

Kordić, Snježana: *Jezik i nacionalizam [Language and Nationalism]*. Zagreb: Durieux 2010. ISBN: 978-953-188-311-5; 430 S.

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In *Language and Nationalism*, Snježana Kordić tackles the tricky question of how languages have influenced the creation of new identities in post-Yugoslav states, especially in Croatia and Serbia. The experienced author is the right person to address the contested subject, as she has worked and (widely!) published across borders and disciplines, amongst other places in Osijek and Zagreb, in Münster or Berlin.

The book is divided into three main chapters, namely, Language Purism (1), Polycentric Standardized Language (2) and Nation, Identity, Culture, History (3). Each of these chapters comprises several smaller ones, one page or more in length, where Kordić elaborates the ideas of language, linguistics, politics, history, culture, etc. in a well-structured and academically highly laudable manner.

The first chapter deals with purism, its purpose and use within twentieth century history. She argues that „purism is an artificially constructed phenomenon“ and „is a characteristic of a certain number of people and not of language itself.“ (pp. 22-23) Kordić criticizes Croatian purist linguistic circles, especially their ideas and methods by which they „with the help of the media are spreading the myth about the decaying standard, while at the same time presenting themselves and their measures as salvation.“ (p. 27) She further argues that the changes introduced into Croatian language since 1991 were all politically motivated and therefore were „limiting the free use of language.“ (p. 36) According to Kordić, creating and introducing such strict rules in proscribing the use of language and creation of the new ones, serves to „artificially increase the differences between the Croatian and Serbian language.“ (p. 48)

Kordić's main argument of the second chapter is that people from Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia all speak one polycentric standardized language while at the same, as she argues, „national ideologues are forc-

ing differences in names in order to suggest that these are different languages.“ (p. 125) She concludes that „more than ninety percent of 'typically' Serbian words can be understood by more than ninety percent of Croats and vice versa.“ (p. 101) and that therefore, „Serbo-Croatian language was and still remains a non-unitary language, that is, a polycentric standardized language which consists of its national variants.“ (p. 144) Kordić goes even further in her criticism of linguistic approaches present among South Slavic linguistic circles and their focus on partial aspects of language in claiming that „indeed, the whole spectrum of features shows that Croatian and South Slavic linguists have substituted their scientific approach with the religious one.“ (p. 164)

In the last chapter Kordić examines and elaborates nation, identity, culture, and history, and how they are present amongst and misused by politically motivated linguists in Croatia. She claims that „in the South Slavic territories many think they will lose their national status if their language is not given the same name as that of a nation and if they do not defend their language as unique.“ (p. 169) She connects such interpretations with what she sees as a strongly rooted belief in the primordial character of nationhood. Kordić warns that „within linguistic circles of former Yugoslavia for the last twenty years one can depict a distinct trend of linguistic and political convergence in such a way that one can hardly discern between the two either by their context or the techniques, when it comes to speaking about the language.“ (p. 366) She concludes that „the fact that Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks or Montenegrins speak the same language does not endanger nations or states, nor does it have any negative consequences for their speakers.“ (p. 379) Here, of course, she distances herself clearly from the linguistic and political mainstream in most ex-Yugoslav republics.

The book provides the reader with an understanding of the highly politicized politics of language and the issues of linguistic and other disciplines in former Yugoslavia. The fierce reactions to the book cannot surprise: Whilst some intellectuals praised the book<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Miljenko Jergović: Hrvatska kao Snježana Kordić

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more deemed it necessary to engage into battle against such heresy. Perhaps the best example for the latter can be seen in the debate around the funding of the book. The fact that the publication was sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Culture caused the president of the Croatian Cultural Council to file a law suit in the name of the Council against the then active minister of culture<sup>2</sup> arguing that the state should not sponsor a book which is „anti-Croatian and against Croatian language,“ and is „aimed against Croatian culture and identity.“<sup>3</sup> Such statements exactly demonstrate the prevailing discourse against which Kordić critically engages in her book, namely that Croatian identity, language, culture, and nation are viewed and explained as inseparable. If one tries to scientifically question one of these ‘core elements’ of nationhood, and tries to deconstruct them, she/he risks the possibility of becoming ostracized simply because they dare to question the supposed ‘existentialism’ of Croats and their state. Presumably, Kordić was well aware of this when she cited Lončarek in saying that within national political elites „still lives, otherwise overcome, romantic-nationalistic idea from the end of the eighteenth century about the holy trinity of language, nation, and state, by which every nation must have a language which belongs only to them.“ (p. 170)

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[Croatia as Snježana Kordić] in: <<http://www.jergovic.com/sumnjivo-lice/hrvatska-kao-snjezana-kordic/>>; (27.03.2012).

<sup>2</sup> See <<http://www.hkv.hr/o-nama/priopenja/7062-prijava-hkv-a-protiv-odgovornih-osoba-u-ministarstvu-kulture-rh-zbog-sufinanciranja-knjige-gjezik-i-nacionalizamq.html>>; (27.03.2012).

<sup>3</sup> Nina Ožegović in: <<http://www.nacional.hr/clanak/95167/hitrecov-jezicni-lov-na-vjestice>>; (27.03.2012).