large number of immigrants

not from historically “Greek” lands, but from all over the world (Mackridge, 2009b). Regardless of where the immigrants are coming from, the issue at hand is the assimilation of the immigrants to the Greek state and the diffusion of the national identity, and who is allowed to claim the national identity.

Currently, the nation-state of Greece has a notable portion of its population that have immigrated after the fall of communism. These people are having children in Greece and are raising them in a system and culture that has defined itself strongly as being ethnically, culturally, and linguistically homogeneous (Mackridge, 2009b). There is no room currently in the Greek national identity for those who are not homogeneous in this way, and yet there are people who only know modern Greece as being their home. The lack of flexibility in this national ideal is unfortunately due, in part, to the use of language as a nationalist tool to instill national identity in Greeks. The singular definition of Greeks is being called into question, because it is no longer crystal clear if all Greek speakers are to be included in the definition of the modern state. Adults coming of age in Greece in the past thirty years hold conflicting national identities, often not knowing what identity to hold for themselves, and the Greek state itself is unclear what it would want for these individuals (Mackridge, 2009b). Greece is undergoing a massive social change, and the previously prescribed and successful nationalist tools that established the fledgling state and created a strong national base are possibly undercutting themselves in the everchanging social landscape of the world.

### Conclusion

*“Language and homeland are one and the same. To fight for one’s homeland or one’s national language is one and the same struggle”*

– Psycharis, 1888

What makes one Greek? It is the eternal question that has plagued the Western world for nearly three hundred years, being ushered into the forefront of intellectual discussion by modernity. It is only when one dives into the historical context that one can begin to understand the complexity of this question. This paper has attempted to answer this question by looking at the role nationalism has played in the creation of Greek national identity, specifically through the use of language in creating Greek national identity.

From a general point of view, we have defined the nation as an “imagined community whose members believe they are linked by a shared culture” (Mackridge, 2009b), and it is within this definition we can understand the ideology of nationalism. Inherent to nationalism is the idea that the world is divided into nations and each nation is a unique entity, and that every individual belongs to a nation (Triandafyllidou, 1998). For the success of a nation, a congruent, singular national identity must be fostered in the new nation-state.

Specifically, national identity is the “perception of the individual belonging to a common group with shared values, behaviors, history, and habits of social life” (Kelman, 1997). How national identity is created is through various aspects of nationalism. When looking at the Greek case, one can see how historical context would make creating a national identity a priority, and also present the various difficulties the intellectuals would face in doing so.

The Ottoman Empire is the world in which the modern nation-state of Greece emerged, so one must turn to the situation in the empire to understand the present-day state of nationalism in Greece. As a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious empire, the Greek national movement would need to overcome all of this to establish a homogeneous, mono-

religious, monolingual nation. In addition, the myth of ancient “Greece” had become powerful outside of the Greek speaking society of the empire (Gallant, 2001; Liakos, 2001), and thus the nationalists would need to prove cultural continuity in Greece to justify the Western European intellectual ideals established during the Enlightenment and to gain support for the creation of the new state.

If the continuity ideal could be achieved in Greece, then the theoretical creation of the Greek state would be secured, allowing the support for the Greek War of Independence and eventual creation of the independent state (Herzfeld, 1986). The tool called on to create this continuity was one of the two cornerstones to the Greek national movement and base of Greek national identity: language. It was through language that the Greek continuity could be supported and a Greek national identity could be cultivated.

The use of language as a unifier in the fledgling state can be understood through the *diglossa* debate. Defined as the coexistence of two varieties of the same language in a given society (Frangoudaki, 2002), the *diglossa* debate in Greece was about the use of *katharevousa*, or “cleansed” Greek, and the demotic, or common/popular spoken language. The language controversy focused on the standardization of the Greek language, which inherently represented the general ideological struggle of the Greek state to project the ideal image of the modern Greeks that the Western world wanted (Frangoudaki, 1996).

The national identity promoted in the *diglossa* debate by both parties, while seemingly diametrically opposed, aimed towards the same ideal of establishing legitimacy for the Greek state through its connection with historical past. The creation of *katharevousa*, rooted in both Ancient Greek and modern Greek, showed a connection of the contemporary Greek world with classical antiquity. Demotic Greek reached out to the Byzantine Empire and highlighted the importance of the Byzantine Empire and the survival of the Greek language through *koine* Greek in the church and as a language of commerce and religion. It

was only with both parties existing that the continuity ideal could be met; it was shown through the Greek language that the modern Greeks were connected with both classical antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. This unified a traditional and internally divided society and created a nation-state that extended in both time and space (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002).

The *diglossa* debate highlighted the importance of language in the creation of the Greek state. To further understand the results of language being so important, we looked at how language affected the educational system, which was a vehicle for “instilling and cultivating national identity (Gallant, 2015; Kitromilides, 1989); domestic policy and the intolerance towards a multilingual society as a threat to the national identity (single language, single nation (Mackridge, 2009b)); and the foreign *irrendenta* policy that used language as a tool to awaken the national identity of the Orthodox citizens abroad. Language had become so salient to the Greek national identity that it was a held belief that all those who did not speak Greek could Hellenize themselves by learning the Greek language (Kitromilides, 1989). Language had become one of the most effective tools the fledgling state had allowed it to establish itself as a nation state, and it is through language that Greece found its legitimacy and created a national identity.

Most importantly, the affect language had on Greek identity was not isolated to the time of the *diglossa* debate alone, but holds power today. The debate officially ended in 1976 with the unified language of Standard Modern Greek being established as the state language, and conflict related to language still ensued. Through numerous examples, including the establishment of the language decline myth, we can show that language is indeed still at the root of the Greek national identity today and plays a role in various aspects of civil, political, and private society.

The purpose of this paper was to understand how language had become one of the cornerstones of Greek national identity. By investigating the results of language as the basis of identity, we have understood the extent in which language has been engrained in the Greek national identity. As a tool, language created a salient, unified Greek national identity that roots itself through spans of time and appeals to both the Western world and the Greek national movement. Additionally, it is in this unique case of Greece that the language itself embodies the national ideals and perpetuates the national identity through its use. While we can understand the past role language has played, the future is unclear; massive social change and increased global migration after the fall of communism in the Balkans is changing the demographic of Greece, forcing the nation-state to look at what it means to be Greek. If language isn't at the base of the Greek national identity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what will be? Who is Greek? Only time will tell.

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