

“Strategy for the maintenance of the Pontian dialect”

**Lecture by Professor Nikos Lygeros
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I will begin my lecture at a slow pace. I want us to walk together. You will see that we will have to find a collective solution. If we manage to do this, I think this conference will provoke a phase change. What characterizes Pontos: The language, the tradition and the genocide. In fact, we do not have too many things. The tradition exists. We have people here too, who maintain it in a dynamic way. As regards the language... we have difficulty. The genocide does not exist... for the time being, as mentioned previously in relation to the United Nations.

Sometimes, when we have to deal with many problems, we have a tendency to separate them. We cut them into pieces and provide solution to each problem separately and we then say that we have solved the whole problem. Sometimes, strategists suggest strange solutions. I think that one way to maintain the Pontian dialect is to forbid it. You do not react immediately because you know me. As we pursue this idea further, you will see the reasoning. If you can remember, when they brought potatoes to Greece, nobody ate them. When potatoes became forbidden, everybody started to steal them. This also happens in neighbouring countries. If you really want the Pontian dialect to survive, it would be wise to let it go through a crisis stage. If it doesn't go through a crisis, you will very simply live the Alzheimer's of the Pontian dialect; in other words, everyone will continue to speak it but it will be gradually fading until it is disappeared. To avoid this phenomenon, we have to do something drastic. To do something drastic, we no longer need to have a defensive framework of the type “I protect the language” but rather something like “I must expose the language”. Language is made to have undertones and implications, as another speaker has already mentioned. And he has explained that the problem of language lies in these implications which in turn can cause problems sometimes. However, we are going to use it strategically. Once the language contains implications, we will hold it responsible. But if we really want to hold it responsible so as to cause a crisis, it must have made a major crime... from others point of view, of course. Without a name, the object does not exist. If you can remember, in the Bible, what characterizes Adam is that he names each living creature. He is not God, he only gives names. Similarly, we may be able to provoke such a crisis so that the Pontian dialect is accused and the Pontian Hellenism comes together in an effort to maintain it.

What could a language do to be accused of so fiercely? If you come to think of it, it is simple. The pontian language must produce a word meaning “genocide”. The Pontians must say, at long last, “Genocide of the Pontians” in the pontian language! The Jews have their own word for the Genocide of the Jews, which is the *Shoah* or **שואה**. The term Holocaust is used exclusively for the Genocide of the Jews. The Armenians too have their own word. In fact, it is an expression meaning “Great Atrocity”. So, when Armenians talk between them about the Genocide of the Armenians, they use this expression. And when we hear this expression from an Armenian, we too know that he refers to the Genocide of the Armenians. When the

Ukrainians speak about the Genocide of the Ukrainians, they use the word Голодомор meaning “Artificial Hunger”. In fact, this word not only does it describe the action, it also stigmatizes the crime. If you describe the Genocide of the Ukrainians mistakenly as Great Hunger, it could have meant usual hunger. Whereas if we speak of Artificial Hunger, it means someone must have imposed it. And this is a direct accusation. The language is, therefore, a very useful tool. But you have to expose it. And to do so, it has to stigmatize. Our problem, as you see, is that we do not have a pure pontian expression to describe the Genocide of the Pontians. It is as simple as that. We are talking about the Genocide of the Pontians, we are describing it, but we should actually use the word which best characterizes it, following the example of other nations who have also suffered genocide. I will give you a tangible example. Recently, we all expected Mr. Obama to say a word: the “Genocide” of the Armenians. What did he do? He said the armenian word which was translated as “Great Atrocity”. The Turks said that he did not mention the word “genocide”. On the other side, the Armenians said that he did say the word. Consequently, “he was fair to both sides”, though the word had been said. The Turks of course, who know the meaning of this word, they also know that indirectly they have been accused.

What I want to suggest at this Conference is that we, too, must work collectively to find a word or an expression to characterize the Genocide of the Pontians. There are many Pontians here, who surely agree. This stigma represents the phase change. Why? The answer is, because it is provocative. This is not about a memorial to be placed in a parking area. This will be a memorial to be placed in the Central Square of every country. This is a different level altogether. That’s why we should not name it whatever comes to mind, but we should give it a serious thought. As a linguist, I can tell you that these choices are important. As I am also a strategic advisor, I am telling you that we must be extremely careful in our choice. I will give you an example. The French very often refer to the Genocide of the Pontians using one phrase. So, there already exists a phrase which is *Massacre Blanc* meaning White Massacre. But this does not serve our interests because “massacre” does not describe genocide. We should, therefore, choose a phrase to express the meaning of genocide specifically, or an abstract phrase to stigmatize genocide. The word Голодомор does not include the word genocide. The word שואה does not include the word genocide. But everyone knows that these are special cases of genocide. Now, let us look into it in the way that the U.N. Charter operates. We have War Crimes. We have Crimes against Humanity. Among the specific crimes that fall within the latter category are genocides. Coming to the point, specific names have been given for genocides. This is the worst thing you could do to the genociders because when you say the specific word or phrase, they know exactly that you are talking about genocide and about a crime against humanity. There is nothing else you need to say. I would even suggest that we use this word to name the next Panhellenic Conference. Nothing else... Just one word! You see, we have organized this conference on the Pontian dialect. We are struggling to maintain our language. We are also struggling for genocide recognition. But we are not combining these two difficulties. We should use our struggle in order to make it known internationally. As you may clearly see, not everyone speaks the pontian language but everyone can recognize Genocide. So they will necessarily have to recognize this one word, too! I will give you another mental schema. When you, as a Cypriot, lodge an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights for violation of your property rights, this appeal must be accompanied by the Title Deed or the relevant certified declaration. As long as you do not present this Title Deed to the ECHR, it

remains a Cyprus document. However, as soon as you present it to the ECHR –which comes under the Council of Europe– and your case is on trial, the Cyprus Land Registry is automatically recognized by all the 47 countries. You do not have to convince each one of them; it is done automatically once you have lodged an appeal.

What I want to point out is that if an official document is accepted with *the* word, we stigmatize every Authority that has signed it. What can we do practically? Here, the solution is very practical! You are Pontians. Many of you are educators. You know the importance of language. Move, and make this word, and make it known. And those of us who are not Pontians, we will be repeating it. In the same way that I can say שואה and the Jews understand. In the same way that I can say Голодомор and the Ukrainians understand. I do not necessarily have to speak the language, but each time I want to show the other that I am strategically working in the same direction, I just say *one* word. He is not expecting anything else from me. Let's imagine that you are presenting at a Conference in the European Union at global level and you begin your lecture with one word, the one that accuses. Then you may explain your talking points. You have set the stigma. Those who have committed the crime do know that you stand on the side of the victims. Consequently, even if you are not a citizen of this nation, you are at least a Just; and therefore, a suspect! So, you will be condemned. But you will have accomplished your mission. Thank you very much.