SPRAWY NARODOWOŚCIOWE Seria nowa / *NATIONALITIES AFFAIRS* New series, 48/2016: 1–21
DOI: 10.11649/sn.2016.001

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA

NATIONS IN THE BUBBLE OF SOCIAL REALITY: LANGUAGE AND ALL THAT[1]

ABSTRACT

In the last century and a half scholars from different disciplines began to distinguish between material reality (the universe), the biosphere, and social reality (the semiosphere), as three important heuristic categories. In the latter half of the 20th century, the philosophers John L. Austin and John Searle proposed that language and its use enable humans to generate social reality. They also analyzed the mechanisms of the process. From another perspective, the evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar offered an explanation of how language was selected in the process of human evolution, and argued that its primary function is group-building, that is, the generation of social cohesion. Drawing on these insights, the article proposes that the dilemma of whether nations exist objectively or are subjective entities can be resolved by analyzing this problem in the light of Searle's distinction between *ontological* objectivity/subjectivity and *epistemic* objectivity/subjectivity.

K e y w o r d s: concept of nation; Dunbar's number; epistemic objectivity / subjectivity; intangibility of social facts; objective / subjective existence of nation; ontological objectivity / subjectivity; semiosphere; social reality; tacit knowledge

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA
University of St Andrews, St. Andrews, United Kingdom
E-mail: tomek672@gmail.com
This work was supported by the author's own resources.
No competing interests have been declared.

[1] As always, I thank Michael O Gorman for his insightful suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, I appreciate Jacek Serwański's and the two anonymous readers' comments that helped me better this text. And of course, I alone remain responsible for any remaining infelicities. I am grateful to Alexander Maxwell for his invaluable advice, and to my students at the Cracow University of Economics, Cracow, Poland with whom, in 2010-1, I usefully discussed some of the ideas presented here. An early inspiration to my pondering these issues was Stanisław Lem's novella *Kongres Futurologiczny* (1971, translated as *The Futurological Congress* [1974]). Reading it in the 'cold and hungry' 1980s in the communist Poland, I began to perceive the highly ideologized 'reality' of communist rhetoric—pouring incessantly from the mass media—as merely a theatrical decoration peeling off the actual reality experienced by the average person in the street.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences [Wydawca: Instytut Slawistyki PAN]

NARODY W KOKONIE RZECZYWISTOŚCI SPOŁECZNEJ WIDZIANE Z PERSPEKTYWY JĘZYKA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Od półtora stulecia badacze z zakresu różnych dyscyplin zaczęli wyraźnie rozróżniać pomiędzy rzeczywistością materialną (tj. wszechświatem, ogółem bytów materialnych), biosferą oraz rzeczywistością społeczną (semiosferą), jako powiązanymi ze sobą trzema kategoriam analizy heurystycznej. W drugiej połowie XX stulecia filozofowie języka John L. Austin i John Searle dali tezę, iż to język oraz jego użycie pozwala ludziom generować rzeczywistość społeczną. Obydwaj również badali mechanizmy rządzące tym procesem generacji. Z kolei psycholog ewolucyjny Robin Dunbar przedstawił model wyjaśniający, jak język (tzn. biologiczna zdolność językowa) został wyselekcjonowany w procesie ewolucji. Na tej podstawie postawił on tezę, iż prymarną funkcją języka jest umożliwianie budowania grup ludzkich, czyli innymi słowy, generowanie potrzebnej ku temu spójności społecznej. Korzystając z powyżej wymienionych ustaleń, artykuł proponuje nowe podejście do szeroko dyskutowanej kwestii czy narody istnieją obiektywnie lub są subiektywnymi bytami, analizując to zagadnienie w świetle zaproponowanego przez J. Searle'a rozróżnienia pomiędzy *ontyczną* obiektywnością/subiektywnością a *epistemiczną* obiektywnością/subiektywnością.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: pojęcie narodu; liczba Dunbara; epistemiczna obiektywność / subiektywność; nieuchwytność faktów społecznych; obiektywne / subiektywne istnienie narodu; ontyczna obiektywność / subiektywność; semiosfera; rzeczywistość społeczna; wiedza milcząca

> *No nation, not even the Dzhan, can live life split up and scattered. People receive nourishment from one another not only through the bread they eat but also through the soul, through sensing and imagining one another; otherwise, what can they think about, where can they spend the tender, trusting strength of life, where can they scatter their sorrow and find comfort, where can they die an unnoted death? With only the imagination of his own self to nourish him, a man soon consumes his soul, exhausting himself in the worst of poverties and dying in mindless gloom.*
>
> Andrey Platonov 'Soul' (2008, p. 130)

WHAT ARE NATIONS?

In recent decades the discussion about the phenomenon of the 'nation' has been dominated by the controversy between primordialists (or perennialists) and constructivists (or modernists), with intermediate stances taken by other participants between the two extremes. The former see nations as very ancient if not eternal, and thus emanations of nature itself. They tend to identify the time of the coalescence of a pet ethnic group with the beginning of a nation; the earlier the better (cf. Isaacs, 1975; Kohn, 1944, p. 430). Constructivists, in contrast, claim that nations are products of modernity, constructed by elites (or 'wannabe' elites, the so-called 'activists') through the means of popular elementary education, conscription into standing armies, ubiquitous state administration, mass production (that is, industrialization) and mass communication (cf. Deutsch, 1953; Gellner, 1983; Hroch, 1985). In the middle ground is the compromise position, attempting to reconcile the two opposed camps, that nations are modern phenomena but are rooted in premodern ethnic groups (cf. Smith, 1986).

All the aforementioned discussants tacitly assume axiomatically that nations exist as a matter of course, and proceed with defining *what* and *when* particular nations are and were. The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) delved into the ways in which ethnicity is generated by human groups and into the mechanisms of this process. Later, the Anglo-Irish-American anthropologist Benedict Anderson (1983) saliently proposed that nations are 'imagined communities,'[2] meaning that people constituting a group (in this case termed a 'nation') see themselves as belonging to it, and, by the very act of 'seeing,' create this group as a social fact. Between them, the two scholars commenced the shift in thinking on human groups from their 'thingness' to the processes that generate them. But as the American sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2004) recently remarked, most scholars researching nations and nationalism tend to be guilty of 'groupism.' They continue focusing on the 'thingness' of nations, looking for their 'essence' and tirelessly searching for 'what they really are,' as if Barth, Anderson and the Czech Marxist historian Miroslav Hroch (with his phase model accounting for how nations tend to be established on the basis of ethnolinguistic groups in Central Europe) had not joined the discussion yet.

CAN YOU KISS A NATION?

The most fascinating but, on the other hand, exasperating quality of nations (or, for that matter, any bigger human groups) is their viscerally felt existence in the face of the eerie and seemingly paradoxical intangibility that characterizes them. To put it differently, nations *exist* but one cannot *touch, see*, or *hear* them. (I am not talking about symbols such as flags, maps, anthems, organizations or governments, which aspire to symbolize or represent nations, but are *not* nations themselves.) This cognitive dissonance is deepened by nationalist rhetoric that requires one to love one's nation and even to sacrifice one's life in its defense. This emotionally charged language is abducted from the sphere of the individual's family and transposed onto the nation. The ideologue's wish is that the individual should behave and act in the interest of the invisible nation as he or she would in the case of his or her own family. Thus, emotional resonances and responses are recruited for political ends.

We know from our everyday experience that families—in the usual meaning of this word—are visible. Their tangible existence hinges on biological reproduction (notwithstanding the possibility and increasingly high occurrence in the modern world of culturally-constructed [ie. non-biological] kinship[3]). Simply put, man and woman in lovemaking share their DNA material, leading to conception and pregnancy, and in the successful conclusion to the latter, woman gives birth to their offspring. These are 'facts of life.' The biological link is reinforced through everyday interaction and various cultural practices customary in a given group that are perpetuated by family members in face-to-face contact with one another and with neighbors who, in turn, constitute their own, separate families.

Obviously a nation cannot be 'one big family,' as nationalists propose, at least not in the literal (biological) sense of this concept. But somehow individuals accept the rhetoric

• • • • • •

[2] A similar idea was expressed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), in the same year that Anderson's book was published, when they proposed that activists and politicians of national movements 'invent traditions' (or 'long and glorious histories') of their postulated nations in order to nudge the nations into existence and to legitimize their political status.

[3] I thank the anonymous reader for this important correction.

(perhaps, initially inducted to it through the practices of not always biologically underpinned kinship) and only rarely are they struck by the strangeness of the language of family being hijacked as the language of nation. Most do not give a second thought to how a country may be one's mother (as in 'Mother Russia'), why in English Ireland can be both, fatherland and motherland, while in Polish, Poland is almost exclusively 'fatherland' (*ojczyzna*)[4] and in Russian Russia must be 'family or clan' (*rodina*[5]). What is more, it does not surprise people that one is expected to 'love' one's nation, even though it is impossible to embrace, let alone, kiss it—the usual ways of showing one's affection for another person.

But humans do create groups that transcend the biological confines of family and of face-to-face groups of biologically unrelated individuals (often termed 'clans' or 'villages' in ethnography and anthropology). Today's norm is that nations number tens, hundreds and even thousands of millions of people. One does not have the faintest chance of meeting all of them in a lifetime; a person can count on meaningful interaction (that is, real face-to-face contact or face-to-face contact mediated through writing and other communication devices[6]) with merely hundreds, or at most thousands, during a lifetime.

Anderson (1983) explains this propensity to claim affective membership of larger groups through his concept of the 'imagined community': people, by believing that there are nations of which they are members and acting upon this belief, make the nations a reality. Barth (1969) explains how these intangible entities (or, more broadly, ethnic groups) maintain boundaries among themselves. In essence these boundaries are not spatial, but they effectively confine a specific ethnicity to a given group. In essence, members of a nation (or a group), wherever they go and find themselves, carry this boundary in their heads by ascribing in-group status to themselves and marking others as outsiders belonging to other nations or groups.

Of course, because the boundary is enshrined in the individual's mind, he or she is able to exchange it for another, thus becoming a member of another nation (or group). Going from one nation (group) to a different one means that one positions oneself outside one's earlier nation (group) and inside another nation (group). This act by itself does not necessitate any change on the spatial plane. The concerned individual may remain in the same house and locality where she used to be a member of a different nation (group) than the one to which she belongs at present. Importantly though, the members of the old nation (group) and the members of the new nation (group) who interact with the individual in question must approve of the individual's choice for it to become effective.

The scenario described above is of the simplest kind, treating groups as discrete entities and humans as capable of belonging to only one single group. Obviously, it is a simplification, though one often posed as the absolute truth by ideologues of nationalism. Groups can intersect with one another and contain one another, while individuals may belong to several groups either serially or simultaneously, as quite 'tangibly' attested by the phenomenon of dual citizenship, or the renunciation of citizenship of one state in order to acquire citizenship of another polity.

• • • • • •

[4] The Polish counterpart of 'motherland,' namely, *macierz* is an obsolete word of much restricted usage. (I thank Jacek Serwański for this reminder.)

[5] Russian *rodina* for 'fatherland' or 'motherland' is derived from the Slavic word *rod* ('clan, extended family'); *rodina* means 'family' in Ukrainian and in Polish, though in the latter it is spelt slightly differently, as *rodzina*. In turn, all these terms stem from Slavic *rodit'*, that is, 'to give birth to' and 'to be born.'

[6] Obviously, television and radio do not count as devices of this kind, because face-to-face contact must go both ways. In addition, this mediated manner of contact seems not to be possible among groups larger than three to four individuals (cf. Dunbar, Duncan, & Nettle, 1994; Stiller, Nettle, & Dunbar, 2003, pp. 400–401).

As a result, the question of how this is possible arises. What enables humans to imagine nations (groups) into their intangible existence, and to see themselves as belonging to these ethereal entities that appear so real to us, humans? I propose that animals can perceive you and me as individuals; they can even sense a family as a separate entity, especially when its members remain in a single household. However, because we have no way successfully to communicate to them the imagined, intangible existence of nations (or of any non-face-to-face groups), animals are inherently incapable of discerning them. By the same token, an extraterrestrial arriving on Earth could be in position to notice humans as discrete beings or entities, but would not be able to perceive their intangible groups, unless the existence of such groups were successfully communicated by humans to this extraterrestrial.

LANGUAGE: NATURE OR NURTURE?

From the above the crucial activity on which the intangible existence of an imagined group is predicated appears to be communication. All living organisms communicate with one another and the inorganic world through an assortment of sensors and signal-producing devices, and also through the consumption of organic matter and of elements drawn from their inorganic surroundings. This is the nature of life as we know it. But humans can also communicate through the use of language. Not that this facility is specific to humans, as we share it with other species, especially primates (cf. Premack, 1971; Savage-Rumbaugh & Fields, 2000). But non-human species seem either incapable of using or simply do not use language as an instrument of group formation (cf. Fitch & Hauser, 2004; Vilain, Schwartz, Abry, & Vauclair, 2011).

On the contrary, in the case of humans, language is *the* instrument of group formation (cf. Deacon, 1997). Robin Dunbar (1992, 1993) proposed that the size of the neocortex in primates (including humans) is the direct measure of the information retrieval limit. Because this threshold differs from species to species, it allows them to constitute socially cohesive groups[7] of varying maximal sizes. It appears to be one of the size-determining factors in group formation. In primates social cohesiveness is achieved by conscious, purposeful and intensive face-to-face relations maintained by all of a group's members with one another. The two direct constraints on the scale of the relations are the size of the neocortex that allows for keeping track of such relations with a certain maximal number of individuals, and the time necessary for gaining and consuming the requisite amount of food and liquid.

In primates the typical non-sexual manner of maintaining one-to-one relations is grooming.[8] In the case of humans, the large size of the neocortex enables one to establish and maintain relations with about 150 individuals ('Dunbar's number'). Employing only grooming for creating social cohesion would have left humans with no time for food gathering. This alimentary constraint appears to have led to the rise of language as *the* instrument of the creation and maintenance of social cohesion in human groups. Grooming

[7] I speak of 'socially cohesive groups' to draw the line between them and socially non-cohesive 'aggregations' of individual animals, as typical of large herds formed by Bovidae (e.g., cattle) or Equidae (e.g., horses).

[8] Sexual relations strongly bind individuals with one another, but the competitive and, thus, generally exclusionary nature of such relations makes them unsuitable for maintaining social cohesion in groups. Sexually created bonds are usually limited to subgroups (cliques) within a socially cohesive group.

can be effectively conducted on a one-to-one basis only, while the maximal size of 'natural' conversational groups (that is, not formally organized groups, as in the case of work meetings or parliamentary assemblies) in humans is between three and four people. The human capability to 'verbally groom' three or four people simultaneously means that language use led to a potential efficiency gain of a factor of three or four in sustaining social cohesion, thus liberating mental and physical resources for other activities (Dunbar et al., 1994; Stiller et al., 2003, pp. 400-401).

The adoption of language for creating and maintaining social cohesion in groups of humans transformed it into the medium of cultural evolution that has been shaping humans and their groups on a par with biological evolution[9] since the emergence of the so-called modern human 200,000 years ago in Africa (cf. Distin, 2011; Liua, Prugnollea, Manicab, & Ballouxa, 2006; Stringer & Andrews, 1988).

It was this unprecedented (to our knowledge) extensive use of language that made the modern human species unlike any other on the planet. Cultural evolution let humans adapt to a dizzying variety of environments on *terra firma*,[10] so that during the last 100,000 years they spread across all the continents with the lone exception of the extremely inhospitable Antarctic (Stone, Lurquin, & Cavalli-Sforza, 2007, pp. 182–215).

SOCIAL REALITY OR THE SEMIOSPHERE?

What is common and necessary both to cultural evolution and to the worldwide spread of humans is language.[11] Its continuous use by humans creates, maintains and recreates

• • • • • •

[9] Cultural evolution (also known as 'cultural transmission,' or 'sociocultural evolution') accounts for changes in the non-physiological behavior and products ('culture') of human groups and for the influence of these changes on the social functioning, thinking and behavior of individuals within these groups. Significantly, transmission of information, or 'cultural traits,' takes place vertically (from parents to children) and horizontally (among peers), and in addition, for the transmission to be successful, the participants do *not* need to be genetically related. Thus, a Vietnamese orphan adopted by an American couple behaves as Americans do and speaks American English. In contrast, in biological or genetic evolution, transmission is (almost) invariably vertical, from one generation to the next, and (nearly) exclusively among genetically related individuals, or more generally, organisms. Biological evolution is possible only through sharing and exchanging genetic material, or DNA, whereas the basis and medium of cultural evolution is culture, or in other terms, social reality as generated by humans and their groups, with their unique capacity for and their actual use of language. As explained below, biological evolution takes place only within the biosphere and cultural evolution within the semiosphere (or, perhaps, in biospheres and semiospheres in the plural, though we have no knowledge of such other spheres at present). The former kind of evolution takes place in and through the bodies of organisms, while cultural evolution (as we know it now) is possible only through the brains in people's heads. Cultural evolution is secondary to biological evolution; the former may be possible only enfolded within the latter, meaning that the rise of the semiosphere would not have been possible without the prior existence of the biosphere. This necessary tie of cultural evolution to biological evolution leads to the phenomenon of 'gene-culture coevolution.' In this area, matters are complicated by the overwhelmingly faster rate of change in cultural evolution than in its biological counterpart (cf. McElreath & Henrich, 2007). One of the most interesting examples of gene-culture coevolution in humans is the close correspondence between genetic distance among human groups and the degree of difference among their languages. Usually, the bigger the genetic distance, the bigger the linguistic difference is (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 2003).

[10] The Earth's surface is composed in one-third from land and in two-thirds from bodies of water. Biologically, the human is incapable of living in water or on its surface, hence cultural evolution opened only land habitats to human beings. It is possible to argue that the uninhabitable character of Antarctica stems from the fact that it is covered by a thick layer of frozen water, that is, the ice sheet. Obviously, the cold itself is also an inhibitory factor.

[11] It seems that because no animals use language as the main instrument of social cohesion, cultural evolution is negligible in their case, biology having the upper hand. In this they are unlike in humans, since cultural evolution appears to be overshadowing biological evolution in the human species. It does not, however, preclude the possibility of the rise of localized bubbles of social reality in non-human groups constituted through one-to-one grooming. Within such face-to-face groups of primates it is possible to analyze the history and social dynamics of relations among individuals and their cliques; the stuff of ethnography, novels

intermeshing human groups, making them into the 'natural' environment (or 'niche') of the human being. The bubble of social reality thus produced embraces all humans creating a symbolic sphere of interaction among them in groups, between groups, and also between individuals and groups. As reasonably suggested in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), should one happen to be ejected outside this bubble of social reality, one perishes or suffers psychologically debilitating 'loneliness.' In the latter situation the individual invariably longs for the resumption of everyday contact with other humans.

How could the bubble be described and analyzed? In Classical Antiquity the Greek term *ecumene* emerged for denoting the 'inhabited world,' also identified as the world known to the ancient Greeks and Romans (Kaerst, 1903). It is a pretty good distinction because the bubble is present only where groups of humans live. Prior to modern times, people living in different areas remained isolated, one group from another, for tens of thousands of years, so in regard of that period it is necessary to speak, in the plural, of ecumene*s*. But the rise of maritime empires, and of worldwide trade and travel, connected them into a single species-wide bubble of social reality (cf. McNeill, 1963), thus heralding the epoch of the 'Homogenocene' (Samways, 1999), or globalization in the more popular parlance of today.

In Soviet scholarship the distinction between the ecumene and the uninhabited parts of the planet was marked with the terms 'biosphere' and 'semiosphere.' The former term was coined by the geologist Eduard Suess (1875, p. 159), by which he understood the surface of Earth where living organisms dwell. He opposed the biosphere to the lithosphere (the 'rocky' bulk of the planet), the hydrosphere (seas and oceans) and the atmosphere. The Soviet geochemist and philosopher Vladimir Vernadsky began in 1925 to use the concept of biosphere (Vernadskiĭ, 1925) quite actively in order to explain the influence of living organisms on the surface of the Earth.

The totality of living organisms (now we know that all are defined by DNA of ultimately the same origin), or the biomass, Vernadsky opposed to the 'noosphere' (from Greek *nous* for 'mind'), which, in a diary entry in 1938, he equated simply with humankind (Vernadskiĭ, 1989, p. 180). Vernadsky and the French philosophers Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Edouard Le Roy had jointly coined this neologism in the course of their discussions in Paris in the early 1920s (Samson & Pitt, 1999, p. 4). The noosphere embraces the part of the biomass that gained self-consciousness, or—as we would say today—possesses the theory of mind, or the knowledge of one's own mental states and the ability to discern and attribute mental states to others (Sodian & Kristen, 2010, p. 189).

It is necessary to possess language in order to think about mental states and name them. As can be seen, the terms devised to describe the space occupied by humans on the planet, be it 'ecumene', 'noosphere,' or 'social reality,' all circle around language as the defining feature of this space. It remained, however, for another Soviet scholar, Yuri (Iurii) Lotman, to hit the nail on the head. Drawing on Verdansky's explicit opposition of the biosphere to the noosphere (cf. Vernadsky, 1945), in the early 1980s, Lotman proposed the concept of 'semiosphere' for denoting the space where semiosis—any activity involving the creation and manipulation of signs for the production of meaning—is possible. He added that outside the semiosphere, language cannot exist. In the extra-semiotic sphere the biosphere tends to be present but is incapable of semiosis; otherwise it would become part of the semiosphere (Lotman, 1984).

• • • • • •

and microhistory (cf. Robbins & Boesch, 2011), and some historians have already become interested in the potential for interspecies comparisons (cf. Smith, 2009).

The formulations are quite tortuous, to the point of opacity. I propose that the ecumene, social reality, the noosphere and the semiosphere are near-equivalents. These concepts, each in its own subtly different way, comprehend the space populated by individual humans and human groups by recognizing the distinctive and *sui generis* nature of that space, due to the extensive and intensive use of language within it. This employment of language gives rise to the intangible network of relations between people and their groups. In their dynamic totality these relations spawn social reality, which is the only field where cultural evolution is possible.

Hence, 'culture' is another equivalent of the four aforementioned terms. The much discussed and commented upon opposition between culture and nature is that between the ecumene and the uninhabited parts of the world, between the noosphere and the biosphere, between the semiosphere and the extra-semiotic space, or between social reality and material reality.

Having said that, it seems that the subject matter studied by the social sciences (including history[12]) and the humanities is necessarily limited to social reality, that is, to the semiosphere. In turn, biology busies itself with the biosphere, while the physical sciences are concerned with the material reality of the entire universe. From this perspective, the bubble of social reality is minuscule (compared with the bulk of our planet's sphere), coinciding with less than 30 per cent of the Earth's surface. Representatives of human social reality travel on and in the hydrosphere and in the atmosphere; they scratch increasingly deeper into the uppermost layer of the lithosphere, occasionally venture to Antarctica and into immediately adjacent outer space. Some have even walked on the Moon a few times. In all these places, by talking and communicating, they carry social reality with them and continually recreate it. However, this is only for a short while, because man has not yet managed to establish any viable or self-sustaining human colonies in these inhospitable places.

On the whole, the semiosphere is extremely fragile, occupying a tiny space in the universe on the non-liquid surface of the Earth, and subsisting in the heads of humans. It is less durable or maintainable than the biosphere, which existed before humankind, and which will in all probability continue to exist after the disappearance of the human species. And both, the semiosphere and the biosphere, are less permanent than the material reality of the universe, which, according to our current knowledge, preceded both and will last after they vanish.

Greek Antiquity	Uninhabited world	Ecumene
Social and natural sciences	Material reality	Social reality
Social sciences	Nature	Culture
V. Vernadsky	Biosphere	Noosphere
Iu. Lotman	Extra-semiotic sphere	Semiosphere

The discussed terminology for distinguishing between material and social reality

[12] Obviously, the methodology of historiography can be deployed outside social reality by making elements of the biosphere and the universe its subject. But history of this kind either probes into these things in order to gauge their salience for humans and social reality, or step-by-step it becomes biology or another natural science.

The term 'social reality' for describing the totality and dynamics of relations among humans and their groups was coined with the rise of sociology in the mid-19th century (cf. Comte, 1853, p. 495). But only a century later, a reflection began on how social reality is actually constituted. Having arrived at the intimation that language mediates (and, significantly, that different languages mediate differently, though not to the preclusion of the possibility of successful communication among speakers of these different languages) the human being's perception and understanding of the world (including other humans), linguists and anthropologists pointed to language as instrumental to the rise and maintenance of social reality (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Whorf, 1956).

The question arose of how the construction of reality is effected through language. The British philosopher John L. Austin (1962) proposed that language is not merely about articulating utterances that may be true or false, which by that time had become the established approach to language. Simplifying his model, he classified human utterances[13] into two groups, *constative* and *performative* utterances. The former describe states or facts, while the latter 'do (or perform) things with words,' shaping and changing social reality. Constatives can be true or false, whereas performatives may be only 'happy' or 'unhappy,' in Austin's formulation, though to denote this distinction in meaning, I prefer the adjectives 'effective' and 'ineffective.'

'The Earth orbits around the Sun' is a true constative, but the constative 'Mont Blanc is higher than Mount Everest' is false. 'The board nominates Mr Smith as the director of the company' and 'I now pronounce you man and wife' are examples of performatives. They cannot be true or false, only effective or ineffective. If, following the articulation of the utterances, Mr Smith is recognized as the director and undertakes his new duties, and a fiancé and a fiancée are joined in a marriage, it means that the performatives were effective. They changed social reality in line with the intentions of the speakers and persons concerned, meaning the board and Mr Smith in the former case, and the priest (or civil servant) and the future spouses in the latter. However, if for some reason Mr Smith refuses to accept the nomination, and a person attending the marriage ceremony makes it known that the fiancé is a married man already, the intentions of the speakers and the persons concerned are not fulfilled, and the performatives are ineffective.

The philosopher John Searle, Austin's American pupil, proposes that performatives generate institutional facts (I prefer the expression 'social facts'[14]) that are intangible and invisible, and as such are imperceptible to anybody else but humans (Searle, 1995, pp. 94–95). For instance, the fact that Mr Smith is (or is not) the director, belongs to the sphere of social, not material, reality, and the same is true of a couple being married or not.

Social facts are created, shaped and reshaped by performatives as exchanged among people, and the totality and the dynamics of social facts generate social reality (semiosphere) in which humankind is immersed. Or even more generally, social facts

• • • • • •

[13] Austin preferred the term 'utterance' to 'sentence,' because the former term rightly underlines the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, language is an oral phenomenon in humans. Thus, 'sentence' is of a secondary order in relation to 'utterance', being a graphic representation, or more truly, a reinterpretation and a reduction of utterance. In the world in which we live, overwhelmingly more utterances are articulated than are written down as sentences.

[14] Searle usefully distinguishes between social and institutional facts, the latter being a subset of the former (1995, p. 26), but the distinction does not need to concern us here, though it should be mentioned that in the majority of cases mentioned in this article 'social facts' actually mean Searle's 'institutional facts.'

—and by extension, social reality—cannot exist without, or outside, language (Searle, 2010, pp. 62–63).

Searle borrowed the concept of 'brute facts' from the Anglo-Irish philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) and opposed them to what he termed institutional (social) facts. The former, in other words, are 'material facts,' that is, rocks, trees, planets, oxygen, magnetic fields, water, mammals and so on. The totality of these material facts adds up to what we understand under the term 'material reality,' which is synonymous with the universe and with Lotman's extrasemiotic sphere. Importantly, social facts are secondary to material facts, meaning that social reality cannot survive without material reality, though the latter can well exist without the former. For instance, before there can be a coin, there must be a small disc of metal that people would agree to see as a carrier of economic value, and thus it becomes what is known as 'money' (Searle, 1995, pp. 34–35).

By the same token, though generalizing a little, material facts are visible, tangible or audible, while social facts are *not*. They are *in*visible, *in*tangible and *in*audible. We cannot see that a metal disc is a coin or money, that Mr Smith is the director or that a couple is married. But we somehow do perceive these, and this is so thanks to the social context, which we have so much internalized by our having been raised in it and living in it that it appears to us to be 'natural.' We know all these imperceptible things about the coin, Mr Smith and the couple, not directly through our senses with which we perceive material reality, but due to our experience of the structure of social reality acquired via continuous bonding with and experiencing other people and their groups.

Since material reality is foundational for social reality, the biosphere (or this part of material reality that is closest to humankind itself) underlies social reality and may well prosper without the latter, too. On the other hand, the semiosphere (social reality), as we know it today, is impossible without the biosphere. Hence, although at present, humanity appears to be more decisively shaped by cultural evolution, in essence, this type of evolution is secondary to biological evolution. And the former would never have had a chance to occur without the latter.

The distinction between constatives and performatives, though important for the comprehension of the generation and of the dynamics of social reality, should not be overdone. Both types of utterances belong to language, and if language is the *sine qua non* of social reality, constatives also contribute to the rise and maintenance of social reality. (Language, however, is part of material reality[15] and links it with social reality by being *the* medium through and with which humans generate social reality.) For instance, the constative 'Mr Smith is the director of the company' is a comment on a social fact, while 'the Earth orbits around the Sun,' is a constative on a material (brute) fact.

• • • • • •

[15] The biological character of language may appear to be a contradiction in terms to many Europeans whose education has led them to share the Herderian belief in languages as 'souls of nations,' a belief dating from the turn of the 19th century. The capacity for language, vested in the human brain and body, is undeniably biological. What is more, talking (or language, actually) is very material: sounds (phonemes) are generated by the speech organs in the mouth and the throat before they are projected as a sound wave (or a change in the pressure of the air between the speaker and the hearer). And if one erroneously chooses to equate writing with language (though the former is a very sketchy graphical representation of the latter; strictly speaking, writing is *not* language, as a photograph of Mr Smith is *not* Mr Smith), ink is dark liquid for jotting letters down on paper, both having mass and specific physical characteristics. I am writing this article on a computer, so the literal weight of the letters is minuscule, but calculable nevertheless, since they are actually magnetic traces on a hard disk.
Interestingly, the ubiquity of writing in the West, and the subsequent influence of the written on the oral (consider, for instance, the phenomenon of spelling surnames and words by the speaker, so that the hearer may know how to write them down) allows for talking about gene-culture coevolution in the case of such intensely literate languages as English or Chinese.

However, it appears plausible to propose that in the totality of all utterances articulated day after day by all humans today and in the past, performatives have always been more numerous than constatives. We must ask why this is so. The answer lies in the evolutionary origins of language itself. The process of evolution did not spawn it for enabling scholarly discussion or scientific books, in which, by the way, constatives outnumber performatives. As remarked above, language, as a novel kind of 'multiple-person touchless grooming,' was an evolutionary response to the alimentary and time constraints which invariably appeared when humans began to constitute face-to-face groups as big as were allowed by the size of their neocortex.

Should we agree with this proposition on the overwhelming preponderance of performatives in human speech, it turns out that the primary function of language is to establish and maintain relations among individuals in human groups, *not* communication in the narrow sense of exchanging disinterested information on social and material facts. Obviously, under certain conditions such exchanges on these facts may contribute to bonding among individuals and to the social cohesion of a group. But most constatives, especially those appearing in scholarly books, do not seem to be effecting this primary function of language.

Not surprisingly then, disinterested analysis of social and material reality is of no (or no immediate) interest to the vast majority of humans. This tendency can be usefully indexed against the greater popularity of novels than of academic monographs. It is so because the former aspire to reflect social reality (in essence they are a kind of gossip on, for instance, who slept with whom after the party on Friday night, which interests most people), while the latter are collections of constatives adding to (often extremely abstract) arguments on the unfolding of specific processes in social and material reality, and on their patterns or regularities – a minority pursuit, indeed. Hence, scholars practice their trade through constatives, while people at large (including scholars outside their professional context) live through performatives. The 'overuse' of constatives makes scholarship and science what they are.

As the Austro-British philosopher Karl Popper proposed, the core of the scientific method is the principle of falsifiability. It means that when a theory is proved wrong (falsified) by a new observation, a new theory must be developed that would account for the newly observed case that falsified the previous theory. However, unlike performatives, only constatives can be true or false, that is, falsifiable. Hence, it is necessary for scholars and scientists to couch their arguments and findings in constatives, which is part and parcel of the scientific method (Popper 1934/1982, pp. 47–59).

Language, as a verbal substitute for social grooming, is actually quite ill-suited for pursuing research. This evolutionary origin of language spawns an interesting consequence. The Hungaro-Austro-British philosopher Michael Polanyi (Polányi Mihály) proposed that the foundation of all human knowledge is 'tacit knowledge.' It can be termed the 'dark matter' of human knowledge, not seen, not employable in a conscious manner, but all the time present at the back of our heads, making the pursuit and use of 'explicit knowledge' possible. The researcher looking for an explanation of a phenomenon, or a solution to a problem must already know—in general—what she or he is searching for. Moving in the realm of explicit knowledge, the researcher nevertheless always falls back on tacit knowledge shared by us all (Polanyi, 1946, pp. 10, 13, 1966/2009, pp. 1–26).

It is difficult, or even all-but-impossible, to communicate tacit knowledge via language, because language did not evolve for the mapping of or for the analysis of material reality

with scientific exactness. Language is for bonding humans in groups, for creating social cohesion. With language we can express infinitely less than we actually feel, perceive and gather with our senses. On the other hand, the intake of our senses is very limited indeed, in comparison to the vastness of material reality. For instance, we cannot see galaxies or atoms with the naked eye, perceive electromagnetic radiation outside the visible range, or hear sounds outside the range of audibility. Nor can we perceive events changing on some shorter or longer time-scales,[16] even when they are potentially available to detection by our senses: both very short-run and very long-run processes involving clearly visible entities, such as the rapidly moving wings of certain insects, or of hummingbirds, the growth of plants, or of forests, or the erosion of the earth, may not be perceived by us. This too closes down the range of our detected informational inputs.

In the course of biological evolution, these ranges were selected alongside the senses correlated to them that are now enjoyed by humans, because both, the ranges and these senses, turned out to be of most use for ensuring the survival and successful propagation of the human species. In line with these developments, the human brain evolved to take in and process as much of the available external stimuli as typically could be gathered by the human senses. (Hence, it may be impossible for this brain to process substantially more, even if the human body were fitted with devices broadening the ranges visible and audible to humans. Such information overload would probably lead to a mental and physical collapse of such a cyborgized human.)

How can the tension between tacit and explicit knowledge be exemplified? Let us consider cycling. No matter how comprehensive, detailed or accurate the manual we receive in which our newly purchased bicycle is described with hints on how to use it, it could never be enough to teach us how to cycle. If you cannot cycle, you will not be able to ride a bicycle after reading the manual. The essential tacit knowledge of cycling is acquired through trial and error and by not giving up in attempts that initially may appear futile. If others can do it, this means that you can, as well. This tacit or 'black matter' knowledge of cycling is acquired through touching, coaxing your body to function in a new way, and reinforcing the newly acquired skill through 'muscle (or motor) memory.' As the saying aptly confirms, when we have learned it, we know how to cycle 'in our bones' (cf. Krakauer & Shadmehr, 2006).

The story is similar with the acquisition (mind you, *not* 'learning') of another language. It is not enough to read a grammar and a dictionary of this language, alongside a manual of its pronunciation. Understanding how the language works does not mean you know the language. In order to 'know' it, you must be able to understand people speaking to you in this language and to produce utterances in it that are comprehensible and make sense to the language's native-speakers (or to others who have learned the language). This can be achieved only through acquisition, that is, by imbibing the tacit knowledge of this language through developing the motor memory of it in your organs of speech and in your brain, and by imbibing the generalized social memory consisting of a myriad of social situations as practiced by native-speakers (cf. Corder, 1967).

Searle (1995, pp. 129–147) refers to the tacit knowledge which underlies the effective use of language for the creation and maintenance of social reality as the 'background.' Among others, on the general plane, it comprises the biological capacity for language and also for employing it in such a manner that allows for the rise of social reality. And within a given human group, the following elements constitute part and parcel of the back-

[16] This possibility was drawn to my attention by a kind note from Michael O Gorman.

ground, namely, the established sets of culture-specific conventions and expectations, together with the actual ways of producing and interpreting utterances in the group's language. These establish and determine the ways in which social reality is generated, alongside its very structure, as shared by the group.

For instance, one needs to possess the generalized capacity for language and for its use to generate social reality in order to interpret and decode a string of sounds as an utterance, to which the speaker attributes an intended meaning of a significance to some hearers within the bubble of social reality. At a specific level, the hearer also needs to know the specific language employed by the speaker, and the conventions of a given society in order to interpret the intended meaning appropriately. Let us consider the following three English-language sentences:

(1) Vidia is playing the piano.
(2) It is not playing any role now.
(3) The girl is playing with a ball.

Although all three sentences employ the same verb 'to play,' in order to grasp the meaning of sentence (2) one needs to know that it is an idiom. Likewise, thanks to the tacit knowledge of English and the specific socio-cultural context, one would not attempt to throw a piano up or dribble it as one would a ball. And vice versa, one would see it as strange to run one's fingers over a ball as if it were a piano keyboard.

NATIONS AND HUMAN GROUPS RECONSIDERED

'What about nations?' the exasperated reader may want to ask. Why spill so much metaphorical ink, before coming to the very point of the article. The spadework was necessary in order to clear the ground for a deceptively simple proposition that, as will soon be seen, would be difficult to grasp or accept without this longish proviso, or without sketching the proposition's tacit knowledge (or 'background,' in Searle's terms).

The study of nationalism, since its beginnings in the early 20th century, has been haunted by two related questions. Firstly, what nations 'really are.' And, secondly, whether their existence is objective or subjective. In reply to the former question, authors traditionally took one of two approaches. They either provided equations of various kinds,

N = X (where N stands for 'nation,' and X for a type of a human group),

or they supplied lists of traits which an aspiring nation (group) must possess to be considered a nation,

n_1 = N iff n_1 = a + b + c +…+ z (where N means the 'concept of nation,' n_1 a 'human group aspiring to be recognized as a nation,' and lower case letters stand for 'attributes,' which the human group must display or acquire to become recognized as a nation).

When tackling the question of 'what nations really are,' nationalists and primordialists stand on the ground that nations are natural or near-natural human groups of the highest order (meaning that 'better,' 'more natural,' 'bigger' cohesive groups than nations, 'groups of a higher order' than nations *cannot* exist); and that these groups are eternal or

of very ancient origin (cf. Dmowski, 1903/1994; Kohn, 1944). In this line of thinking, the role of scholars and politicians is necessary to identify the extant nations and to endow them with their own nation-states in order to reach the 'end of history,' the achievement of which will herald the emergence on Earth of a blissful and eternal national paradise of peace, prosperity and mutual respect of one nation for another.

On the opposing side, constructivists and Marxists maintain that nations are created in a voluntaristic (subjective) manner, and as such they are themselves the very product of modernity. Variously, industrialization (Gellner, 1983), 'print capitalism' (Anderson, 1983), intelligentsia-led national movements (Hroch, 1985), or different combinations of various phenomena drawn from Western-style modernity are proposed as the explanation of why nations began to emerge. Scholars of this persuasion rarely divagate on what may come after nations,[17] though they tacitly imply that nations, at some point, will disappear as all human creations do.[18] However, classical Marxists maintain that nations are a form of social organization correlated with the capitalist stage of economic development in human history. In their view, all societies must pass through the phase of being nations before communism could be reached (cf. Stalin, 1913/1942).

Sociologists hope to marry the 'objective' position taken by primordialists and nationalists, and the 'subjective one' to which constructivists and marxists subscribe. In their writings the very concept of 'society,' quite unreflectively—and in most cases tacitly—is equated with 'nation.' But when it comes to discussing the 'nation' in explicit terms, they are prone, following Max Weber's example, to distinguishing between objective and subjective traits of the nation. In this dichotomy they perceive as subjective, for instance, national (collective) character, the belief in a common origin, the spirit (or soul) of a nation, the national feeling (of commonality), or national culture. These sociologists oppose to these subjective elements what they consider to be objective elements; among others these include language, religion, (national) customs, folklore, state, or history (of the ethnic group or a not-yet-national polity identified with the nation in question) (cf. Kabzińska, 2006, p. 14; Kłoskowska, 2001, p. ix; Norkus, 2004). Certainly, it is not immediately apparent which element should be classified as 'objective' and which as 'subjective.' Scholars vary in this regard, and the very dichotomy itself appears to be rather subjective.

An escape from this cul-de-sac was offered by Benedict Anderson when he proposed the concept of 'imagined community' to explain the mode of the existence of nations. (1983) Thus, members belonging to any large, non-face-to-face group, for instance, a nation, make their group real by believing that it exists and by maintaining that they are members of it. It was an intellectual quantum leap from an increasingly sterile two-di-

• • • • • •

[17] For instance, in his Phase model of nation-building Hroch wraps it up with Phase C, or the completion of the founding of a nation (cf. Maxwell, 2010, pp. 871–872).

[18] Scholars rarely come up with schemata for the unfolding of human groups that would explicitly address their rise and decline; perhaps the latter part is not liked by grant-making bodies and is seen as 'defeatist' by politicians and national populations at large. A rare exception to this rule is the American sociologist Armand Mauss, who, for analysing social groups (movements), proposed a schema of the following five phases: incipience, coalescence, institutionalization, fragmentation and decline (1975, pp. 61–68). Also the Soviet polymath Lev Gumilev promoted the idea that ethnoses (ethnic groups) emerge, thrive and disappear, passing through the phases of rise, development, climax, inertia and convolution (agony). However, he saw this process as driven exclusively by the biochemical energy (dubbed by him as 'passionarity,' a term closer to Orthodox theology than to social or natural sciences) of the biosphere and its internal dynamics, making no concessions for social forces (social reality or the semiosphere) as a salient factor. This myopia is the theory's main flaw, but Gumilev's work should be more widely known worldwide, as after the break up of the Soviet Union it became the intellectual backbone of the renewed ideology of Eurasianism, especially in Central Asia's post-Soviet states. In 1996, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev honored the scholar by naming Gumilev Eurasian University in Astana after him, one year before the Kazakhstani capital was officially moved to this city.

mensional discussion between 'objectivists' and 'subjectivists' to the third dimension of social reality (though Anderson never mentioned social reality explicitly in his 1983 monograph). Nations exist in people's heads and become a social fact when members of human groups act in unison upon their conviction.[19]

It is like in the case of money. We perceive discs of metal, pieces of paper and, increasingly, electronic impulses as money, and are eager to work long hours to acquire these tokens, as well as to part with our own houses or cars in return for them. In themselves, objects identified by us as money have little inherent value and in most cases we would not care about keeping them if they were not money. Basically, they would be rubbish should we fail to see them as money. Money, like the nation, is a social fact. If I decided to use an object not perceived by others as money, for example, ball bearings, I would be laughed at, or even confined to an asylum, if I persisted in my fallacy. Shop assistants to whom I would want to hand my 'money' would invariably see the objects as ball bearings, *not* as money (cf. Searle, 1995, pp. 37–43).

However, the idea of social reality, or the semiosphere, was not taken up by researchers to deepen Anderson's insight into the nature of nations as social facts generated by collective intentionality (see footnote 19). The discussion on the character of the phenomenon of 'nation' stalled again. It was becoming circular. Critics asked, 'if nation is an imagined community, does it mean that nation does not *really* exist?' Proponents of Anderson's idea replied that nation is an abstract community (cf. Kilias, 2004) created by the shared consensus and beliefs (that is, collective intentionality) current in a large (non-face-to-face) group of people, who thus constitute a nation. Nationalists disagreed, because in their view, nation appears to be more real and permanent than material objects themselves.

Students of nationalism lacked a theory to account for the rise or creation of intangible nations in the very material world of houses, cars, mountains, rivers, clouds, rain, or sunshine. At the conceptual level, they could not explain how it is possible for intangible nations to exert very direct and sustained influence on material reality, as tellingly exemplified by the constant and massive flow of very material military personnel, weaponry and equipment from one continent to another in the case of the US intervention in and occupation of Iraq during the first decade of the 21st century.

Exasperated by this situation, in 2004, the American sociologist and anthropologist of nation and Central Europe, Rogers Brubaker, in his tellingly entitled monograph *Ethnicity without Groups*, proposed to analyze categories and processes that spawn ethnic groups, or nations, in order to shift the focus away from the (thus far) fruitless preoccupation with groups, or nations as 'things-in-themselves' (*Dinge an sich*) (Brubaker, 2004, p. 13). In a way, Fredrik Barth (1969) had already adopted a similar approach when, instead of concentrating on ethnic groups themselves, he probed, from the perspective of anthropology, into the small, everyday ways in which people create and maintain ethnic boundaries among ethnic groups of which they are members. Recently, Brubaker (and his collabora-

• • • • • •

[19] Searle dubs this collective process of group creation or generation (or more generally speaking, 'social reality' creation or generation) as 'we-intentionality.' Importantly, he proposes that unlike traditional approaches, we-intentionality is not a simple sum of individual intentionalities of the same kind (I_1 intend our nation to arise + I_2 intend our nation to arise + I_3 intend our nation to arise + … I_n intend our nation to arise), but the actual sharing of a we-intentionality (we-feeling) by individuals intending to achieve something together (for instance, to form a group). The latter kind of collective intentionality (we-intentionality) may be represented as follows: $Individual_1$ thinks: we intend our nation to arise + $Individual_2$ thinks: we intend our nation to arise + $Individual_3$ thinks: we intend our nation to arise + … $Individual_n$ thinks: we intend our nation to arise (cf. Searle, 1995, pp. 25–26, 2010, pp. 42–60).

tors) also made good on his proposal by examining in detail the everyday workings of ethnicity (nationalism) in Cluj, the historical capital of Transylvania, nowadays in Romania (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, & Grance, 2006).

These processes, categories, their combinations and dynamics, as exemplified by numerous instances taken from the past and the present-day world—the study of which Brubaker recommends—are none other than social facts and the actual workings of social reality. The deepened analysis of these phenomena and the search for any regularities among them is nothing less than a quest for a theory that would explain the mechanisms and ways in which social reality is generated and maintained.

I am not saying that Searle's explanation of how social reality arises is perfect or final, but I believe that his approach may help to deal with paradoxes that nowadays stall the study of nation and nationalism. The mainspring of these paradoxes is the dilemma of whether nations are objective or subjective phenomena: whether they are 'for real,' or perhaps just 'figments of the human mind.'

Searle proposes in his analysis of social reality and its connection to material reality that it is necessary to distinguish between two different senses of the objective-subjective distinction. He names the senses 'epistemic' and 'ontological' (Searle, 1995, pp. 7–9).

'In the ontological sense, "objective" and "subjective" are predicates of entities […], and they ascribe modes of existence' (Searle, 1995, p. 8). Ontologically speaking, seas or forests are objective because their mode of existence does not depend on the perceiver. However, nations are subjective in the ontological sense, because they would not exist if it were not for their members' collective intentionality that generates these nations.[20] By extension, social facts, social reality, or Lotman's semiosphere are ontologically subjective, because these entities (phenomena) are generated and maintained by humans through language. They depend on the perceiver. On the other hand, animals, plants and bacteria (conceptualized as the biosphere), or rivers, stones, gases, radiation, stars (conceptualized as material reality, or the universe) are objective in the ontological sense. They existed before humankind and will continue after our species disappears. The existence of these objects is entirely independent of the human perceiver.

The terms 'objective' and 'subjective' as applied in the epistemic sense are 'predicates of judgements' (Searle, 1995, p. 8). Judgements are objective when their truth or falsity is independent of anyone's emotions or attitudes. Thus, saying that nation B is better than nation A epistemically is a subjective comment on entities that from the ontological vantage are subjective. But although proclaiming that cats are more beautiful than dogs is also epistemically subjective, it is, however, a comment on ontologically objective entities. With the use of the same ontologically subjective and objective entities, we may produce such epistemically objective statements as, for instance, 'The

• • • • • •

[20] In principle it is possible for an external group to define a nation, without the concurrence of the members of the would-be nation, especially in a colonial situation. The joining together or the severing of groups into separate nations may be imposed from outside, but rarely becomes a reality, unless in the postcolonial situations the populations concerned concur to continue within the framework of these colonial impositions. For instance, Britain's colonial project of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-63) did not work, and the territory is today divided among Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. On the other hand, the Soviet overhauling of Central Asia's Turkic-speaking Muslims into the nations of Kazakhs, Kyrgyzes, Turkmen and Uzbeks turned out to be successful, and was reconfirmed with the endowing of these nations with their own independent nation-states on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (cf. Caroe, 1967). The colonial initialization of nation-building in the form of shaping the frontiers of a colony (or a national republic in the Soviet context) can be fruitfully equated with Horch's Phase A of nation-formation, while the internalization of the project by the colonial population as 'theirs' with the Czech scholar's Phase B of the national movement and Phase C of the massification of this movement and its national goals (Hulec & Olša, 2008, pp. 203–237). (I thank Michael O Gorman for drawing my attention to this salient possibility.)

German nation has 40 million more members than the Polish nation' and 'Dogs are usually heavier than cats.'

In addition, Searle writes that in the epistemic sense it is also possible to speak of facts and entities (Searle, 1995, p. 8). He does not say so explicitly, but the predominant category of epistemically objective facts and entities are social facts that, due to their very nature as discussed above, are dependent on the observer (perceiver). Hence, social reality, or the semiosphere, is composed of epistemically objective facts and entities, while ontologically objective entities and facts add up to material reality. From the epistemic vantage, nations exist objectively,[21] whereas walruses exist objectively in the ontological sense.

CONCLUSION

Hence, the subject matter of the natural sciences is material reality, while social reality is probed by the social sciences and the humanities. As atoms are the basis of material reality, and the DNA helix underlies the biosphere, Searle's theory accounts for the building blocks ('atoms,' 'DNA,' 'memes') of social reality (Searle, 2010, pp. 200–201). To the panoply of the aforementioned terms for social reality (ecumene, semiosphere, noosphere), Searle adds two more, the very technical term 'human institutional reality,' which he uses interchangeably with the more demotic one of 'human civilization' (cf. Searle, 2010, p. 201).

He rightly notes that bearing in mind the ontological difference between material and social reality is the best prevention of the confusion between what and how natural and social sciences should study. This should be done without forgetting the indissoluble and necessary link between material reality and social reality. The former is constitutive of and primary to the latter. Remembering these distinctions could have prevented economists from treating the subject matter of their study as material reality, which contributed to pushing the world into the recent economic crisis (2008-?). Economies, like any other social facts, are 'products of massive fantasy' (Searle, 2010, p. 201), or of collective intentionality, as much as nations are.

If Searle is right in his findings and approach, the various methodologies of social sciences should be transparent to one another, and actually it ought to be possible to work out a more unified methodology common to all the social sciences (Searle, 2010, p. 202). This is also true of the interdisciplinary study of nation and ethnicity.

• • • • • •

[21] The question also arises whether there obtain social entities that are epistemically subjective. Perhaps this category should include objects the knowledge of which is widely transferred across a society but which exist neither in material reality nor in social reality. They may include Santa Claus, ghosts, gods and goddesses, fairies, or trolls. It is people who invent them, proposing, mostly to children, that they are part of material (or social) reality. Thus, mechanisms of social reality are employed to falsify (that is, as long as a given belief does not come to be shared by an entire community, hence, becoming part and parcel of social reality) the picture of material (or social) reality in the heads of other people, giving rise to myths and fairy tales, which are, nevertheless, objectively existing social facts.
However, as it is with all distinctions, they are heuristic, and reality at hand tends to be more complicated or blurry. Thus, when a community or any extensive group of people start believing in an initially epistemically subjective phenomenon, and act in line with its presumed existence, this phenomenon becomes epistemically objective and enters the fabric of social reality. For instance, today Zeus is an epistemically subjective entity, but for the Ancient Greeks he was epistemically objective, as the monotheistic God is for millions today, or Santa Claus is for many children in the West. (I am indebted to Krzysztof Jaskułowski for this important insight.)

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

Anscombe, G. E. M. (1958). On brute facts. *Analysis*, *18*(3), 69–72. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/analys/18.3.69

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words: The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. (J. O. Urmson, Ed.). London: Clarendon Press.

Barth, F. (1969). Introduction. In F. Barth (Ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference* (pp. 9–38). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Brubaker, R. (2004). *Ethnicity without groups*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Brubaker, R., Feischmidt, M., Fox, J., & Grance, L. (2006). *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Caroe, O. (1967). *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and stalinism*. London: Macmillan.

Cavalli-Sforza, L. L., & Feldman, M. W. (2003). The application of molecular genetic approaches to the study of human evolution. *Nature: Genetics Supplement*, *33*(Mar.), 266–275. http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/ng1113

Comte, A. (1853). *The positive philosophy of August Comte* (Vol. 2). London: John Chapman.

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, *5*(4), 161–170.

Deacon, T. W. (1997). *The symbolic species: The co-evolution of language and the human brain*. New York: Norton.

Defoe, D. (1719). *The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner […]*. London: Printed for W. Taylor at the Ship in Pater-Noster-Row.

Deutsch, K. W. (1953). *Nationalism and social communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality*. Cambridge MA: The Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Distin, K. (2011). *Cultural evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dmowski, R. (1994). *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*. Wrocław: Nortom. (First published 1903)

Dunbar, R. I. M. (1992). Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates. *Journal of Human Evolution*, *22*(6), 469–493. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0047-2484(92)90081-J

Dunbar, R. I. M. (1993). Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *16*(4), 681–735.http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00032325

Dunbar, R. I. M., Duncan, N. D. C., & Nettle, D. (1994). Size and structure of freely forming conversational groups. *Human Nature*, *6*(1), 67–78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02734136

Fitch, W. T., & Hauser, M. D. (2004). Computational constraints on syntactic processing in a nonhuman primate. *Science*, *303*(5656), 377–380. http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1089401

Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gumilev, L. (1989). *Etnogenez i biosfera zemli*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta. (First published 1979[22])
Gumilev, L. (1990). *Ethnogenesis and the biosphere*. Moscow: Progress.
Gumilev, L. (1995). Publikatsii moikh rabot blokiruiutsia. Retrieved 14 January 2012, from http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article36.htm
Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hroch, M. (1985). *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe: A comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hulec, O., & Olša, J. (2008). *Dějiny Zimbabwe, Zambie a Malawi*. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.
Isaacs, H. R. (1975). *Idols of the tribe: Group identity and political change*. New York: Harper & Row.
Kabzińska, I. (2006). Wstęp. *Etnografia Polska*, *50*, 4–16.
Kaerst, J. (1903). *Die antike Idee der Oekumene in ihrer politischen und kulturellen Bedeutung: Akademische Antrittsvorlesung*. Leipzig: Teubner.
Kilias, J. (2004). *Wspólnota abstrakcyjna: Zarys socjologii narodu*. Warszawa: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN.
Kłoskowska, A. (2001). *National cultures at the grass-root level*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
Kohn, H. (1944). *The idea of nationalism: A study of its origins and background*. New York: Macmillan.
Krakauer, J. W., & Shadmehr, R. (2006). Consolidation of motor memory. *Trends in Neurosciences*, *29*(1), 58–64. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tins.2005.10.003
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lem, S. (1971). Kongres Futurologiczny. In S. Lem, *Bezsenność*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
Lem, S. (1974). *The Futurological Congress*. New York: Seabury Press.
Liua, H., Prugnollea, F., Manicab, A., & Ballouxa, F. (2006). A geographically explicit genetic model of worldwide human-settlement history. *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, *79*(2), 230–237. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/505436
Lotman, I. (1984). O semiosfere. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, (17), 5–23.
McElreath, R., & Henrich, J. (2007). Modelling cultural evolution. In R. I. M. Dunbar & L. Barrett (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of evolutionary psychology* (pp. 571–586). Oxford: Oxford University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198568308.013.0039
McNeill, W. H. (1963). *The rise of the West: A history of the human community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mauss, A. (1975). *Social problems as social movements*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

[22] The monograph had a tortuous publication history, like many books in the Soviet Union. In 1979 its typescript was to be duplicated in 2,000 copies, then the standard way to publish scholarly works. But the publication permit was withdrawn and the typescript was deposited with VINITI, the All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Only a selected and trusted few could consult the book afterward, and for all practical purposes it was banned until its actual publication in 1989 (Gumilev, 1995).

Maxwell, A. (2010). Typologies and phases in nationalism studies: Hroch's A-B-C Schema as a basis for comparative terminology. *Nationalities Papers*, *38*(6), 865–880. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2010.515970

Mazzini, J. (1862). *Duties of man*. London: Chapman & Hall. (First published 1860)

Norkus, Z. (2004). Max Weber on nations and nationalism: Political economy before political sociology. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *29*(3), 389–418. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3654673

Platonov, A. (2008). Soul. In A. Platonov, *Soul and other stories* (pp. 3–146). New York: The New York Review of Books.

Polanyi, M. (1946). *Science, faith and society*. London: Oxford University Press.

Polanyi, M. (2009). *The tacit dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (First published 1966)

Popper, K. (1982). *Logik der Forschung*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). (First published 1934)

Premack, D. (1971). Language in Chimpanzee? *Science*, *172*(3985), 808–822. http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.172.3985.808

Robbins, M. D., & Boesch, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Among African apes: Stories and photos from the field*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Samson, P. R., & Pitt, D. (Eds.). (1999). *The biosphere and noosphere reader: Global environment, society and change*. London: Routledge.

Samways, M. (1999). Translocating fauna to foreign lands: Here comes the homogenocene. *Journal of Insect Conservation*, *3*(2), 65–66.

Savage-Rumbaugh, E. S., & Fields, W. M. (2000). Linguistic, cultural and cognitive capacities of bonobos (Pan paniscus). *Culture and Psychology*, *6*(2), 131–154. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354067X0062003

Searle, J. R. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press.

Searle, J. R. (2010). *Making the social world: The structure of human civilization*. New York: Oxford University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso bl/9780195396171.001.0001

Smith, A. D. (1986). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Smith, E. O. (2009). Evolution, primates, and subaltern genocide. In N. A. Robins & A. Jones (Eds.), *Genocides by the oppressed: Subaltern genocide in theory and practice* (pp. 159–184). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Sodian, B., & Kristen, S. (2010). Theory of mind. In B. Glatzeder, V. Goel, & A. von Müller (Eds.), *Towards a Theory of thinking: Building blocks for a conceptual framework* (pp. 189–203). Berlin: Springer. (Parmenides Book Series On Thinking, 2). http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-03129-8_13

Stalin, J. (1942). *Marxism and the national question*. New York: International Publishers. (First published 1913)

Stiller, J., Nettle, D., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2003). The small world of Shakespeare's plays. *Human Nature*, *14*(4), 397–408. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12110-003-1013-1

Stone, L., Lurquin, P. F., & Cavalli-Sforza, L. L. (2007). *Genes, culture and human evolution*. Malden MA: Blackwell.

Stringer, C. B., & Andrews, P. (1988). Genetic and fossil evidence for the origin of modern humans. *Science*, *239*(4845), 1263–1268. http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.3125610

Suess, E. (1875). *Die Entstehung der Alpen*. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller.

Vernadskiĭ, V. (1925). Khod zhizni v biosfere. *Priroda*, (10-12), 25–38.

Vernadskiĭ, V. (1989). *Biosfera i noosfera*. Moskva: Nauka.
Vernadsky, V. I. (1945). The biosphere and the noosphere. *American Scientist*, *33*(1), 1–12.
Vilain, A., Schwartz, J.-L., Abry, C., & Vauclair, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Primate communication and human language: Vocalisation, gestures, imitation and deixis in humans and non-humans*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. (Advances in Interaction Studies, 1). http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/ais.1
Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, thought and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. (J. B. Carroll, Ed.). Cambridge MA: MIT Press.