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Language, Religion and Ethno-National Identity: The Role of Knowledge, Culture and Communication

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Abstract

The influence of religion and language on ethno-national identity is well-established. This article explores these concepts as mutually reinforcing aspects of cultural identity and examines their relationship to the formation of world views and causal interpretations shaping often incompatible ethno-national identities and hence conflicts. Especially we focus on the role of oral cultures as primary communication forms as against print-based ones, and how they differ in recording the past and interpreting the present and future. In orality we find a relatively strong influence of traditional religion, mysticism and past references as key informers of identity, whilst print correlates with the declining role of traditional religion and the rise of science as fundamental dimensions of ethno-national identity. We argue that this distinction helps to explain different experiences of ontological security and insecurity linked to ethno-nationalism and religion.

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Introduction

The roles language and religion play in ethno-national formation are well-established (Simpson, 2007; Harttgen and Opfiger, 2012; Safran, 2008). However, they tend to be examined instrumentally: thus, language is explored as a tool for excluding non-nationals from economic opportunities (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm 1992; Dingley & Morgan, 2004) or religion as a means to convey legitimating myths or networks of relations that solidify ethnic identities (Dingley, 2011a; Smith, 1986, 1991). When the two are put together they become mutually reinforcing, especially when unique ethnic languages convey a religious message, conflating religion with the ethnic 'word', as in the Balkans (Dingley, 2011b; Merdjanova, 2000).

This article argues that the roles of language and religion in human cognition at individual and social/collective levels, and their impacts on trust and cognitive barriers of 'in and out groups', also need exploring. These effects reflect the way oral cultures structure the mind differently from print-based ones. In showing how religion and language play fundamental roles in shaping oral cultures, we build on the modernisation versus resistance to it theories of ethno-nationalism. This posits that economically developing societies forge cultural systems embracing Enlightenment values and attitudes, whilst those threatened by development rejected them for Romantic ideologies (Berlin, 2000; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992; Smith, 1998; Breuilly, 1993).

Modernising cultures are essentially print-based and print was fundamental to the rise of science, industry and the Reformation. Modernity is here defined in the classical sociological sense of industrialisation superseding rural-peasant societies with limited scope for economic growth (Armstrong, 2014; Nisbet, 1996). In societies fending off modernity the culture, if not predominantly oral and scribal, was strongly influenced by their vestiges, the transition often occurring over centuries. Such oral cultures were significantly undermined and ontologically disrupted by print.

This analysis thus aims to develop the relationship, primarily in the West, between the advent of modern society and the emergence of nationalist concepts embedded in classical sociology (Dingley 2008, 2015; Giddens, 1987). The analysis is primarily theoretical and draws mostly on the work of Ong (2002) Luria (1990) Stock, (1983) Goody (1977, 1986) and Havelock (1986) on orality, scribal and print culture, Yates (1992) on mnemonics and Eisenstein (2005) on printing and the book; relating their insights to the major modernisation theories on nationalism. In turn, we develop the relationship between these and arguments concerning ontological security and modernity (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Skey, 2011) to explore impacts on ethno-national conflicts.

With modernity, a new 'society' was created from pre-existing ethno-religious and ethno-linguistic divisions, for instance, in old composite monarchies. When different ethno-religious and linguistic groups shared in the benefits of modernity (or had it successfully imposed upon them) a cohesive integrated nation formed, hence the greater success of integrating the Basques in France than in Spain (Storm, 2004). Where this failed the old state fragmented into different ethnic nations.

Often these early breakaway ethnic groups were rural/peasant societies in regions where traditional religion still dominated social and political life, and they became a key feature in violent secession campaigns (Skocpol, 1979). Consider the break-up of Yugoslavia, where ethnic Serbian sentiment and militancy were strongest in predominantly rural areas, not Belgrade, Serbia's only urbanised region (Ramet, 1996).The worst ethnic atrocities were committed where the Serbian Orthodox Church's influence was strongest. Dingley (2011b) charts how the major (Western) terrorist campaigns of the previous 40-50 years were predominantly in rural, peasant, anthropologically 'low culture' (Gellner, 1983, 1990) regions. Here - from Québec to the Basque country - strong linguistic identities and traditional religion played key roles. The partition of Ireland was particularly symbolic in that predominantly Protestant Ulster was Ireland's earliest region to industrialise, with English as the 'natural' language of its industries. The rest of Ireland (90 per cent Roman Catholic), had an avowedly peasant-proprietor economy and - following independence (1921) - sought to revive Gaelic as the national language, measures hostile to industrial-commercial interests (Dingley, 2015).

Such religious-linguistic differences correlate with Gellner's (1983, 1994, 1997) arguments about the structural and cultural imperatives of modern nationalism and Berlin's (1991, 2000, 2007) observations of Romantic reactions against the Enlightenment (see Lyon, 1994), illustrated by Hobsbawm on the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

> The battle lines of linguistic nationalism were drawn by provincial journalists, schoolteachers and aspiring subaltern officials. The battles of Habsburg politics, when national strife made the Austrian half of the empire virtually ungovernable, were fought about the language of instruction in secondary schools or the nationality of station-masters' jobs (Hobsbawm, 1992, 117).

This linguistic intolerance reflects more than simple prejudice or material interests, being inflected by the structuration of the mind in oral cultures and how they and relating authority systems, are disrupted by the introduction of print. Such media are not simply channels for news and information. They convey constructions of reality, shaping and reflecting social meanings, understandings, opinions and identities (Gamson, 1992; Adoni and Mane, 1984;

Berger and Luckman, 1967). The most fundamental media revolution was the invention of printing: introducing printed records and books, diagrams, tables and graphs to replace first scribal and then oral traditions based on memory (Eisenstein, 2005; Febvre and Martin, 2010; Stock, 1983; Goody, 1977, 1986). Such developments raised vital questions of ontological security and the relation of the individual to the group, since how the past is recorded, one's current and future place in the cosmos, were now mediated very differently. They mark new forms of knowledge and ideas of truth, with major implications for structures of authority and power, reflected in the sociology of Weber (rational efficiency, 1976), Durkheim (mechanical versus organic society, 1984) and Tonnies (community and society, 1963). Such themes dominated sociology in nineteenth century Europe (Nisbet, 1996; Hughes, 1961) and still echo in the works of figures like Derrida and Heidegger (West, 1996).

There are other dimensions to linguistic and religious nationalism, but we concentrate here on the ontological aspects of print versus orality, a hitherto generally overlooked area. Additionally, we show that Anderson's (1991) argument about the importance of print-capitalism for national identity has deeper implications than he argued, by emphasising the role of print media in structuring the mind differently. This, we contend, impacted differentially on the coalescence of various cultural groups into a single national imaginary. These structures are accordingly delineated as important features of mental, social and political life and, consequently, the formation of cultural identities.

Orality and scribal versus print cultures

A seminal work here is *Orality and Literacy*, wherein Ong (2002) argues that the invention of printing occasioned a fundamental shift in knowledge production and processing. Printing was more than just a technological leap forward with economic and utilitarian benefits. It profoundly restructured minds, perceptions of the cosmos and the human place within it, space and temporality. This break with the past and corresponding re-orientation to the future, also reshaped systems of knowledge, through moving away from the subjectivity of oral cultures. Instead, the apparent objectivity of print culture enabled projection forward, rather than backward, in terms of both cognitive and moral knowledge, thereby helping to create a consciousness of 'progress'.

Ong's insights reinforce Goody's anthropology (1977, 1986) and Stock's (1983) ecclesiastic history. Both noted the impact of scribal culture on the structure and production of knowledge. For Goody, working in Africa, only the advent of writing enabled the ability to draw up precise lists, formally categorise and group objects together, freeing minds from the

burden of having to remember everything. This enabled a new degree of worldly comprehension, organisation and control to be exercised by those who could write, who then became differentiated from the non-literate. They could project ahead and begin to intellectualise about events by drawing comparisons from written lists that enabled them to categorise and identify connections, something virtually impossible in the ethereal world of orality and memory. Structures and ideas could be reified, which the sentiment driven and memory dependent oral world made very difficult. The written word possessed an apparent objectivity the oral lacked.

Meanwhile, for Stock (1983), the development of late tenth and eleventh century scribal culture in newly established monasteries and religious orders initiated an abstraction and intellectualisation in religious debate. The written word enabled reflection on and analytical response to the text. Consequently there developed an increasingly rigid religious doctrine which referenced, not tradition, custom and popular sentiment but formal records, canonical law and scripture. Theology and church teaching moved from mass participation to abstract doctrine which only small, literate elites could participate in. The rest were increasingly marginalised and made passive recipients of an increasingly centralised and bureaucratic Church and State. However, as Stock observes, scribal writing still was often written for transmission orally to an audience. Meanwhile, scribal works could never be properly standardised due to issues such as human copying error. Nonetheless, the ability to objectify and develop intellectual arguments - separating objectivity from subjectivity - was clearly enhanced. This laid the foundations for the development of modern scientific thought. The relationship to science, for Ong, made print a much more significant communications development than writing.

Walter Ong

This insight was informed by Havelock's (1986) pioneering analysis of Greek drama that identified a profound compositional shift from oral to written, following Albert Lord's (1960) earlier findings on the orality of epic poetry. The texts strongly suggest the poetry was only written down and fixed as a text considerably after initial composition. Thus the compositional style of early Greek drama, Havelock found, differed markedly from later work. The structure, vocabulary and syntax in the latter suggested these were now written rather than oral compositions. In the process they accordingly used a different narrative style from the earlier dramas. This led Havelock to claim that writing was fundamental to the shift in Greek consciousness that enabled initial development of scientific modes of thought. It enabled Greek philosophy because it facilitated fixing the meaning of concepts in objective

(written) words, enabling precision of meaning. Without precision scientific language is impossible, being simply poetic, subjective (emotive) and ascriptive, not analytic and descriptive. Poetics, as Aristotle observed, are necessarily imprecise, not analytical, articulating subjective understandings of truth, not literal (objective) ones. But by creating precision, sharable between reader and writer, the shift from oral to written culture created new epistemic communities. Epic poetry performed in social gatherings speaks to shared emotions and communal experiences, whilst written language conveys objectified knowledge which is no longer experiential.

The foregoing is particularly true vis-a-vis how language became fixed in written form in the ancient world. Written law codes fix meanings and penalties and hence define behaviours. These, tax and revenue records and receipts define a community, who are members, their obligations and what constitutes transgressions against that community. These identity- and state-forming processes were facilitated by the shift from oral to written culture, as settled cultures require stability, which necessitated greater precision in behaviour and obligations than nomadic cultures. Thus Hammurabi's code was incorporated into the second main form of written text of the ancient world – the sacred text (Farkas, 2011).[1] Ideas of law were thus both fixed in writing and divinely sanctioned. Sacred texts established authoritative hierarchies of knowledge shared vicariously through scribal copies. The highest form of knowledge became that revealed in scripture.

Whilst oral culture required laborious, imprecise, memorisation of laws, facts, figures and divine commands, records of information enabled greater accuracy and capacity. Further, it was easier to project forward and think constructively from these data banks. Not least, the written record became fixed and external (objective) to the subjective mind and emotional (impressionistic) distortion, aiding the development of abstract thought.

Naturally Havelock had critics (Halverson, 1992) but he profoundly influenced many later scholars, including Goody (1977, 1986). Perhaps the most important exponent of Havelock's thesis is Ong (2002) who applied it to the advent of print. Ong argues that its impact far exceeded that of scribal culture, for writing without print was often just a more highly developed version of orality. Scribal culture was also highly individualistic, each scribe writing down their own interpretations of what others said or wrote. It was idiosyncratic, relying on memory or the scribe's emotional state when writing. Subjectivity and mistakes played a major role. Because each book or document was individually written it was also rarely possible to compare it with an original or standardised version (itself a problematic concept, since what counted as standardised varied in different traditions and times).

Further, scribal documents necessarily had very limited circulation (due to lack of quantity and resulting high cost), restricting literacy and knowledge of these documents. Accordingly, they were often written to be read out aloud, often to illiterate audiences, thereby retaining many oral features to enable audience participation and memorising, e.g. mnemonics or poetic styles. Consequently, few even among the literate could check for textual accuracy or authenticity.

For Ong, print radically altered the situation, ushering in a consequent cultural and mental revolution. The introduction of print to Europe and the invention of moving type (Hannam, 2011) meant books could be mass-produced to be read by large numbers relatively cheaply. Knowledge and debate began to be democratised. It became possible to produce standard versions (corrected and proof-read). Perhaps more importantly, the requirement to memorise ended. This freed the mind to concentrate on debating and discussing meanings, new interpretations, veracity and speculation on the future with constant reference back to the standard text. The fixed, standard reference in the printed word enabled critical engagement with, rather than passive memorising of text. It could now be compared and debated accurately by many individuals across time and space, enabling precise reference and comparison. Concurrently, it therefore also hardened and objectified linguistic divisions as texts became standardised in vernaculars, enabling a mass market to emerge. (Eisenstein, 2005; Febvre and Martin, 2010; Anderson, 1991).

These developments were vital for the rise of science, as experiments could be accurately recorded, distributed, and replicated amongst fellow scientists and observers throughout a growing international republic of letters. This sharing of empirically acquired knowledge allowed faster data collection through cooperative action. It also facilitated sorting the new knowledge into taxonomies. These findings could then be re-examined to check that results and findings remain constant, facilitating validation in print for further replication. This has become the basis for peer-reviewing and cross-checking across an epistemic community, consequently creating higher forms of knowledge than the teller of (tall) tales, forming the core of the self-correcting methodology of science (Popper, 1963) and the basis of its legitimacy and prestige in western society. None of this would have been possible without print.

With print, knowledge and information became fixed and determinate, providing a foundation for rational debate: as Voltaire put it, 'If you wish to converse with me, define your terms' (Bossard, 1931). Additionally, it furnished a basis for observable change, and thus for the new conceptions of progress emerging in the eighteenth century. For Ong, this is because modern print culture restructured minds, moving away from elliptical and subjective

thought into thought systems based on formal rationality and observation of cause and effect. Current critical theory (see Sokal, 2010; Koergte, 1998) does not undermine this point: that the development of scientific methods established means for a verifiable approach to observable truth (Brown and Malone, 2004). It additionally freed people from dependence upon nature. Instead, as Thomas Tregold put it in 1824, by 'directing the great sources of power in Nature for the use and convenience of man' (Kennelly, 1926) the construction of the new and artificial world of industrial society was facilitated.

The key factor for Ong was the shift from elliptical to structured thought, enabling rational explanation. He considered thought processes in oral cultures elliptical both because minds dominated by memory recall are subject to problems of remembering - which require poetic and mnemonic aids - and because their story-telling is therefore not direct and sequential, which requires detailed knowledge usually beyond the capacity of memory. Alongside this development Ong added a further dimension, the impact on traditional religion of the decline in oral culture.

This decline in traditional religion (in the post-Reformation West) is directly linked to the rise of print, for the Reformation would hardly have been possible without its invention (Stock, 1983). The resulting standardised, vernacular Bibles - widely available in terms of quantity and cost - proved instrumental in facilitating a literate society (Eisenstein, 2005; Febvre and Martin, 2010). Subsequently any literate person could read the Bible for themselves. The nature of debates shifted, with references to text and documentation replacing ideas of tradition and custom, especially for those elites who debated and interpreted this new knowledge for the still illiterate or semi-literate majority. Print, the Reformation and the development of scientific method changed the way knowledge was understood in early modern Western Europe (Thomas, 1971; Brooke, 1991). In addition, these changes in the nature of knowledge and knowledge production thus altered the way these new elites understood themselves and the external world they inhabited, helping to shape the cultural clashes of post-1789 Europe.

Luria, print and mind structuration

Ong also extensively drew upon the work of the Soviet neuro-psychologist, Alexander Luria (whose work mostly occurred under Stalin's regime and was therefore unknown in the West until much later). Luria's particular field of research is expressed in his book's title *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations* (1976), which explores significant differences in how the mind is structured and functions between literate and non-literate people in 1930s Uzbekistan. Luria found differences of perception, generalisation and

abstraction, deduction and inference, reasoning and problem-solving, imagination and self-analysis and self-awareness. Thus his literate subjects grouped objects of different shapes and utility into formal taxonomies. The non-literate subjects did not, instead establishing utility links between objects and grouped them accordingly: thus one hammer, one saw, nails, screws and screwdrivers were grouped as a set of carpenter's tools. Similarly, geometric shapes were grouped in relation to concrete objects, such as circle and plate or moon.

Thus literate subjects thought in terms of abstract categories, whilst non-literate subjects grouped in situational terms and practicality. Luria found a contrast between formal logic, abstract principles and intellectual deductive procedures and thinking dependent on known objects, activities and concrete exemplars. Similarly, non-literate subjects resisted general definitions of objects: their world was personal, experiential and situational. It was also emotional, with few abstract categories linked by formal logical reasoning derived from text-formed thought and analysis. Abstract statements and self-analysis were difficult for them, and they found it difficult to separate themselves from lived experience. They had their own sophisticated and complex explanations for what were for them important life matters. However, their thought was constructed differently, utilising symbolism to a greater extent to communicate meaning. And whilst Luria associated print with science, he associated oral culture with art forms; not just pictures but poems, songs, rhymes and other metrically tailored formulas to aid recall.

In Berlin's (1991, 2000) classic style the foregoing returns one to a dichotomous Enlightenment versus Romanticism view of humanity, based upon science versus arts, and modernisation versus resistance to it nationalism. Support for this also comes from studies of Ireland (Foster, 2015; Brown 1981; Garvin, 1981) that note how late nineteenth-century Irish revolutionaries were often poets and dramatists, whilst the Unionists of the time were contrastingly industrialists and scientists (Boyce and O'Day, 2001; Bowler and Whyte, 1997). Similarly, poetic narrative and composition was equally important in the internal communications of the traditional rural society in early twentieth century Yugoslavia (Ong, 1982; Ramet, 1996). For Ong this connects the work of Parry with Havelock's analysis of classical Greek drama. Parry showed that these poems were structured to aid memory, not replication. The poems, although metrically regular, were never repeated exactly the same, always being adapted to context and rural audience in Orthodox Yugoslavia. (Parry, 1971; Lord, 1960).

Such observations parallel Zulaika's (1988) analysis of Basque Bertsolari (oral poetry). As Zulaika observes, traditional Basque culture is not only rural (and highly resistant

to modern agri-economics) but Roman Catholic. This culture is reflected in a tradition of non-standardised and improvised poetry composed orally on the spot. Concurrently, it also reflects traditional concerns and themes. In particular, Basque nationalism is strongly marked by resistance to modern, 'scientific' approaches to agriculture and the intrusion of a modern secularising state into its regional affairs (Clark, 1984; Dingley, 2010). Similarly, Irish nationalism centred upon a peasant-proprietor ideal, reflected in resistance to science, commerce and centralisation of the modern state (Dingley, 2013, 2015). Ramet (1996) noted the same dichotomy between rural and urban in Serbia. The separatist movement of Québec was also founded upon a traditional rural economy wherein the Roman Catholic Church played a central, communal role. Catholicism is of note here, since both print and subsequently science were severely restricted after the Reformation (through the Inquisition and the Index of Books) in Catholic states like France, Italy and Spain. The emergence of the counter-Reformation in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thus terminated the early role of Northern Italy in the Renaissance (Eisenstein, 2005; Febvre and Martin, 2010; Shapin, 1995; Gaukroger, 2008).

Romantic cultures and nationalist movements/identities mostly reflect what Ong describes as strong residual orality. Thus, citing an example from Cork (Southern Ireland), he identifies how questions are answered by questions – an elliptical response – not direct answers. Discourse and verbal interplay is demanded, not object attention and introspection; in turn reflecting a communal not individual reference and structure to thought. A similar experience, as Ong indicates (1982, 67-8) is the process of haggling in Middle Eastern bazaars, which involves more than economic transaction. Here, prices are not fixed, as in regulated capitalist enterprises. A product's value is negotiated in a face-to-face society. To an extent this still happens in the West, through networking, but here it is influence and access, not goods that are traded. Thus print culture does not terminate informal economic relations, but does formalise key swathes of economic activity, creating an impression of abstract market forces, delineated with the rise of eighteenth century print culture, such as Smith's (1776) invisible hand. Thus print helps generate different types of consciousness between the literate and non-literate. This encourages separatist nationalisms, particularly of the Romantic kind, which attempt to hold on to normative, unchanging views of identity in resistance to the disruptive universalising actions of modernising states. This insight can also be used to help explain ethno-religious conflicts where an elite print culture finds itself in conflict with indigenous oral culture, as in Serbia, Ireland or the Basques. Progress from one to another is not necessarily even or complete over time or space.

Mnemonics and the art of memory

Of particular relevance here is the seminal work of Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* (1992). She, like Ong and Havelock, notes how classic Greek drama and poetry required enormous feats of memory, even after script was invented. Aiding memory therefore took precedence over accuracy of recall. Thus memory-enhancing images which associated ideas with objects often dominated orality. Consequently oral culture had an elusive quality, evoking magic, emotion and mysticism. Memory worked by association through mnemonics. Indeed, mnemonics was regarded by scholastic philosophers as a cardinal virtue, rooted in Aristotle and incorporated into medieval (Western) Christian thought via Thomas Aquinas. In a pre-print age people recalled via images and mental pictures and spoke in rhetoric (a core ancient and medieval skill) where the role of the imagination was vital. The spoken (rhetorical) word expressed this, not through abstract categories and fixed causal relations reliant on print-data for reference.

Mnemonics was therefore a central feature of memory, knowledge and the soul. It was part of the divine, part of the lost world that Tonnies or Heidegger invoked (West, 1996, Nisbet, 1996). It was also specialised and exclusive. Mnemonics required great learning and skill, taking years of training and mental exercise to acquire and develop. Meanwhile, its roots in memory and imagination placed it closer to traditional religion and the arts. Above all, it was fundamentally backward-looking, relying on a shared, normative past between teller and audience as well as the requisite memory skills (Nora, 1989). Such story-telling required a static and normatively understood past and society, so that associated images remained readily identifiable to the audience. So although mnemonics uses flux, ellipsis and change it does so by relying on a very fixed world of order and images that the audience knows and understands precisely because it is collectively understood as fixed and unchanging.

This was the medieval thought-world where scribal culture was limited to small (clerical) elites whose writing was often designed for oral recitation or memorised for the illiterate masses. The insides of churches were painted with pictures to tell biblical stories with moral instruction via images, not words. Bibles were rare, hand-written and for reading out loud, whilst plays by strolling players were also popular means for religious and moral instruction (Stock, 1983). This was also a world in which bards played a major role in noble and chieftain courts. The poems and sagas they told were often oral records for moral instruction, full of allusion for current and future action. The bard was consequentially a significant figure, often coming from a traditional bardic family who passed their skills and folklore on, adding to their mystique (akin to the magician).

A dominant intellectual figure here was Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), who introduced the scholastic philosophic (based on Aristotle) tradition that dominated Catholic theology until Vatican II (1960-64). Aquinas had discovered Aristotle via the Islamic philosopher Averroes (Hannam, 2011). This philosophy rooted the soul in the memory and treated mnemonics as a key intellectual tool, thus also implying an equivalent place in Catholic theology. The art of memory, mnemonics and scholasticism had deep implications for Roman Catholicism, reflected in its commitment to tradition, imagery, ritual, and ceremony (greatly emphasised during the Reformation debates, Wallace, 2012). Meanwhile scholasticism had great significance for modernity. Bertrand Russell (1996, 428) noted its 'Indifference to facts, and science, belief in reasoning in matters which only observation can decide, and an undue emphasis on verbal distinctions and subtleties'.

Science, whose methodology is founded on facts and observation, is almost wholly without this intellectual compass: indeed, it positively threatens its existence. Additionally, and partly in consequence, science is future-orientated, concerned with discovery and the new, utilising banks of past data gathered and recorded for future use. The consequence was a clash between two systems of knowledge - both requiring great investment in time, learning and resources - in which religion was deeply implicated.[2]

As modern church and social historians (Wallace, 2012; Bossy, 1985; Armstrong, 2007; Turner, 1991) have observed, the term 'religion' derives from the Latin *religio* relating to customary bonds, mores and practices. Thus religion reflects the society we live in and depend on, the social relations that maintain us both mentally and physically, including the kind of knowledge needed to survive in our environment. In contrast, modernity frames communal inclusion through the prism of the nation (as the politically bounded social community) rather than religion. It also creates opportunities for the cultural residues of religion to shape identity politics in contemporary societies. Populist politicians can now use residual religious sentiments for mass mobilisation against outsiders (Whitehead et al., 2018). Similar tactics may be utilised by immigrant community leaders to mobilise their communities against host populations (Carment, 2007; Cox, 2017; Posner, 2017).

This reflects the kind of observations classical sociologists, such as Weber, Tonnies or Durkheim, made about religions' role - both symbolic and practical - in the acute nineteenth century problems posed by the rise of science and industrial society (Hughes, 1961; Nisbet, 1996) This development undermined old settled communities, traditional social bonds and relations. Even within existing states such changes, were not spatially uniform (Breuilly, 1993), instead being marked by rural/urban and religious divisions that map onto

the epistemic communities delineated here. The residue of this process continues to shape contemporary ethno-national identities and conflicts.

Criticism of Rome long pre-dated the Reformation. Examples include medieval Cathars (France), Italian Waldensians and Bohemian Hussites (Stock, 1983). However, the combination of the Reformation with the spread of printing enabled mass reading of a standardised Bible, personal study, scriptural reflection and analysis of Church teachings (Ives, 2012). Print also enabled mass circulation of pamphlets criticising clerical elites and highlighting abuses. The more people read, so their minds became better trained to critique and question, most dangerous for established elites. Thus many church historians (Wallace, 2012; Bossy, 1985; MacCulloch, 2004) stress how it was amongst new rich merchant elites and nobility and regions with expanding economies - all of which were positively impacted by the way print helped standardise and enhance markets - that the Reformation took hold. These societies, emphasising industry and international trade, became the Protestant nation-states of the Atlantic seaboard. They forged new world-wide socio-economic and political relations, whilst internally stimulating industrial revolutions and enlightened unification nationalisms.

These new states were also (relatively) liberal, tolerant and scientific centres as well as Protestant. When elites in Roman Catholic states attempted a similar modernisation, such as in France or Italy, it led to revolutionary collisions with the Roman Catholic Church. Thus the unification of Italy in the 1860s led to the new King and government being formally excommunicated by the Pope, after the state had dissolved the monasteries and religious orders and forcibly incorporated the Papal States into unified Italy (Duggan, 2008). France had a century of revolutions and ultimately a formal secularisation that totally separated Church and State (Dingley, 2008).

A society's level of orality and religious culture thus influences deep identity conflicts over modernisation processes. The legacy of a once vibrant bardic culture was, for instance, a significant aspect of the clashes that shaped the emergence of eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish nationalism (Brown, 1981; Foster, 1989). Indeed, as Riordan (1990) indicates, part of the trauma of Ireland's incorporation into a metropolitan British state lay in the seventeenth century eclipse of the Gaelic bards' poetic and mental world. Its continuance in a peasant folk-world relatively untouched by a rationalising 'Protestant Ascendancy' furnished a tradition readily recalled in the land conflicts of the 1880s and the Gaelic revival they prompted (Boyce, 1988; Lee, 1989).

Similarly Dingley (2010) shows that the core of traditional Basque identity is not just Catholicism but an attachment to traditional farming patterns (*basseria*) and the informal

communal relations around them, symbolised in the *bertsolari* (improvised, oral, poetic tradition). As Clark (1988) noted, Basque violence mostly evolved within a narrow band of territory where the modern world directly clashed with the traditional. This explains the antipathy of traditional Basque (peasant) farmers to the new co-operatives established to help make their farms sustainable – because the co-operatives required modern scientific (economic) management, taking the 'soul' out of them (Zulaika, 1988). Stewart (1989) makes similar points in his 'shatter-belt' analogy, identifying the worst violence in Ulster as happening where modernisation directly impacted on traditional Ireland. Furthermore, Ireland's partition followed not just Protestant versus Roman Catholic divisions, but also those between an industrial and scientific versus a peasant economy (Dingley, 2015). In Ireland 70 per cent of all pre-1914 science school places were in (Protestant) Ulster alone (Bowler and Whyte, 1997). In Islamic societies (also rooted in scholastic thought) the case is similarly stark. Thus prior to 1726 printing was permitted only for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, and between 1727 and 1838 (when print was opened to all) only 142 books were published (Hanioglu, 2010). Within our framework it is unsurprising that only subsequent to the *Tanzimat* reforms did nationalism slowly emerge within the Ottoman Empire.

Ontological security

The disruptive effect of print thus observably impacts on ontological security in oral cultures. This concept of ontological security has been given prominence by Giddens (1990, 1991), relating it to perceived cultural or existential threats to socio-political identities. Ontological security in traditional, oral cultures is thus based on normative understandings of how society and culture operates and of the individual's place within those structures. Ontological insecurity is aroused by perceived outside challenges, whether intellectual (new ways of thinking) or from incomers whose mere presence might disrupt what are perceived as unchanging, organic structures and processes.

In modernity nationalism plays an important role in providing ontological security via its historical narratives, whose accuracy is secondary to its security role in providing an account of belonging and being. This collective account has a past - a story, tragic or glorious - which explains how and why we are here and (hopefully) where we are going and our contribution to it. Consequently, attacks on this reified nation, its constructed identity and history can meet with great emotional resistance, causing acute anxiety and possible conflict. That which disrupts ontological networks, from immigrants to counter-narratives is ontologically deeply disturbing.

Before nationalism religion provided ontological security, thus explaining the strong emotive responses to attacks on religious narratives, for religion's social function is about collective bonds (Armstrong, 2007; Ives, 2012; Wallace, 2012; Whitehead et al., 2018). Most early religions were civic, with civic gods that later developed into national or even universal ones of belonging and inclusion in a collective set of relations. Religion provides a sense of continuity, linking present, past and places of origin in a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger, 2000), a role modernity conflates with nationalism (Smith, 2003; Dingley, 2011a).

If religion and nationalism can coalesce in shared narratives around a common socio-political order they provide a stable basis for ethno-national identity. If not, they become a source of conflict, particularly for a modernising (scientific) nationalism. One threatens the existence of the other. And the emotional problem for traditional religion can be quite traumatic, since it involves loss of the orally defined 'soul' and its ontological security, hence the lure of Romantic nationalism.

This relates to Durkheim, Tonnies and Weber's work on religion and the law. All identified the rise of industrial, scientific society with the Reformation, a withering away of formal religion, growing rational-secularism (Durkheim, 1984; Weber, 1964) and the rise of new societies, which Giddens (1987) identifies with nationalism. However, all concurrently noted the change in the nature of law, which became more rational and intrusive, shifting from tradition, custom and group rights to individual contract law (Little, 1969) in developing states. This implied major breaks from the past, with its few fixed and finite relations, leading to greater modern flexibility and movement, making and remaking relations via agreed contracts geared to highly specific and fixed relations. These were shorter, but more immediate and finite, part of an ongoing, future-orientated process of change within a greater, more abstract collective (nation), which continued on and fixed the individual firmly within it (Gellner, 1983). Thus increased individualism and freedom of movement and ideas coincided with an increased dependency on the nation to provide for ontological security.

The opposite applies to collectivities where traditional religion dominates. The 'soul' is locked in belief systems: hence neither that belief system nor the consequent ethnic identity can change without losing it. Individuals cannot move on, develop and change without undermining their soul: a resistance enforced by authority structures, including the family (Arensberg and Kimball, 1968). Consequently development often prompts violent counter-reactions, such as in Québec's resistance to increased incorporation into Canada (Dingley, 2011b); whilst Southern Ireland's resistance to incorporation into the UK displayed similar traits. Such cultural clashes continue to shape reactions against the revisionist interpretation of Irish history which began to emerge in response to Northern Ireland's

'Troubles' and the rapid modernisation of post-1960s Ireland (Boyce & O'Day, 1996; Brady, 1994).

These observations correlate with Durkheim's (1984) identification of religion with society, not least in terms of maintaining social relations. For Durkheim religion was but the idealised symbolic representation of society, its structures and relations. The soul was the internalised collective voice of society calling to the individual on the psychic level, part of our consciousness and sense of being. As social relations changed so did individual consciousness. Consequently these became less religious and more national, while performing the same identity functions. Resistance to such processes, however, helped create the ethno-national identities delineated in this article.

Conclusion

We argue that print structures the mind differently, enabling science and scientific thought and creating new forms of consciousness which shift ontological senses away from religion towards nationalism. This suggests explanations for why some multi-ethnic and multi-religious states were less disrupted by modernity than others. It is these others that tended to produce ethnic conflict because different ethno-religious (structured) minds cannot unite into a single 'collective consciousness' without losing (or sometimes trying to recapture) a sense of existential ontological security.

In traditional societies identity works through personal relationship groups, which overlap with civil identities and religious affiliations. Print, as Anderson (1991) observes, enables the imaginary of the group to transcend these limits and associate instead with the 'imagined community' of the nation. However, in the process of defining more tightly and commonly across territory who the national in-groups are, it also importantly contributes to defining out significant others. Thus it creates consciousness of differences, not least through the differing knowledge structures print highlights and reifies.

Such an analysis also ties in with the general themes of sociology and philosophy that have long dominated them. Thus Tonnies' observations on the loss of *gemeinschaft,* with its ideas of close intimacy and fellow feeling, rather than calculation and rational association of industrial society (*gesellschaft*), can be correlated with oral versus print communication and culture. Rational calculation necessitates a print culture, whilst fellow feeling implies an oral one (Nisbet, 1996). Meanwhile, one can identify links with Heidegger's concern's for autochthony (or groundedness) in his search for meaning in an industrial and technological world of *techne,* with necessarily written instructions and formal rules (Metcalf,

2012; Geschiere, 2011). Similarly Derrida, in his deconstruction of language and concept of *difference*, seeks to transcend the western metaphysical tradition to identify a totality and self-presence that lies in the play between 'presence' and 'absence' (West, 1996). In this Derrida, like Tonnies and Heidegger, implicitly recognises the connection between language and religion, soul and community.

Language, as our analysis utilising Ong's orality versus print model shows, should therefore be seen as more than simply a matter of differences of expression, while religion is clearly more than just creation myths, symbols and narrative. Instead, both are dynamic and fundamental to understandings of the world. Such modes of communication shape forms of knowledge and identity, since print enables more structured record-keeping, categorisation and the development of modern science. Concurrently, its advent disrupted - and in some regions still does - oral cultures wedded to traditional forms of knowledge and communication, provoking resistance and conflict. This framework thus provides new insights into ethno-religious identities and conflict by seeing them as reflective of epistemic communities. In the process it also offers an alternative and more plausible explanation for their emergence through the interplay between adaptation and resistance to these changes in modes of communication and thus the structuring of thought-worlds. Accordingly, it is a framework which can also be used to analyse the relationship between new types of communication such as the rise of social media, knowledge formation and contemporary developments in ethno-national identities, but that is a subject for a future article.

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[1] These, like Greek dramas, contain much that is poetic and oral in origin.
[2] Some caution is required as many fundamentalist Protestant sects, such as Old Light Presbyterians in Ulster, also utilise a scholastic frame of reference, wherein the authority of the Bible is taken literally.

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