

Nation, Race, Language, and Spirituality: Reading Fichte's Addresses to the German Nation

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Introduction

This article offers a careful reading of how Fichte characterizes the German nation and determines the boundaries of it in his *Addresses to the German Nation*. Fichte delivered these addresses in Berlin during the winter of 1807/1808 under a humiliating situation in which Prussia was occupied by Napoleon's troops and the Holy Roman Empire dissolved. At that time for German people there was no unified German nation except in imagination. A politically motivated thinker, Fichte felt compelled to relieve the defeated German people of distress. Eager to encourage them, Fichte tries to show them what true Germanness is and to argue that current Germans can and ought to become the true German nation. Thus, in the *Addresses* Fichte tries to delimit true Germanness.¹

Abizadeh's recent argument usefully presents three ways of interpreting how Fichte characterizes and delimits the German nation in the *Addresses*. According to the first way, the *Addresses* advocates "*unmediated ethnic nationalism*, which champions a nation defined in the first instance directly in genealogical terms" (Abizadeh 2005, 336; emphasis in original). Here "ethnic" means having common racial characteristics. Common cultural or linguistic characteristics are not included. According to the second

¹ Fichte proposes a new national education as the best device to turn them into a true German nation. But I do not go into Fichte's argument on education.

way, the *Addresses* champions cultural nationalism. On this view the nation, “neither ethnic nor purely contractarian,” is envisioned as a “matter of cultural character formation.” Fichte’s emphasis on a “historically shared language” as a defining factor of what the nation is points to this view (339-40). According to the third way, the *Addresses* expresses “*mediated or crypto-ethnic nationalism*.” On this view Fichte at first envisions the nation in non-ethnic terms but ends up drawing on an “ethnic supplement” (336; emphasis in original). Abizadeh argues for the third: “the *Reden* start out as uncompromising cultural nationalist, to be sure; but eventually the *Reden*’s cultural nationalism subtly collapses into an ethnic one” (341). It is suggested that Fichte’s cultural nationalism is rather innocuous while his ethnic nationalism is harmful.

This article offers a different and more nuanced reading in four respects. First, while the *Addresses* certainly contains both ethnic-genealogical and cultural-linguistic elements, we find these two elements in reverse order. That is, Fichte begins and ends the *Addresses* by characterizing the German nation as a racial community. Within this racial framework Fichte introduces the theme of the German language. Second, Fichte’s argument for the importance of the German language (or Fichte’s cultural nationalism in the words of Abizadeh) is more problematic than the third reading mentioned above suggests. This is because to make that argument Fichte intentionally represses a historical fact about how German became the language it is and invents a story of it to his advantage. Third, the way Fichte tries to determine the boundaries of the German nation is more complicated than the third interpretation suggests. By resorting to the criterion of spirituality (one’s belief in universal values such as freedom and justice), Fichte banishes from the German nation certain people who may be native German speakers. But Fichte also excludes from the German nation those who believe in such spirituality but whose

first language is not German. Fourth, Fichte's argument is full of tensions produced by his use of the three criteria for delimiting true Germanness: race, language, and spirituality.

The *Addresses* should be important to those who, while unfamiliar with the *Addresses*, are interested in nationalism generally. We find in the *Addresses* a twofold danger involved in delimiting a nation. First, some people who meet one criterion but do not meet another are excluded from the true German nation. What is implied is that various people can be excluded through the clever and ad hoc use of the criteria. Second, those considering themselves members of the true German nation are incited to elevate their national consciousness to the point that it becomes extravagant. We also find in the *Addresses* the difficulty of delimiting a nation. In the end, while Fichte has reasons for using each criterion in the way he does, the tensions produced by his use of the three criteria make a coherent delimiting of the true German nation impossible. Recently the world has witnessed a resurgence of nationalism, where what a true nation is and how it is to be delimited are likely to be at issue, while race and language (culture) remain among the dominant vocabulary for characterizing a community. This article concludes by suggesting that we might well be faced with a danger and difficulty similar to those we find in the *Addresses* and that the *Addresses* serves us as a reference point for considering such a resurgence, danger, and difficulty. Thus, the *Addresses* should be important to anyone interested in nationalism, including those unfamiliar with the *Addresses*.²

This article focuses on the *Addresses*. But before that, let us look briefly at the philosophical and political background of Fichte's thought in the *Addresses*.

² I do not at all mean to say that this is the only sense in which the *Addresses* is important to these people. As Abizadeh says, "If only a handful of texts can rightly claim to rank among the foundational texts of nationalist political thought, ... *Addresses to the German Nation* is surely one of them" (Abizadeh 2005, 334). Anyone interested in nationalism, including those unfamiliar with the *Addresses*, will have something to learn from such a foundational text.

Philosophically, the *Addresses* is a continuation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (Kelly 1968, xv-xxv). Fichte keeps two ideas in the *Addresses*. The first idea is that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is both "the truth about human reality" and a "précis of "reasonable" Christianity" (Kelly 1968, xxi, xxiii). The second idea is that this truth can and should be fully realized in the real world according to the teachings of Fichte's philosophy. In the *Addresses*, the state in which this truth is fully realized is called a "moral world-order," a "social order of mankind as it ought to be," an "empire of the spirit and of reason" or a "realm of justice, reason, and truth" (Fichte 1968, 11, 27, 225, 226-7). Politically, Fichte's thought takes a turn in the *Addresses* concerning which people would take on the mission to lead humankind to the full realization of the truth of his philosophy (Kohn 1949, 324-7; Kelly 1968, xxiii-xxv). At first, Fichte thought that the French people, according to the spirit of the French Revolution, would lead humankind. Fichte was indifferent to the possibility that the Germans might lead humankind. But around 1800 Fichte came to be suspicious of this view on the French people. Fichte began to see the German people as important because idealism, a philosophy that captured the truth of human reality, was conceived by German minds with the German language. German became the most important language for Fichte. In the meantime, as Prussia was conquered and occupied by Napoleon's troops, Fichte's patriotism grew and his Francophobia and hatred of Napoleon deepened. Fichte "saw in Napoleon an empty, amoral giant, untouched by the slightest notion of philosophy or Christianity" (Kelly 1968, xxiv). By 1806 Fichte came to think that the German nation would lead humankind. This idea recurs throughout the *Addresses* (Fichte 1968, 11, 40, 116, 133, 160, 167, 173, 183-4, 187, 215, 228). As Kelly argues, "the *Addresses*... represent... a rejoining of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to the march

of concrete events” for these philosophical and political reasons (Kelly 1968, xvi).³ This is the politico-philosophical background of Fichte’s thought in the *Addresses*. The question that remains is what the German nation is. Let us turn to an examination of the *Addresses*.

Reading the *Addresses*

The *Addresses* consists of fourteen addresses. We examine Fichte’s argument basically in order of addresses. Fichte introduces and uses three criteria of delimiting true Germanness: race (blood), language, and spirituality. While Fichte has reasons for using each criterion in the way he does, his use of the three criteria as a whole produces tensions. These tensions make a coherent delimiting of true Germanness impossible.

The first address is an introduction to the whole series of addresses. From the beginning of the first address Fichte characterizes the German people as a racial group. The criterion of the German language appears in the fourth address, and that of spirituality, in the seventh. I suggest that Fichte introduces the criterion of race so that his nationalism is essentially related to racial thinking and something like racism. There are three reasons. First, the idea of the German people as a racial community is Fichte’s framework of argument in the *Addresses*. Second, the logic of Fichte’s nationalist argument requires racial thinking. We will see this in the idea of earthly immortality and eternity that are

³ Balibar says that Fichte’s German nation in the *Addresses* represents a reworked essence of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in a “popular style” (Balibar 1994, 79). Kohn argues that an idea remained with Fichte throughout his life: Kultur. By “Kultur” Fichte means “the exercise of all our forces for the purpose of total liberty, of total independence from everything that is not... our pure ego” (Fichte, *Sammtliche Werke*, 8 vols. (Berlin: Veit & Co., 1845-46): V, 288; quoted and translated in Kohn 1949, 322). McGuire argues: “In the *Addresses* Fichte comes to grips with the issues he regards as fundamental to his metaphysics—namely, the relation of the Absolute Ego to the Finite Ego and of both to the non-ego. ...[In the] *Addresses*,... Fichte assertively describes the (universal) German Ego, and the role of individual Germans (finite egos) in relation thereto” (McGuire 1976: 138-9; original emphasis). Cheah says: Fichte’s “nation is thus an actually existing intellectual intuition, the self-positing *I* writ large as a collective cultural subject” (Cheah 2003, 121; also 117-123; 132-3). What Fichte calls “intellectual intuition” is supposed to give insight into the “necessary structure of the world where liberty is eternal” (Kelly 1968, xviii-xix).

embodied in the nation. Third, as noted, Fichte thinks that his philosophy captures the truth about human reality and that a people will lead humankind to the full realization of that truth. This means that such a people is superior to other peoples in leading the way to the realization of the truth. Fichte thinks that the Germans will take leadership in this task. Since Fichte views the German people as a racial group, the superiority mentioned takes on the character of racial superiority and thus something like racism.

Let us turn to how Fichte characterizes the German people in the first address. At the beginning of it Fichte describes the German people in distress as “a race [*Geschlecht*] which has lost its former self, its former age and world” (Fichte 1968, 2). The term *Geschlecht* in the *Addresses* does not mean “human species.” As Abizadeh says, it means kin, blood relatives, a race, or an ethnic group of common descent (Abizadeh 2005, 351). German people can save, encourage, and sustain themselves “only by means of the common characteristics of Germanness [*Deutschheit*]” (Fichte 1968, 3). Even if they have lost their former self, age, and world, the German people remain a race of common descent. Having common descent constitutes essential part of Germanness. Fichte does not explain why he sees the Germans as a racial group in the first place. But throughout the *Addresses* Fichte consistently characterizes the German nation as a racial community. We should think that the idea of Germans as a racial community is introduced as a presupposition of Fichte’s argument. The whole framework of Fichte’s argument is structured around the notion that the German nation is a racial group of common lineage. In that sense, Fichte’s nationalism is essentially related to racial thinking.

In the first address Fichte goes on to portray the German nation as an “organic [or connate] unity [*verwachsene Einheit*] in which no members regards the fate of another as the fate of a stranger” (Fichte 1968, 3). We will encounter this again when Fichte speaks

of the German nation as an “organic [or connate] unity [*verwachsene Einheit*]” in the thirteenth address after he has elaborated on the characteristics of the true German nation. Fichte tries to reveal true Germanness in order for German people to become the true German nation. The true German nation is called an “entirely new self,... universal and national self [*allgemeines und nationales Selbst*]” and is characterized as a “corporate body” (10, 12). The true German nation, as Fichte later says, is “what it [the current German nation] ought to be” (107, 177). Both the current Germans and the true Germans are members of the same racial community of common descent. But the former are not sufficiently aware of what makes them the German nation. Thus the former have to be exhorted to become the latter by recognizing their true Germanness.

In the second and third addresses Fichte also sees the German nation as a racial community. Fichte mentions “the molding of the race [*die Bildung des Geschlechtes*] [into the true German nation] by means of the new education” (Fichte 1968, 20) and the German pupil’s “faith in his race [*Geschlecht*]” (34-5). Fichte strengthens the notion of the German nation as a racial group by introducing the idea of earthly immortality. Fichte thinks that the human being longs for something that would give ultimate meaning (above all the guarantee of a sense of immortality) to his or her existence. In this context Fichte speaks of a “fundamental drive of the human [*Grundtrieb des Menschen*]” for such something (38; also 51, 113). “In the new era,” Fichte says, “eternity does not dawn first on your side of the grave but comes into the midst of the present life” (33). The nation is such something “in the new era” because members of a nation consider it as existing eternally from their ancestors of the immemorial past to future generations. A nation is an earthly embodiment of immortality, and its members are part of such an embodiment. Thereby they are assured of a sense of immortality in their present life. As we will see,

this idea of earthly immortality is crucial for Fichte's nationalism argument. The fact that Fichte introduces this idea in relation to the German nation as a racial community strongly suggests that the idea of earthly immortality is tightly related to the criterion of race. We will come back to this. We will also see that Fichte strengthens the notion of the German nation as a racial community by resorting to German "blood" more than once.

Let us turn to the theme of language. Two ideas appear for the first time in the fourth address. One is that of the German language as a criterion of delimiting true Germanness, and the other, that of German as a pure and original language. Before we discuss why Fichte introduces these two ideas, let us note that the theme of race or common descent does not disappear when the theme of language is introduced. The fourth address is entitled "The Chief Difference between the Germans and the Other Peoples of Teutonic Descent [*Abkunft*]." To be sure, Fichte emphasizes the importance of language as a natural basis to determine what a nation is and how one nation differs from another.⁴ But the title shows that the uniqueness of the German language is posed within the framework of a racial concept of the German nation. From the beginning of the fourth address Fichte repeatedly stresses that "the German [*Der Deutsche*] is a branch of the Teutonic lineage [*Stamm der Germanier*]" or "descent [*germanischen Abstammung*]" (Fichte 1969, 45). The German nation and the other branches of this descent have developed from the same "root [*Wurzel*]" (47).

Fichte introduces German language as a criterion for delimiting true Germanness.

⁴ This is nicely summed up by Abizadeh (2005, 344-5): "First, they [actual languages] have a deep relation to nature. Language springs forth from the immediate force of nature (*Naturkraft*) in the sense that the object determines the sign. Second, and relatedly, language has a deep relation to the life of a people, in two senses: words influence life, and life influences language. Language develops out of the common life of a *Volk*. Third, the evolution of language is a continuous non-arbitrary stream of the actual common life of a people. So a language is both a child of nature and intimately bound up with the life of a people. ...just as its language persists over time, so too does the *Volk* itself."

There are three reasons. First, as Kelly points out, Fichte thinks that those speaking German can best realize the truth of human reality, life, and purpose because the philosophy best capturing this truth, that is, his philosophy, is conceived in German (Kelly 1968, xxiii). Second, as a matter of fact, and as Fichte makes it clear, he is able to address German people only via his language (speech, writing, printing, and reading). If those to whom Fichte speaks did not understand him (German), the *Addresses* would be pointless. Third, as we will see, Fichte, fascinated by the communicative potential of print and writing, thinks that print and writing make a new form of community possible.

Fichte intentionally characterizes German as a pure and original language (that is, free from foreign, above all Latin influences) for the reason that concerns his view on German and French. German, as noted, is the most important language for Fichte because the philosophy best capturing the truth about human reality is conceived in German. But Fichte also knows how German transformed itself and became the language it is. That is, not only did German borrow and translate foreign, especially Latin words, and coin German words and create meanings impossible without these foreign words. But also, compared to other languages, German depends to an unusually large degree on such borrowing, translating, and coining (Martyn 1997).⁵ Moreover, as we will see, Fichte

⁵ In the *Addresses* Fichte picks up some German words and tries to show how they are genuinely German free from foreign elements. Martyn (1997) shows how these and other German words crucial for Fichte (*Geist*, *Bildung*, *Menschenfreundlichkeit*, *Vaterland*, and so on) are not “genuine” or “true” German as Fichte claims them to be. The German language, as any other language, has “what the philologist Werner Betz calls “loan coinages” (*Lehnprägungen*), that is, words that are German in construction but which in all likelihood would never been coined, or would never have acquired their modern meaning, were it not for the influence of a foreign model” (305). The German language also has what Betz calls “loan meanings” (*Lehnbedeutungen*), German words that have undergone a fundamental change in meaning in order to translate a foreign word” (305). “Many words that we tend to regard as originally and specifically German are in fact “loaned” from other languages. ... German “borrows” as much as other languages, but it relies to an unusual degree on loan coinages when doing so” (306-7). “German became the language it is, because it was unable to translate the foreign without fundamentally altering the domestic” (308-9). That is, German is the product of

probably knows that the German language in which he writes is a result of Luther's translation of the Bible from Latin. If so, the truth about human reality may well be better captured by a philosophy written in a language that is closer and more similar to Latin than German is. French is one such language. If the spiritual and cultural value of a language is to be judged compared to other languages, and if such a value is determined by how close and similar that language is to Latin, French would be superior to German. But Fichte cannot accept this. Recall Fichte's deep Francophobia and hatred of Napoleon. For German to be superior to French, and for French to be devalued, a different criterion for judging the value of language must be invented.

Fichte invents such a criterion in the fourth address when severely attacking French. There Fichte contrasts German to Latin-derived ("neo-Latin") languages. Fichte praises the German people as a living people, and attacks neo-Latin peoples (those who speak neo-Latin languages) as spiritually dead peoples. Fichte attacks above all the French language without calling it French. Criticizing French/Latin-derived German words such as "Humanität" and "Liberaltät," Fichte argues that the language in which these words originate is a spiritually dead language and deplores the fact that German has been contaminated by these words (Fichte 1968, 55-9).⁶ Here Fichte is inventing a different criterion for judging the spiritual and cultural value of language. That is, the criterion must

translation to a greater extent than other languages. Fichte is well aware of this (309). Martyn argues that Fichte's nationalism not only "exemplifies how erroneous notions of linguistic purity can lead to an aberrant chauvinism; it shows too the specifics of how the fantasy of linguistic and national uniqueness is played out in German. Since German, more than other languages, tends to borrow in the form of loan coinages, it can use loan coinages to conceal the extent to which its vocabulary of foreign extraction and to create the illusion among its speakers that the words they are using are natively "German"" (311). Martyn says that Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* is truly noteworthy in its ability to forget or to repress the foreignness of what is erroneously celebrated as "genuine" and "true" German" (313-14). I suggest that Fichte represses such foreignness rather than forgetting it.

⁶ Fichte does not explicitly say "the French language" presumably because of the censorship under French occupation.

be to what extent a language is free from Latin influences. Moreover, Fichte wants German not only to be superior to French but also to be evaluated as the most important language. That is, German not only is less influenced by Latin compared to French, but also must be viewed as originally absolutely free from such influences since the time of its origination. That is why Fichte intentionally resorts to the idea of a pure and original language. Thereby Fichte represses the fact that in becoming the language it is German owes a great deal to the foreign.

Once introduced, the idea of German as a pure and original language in turn reinforces the idea of German as a criterion for true Germanness: German is such a criterion because it is a pure and original language. From this follow some extravagant claims. Fichte says that the German people “retained and developed the original language of the ancestral stock [*die ursprüngliche Sprache des Stammvolkes*]” (47). The German language is unique because it is the pure (free from foreign, especially Latin influences), original, and living language. Since a nation’s life is formed by language, the German nation alone retains something pure, original, and living in its life, while all other peoples have impure and spiritually dead life. One, Fichte claims, can rightly see “the Germans as an original people” or “simply *the* people” (92; emphasis in original; also 107).

This kind of extravagant claims aside, some tensions derive from the fact that Fichte has to characterize German as a pure and original language. These tensions have to do with the issues of spoken language, reading, writing, and translation and threaten to debunk Fichte’s argument. The German language, Fichte insists, is unique because it has continued to be spoken by the German people in the form of the original language. Immune to something foreign, it basically remains unchanged from the original language. (Fichte 1968, 47-8) But tensions arise. How can Fichte know or conjecture that German

has been spoken since the remote past? It is to a large extent through a written language (records and documents). Not only that, but writing and reading (the written German language) may have significantly changed the way in which a language (German) is spoken. If so, the spoken language thus identified is a result of writing and reading. Moreover, how has the German language in which Fichte writes and reads emerged? How could it be free from anything foreign, especially Latin? I suggest that, aware of these tensions, Fichte intentionally makes an inversion to conceal them.

Fichte introduces the German language as a criterion for Germanness because otherwise the whole project of the *Addresses* would be pointless. As a matter of fact, Fichte delivered these addresses in German. In the first *Addresses* Fichte says that through the “dumb printed pages” his spirit will reach and grip those whom he has not met (Fichte 1968, 3). Fichte later stresses that the addresses he has delivered will “invite” and “assemble” the “whole German nation... around a speaker [Fichte] by means of the printed book [*durch den Bücherdruck um sich zu versammeln*]” (178). Note that in these two places Fichte is not speaking of German as a criterion of Germanness but as a means to carry out his project of the *Addresses*. But from this it follows that, for the project to be possible at all, those whom Fichte addresses must be able to understand German. It is a requirement that they understand German. Thus, German must be a criterion of Germanness. Fichte’s project of the *Addresses* would be pointless if these people did not understand German. Fichte is aware that the criterion of race alone would not be enough for the whole enterprise of the *Addresses* to make sense.

Why does Fichte specifically stress print (and thus reading)? The reason is that Fichte is aware of the importance of print and reading for a new emerging national community. Indeed Fichte had already been fascinated by print and its communicative

potential well before he delivered these addresses. La Vopa says that in the 1790s:

He [Fichte] aspired to be read, not heard, by a mass audience, and he was in fact intoxicated by the communicative potential of print. Unlike the face-to-face communication of an oration, print communication seemed to make for a kind of *impersonal* intimacy. ...the virtue of egalitarian impersonality... made print communication so appealing. ... impersonality seemed to be the necessary condition of egalitarian reciprocity. (La Vopa 2001, 117, 125; emphasis in original)

What Benedict Anderson would point out when discussing the significance of print for a national community are all present here: print, print circulation, a mass audience, impersonal intimacy, egalitarian impersonality, and print communication (Anderson 1991). Fichte stresses print and reading because of their communicative potential for a new national community, that is, the true German nation.

Nevertheless Fichte stresses that the importance of the German language lies in its having continued to be spoken in the form of the original language. I suggest that Fichte knowingly inverts what is the result of writing, print, and reading (the German language in which Fichte and his contemporaries communicate) into an origin or cause (the original language). The inversion operates at two levels. The first concerns the relation between orality (a case in which writing and reading have not at all been introduced yet) and literacy (a case in which they have been practiced). Ong convincingly shows three things concerning the relation between orality and literacy (Ong 1988). First, there is a gap between the state of orality and the state of literacy. This gap is inconceivable once one

becomes familiar with writing and reading. Second, thinking, analysis, and explanation that are abstract, sequential, systematic, and classificatory (translation, philosophy, etc.) are impossible without writing and reading. Third, “persons who have interiorized writing not only write but also speak literately,... they organize, to varying degrees, even their oral thought patterns and verbal patterns that they would not know of unless they could write” (56-7). If so, the spoken German language that Fichte identifies or conjectures at all is largely the result of writing and reading. So is Fichte’s own speech. Moreover, if Fichte can at all think philosophically about the original spoken language (or for that matter, about true Germanness), that is because writing and reading have already been practiced.

The inversion at the second level concerns how German in which Fichte speaks and writes emerged: Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible from Latin in the 16th century. In the *Addresses* Fichte mentions Luther’s translation of the Bible only in passing (Fichte 1968, 51). This is so even though Fichte recognizes the importance of writing, extensively discusses the translation of Latin words into the German language elsewhere, and stresses the historical, religious importance of Luther for the Germans (81). This is surprising because it is Luther’s translation of the Bible that created the modern standard written German language in which Fichte writes. Until Luther’s translation there was no standard written German language. Combining official government language and popular speech (dialects) of the common people, Luther’s translation produced a national language and influenced the vocabulary in everyday vernacular speech of the German people (Waterman 1976, 128-136, 146-47; Wells 1985, 189-209).

Fichte was probably aware of this accomplishment of Luther’s translation. In 1833 Heinrich Heine writes:

he [Luther] created the German language... by translating the Bible.... into a tongue that had not as yet come into existence. ... [T]he Lutheran language spread in a few years over the whole of Germany, and was raised to the rank of a written tongue. This written tongue holds its place to this day in Germany, and gives to that politically and religiously dismembered nation a literary unity. ... Luther's original writings have also contributed to fix the German language. (Heine 1986, 53-6)

While there may be some exaggeration here, Luther is no doubt the most crucial single figure in the development of the modern standard German language. Berman shows nicely that Fichte's contemporaries such as Goethe, Herder, the Romantics, and others all recognized and appreciated this feat by Luther (Berman 1992). It is extremely unlikely that Fichte alone did not know it.

When Fichte exhorts the contemporary German nation to become what it ought to be, this contemporary German nation is what Heine calls a "literary unity." In fact, in discussing how to preserve the German nation, Fichte remarks in the twelfth address:

long before the most recent events [that happened between France and Germany], we had to hear, in advance as it were, a saying which since then has frequently been repeated in our ears: that even if our political independence were lost we should still keep our language and our literature, and thereby always remain a nation; so we could easily console ourselves for the loss of everything else. (Fichte 1968, 182)

While dismissing this consolation, Fichte regards the German language as important for preserving the German nation. In the same address Fichte declares, as we have seen, that his *Addresses* will assemble the whole German nation by means of the printed book. But Fichte is not the first to assemble the nation in this way. Fichte writes:

to assemble his nation... has always been the exclusive function of the man of letters, because Germany was split up into several separate States, and was held together as a common whole almost solely by the instrumentality of the man of letters, by speech and writing. (185)

Fichte knows that the German nation has never existed except by speech and writing. I suggest that Fichte knows that what he envisions as the German nation that continues to speak the original language is in fact a recent product of writing, a product of Luther's translation of the Bible. Fichte knowingly inverts a recent product (the result) into what has been the case since the remote past (the origin).

I suggest that Fichte knowingly makes this inversion in order to claim that German has continued to be spoken in the form of the original language. Otherwise, Fichte would not have been able to keep the idea of the true German nation based on the notion of German as the pure and original language. The fact that Luther's translation of the Bible created the modern written German language as the core of German national and cultural identity poses a problem for Fichte. Through translation something foreign to a translated language is incorporated into that language. This something can be said to be an original, and a translation of it, a copy. If the modern written German language was created by translation, both the foreign and the copied turn out constitutive of the very core of the

German national identity (Berman 1992). In fact, Fichte is aware that “German became the language it is, because it was unable to translate the foreign without fundamentally altering the domestic” (Martyn 1997, 308-9). But for the Fichte in the *Addresses* this is a grave threat to the very identity of the German nation because he considers it original and free of anything foreign. Thus understood, we can make sense of Fichte’s claim in the fourth address that would otherwise sound extravagant or absurd. Fichte states: “the German, if only he makes use of all his advantages, can always be superior to the foreigner and understand him fully, even better than the foreigner understands himself, and can translate the foreigner to the fullest extent” (Fichte 1968, 60). If for Fichte the German language can translate and understand what is foreign extremely well, is it not mainly because German became the language it is as a result of translation? According to Berman, that is Goethe’s view (Berman 1992, 33, 57). While to think this way poses a serious threat to Fichte’s view on the German nation, he does not want to deny the fact that the German language can translate what is foreign very well. Fichte’s solution is to interpret this fact, to suit his own purpose, as showing the German nation’s strength by resorting to the idea of the original language. Fichte thus insists that the foreign can be translated and understood in the German language because it is the pure, original, and living language. I suggest that in the *Addresses* Fichte does not celebrate the feat of Luther’s translation of the Bible, because doing so will put in danger Fichte’s project of addressing, assembling, defining, and forming the true German nation. But we will see that, despite such efforts to justify the criterion of language, Fichte argues that that criterion is not enough to characterize true Germanness.

In the fifth and sixth addresses too the German nation is described as a racial community. The fifth address treats the consequences arising from the difference

discussed in the fourth address between the Germans and others of Teutonic descent. The sixth address explores the characteristics of the German nation as they are displayed in history. Throughout these two addresses, the terms meaning kin and common descent (*Abkunft, Stamm, Geschlecht*) are used together with the terms “*Volk*” and “*Nation*” to designate the German nation. For example, Fichte speaks of “the hitherto continuous stream of the development of our race [*Bildung unseres Geschlechts*]” (Fichte 1968, 76). Fichte also refers to the German “nation [*Nation*]” as the “parent stock [*Stammvolk*]” in German history (89).

Let us examine a passage in the seventh address in which Fichte characterizes the German nation in terms of race and a criterion different from language. The seventh address aims at clarifying “the originality and characteristics” of the German nation (Fichte 1968, 92). “What we have meant by Germans,” Fichte declares, are those who

believe in something absolutely primary and original in man himself, in freedom, in endless improvement, in the eternal progress of our race [*unsers Geschlechts*]... whoever believes in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality, and who wills the eternal development of this spirituality by freedom, wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks, is of our race [*unsers Geschlechtes*]... Whoever believes in stagnation, retrogression..., wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks, is non-German and a foreigner to us [*undeutsch und fremd für uns*]; and it is to be wished that he would separate himself from us completely, and the sooner the better. (107-8)

As the phrase “whatever language he speaks” shows, the German language is not at all

presented as a criterion for true Germanness. Instead, the third criterion for true Germanness is introduced: spirituality.

Two issues should be discussed about this passage. One concerns “our race” and blood, and the other, what Fichte means by “a non-German and a foreigner to us.” Let us begin with the former. By spirituality Fichte means one’s belief in the universal values of freedom, justice, reason, and truth. The belief in spirituality is supposed to motivate people to strive for what in the fourteenth address Fichte calls an “empire of the spirit and of reason” or “a realm of justice, reason, and truth” (Fichte 1968, 225, 226-7). (He does not explain what such a realm would be like.) In the seventh address Fichte refers to the German spirit as “universal and cosmopolitan” because it aims at such a realm and supports these universal values (99). To be sure, spirituality is introduced as a criterion for true Germanness because for Fichte the true Germans are supposed to believe in it. But it is not that anybody who believes in spirituality is counted as a German person. This is because Fichte explicitly delimits twice what is German and what is non-German by the criterion of race (*Geschlecht*). These universal values are to be spread and realized by the German race. Note that, while saying “wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks” twice, Fichte never adds “whatever lineage or common descent he has” or “whatever race he belongs to.” In fact, in the same seventh address Fichte indicates that Germanness is defined by “blood” when he speaks of “the honor of the German blood and the German mind [*Ehre deutschen Geblütes und Gemüthes*]” (98). Fichte’s reference to “honor” in relation to “blood” is not accidental because he, as we will see, speaks of “honor” in the same way in the final, fourteenth address.

Having mentioned Fichte’s reference to German blood, let us look at the next, eighth address because in it we encounter Fichte’s positive remarks on German blood. The

eighth address is entitled “What is a People [*Volk*] in the Higher Meaning of the Word, and what is Love of Fatherland?” The eighth address investigates what the German nation is in its “higher meaning,” now that the question of what the German is “as contrasted with other peoples of Teutonic descent [*andern Völkern germanischer Abkunft*]” has been answered by the previous four addresses (Fichte 1968, 111). These four addresses have answered this question by showing that the German nation is a living people because the German language is the pure, original, and living language. The eighth address is devoted to the idea that the German nation is earthly immortal through its existence over generations from the immemorial past to the future. “People and fatherland [*Volk und Vaterland*]” are a “support and guarantee of eternity on earth” and “that which can be eternal here below” (118). The German nation in its higher meaning is aware of and appreciates this. True, Fichte does not forget to describe “us”, the German people of his generation, as the “immediate heirs of their [our common forefathers’]... language [*Sprache*]” (123). But “we,” Fichte hastens to add, are also the “immediate heirs of their soil [*Bodens*].” Fichte then characterizes the German nation in its higher meaning by referring to German blood twice: the German “blood inherited [*abgestammte Blutstropfen*]” from ancestry to “us” or “our veins” to posterity, and the “utilization of German property and blood [*deutschen Blutes*]” for the higher German culture (124, 127). What is at issue in the four addresses preceding the eighth is the succession of the German language as the pure and original language. Likewise, although Fichte does not explicitly say so, what is at issue here is the purity and succession of blood through which the existence of the German nation over generations is possible. Otherwise, it is hard to understand why the theme of blood is relevant at all in this context.

In the extended cited passage from the seventh address Fichte is explicit that the

German language is not a criterion for true Germanness. The phrase “wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks” that occurs twice in the cited passage should be understood differently in each case. In the first case Fichte refers to a person who is “of our race.” What Fichte means is that this person, even if she was not born in Germany and even if she does not speak German, is both “of our [German] race” and supposed to believe in spirituality because of common descent and blood. But there is a tension here because Fichte aims to assemble the German nation through written and spoken word in German. Those who are “of our race” and who do not speak German cannot be assembled that way. In the second case Fichte refers to a person who is “non-German and a foreigner to us.” What Fichte means is that even if she was born in Germany and even if she speaks German, she should be completely severed from “us,” the Germans. In either case, the German language is not a defining factor of Germanness.

Let us turn to the issue of the foreigner just mentioned. As Abizadeh says, it is true that if we interpreted the extended cited passage as saying that the German language is not a criterion of true Germanness, we “would make nonsense of a great deal of the *Reden*” (Abizadeh 2005, 348). Thus Abizadeh dismisses this interpretation. But the fact is that Fichte says that German is not a criterion for true Germanness. I think we should take this fact seriously rather than dismiss it. We should think that Fichte says so in order to exclude from the true German nation “a non-German and a foreigner” who may or does speak German. To that extent, I suggest, Fichte wishes to banish this foreigner from the true German nation.

Who is this foreigner? Born in Germany, this foreigner may or does speak German, “believes in stagnation” and “retrogression,” and is “wished” to separate herself from “us” the German nation completely as soon as she can. Strangely, the contrast in the extended

cited passage is not between those who believe in spirituality and the improvement and progress of the German nation and those who do not. Instead, the contrast is between those who believe that way and those believe in “stagnation and retrogression.” Those who do not believe in spirituality are not required to and may not believe in “stagnation and retrogression.” It may be that they are just concerned about their individual daily life rather than about the lofty life of the true German nation. Fichte speaks specifically of those who believe in “stagnation and retrogression.” We should think that here Fichte has a specific group of people in mind.

Although Fichte does not refer to the Jews in the *Addresses*, I argue that he has the Jews in mind. There are two reasons. The first concerns the stereotypical perception of the Jews. The emancipation of the Jews became an issue from the late 18th century to the 19th century. Those considered progressive and enlightened opposed the emancipation of the Jews. One reason for this is that these supposedly progressive and enlightened people thought of Judaism as stubborn about its practice, immutable, and incapable of progress and enlightenment. In discussing the stereotypes of the Jews Katz says: “Stagnation... was the characteristic of Jewish life through the ages” (Katz 1980, 149). This strongly suggests that Fichte is speaking of the Jews when he refers to those who believe in stagnation.

The second reason concerns Fichte’s anti-Semitism. Although Fichte does not refer to the Jews in the *Addresses*, Mosse finds Fichte’s “hatred of Jews” in the *Addresses* (Mosse 1985, 43-4). But Mosse does not explain how and where he finds it in the *Addresses*. In his 1793 piece, with his notorious rhetoric Fichte strongly opposed the emancipation of the Jews (Fichte 1995).⁷ Fichte stresses that the Jews’ descent or lineage

⁷ Fichte says: “I see absolutely no way of giving them [the Jews] civic rights; except perhaps, if one night we chop off all of their heads and replace them with new ones, in which there would not be

differs from that of the German people. La Vopa argues that Fichte's Jew-hatred displayed in this 1793 piece is "largely absent from Fichte's later writings," although La Vopa does not mention whether this is true of the *Addresses*. But La Vopa goes on to argue that "the major exception is an unpublished manuscript from 1807" (La Vopa 2001, 135). This is precisely the year in which Fichte began to deliver his speeches published as the *Addresses*. This exception can in part be explained by the following factor. Katz writes that in Germany,

substantial steps toward civil equality [of the Jews] were taken only under the pressure of the French conquerors or under the influence of their dominating example. Jews achieved civil rights in most German states in the years 1806-1808, and in Prussia in 1812. When French hegemony was abolished, a revisionist mood—an aspiration to obliterate the traces of the occupation and the surrender to French influence—took hold in Germany. Doubt was cast on the right of the Jews to retain what they had achieved in the wake of French influence. (Katz 1980, 74-5)

In the above 1793 piece Fichte already fiercely opposed giving civil rights to the Jews who could never be a part of the German nation. Erspamer says that "many patriotic Germans maintained that the emancipation of the Jews could not be condoned because it began with French oppression" (Erspamer 1997, 6). With his Francophobia, Fichte at least in the *Addresses* is enthusiastically nationalistic, as we will see. It is unlikely that Fichte did not know that the Jews had begun to achieve civil rights. Thus, I would argue that

one single Jewish idea" (Fichte 1995, 309).

Fichte has the Jews in mind when he speaks of those who believe in “stagnation” in the passage at issue.

But the Jews would not be the only foreigners to be banished completely from the German nation. Suppose there is a foreigner who wants to be accepted as a German. Her first language is not German, but she can learn German. She is ready to believe in the spirituality Fichte speaks of in order to become a “true” German person. She does not and will never believe in “stagnation” and “retrogression.” Would Fichte accept this person as a German? Probably not. When introducing in the fourth address the idea of German as a pure and original language, Fichte has explicitly stated that “the foreigner can never understand the true German [person] without a thorough and extremely laborious study of the German language, and there is no doubt that he will leave what is genuinely German untranslated” (Fichte 1968, 60). The foreigner has to overcome such an extreme difficulty to understand the true German person. This is because German is seen as a pure and original language. Fichte knowingly forces such a difficulty upon the foreigner by producing this notion of the German language through the inversions discussed earlier. If so, it must be much more difficult and virtually impossible for the foreigner to become a German, let alone a true German. The foreigner is intentionally excluded. Cleverly using the criteria of race, language, and spirituality, Fichte distinguishes those who are entitled to belong to the German nation from those foreigners who are to be excluded.

We have examined Fichte’s discussion in the seventh address that the German language is not a criterion for true Germanness. In doing so, we have looked briefly at the eighth address. Let us further examine the eighth address because in it Fichte’s extravagant and dangerous nationalism comes to the fore (or Fichte incites such nationalism). After that, we look at two passages in which Fichte argues that the factor of

language is not enough to characterize a nation's higher meaning. One is found in the twelfth address, and the other, in the thirteenth.

The eighth address describes the nation in its higher meaning as an earthly embodiment of immortality and eternity. This is a crucial component of Fichte's argument on the nation and nationalism, and this component requires race or blood as a criterion for the true German nation. People have patriotism for their nation. But patriotism can be turned into "higher patriotism" when it becomes love which "embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal" (Fichte 1968, 111, 120). There is the "natural drive of man [*natürliche...Trieb des Menschen*]" for eternity and immortality (113). Elsewhere Fichte calls this drive "fundamental drive of the human [*Grundtrieb des Menschen*]" (38; also 51). Such a drive finds immortality in its earthly form in the notion of the nation that exists over generations from the immemorial past to the future: "this permanence is promised to him only by the continuous and independent existence of his nation" (116).⁸ The German nation, in which "the divine" appears, is an "eternal people," a "support and guarantee of eternity on earth," and a "vesture of the eternal" (116, 118, 120, 129). Fichte, we have seen, appeals to the theme of German blood twice in this context. The eighth address also portrays the German nation through terms such as *Geschlecht* and *Abstammung*.

Here we can see that Fichte's nationalism is essentially related to racial thinking. This is because the idea of race or blood can guarantee an individual a sense of earthly

⁸ Nationalism scholars see this as a crucial element of nationalism. Anderson (1991); Smith (1991) and Smith (1996). Kohn has already said concerning Fichte's *Addresses*: "in a secularized age, nationalism fulfilled the individual's longing for immortality" (Kohn 1949, 338). Many commentators have pointed out that Fichte's German nation has a metaphysical dimension. Sluga argues that in the *Addresses* Fichte, elevating "Germanness to a metaphysical essence," created and developed a "metaphysical nationalism" (Sluga 1993, 30, 45). Cf. Balibar (1994, 349-50); Redfield (1999, 73-4).

immortality and eternity much better than either the idea of language or that of spirituality. Suppose the German language defines the true German nation. There is no guarantee that the true German nation will exist in the future because German people might give up German. As we will see, Fichte expresses this worry (Fichte 1968, 182). The same is true of spirituality. German people may cease to believe in the spirituality Fichte speaks of. Suppose the true German nation is defined as a racial community. The German people cannot cease to have racial characteristics (excluding both the case in which all German people engage in “inter-racial” marriage for generations and the case in which German people are extinguished). The idea that the German nation will continue to exist eternally makes more sense than when it is conceived of in terms of either language or spirituality. By belonging to such an immortal nation, German people can find a sense of earthly immortality guaranteed and assured. The idea that the German nation will continue to exist over generations requires the idea of the German nation as a racial community.

To the above notion of the German nation in its higher meaning Fichte adds two elements. The first element is the notion that the German nation is to guide the rest of humankind. Here the idea of the German nation as a racial community takes on the character of racial superiority. The German nation saves and maintains itself through its mission to realize a new, moral and social order (the realm of justice and reason noted earlier) in the world.⁹ Fichte declares that through its salvation the German nation, in which “the seed of human perfection” unquestionably lies most clearly (Fichte 1968, 228), aims to and is supposed to bring about the “improvement and regeneration of the whole

⁹ This is an example of what Anderson calls the notion of a “transcendental Right or Good” that people believe is inherent in their nation (Anderson 1998, 360). Such a “Right or Good” is “transcendental” because, while it cannot be proved to be inherent in a nation, it makes it possible for a nation to exist and flourish in the sense that without presupposing such a “Good or Right” a nation cannot have a sense of what it exists for. Also Kelly (1968, xxviii).

human race” (160). This idea recurs throughout the *Addresses* (11, 40, 116, 133, 160, 167, 173, 183-4, 187, 215, 228). The Germans embark on such an enterprise once “the devouring flame of higher patriotism” for the German nation has been ingrained in them.

The second element is the notion that such higher patriotism can legitimately require a person to sacrifice her life for her nation, whether she is willing or not. There are two justifications for requiring such a sacrifice. First, physically, “everyone should know that he is indebted absolutely to the community [the German nation], and should eat or starve along with the community” (Fichte 1968, 157). Second, metaphysically, a person is indebted absolutely to her nation for “the promise of a life here on earth extending beyond the period of life here on earth” (121). Thus the nation holds an “undisputed right to summon and to order everyone concerned, whether he himself be willing or not, and to compel anyone who resists, to risk everything including his life” (120). For this right to be effective the nation has to have its armed forces. True, Fichte says that “the fight with weapons has ended; there arises now, if we so will it, the new fight of principles, of morals, and of character” (that is, the new fight over the vision of an eternal, moral and social world order) (201). But if such a new fight is hindered by foreign nation-states with weapons, the German nation has to fight with weapons as well. Consistent with his claim that the nation is justified to require each member of it to sacrifice her life, Fichte argues that a German person with higher patriotism for the nation “fights to the last drop of his blood to hand on the precious possession [of his fatherland] unimpaired to his posterity” (117). Fichte repeats the same point in the eighth address.¹⁰ For such higher patriotism

¹⁰ “The noble-minded man,” a national with such higher patriotism, “will sacrifice himself for his people...” (Fichte 1968, 116); “in order to save his nation he must be ready even to die that it may live, and that he may live in it the only life for which he has ever wished” (116-7); “the noble-minded man joyfully sacrifices himself, and the ignoble man... must likewise sacrifice himself” (120); higher

alone (accompanied by the vision of an eternal moral and social world order to be realized by the German nation) “the State assemble[s] an armed force” (119). In the eleventh address Fichte again insists that if they fully cultivate higher patriotism, the Germans “would need no special army at all, but would have in them an army such as no age has yet seen” (163). Such an army is supposed to be more powerful, motivated, and disciplined than Napoleon’s army.

As note earlier, Fichte argues twice that the criterion of language is not enough to characterize true Germanness. One argument is found in the thirteenth address, in which Fichte appears to characterize the German nation by language rather than by race:

The first, original and truly natural boundaries of States are beyond doubt internal boundaries [*inneren Grenzen*]. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and have the power of continuing to make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole. Such a whole, if it wishes to absorb and mingle with itself any other people of different descent and language [*anderer Abkunft und Sprache*], cannot do so without itself becoming confused, in the beginning at any rate, and violently disturbing the even progress of its culture.

(Fichte 1968, 190)

patriotism alone “can inspire men even onto death for the fatherland” (121); “for an order of things that long after their [a generation of the German people] death should blossom on their graves, they so joyfully shed their blood” for “the bliss of their children and of their grandchildren as yet unborn and of all posterity as yet unborn” (121-2); the noble-minded man “stakes everything he has, including... life itself” (124).

As Abizadeh points out, in this passage “descent and language appear as an indissoluble pair” even though this is exactly where such a pair should not appear if language, and language alone, is to be the “first, original, and truly natural” criterion of Germanness (Abizadeh 2005, 356). Moreover, for Fichte Germans are Germans through the German language “long before any human art begins.” If so, it is impossible for a person whose first language is not German to become a German later whether by learning German or by coming to believe in spirituality. This view is consistent with Fichte’s claim we have seen that the foreigner, even if she learns the German language thoroughly, can hardly understand the “true” German person and would never be able to become the true German person.

In the same thirteenth address, a few pages after the cited passage, we encounter once more Fichte’s reference to German blood. Note that in the cited passage Fichte, when he refers to internal boundaries that make a people united, thinks of the Germans who have no choice but to live apart in separate states. This is important to note because it is precisely when he indicates these inner borders that Fichte turns to the theme of German blood. The German people are forced to live in separate states, Fichte argues, because foreign countries “artificially destroyed... the close organic [or connate] unity [*innig verwachsenen Einheit*] of Germany” first religiously and then politically (Fichte 1968, 194). This unity was “artificially destroyed.” In other words, it is a natural unity. In the third address this unity is called “our national body [*unseres Nationalkörpers*]” (44). In the eighth address Fichte has stressed German blood as crucial for what the German nation is in its higher meaning. Back to the thirteenth address, Fichte says that these separate states, despite such an organic unity, ended up being forced to wage their wars against one another “on German soil and with German blood [*deutschem Boden und mit*

deutschem Blute]” (194). The implication is obvious: the German language is not enough, and the German blood is necessary, for the German nation to have its firm, natural, and organic unity. In fact, shortly Fichte speaks again of the lineage that connects German people of his generation to both “our descents [*unsere Nachkommen*]” and “our fathers [*unsere Väter*]” (195). Recall that in the first address Fichte characterized the German nation as an “organic [or connate] unity [*verwachsene Einheit*].” In the thirteenth address Fichte adds the word “close [*innig*]” because, having elaborated on true Germanness, Fichte expects the German nation to have realized an organic unity deeper than that in the first address.

Fichte’s other argument that the factor of language is not enough to characterize a nation in its higher meaning is found in the twelfth address. The twelfth address concerns the means of preserving the German nation. Fichte announces that “from this point onwards I must leave each [German] man to settle it [the question of how to preserve the German nation] for himself.” Fichte then introduces a view on this issue. The view is that the German nation will remain a nation if it keeps its language and literature even if its political independence has been lost. Asking how and on what basis the German people can hope that this view is true, Fichte expresses his worry:

Those men now living and mature, who have accustomed themselves to speaking, writing, and reading in the German language, will no doubt go on doing so; but what will the next generation do, and, more important still, the third generation?
(Fichte 1968, 182)

Fichte’s worry is general, although in this specific context Fichte is worried that the

German people may give up German and begin to speak French. If the German language defines the true German nation, there is no guarantee that the true German nation will exist in the future over generations because the Germans might give up German. While Fichte leaves each German person to solve the posed question, the implied answer is obvious. That is, the German nation, because of its blood or lineage, will remain a nation and continue to guarantee German people a sense of earthly immortality even if they give up German.¹¹ The twelfth address, as might be expected, ends with Fichte's reference to the preservation of "ourselves in existence,... our race [*unseres Stammes*]" (189).

Fichte's argument is an example of what Balibar means by "the specific articulation of racism... within nationalism" (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 9). Balibar uses the term "ethnic" or "ethnicity," in a way broader than Abizadeh does, to mean a group having common characteristics, racial, cultural, or linguistic. While the ethnic basis of any nation is a fictive ethnicity, such an ethnicity must be produced so that "it does not appear as fiction, but as the most natural of origins" (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 96). History tells us two ways to produce such an ethnicity: language and race. Language alone is not enough. Stating that "the language community is not sufficient to produce ethnicity," Balibar explains why:

the language community is a community in the present, which produces the feeling that it has always existed, but which lays down no destiny for the

¹¹ Examining a different passage, Abizadeh also discusses the relation between language and descent in Fichte. Abizadeh argues that for Fichte "language must indeed coincide with descent" because that is the only way in which one can think that the German language as the original language has been maintained despite historical change since current Germans' "*ancestral* people" (Abizadeh 2005, 354; emphasis in original). Without denying this reading, I argue that in the passage at issue Fichte offers a different view. That is, language does not coincide with descent, and the German people would maintain true Germanness through descent even if language disappeared. Although in conflict, both Abizadeh's argument and mine have textual support.

successive generations. ...For it to be tied down to the frontiers of a particular people, it therefore needs an extra degree [*un supplément*] of particularity, or a principle of closure, of exclusion. This principle is that of being part of a common race... the symbolic kernel of the idea of race... is the scheme of genealogy, that is, quite simply that the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community know as 'kinship.' (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 99-100)

If we look at the *Addresses* as a whole, certainly Fichte begins with the idea of the German nation as a racial community and then turns to the theme of language, not the other way around. Still, the cited passage from the twelfth address, in which Fichte tacitly shifts his point back from language to race, shows how race and language are intertwined to produce nationalism or a sense of the national community.¹²

There is a passage in which Fichte appears to dismiss the idea of the purity of common descent. Before we turn to the final address, let us look at that passage. It will be suggested that Fichte does not dismiss that idea. The passage reads: "it would not be easy at the present day for any one of the peoples descended from Teutons to demonstrate a greater purity of descent [*Reinheit seiner Abstammung*] than the others" (Fichte 1968, 47). Fichte writes this passage when he compares the German nation with the other peoples of the same Teutonic descent. As Abizadeh argues, it may be said that while Fichte dismisses

¹² Strangely, in his discussion of the *Addresses* Balibar denies the existence of the element of race or blood in the *Addresses*, let alone discusses such an element. For Fichte, Balibar insists, "the anthropological unity is not genealogical... The inheritors of the language and culture that represent the temporal unity of a nation (and in particular of Germanness) have nothing to do with the "blood" descendants of Teutons, Slaves, or Celts" (Balibar 1994, 76-7).

the idea of the purity of descent, he does not dismiss the idea of descent per se (Abizadeh 2005, 352). But it is not clear whether Fichte dismisses the notion of the purity of descent. If he dismisses that notion at all, Fichte does so not because he sees it as meaningless but because he finds it difficult to “demonstrate” that the Germans keep the greatest purity of descent. If so, Fichte should also dismiss the idea of German as the pure, original, and living language because he (and he knows that he) does not “demonstrate” that German is such a language. But Fichte keeps the idea of German as the pure and original language.¹³ This makes us doubt how seriously Fichte intends to dismiss the idea of the purity of lineage. In addition, Fichte’s remarks on blood imply the importance of the purity of blood, and our discussion of such remarks casts considerable doubt on his dismissal of the notion of the purity of descent. Moreover, while this is the only place where Fichte seems to dismiss the idea of the purity of lineage, Fichte stresses the importance of common descent and blood in many places. Thus, I want to suggest that Fichte does not dismiss the idea of the purity of descent, let alone the idea of descent.

Let us turn to the final, fourteenth address. There all the elements examined thus far are confirmed and put together. In the opening paragraph Fichte reaffirms two things (Fichte 1968, 211). First, Fichte confirms that it is to “the whole German nation” that he has intended to direct these fourteen addresses. To the whole German nation belongs anyone who is in the “domain of the German language” and whose way of thinking (that is, whose spirituality) is “akin to ours.” Second, Fichte confirms that what he has tried to do to the German nation is to stir up “a spark... a single, continuous, and unceasing flame

¹³ One might say that an exception is the case in which Fichte banishes the Jews from the German nation because in doing so he dismisses the idea of the German language as a criterion of Germanness and thus virtually dismisses the idea of German as the pure and original language. But logically, it is possible to keep the latter idea but reject the former idea (or vice versa). In any case Fichte says nothing about the latter idea when banishing the Jews.

of patriotic disposition.” Such a patriotic flame will grow over “the whole soil of the fatherland [*vaterländischen Boden*] to its utmost boundaries [*ferneste Grenzen*].” The internal and spiritual boundaries of the German language are thus explicitly required to coincide with the external and physical boundaries of the German soil. Fichte says nothing about how far this “utmost” can or should go. But it is tempting to think that this “utmost” amounts to the entire globe because Fichte ends the fourteenth address (thus the *Addresses* as a whole) with his oft-repeated claim of the German mission for the whole humankind (228). The German nation is required to spread the German “spirit [*Geist*]” to realize “world domination [*Weltherrschaft*]” (226). As noted, in the seventh address Fichte refers to the German spirit as a “universal and cosmopolitan” spirit because it aims at a world order based on reason and justice. If the external, physical boundaries of the German nation expanded to the entire globe, these boundaries would no longer operate as such. The internal and external boundaries are expected to cease to be two separate boundaries that may or may not coincide with each other. These two are expected to become one. The whole world is to be Germanized.

To be sure, in the opening paragraph of the fourteenth address the theme of common descent or lineage does not appear. But Fichte is silent on this issue here because he has much to say about it later (Fichte 1968, 225-7). The fourteen addresses, Fichte announces again, “solemnly appeal... to all you Germans.” Fichte then begins to speak of the German nation as a racial community of common lineage running from “your forefathers [*Vorfahren*]” to “your more recent forefathers” to “your descendants not yet born [*noch ungeborene Nachkommen*].” “All you Germans,” to whom Fichte delivers his speeches, receive solemn appeals and voices from these ancestors and descents. We encounter a series of words meaning or indicating common lineage numerous times in this

context (*Ahnen, Nachwelt, Geschlecht, Abkunft, Abstammung, Stamm*).

In this context Fichte uses the term “honor [*Ehre*]” or “honorable [*ehrenvoll*]” (Fichte 1968, 225-7). The first group of the remotest forefathers calls on the current Germans to keep the memory of these forefathers “honorable” and to let it hand on to posterity. “If our race [*unser Geschlecht*] dies out with you, our honor will be turned to shame.” The second group of “more recent” forefathers also calls on the current Germans to “save our honor too... justify and give meaning to our sacrifice.” The third group of unborn descendants also calls on the current Germans to keep their reputation “honorable” so that the unborn can bear “honorable witness” for them. Thus, we can see that it is no accident that in the seventh address Fichte speaks of “the honor of the German blood and mind [*Ehre deutschen Geblütes und Gemüthes*]” (98).

Moreover, we encounter another example in which Fichte cleverly excludes some people from the true German nation. Fichte insists that the German nation is supposed to realize “the empire of the spirit and of reason” based on their belief in spirituality (Fichte 1968, 225). Fichte argues that the German nation receives a solemn appeal for such an empire from foreign countries as well as from its ancestors and descendants discussed above. In foreign countries too there are some people who believe in spirituality and rise at a call to the advent of such an empire, or “a realm of justice, reason, and truth.” But such people, Fichte goes on, “count upon you,” the Germans (227). They are not counted as Germans. As we have seen, in the seventh address Fichte appears to support but in fact subtly dismisses the idea that anybody who believes in spirituality and the empire or realm just mentioned is a member of the German nation. Likewise, while in the first paragraph of the fourteenth address he says, as noted, that anyone whose way of thinking is “akin to ours” is a German, Fichte now dismisses such an idea. Spirituality is a criterion for true

Germanness because a true German person is supposed to believe in spirituality and the empire or realm mentioned. But not everyone who believes in these is counted as a German. Here Fichte refers to those who believe in these but who are still foreigners. Fichte states that these people should count on the Germans. Since Fichte makes this statement right after his discussion of the Germans' forefathers and unborn descendants, it is evident that these foreign people are to be excluded from the German nation because they do not belong to the same lineage of blood.

Fichte introduces and uses the three criteria of race (blood), language, and spirituality (one's belief in some universal value such as freedom, justice, and reason) to delimit true Germanness (*Deutscheit*). While he has reasons for introducing and using each criterion in the way he does, Fichte is aware that his use of the three criteria as a whole is conflicting and produces tensions. These tensions make it impossible for Fichte to delimit neatly and coherently true Germanness.

Among the three criteria the criterion of race is the most constant and systematic. But if this alone were enough, those who, although of the German blood, do not speak German would be entitled to Germanness. This is in conflict with the importance Fichte assigns to the German language. This is also in conflict with Fichte's whole project that aims to direct his speeches at those who speak German and to assemble the German nation by speech, reading, and writing. Too much emphasis on race would make the attempt to address and assemble the German nation impossible. The *Addresses* would become pointless. But even if the German language is introduced as a criterion, there is no guarantee that German will be spoken in the future. At the same time, if anybody speaking German is counted as a German, it is likely that those considered Germans include unwelcome people such as those who believe in "stagnation." These unwelcome people

must be banished. To expel them, Fichte uses the criterion of spirituality and dismisses that of language. Yet, while the true Germans are supposed to believe in spirituality, not everyone believing in spirituality is counted as a German person. Some people who believe in the spirituality Fichte speaks of are excluded from the true German nation. Fichte cannot just introduce the German language as a criterion. To stress the importance of German, Fichte also has to resort to the idea of German as the pure and original language even though he knows that this involves tensions. To do so, Fichte has to repress the fact that German became the language it is only through translating the foreign and thereby fundamentally transforming itself. This fact threatens the national and cultural identity of the German nation as Fichte conceives of it, because what he envisions as the true German nation turns out to be a recent historical product via the foreign (writing, reading, and translation). These tensions are involved in Fichte's argument.

Conclusion

The *Addresses* shows a way in which race, language, and some universal value, while involving tensions, are used to delimit what a nation is. We find in the *Addresses* a danger involved in delimiting a nation. The danger is twofold. First, some people who meet one criterion but do not meet another are excluded from the true German nation. What is implied is that various people can be excluded through the clever and ad hoc use of the criteria. Note that Fichte never says that only those who meet all of the three criteria are true Germans. Indeed, for those who do not hold the three criteria in the way Fichte does, Fichte would appear to be using these criteria rather arbitrarily. Second, those considering themselves members of the true German nation are incited to elevate their national consciousness to the point that it becomes extravagant. We can also see the tensions discussed in this article as indicating or reflecting the difficulty of delimiting a

nation. In the end, while Fichte has reasons for using each criterion in the way he does, these tensions make a coherent delimiting of the true German nation impossible.

How does our reading of the *Addresses* serve us? My argument shows that it is hard to draw a positive lesson. Kelly suggests a positive lesson to be learned in his introduction to the *Addresses*. Kelly understands Fichte's German nation as a nation of a cultural-linguistic character. Strangely, Kelly understands so even though he quotes a passage from the *Addresses* in which the phrase "*unsers Geschlechtes*" is translated as "our blood." According to Kelly, while Fichte's argument contains extravagant claims on the German language and the German nation informed thereby, the *Addresses* may help us understand contemporary situations. Noting that "the Germany of this time [Fichte's time] was in fact an underdeveloped country," Kelly says affirmatively that we might refer the *Addresses* to "contemporary [as of 1968] declarations by the leadership of ex-colonial areas, even if the ideological focus is somewhat altered" (Kelly 1968, xxvii).¹⁴ That is, the *Addresses* may serve us as a positive if not ideal example of how people in distress under a humiliating situation (whether caused by colonialism or not) can be encouraged so that a nation can be made of them. But our reading of the *Addresses* makes us reluctant to draw such a positive lesson.

As mentioned, the *Addresses* may be understood as a work showing the danger and difficulty involved in delimiting a nation. We might well be faced with a similar danger and difficulty, and the *Addresses* may serve us as a reference point for considering such a danger and difficulty. On the one hand, we seem required to re-imagine a community as the idea that the nation-state is the sole legitimate and self-evident

¹⁴ Cheah also suggests that we may be able to read positively the *Addresses* with postcolonial situations in mind (Cheah 2003, 117-41).

framework of a political community is being reconsidered. This is because the state seems incapable of holding its people together as a unified nation in an increasingly diversified society, of looking after its people, and of coping effectively with globalization (Linklater 1998; Archibugi 1998). On the other hand, we seem to be witnessing a resurgence of nationalism at least partly as a reaction of people under distress caused by the state's incapacity just mentioned (Kaldor and Muro 2003; see also Smith 1996). To be sure, discourses inciting such nationalism try to do so differently than the *Addresses*.

Humiliating situations in which people are placed today under globalization differ from the situation in which Fichte delivered the addresses. Moreover, while the *Addresses* is a product of the time when the nation-state was taking shape, the nation-state is now being reconsidered, as mentioned. Even so, race, culture, and language remain among the dominant vocabulary for characterizing a community. Also, even if we re-imagined a community different from the nation-state, issues concerning how to delimit this community would remain, and some universal value would be involved in such issues.

Some criteria would be needed to determine who should be included in this community. It would be difficult to determine which criteria to be used, how to use them, and what weight to be placed on them. It would be unlikely that none of the criteria of race, culture, language, and universality appears at all in discourses on how to delimit this community. Some people may adhere fanatically to one criterion at the expense of other criteria. As in the *Addresses*, some criterion may operate powerfully through various ideological inversions. Some people may develop an extravagant sense of belonging to this community, while some others may be excluded arbitrarily. If so, we might well be faced with a danger and a difficulty similar to those that the *Addresses* shows us are involved in delimiting a nation. Our reading of the *Addresses* may help sharpen our alertness to such a

danger and difficulty.

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