Imagined Communities

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BENEDICT ANDERSON

The son of an English mother and an Irish father from a lineage of Irish nationalists, Benedict Anderson grew up between China (where he was born while his father worked in a customs office), Ireland, and the United States. He studied classics at the University of Cambridge in England, from which he graduated in 1957, and then returned to the United States to earn a PhD at Cornell, which he finished in 1967 with a dissertation on Indonesian nationalist politics. Atypically for an academic, he gained widespread fame as a graduate student for publishing the so-called "Cornell Paper," a 1965 document in which he and his co-authors and fellow graduate students Ruth McVey and Frederick Bunnell challenged the Indonesian government's argument that an attempted coup d'état (government overthrow) in 1966 was a Communist scheme, an argument that led to the mass murder of at least 500,000 accused Communists. The fallout of the coup and massacres contributed to the upheaval of Indonesia's political order and the nation's transition to a long authoritarian rule by the president Suharto. After the Cornell Paper was leaked to the public and Anderson testified in court to defend an Indonesian Communist leader, he was banned from Indonesia for the more than three decades of Suharto's rule (until 1998, when his first trip back became an important public spectacle). Anderson then turned his research focus to Thailand and the Philippines, although he remained a prominent expert on Indonesia and even edited the academic journal *Indonesia* for nearly two decades. Anderson spent his entire academic career teaching at Cornell (1965-2002), where he became the Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor Emeritus of International Studies, Government, and Asian Studies in 1988. Although widely decorated for his whole body of work, Anderson remains by far best known for *Imagined Communities*, which is still widely considered the most important study of nationalism. The book remains controversial in the (characteristically Eurocentric) academic world for arguing that nationalism began in the Americas, not in Europe. After retiring in 2002, Anderson spent most of the rest of his life in Southeast Asia, where he died in eastern Java (Indonesia) in 2015.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As Anderson's book is in large part a work of history spanning at least four centuries and every inhabited continent, it would be impossible to provide anything approaching a comprehensive historical background without simply recommending an in-depth world history textbook. Particularly relevant to Anderson's discussion of nationalism are the Enlightenment's philosophical innovations, the rise of the printing press, and most of all the history of European colonialism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia from the 15th to 20th centuries. But Anderson provides all this historical background in the text of his book. More important for readers seeking to understand Anderson's project are the specific developments in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s that motivated him to undertake this project. First, during Anderson's academic training in the 1960s it became clear that colonies across the globe would use nationalism as a paradigm for resisting European rule and decolonizing into sovereign states. Secondly, this nationalism emerged at different territorial scales in different places—while Indonesia and India became unified countries, for instance, pan-African and pan-Arab sentiment did not create similarly large and diverse states, just as centuries before, 13 British colonies became the Untied States but the various Spanish colonies throughout the Americas became separate countries. Explaining this diversity in outcomes requires understanding the factors that contribute to nationalism, which is Anderson's goal in this book. Finally, and arguably most importantly, Anderson wants to know why Marxism was beginning to falter in this era—and specifically, why Marxist-Leninist countries were putting their individual *national* interests above their collective ones, despite claiming to represent the international proletariat and seeking to end the nation-state structure through long-term economic transformations. Specifically, he was looking at what is now commonly considered an early stage of the Third Indochina War, which he presents in the first chapter as the immediate impetus for his thinking about the relationship between nationalism and other political ideologies. In short, after the South Vietnamese and American defeat in Vietnam, which was then united under North Vietnamese rule in 1976, Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia, drawing the ire of China, which in turn invaded Vietnam. Although Vietnamese and Cambodian forces had worked together to fight the American invasion, now they were at odds—and both, like China, considered themselves Communist governments. Accordingly, Anderson wondered whether the dominance of nationalism might threaten the economic and cultural transformations that so many leftist governments wanted to undertake, and this inspired him to investigate the resonances and differences between nationalism and other kinds of political ideologies in this book.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The global scope of Anderson's argument in this book meant he necessarily relied on the work of numerous other historians,

especially but not exclusively when it came to regions besides Southeast Asia (Anderson's specialty). A select few of these works include Scottish scholar Tom Nairn's landmark *The Break-up of Britain* (1977), Hungarian historian Oscar Jászi's *The Dissolution of the Hapsburg Monarchy* (1929), and Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul's dissertation "Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of Siam" (1988). Anderson also looks at a series of comparably broad works for theoretical inspiration, including Hugh Seton-Watson's *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (1977), David Landes's *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (1983), Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* (1976), and the work of renowned Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, especially *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (1964). In addition, Anderson also takes historiographical inspiration from the renowned German critical theorist Walter Benjamin (*Illuminations*, 1973). His analysis of nations copying one another's nationalisms comes in large part from Erich Auerbach's work on mimesis (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 1957), and Anderson also uses Victor Turner's work (*The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) in his analysis of the idea of pilgrimage. Nationalist literature cited by Anderson includes Filipino revolutionary José Rizal's *Noli Me Tángere* (1978), the works of various Indonesian writers like Mas Marco Kartodikromo and Pramoedya Ananta Toer (e.g., *This Earth of Mankind* (1980) and *House of Glass* (1988)), and Mexican writer José Joaquín Fernandez de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816). And, of course, since his publication of this book, a wealth of literature has taken up Anderson's arguments and theories. In his Preface to the Second Edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson cites the following as important texts appearing in the twelve years after his book's initial publication: "J. A. Armstrong's *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982), John Breuilly's *Nationalism and the State* (1982), Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Miroslav Hroch's *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (1985), Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), P. Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), and Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1788* (1990)." The decades since have seen important subsequent books by Chatterjee, Gellner, and Smith, along with a flood of literature—many hundreds, if not thousands, of books—about particular nationalist movements, general trends in nationalism around the globe, and nationalism as a theoretical issue. Good general readers and student-level introductions to nationalism include Thomas Hylland-Eriksen's *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (2010), Umut Özkirimli's *Contemporary Debates On Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (2005), and the compiled edition *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (ed. Spencer and Wollman, 2005). Finally, Benedict Anderson's other most significant books include *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (1972), *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (1985), *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (1998), and the posthumous memoir *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (2016).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*
- **When Written:** Early 1980s
- **Where Written:** Unknown
- **When Published:** 1983
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Anthropology
- **Genre:** Scholarly Monograph, Historical Anthropology, Marxist Political History, Postcolonial Studies, Interdisciplinary Social Sciences
- **Point of View:** Third-person historical analysis

EXTRA CREDIT

Linguistic Mastery. The fluency with various cultures and masterful knowledge of world history that Anderson shows off in *Imagined Communities* are, perhaps, second only to his remarkable grasp of languages: in addition to his native English, he fluently spoke Indonesian, Javanese, Tagalog, and Thai, and had at least a proficient reading knowledge of French, German, Spanish, Russian, Latin, and Dutch. It is perhaps no wonder that one of Anderson's obituaries lauded him as a "Man Without a Country."

Star Siblings. Anderson wasn't the only notable talent in his family: the comparably illustrious Marxist historian Perry Anderson is his younger brother, and his sister Melanie Anderson is a prominent anthropologist.

PLOT SUMMARY

Benedict Anderson's landmark study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, starts by rejecting the assumption that nations are a natural or inevitable social unit. Instead, Anderson describes the nation as a cultural construct, with a particular history rooted in the fall of monarchies and empires, as well as specific advancements in literacy, technology, and capitalism. To understand the essential features of nations and the remarkable power they seem to hold over their citizens, Anderson points to the continuities among nations that formed in different eras and places, many of which he argues result from countries simply copying one another. But he also turns to the radical differences between nations, both in the eras when they formed and today, to point out the way they depend on history and show how they preserve many of the structures,

tendencies, and inequalities inherent to the forms of social and political organization they superseded.

In his introduction, Anderson illustrates what is special about nationalism with a case study. In 1978 and 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and then China invaded Vietnam. This is remarkable because all three countries were Marxist, so they had aligned goals in the international sphere and would be expected to side with one another during wars, not fight against each other. But these countries put their nationalist ideologies above their Marxist ones, letting their historical grievances and concepts of ethnic identity get in the way of their long-term political goals. This shows that nationalism is different from other political -isms: nobody would die for the idea of liberalism, but thousands of people die for their nations every year. The idea of the nation is so powerful that everyone assumes everyone else belongs to one; the world's most important international political body is called the United *Nations*; and "since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms." And yet, Anderson notes, nobody really knows or agrees on what "nation, nationality, [and] nationalism" even mean, and the more scholars look for explanations or justifications for nationalism, the less sense it seems to make. When someone dies for their country, what is their sacrifice actually *for*? According to Anderson, it is for an idea: nations are emotional and cultural phenomena, not concrete ones. Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Like any group larger than a small village, a nation is "imagined" because most citizens will never meet one another face-to-face, and yet see themselves as being part of a "political community" that is like a family, with shared origins, mutual interests, and "a deep, horizontal comradeship." The nation's borders are seen as definite ("limited") and it is seen as the only legitimate authority within those borders ("sovereign").

In his next chapter, "Cultural Roots," Anderson argues that one of nationalism's most important effects is to create meaning where it is lacking—when one dies in battle, for instance. When religion declined in importance and lost its political role after the Enlightenment, nationalism conveniently took its place in giving meaning to people's striving for improvement, service to their overlords, and even deaths. After the Middle Ages, people of different religions began meeting one another, vernacular languages started displacing sacred ones in print, and people started thinking of "history as an endless chain of cause and effect," rather than as the preordained will of God. (Anderson calls this new concept "homogeneous, empty time.") Anderson looks at a few examples of nationalist novels written in vernacular to show how they begin portraying a community of citizens living in a bounded territorial entity, and then analyzes "the newspaper as [a] cultural product" to show how it constructs an imagined community out of its readers.

In the next chapter, "The Origins of National Consciousness," Anderson looks more deeply at the role of printed texts circulated in progressively more accessible languages to progressively wider audiences, which he calls print-capitalism. He cites the Protestant Reformation as an important early influence that helped "dethrone" Latin from its position as Europe's common scholarly and political language. Then, Anderson shows how print-capitalism contributed to the standardization of languages: publishers chose a "standard" dialect to print in, one that would be accessible to their whole audience. These standard dialects became "prestige" versions of languages and, because they were now written down, changed much less than oral languages through the ages.

In his fourth chapter, Anderson turns to the earliest nationalist movements, which were in the Americas (not in Europe) and led by the elite creole classes (not by the disenfranchised masses). Because they shared languages with their imperial rulers in Europe and easily got access to European Enlightenment philosophy, the colonial elite revolted with ease and inevitably created democratic republics in the New World rather than replicating the European monarchies that oppressed them economically and culturally. In the second half of this chapter, Anderson tries to explain the scale of nationalist movements: why did the United States become a single, large country, but the Spanish empire split into more than a dozen? Whereas the British colonies were "bunched geographically together," with their newspaper markets and economies closely integrated, the Spanish colonies were much more spread out. Moreover, in the Spanish empire, colonial-born bureaucrats could only work in the nearest colonial capital, but could never make a "**pilgrimage**" all the way to Madrid. As a result of this administrative organization and these geographical limitations, a separate economy, newspaper system, and sense of national identity arose in each major Spanish colonial territory, and then each launched a separate revolution to become its own country.

In the next chapter, "Old Languages, New Models," Anderson turns to the next 100 years, from about 1820-1920, when nationalist republics began displacing monarchies in Europe. Again, language was crucial: the "reading classes" of each major European language began thinking of themselves as a community, and also expanded rapidly due to the growth of government bureaucracies and a new bourgeoisie class (both of which essentially required members to be literate). But Anderson also introduces a new cause of nationalism: the fact that Europeans could copy their American counterparts, who had already revolted and built nations. Anderson calls this phenomenon "piracy." In the sixth chapter, "Official Imperialism and Nationalism," Anderson looks at how established states and empires also began copying nationalist tropes in an attempt to stave off populist revolutionaries. He offers a number of examples of official nationalism, from the Russian and British

empires forcing their national languages on linguistic minorities to Thailand copying European empires' diplomatic and infrastructure projects in its ultimately successful attempt to avoid getting invaded by them.

In his seventh chapter, Anderson turns to "The Last Wave" of nationalisms, which arose after World War II in Africa and Asia, specifically in colonies rebelling against European rule. New technology and the growth of bureaucracy meant that natives of these colonies could more easily participate in government and make pilgrimages to Europe. Largely young and idealistic, they became excellent revolutionaries, copying the strategies of earlier nationalists on other continents and defining their nations in contrast to the specific European countries that colonized them (but using the same European languages). There were still differences between these nations, however: for instance, the huge and diverse archipelago of Indonesia, colonized but ruled indirectly be the Dutch, became a single nation after World War II in large part because of the spread of standard Malay (now called *bahasa Indonesia*) and the centralization of higher education in a few universities in western Java. In contrast, in West Africa and Indochina, the French built schools in more provincial cities and played ethnic groups against each other, which led these territories to split into various smaller countries.

In his eighth chapter, Anderson asks why people feel so attached to their nations, to the point of dying for them. Nationalism and racism often go hand-in-hand, as many scholars have pointed out, but nationalism also leads to a "profoundly self-sacrificing love," akin to people's love for their families. Anderson argues that nationalism is always open to the possibility of new people joining the nation, for instance by learning the language and naturalizing, while "racism dreams of eternal contaminations" and has been used by powerful people *everywhere*, throughout history, as a tool of oppression. Accordingly, he concludes that nationalism does not cause or lead to racism, although racism *can* be expressed in nationalistic language.

In the ninth chapter, the original conclusion to *Imagined Communities*, Anderson re-emphasizes the role of imitation and "piracy" in the history of nationalism. He traces his original example from the introduction—China, Vietnam, and Cambodia—to states copying bad models of official nationalism and Marxist revolution. With nationalism clearly more important to countries like these than the political ideologies they formally espouse, Anderson thinks scholars should stop putting Marxist theory before the evidence and start expecting more "inter-socialist wars."

The last two chapters are later additions, Anderson's attempts to refine his arguments in the book's revised edition. Chapter Ten looks at three colonial institutions—the "Census, Map, [and] Museum"—that Anderson believes made it possible for post-World War II revolutionaries to imagine their lands as nations (specifically in Southeast Asia, his area of expertise). Colonial censuses and maps used "systematic quantification" to divide people and territory into systems of "totalizing classification," while maps and museums created logos and symbols of national identity, turning living history into a series of dead artifacts. Chapter Eleven looks at the role of history itself in nations' narratives of identity. The earliest nations were forward-looking and thought of themselves as breaking new historical ground, but the next generation (1815-1850) argued that its nations were "awakening from sleep," with their people recognizing a longstanding, ancient, primordial unity. With the corresponding shift to homogeneous, empty time, the new academic discipline of History became a key tool for nations to define the deep ties that bound their people, specifically by selectively choosing what "to remember/forget"; that is, what to include in and erase from narratives of national identity.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

José Rizal – José Rizal was a prominent Filipino nationalist leader, writer, and doctor who was executed by the Spanish in 1896 for inspiring the Philippine Revolution. Considered a national hero, his Spanish-language novels *Noli Me Tángere* and *El Filibusterismo* remain classics of Philippine literature. Anderson cites *Noli Me Tángere* and the last poem that Rizal wrote before his execution as exemplars of nationalist literature.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Benedict Anderson – The author of *Imagined Communities* was a renowned social scientist, variously claimed by political scientists, historians, and anthropologists as one of their own. Anderson specialized in the politics of Southeast Asia (specifically Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand).

Thongchai Winichakul – Thongchai Winichakul was a historian whose dissertation on geography and mapmaking in Thai history plays an important role in Anderson's discussion of the Map in Chapter 10.

TERMS

Marxism – Marxism is a political philosophy and social science methodology based on the work of groundbreaking German economist Karl Marx. Marxists analyze history and politics in terms of the economic relationships and conflicts between different social-economic classes. Marxists view contemporary capitalism specifically in terms of the conflict between the proletariat, which refers to the majority of workers, and the bourgeoisie, the small minority class that sets the terms on

which the proletariat works because it controls the property, resources, and institutions (in Marx's terminology, *the means of production*). Marxist revolutions and governments attempt to help transfer control of these means of production to the proletariat, which is often conceived as an international class of workers all over the world. Because of this standard concept of *internationalism*, **Anderson** finds it strange that three supposedly Marxist countries—China, Cambodia, and Vietnam—have invaded one another, which seems like it would be contrary to their broader political goals. By starting the book with this example, Anderson shows how nationalism is actually a more powerful force than nations' explicit political ideologies (whether Marxism, Liberalism, or whatever else).

Proletariat – According to Marxist thought, the proletariat is the class of workers who lack property and are forced to sell their labor to the bourgeoisie in order to survive, and who comprise the majority of humanity.

Bourgeoisie – According to Marxist theory, the bourgeoisie is the minority ruling class of industrialists, investors, and executives who own the vast majority of a society's wealth, capital, land, resources, and government power. Seeking to maximize their own profits, they continually try to reduce costs—including, of course, the cost of labor, which is done by the proletariat. This means the proletariat's loss is the bourgeoisie's gain, and over history, according to Marxists, the bourgeoisie will continually drive the proletariat as close to starvation and slavery as possible. In the context of **Anderson**'s reconstruction of the history and roots of nationalism, the rise of capitalism and colonial conquest leads the bourgeoisie—a class unified only because of its economic position—to gradually replace the traditional aristocracy—which is not only economically powerful but also comprises distinct hereditary and social groups. In other words, the bourgeoisie is an *imagined* class, whereas the aristocracy is a *concrete* one. Moreover, the bourgeoisie is wealthy because of capitalism, which transmits money and power through deeds, records, and financial entities like stocks—in other words, through paper and writing, making literacy paramount for the bourgeoisie. So whereas "an illiterate nobility could still act as a nobility," Anderson argues, "an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable." This further strengthens the role of print media, which is the bourgeoisie's means of recognizing their unity and interests as a class, and in turn contributes to the spread of nationalism in the 19th century.

Liberalism – Liberalism is a political philosophy that remains dominant in much of the contemporary world, and which contrasts with Marxism. Liberalism emphasizes individual economic freedoms and property rights within a capitalist regime, as well as social, political, and human rights for all citizens of a democratic state.

Sovereignty – The concept of sovereignty refers to a state's absolute and exclusive power to govern what happens within (and crosses over) its borders. Following a long tradition in political philosophy, **Anderson** deems sovereignty an important characteristic of a state.

The Enlightenment – The Enlightenment was a wide-ranging philosophical, artistic, and scientific movement spanning much of the 18th century. Its defining feature was that it began to conceive of human knowledge and inquiry, rather than tradition and God's will, as the locus of life's value and the proper source of knowledge and collective decisions. The Enlightenment was instrumental in the rise of nationalism, **Anderson** argues, because it forced people to see their political organization as historically contingent and fallible (not grounded in God's will) and gave people an incentive to seek new narratives—like national ones—that could lend meaning to the randomness and unpredictability of human life.

Republic – A republic is the dominant form of government in the contemporary world. It is a form of representative democracy based on the model of Rome, in which the governing body is bound by a set of established rules or procedures (usually set out in a constitution and declaration of all citizens' rights). In his historical analysis of nationalism, **Anderson** asks why nationalist movements all created republics, which replaced the absolute monarchies that tended to rule beforehand.

Vernacular – A vernacular is a commonly spoken language among the people of a territory or state, as contrasted with a language of state or scholarship that may be used in institutions and even in daily life by a small elite, but is no one's (or virtually no one's) native language. **Anderson** traces how vernacular languages generally took over as the languages of the press and government as states moved toward nationalism.

Creole – The word *creole* has a wide variety of meanings in different academic contexts, but in this book it is used to refer specifically to European-descended people who lived in overseas European colonies. This includes the children of Spanish colonists growing up in Latin America, for instance, as well as white colonists in what are now the United States and South Africa. Because they served an important role mediating between imperial centers in Europe and the native populations of the colonies where they lived, and yet were still economically oppressed by Europe, the creole classes were particularly well-suited to lead independence movements—every independence movement in the Americas, **Anderson** notes, had creoles at its helm.

Popular Nationalism – Popular nationalism is **Anderson**'s term for nationalist sentiment driven by a country's common people, often as a result of grievances against the ruling class or a majority group's sense that it is being marginalized in a country it believes it should exclusively control. This contrasts with official nationalism.

Official Nationalism – Official nationalism refers to a ruling

class's efforts to arouse nationalist sentiment among the public. It is often used as a means of holding on to power in response to threats posed by popular nationalism, but it is also sometimes used to garner support for existing leaders, policy agendas, or imperialist ambitions. **Anderson** notes that this is an inevitably contradictory policy, especially when an imperial power sings its own praises in the countries it has conquered or when a leader tells oppressed people that they must agree with their government in order to count as patriotic. But official nationalism's ability to divert attention from the missteps of a ruling party and suppress dissent through patriotism make it particularly effective, to the point that it has become a standard ideology for contemporary nations.

New Guinea – New Guinea is the world's second-largest island (after Greenland), which is located in western Melanesia, due north of central Australia. Formerly occupied by the Dutch, Germans, and British, it is now divided in half by a straight line, with the western half belonging to Indonesia and the eastern half to the independent state of Papua New Guinea. In his penultimate chapter, **Anderson** uses New Guinea's conversion into a symbol of Indonesian nationalism, despite its significant differences from the rest of Indonesia, to show how states use logos to build a sense of imagined community among people who fall under their territorial sovereignty.

Homogeneous, Empty Time – This is **Anderson**'s term for the new concept of time that arose at the end of the Middle Ages. During and before this period, people tended to think of the past, present, and future as all already determined and all existing together as God's will, as though people were merely unwitting actors in a play that had already been written out for them. However, Anderson shows that a new, modern vision of time soon arose—this is the one we still have today, in which time moves forward linearly, can be measured by a calendar or clock, and gets "filled" by the events that not only happen, but also cause one another in an endless chain. In "homogeneous, empty time," large imagined "sociological organism[s]"—like the neighborhood, the political party, or the nation—can be conceived of as moving through time and developing in parallel with other changes and events in the world. Anderson cites novels, newspapers, and early works of historical scholarship as proof that this conception began to displace the old, divine-based view of time: novels began to move linearly through time and imagine their readers looking back from the future, for instance, while newspapers gave readers a snapshot of a single day across the globe, and history started to look at cause-and-effect relationships between events that occurred in succession. Because it made imagining an entity like the nation possible, Anderson argues, the rise of "homogeneous, empty time" was an important precursor to nationalism.

Print-Capitalism – This is **Anderson**'s term for the interplay between printing technology, which made the large-scale production of texts like books and newspapers possible, and the rise of a capitalist economic system that incentivized printers to sell as many copies of their texts as possible, often by switching to publishing in the vernacular language and writing for the growing literate bourgeoisie. Anderson considers this one of the most important factors in the rise of nationalist revolutions, especially in their earliest iterations in the Americas and Europe, but also in later African and Asian contexts.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE NATION AS IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Benedict Anderson's most enduring scholarly contribution remains the succinct but revolutionary definition of the nation he offers in the introduction to *Imagined Communities*: a nation is "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." This definition is radical because it presents a transformed understanding of the *kind* of thing a nation is—Anderson claims that it is an *idea* that binds people, not a natural political unit. At the same time, people's instinctual belief that nations *are* inherent, concrete, and inevitable is proof that the nation is unlike other political ideas: it compels action, loyalty, and sacrifice to a virtually unparalleled extent. Anderson's novel concept of the nation as an imagined community allows him to explain why nationalism is historically distinctive, more powerful than other political ideologies, and misunderstood by the scholars who preceded him.

Anderson begins by pointing out that nations are uniquely powerful compared to other political formations, which shows that they therefore need to be analyzed in a unique way. He sees the mutual invasions of Vietnam, Cambodia, and China as an example. He interprets these invasions as evidence that nationalism is more powerful than explicit political ideology: even revolutionary Marxist leaders who proclaim a desire to transform the international economy ultimately put the "national interest" first. Nationalism is now undisputedly dominant in the world, to the point where the United Nations is the most important international body, virtually every revolution is nationalist, and everyone simply assumes everyone else has a nationality. This dominance is both a result of and a further cause of nationalism's emotional power. In fact, this dominance is what makes Anderson's argument so necessary: many people seem to forget that nations have not

always existed, and that national identity is not written into people's DNA. Rather, nationality is an identity constructed through people's *feelings and cultural beliefs*. According to Anderson, this is why nationalist identities are now so dominant.

Anderson goes on to explain that nationalism is different from other political ideologies because nations are cultural phenomena—emotional, imagined *communities*—rather than intellectual theories. While they are still *ideas*, nations' cultural dimension makes them *feel and look* like concrete and inevitable social groups. Anderson repeatedly returns to the example of *dying for one's nation*, which is seen as noble—while parallel situations like dying for liberalism or dying for the city council seem nonsensical. Because citizens believe they make up the nation, they easily grow dedicated to it, for instance using metaphors of family to talk about it—territory becomes the "mother-land," and fellow citizens are "brothers and sisters." This shows that the nation's emotional force is directed "horizontally" at other citizens, and that the abstract idea of the nation relies on (and produces) the idea of a concrete community of individuals who belong to, and constitute, that nation. Meanwhile, other political philosophies besides nationalism are based on ideas—Anderson notes that, upon any further examination, nationalism is fundamentally illogical and will never have any "grand thinkers." Because it is a *feeling* and a *narrative*, not a philosophy, nationalism is more like "kinship" or "religion" than "liberalism" or "fascism." Indeed, nationalism relies on cultural and artistic forms—songs, novels, poems, holidays, flags, logos, and more—to build identities. Anderson argues that this became necessary after the Enlightenment, which made political structures and human suffering suddenly seem meaningless (because they were not ordained by God). Nationalism filled the void, replacing religion with politics: it used art and culture to bring citizens together on an emotional level, allowing them to see themselves as unified and sharing common goals. In its origins as well as its manifestations, then, nationalism truly is cultural, not intellectual.

For various reasons, however, scholars have failed to see the unique cultural dimension of nationalism. This leads them to underestimate it, both by failing to see its power over people and by only looking at its negative dimension. Anderson argues that one primary reason for this failure is many scholars' dedication to their own political ideologies (Marxism, liberalism, and others). Hoping their favored ideology will come out on top instead of nationalism, they simply treat nationalism as a set of ideas, conclude that it is illogical (*because it is*), and decide that it will fall after the "anomaly" passes. But they never look at the fact that nationalism's power does not rest on its logic: it rests on its emotional and cultural weight. And scholars' misunderstanding of nationalism leads them to other errors, too, like assuming that nations are necessarily closed to outsiders, and that nationalists are racist against people unlike them. Anderson responds that, whereas the concept of a nation is always closed because it always opposes citizens to noncitizens, the *category* of citizens is always open. Just as people can learn a new language and thereby join a new communicative community, Anderson explains, people can naturalize into a new nation and join a new imagined community. While racism is common in nationalist contexts, Anderson thinks that the powerful inevitably use it to maintain their power, regardless of political structure. Instead, Anderson points out the positive dimension of nationalism: it gets people to care deeply about others they will never even meet, which (in multicultural nations) can even be an *anti*racist force.

Anderson's book is, of course, an attempt to correct the erratic course of scholarship on nationalism. He recognizes that his project is ambitious, but this ambition has been rewarded: few scholars since have dared to write on the subject without accounting for the revolutionary perspective Anderson puts forth in this book.

LANGUAGE, PUBLISHING, AND IDENTITY

As he traces the rise of the nation-state throughout history, Anderson continually returns to language, literacy, and publishing technology as key factors that allowed people to imagine themselves as members of communities and then claim political identities and rights based on those communities. He shows how the spread of common languages allowed people to see their shared interests and, eventually, organize revolutions. And he concludes that, because dialect can stand in for identity and publishing can connect people who will never meet face-to-face, language is a crucial—but by no means the only—medium for people to imagine and create national communities.

Anderson first looks at how people define themselves and their political communities through their languages: belonging to the nation can mean speaking a specific language. Anderson starts with the spread and rising prestige of vernacular languages after the Middle Ages, when sacred languages like Latin, Classical Arabic, and formal Chinese lost their power because people stopped believing they offered unique paths to the divine. Vernacular languages began to take their place, first in literature and religion, which helped shift power in these domains from the traditional scholarly elite to the people. This process foreshadowed and enabled the later shift in *political* power effected by republican nationalism: in short, when the people's language became the language of government, the people began to govern. This illustrates how language tends to imply or even define community. In 19th-century Europe, language became a very important way for people to conceive of their national identities, to the point where people simply assumed that a nation meant a language group. This contributed to the fragmentation of multilingual empires like Austria-Hungary. Again, this shows that language was in many

ways synonymous with national identity in many early nationalist contexts. And, recognizing language's power to unify, empires used their languages as tools of official nationalism: Russia, England, and France forced their respective national languages onto their colonies' populations. This example shows that language's consolidating force is separate from ethnicity, class, or history, and can be used to stymie as much as to support independence movements (although the second is much more common).

According to Anderson, the spread of literacy and modern publishing helped language achieve its potential to create political identities. It spurred revolutions across the world by giving large groups of people the resources to imagine themselves as members of national communities. Seeking higher profits and larger markets, publishing companies started printing in the vernacular, both *elevating* and *standardizing* it by choosing a dialect that everybody could understand (or easily learn). Through these two simultaneous processes, the vernacular became the medium by which a readership could imagine itself as a community. Anderson studies early nationalist novels—in one, the narrator depicted a united national territory, and in another, the author explicitly spoke on behalf of a community of citizens. Similarly, Anderson argues that newspapers painted their readers as witnesses to a set of simultaneous, newsworthy events across the globe, inside and outside their own spheres of interest—or potential nations. So novels and newspapers both imagined the people as a collective with shared interests, creating a precedent for the concept of citizenship and helping the reading classes develop identities opposed to the colonial powers or monarchs that ruled them. It becomes clear that these processes of "print-capitalism" allowed readers to begin imagining national communities and republican governments. Concretely, Anderson notes, the circulation of newspapers made planning revolutions possible: the bourgeoisie began seeing its shared interests as a monied class, and pamphleteers could use the printing press to spread news of revolutionary plans and import ideas and philosophies from overseas. This was especially important in the Americas, where printed materials became the basis for revolutions. In short, Anderson's examination of written texts shows that the rise of nationalist sentiment and revolutions relied not only on the sense of identity offered by a common language's promise that any two citizens could *potentially* communicate, but also on the linguistically and politically united community depicted in literature and assumed by newspapers as their readership.

While language is a crucial factor binding people together, however, Anderson makes it clear that it is not always necessary for the formation of a nation. He illustrates this through the contrasting examples of Indonesia, where language was essential to the unification of a diverse territory, and Switzerland, where such unification took place despite the lack of a common language. The Dutch ruled the whole territory of what is now Indonesia, but very few Indonesians learned Dutch. However, many spoke Malay, which was already a common language in the area. Indonesians began using Malay in their fight for independence, and today it remains the archipelago's principal, national, and "national(-ist)" language (*bahasa Indonesia*). Without the language's spread, Anderson implies, the creation of a unified nation would have been very unlikely, and so Indonesia offers an example of how a language can be absolutely crucial to a nation's existence. But in contrast, Switzerland shows that linguistic unity is not *necessary* for the formation of a nation. Split among French, Italian, and German speakers, Switzerland made the three languages equal in order to respect its larger neighbors. It remains a united nation, even making this linguistic diversity a central symbol of its national identity. The example puts a caveat on Anderson's argument, reminding the reader that nothing is necessary or fated, least of all nationalism—rather, particular situations depend on the different contexts and forces that operate in each.

On a broad historical level, then, the standardization of languages and spread of literacy and print-capitalism were essential for the nation-state to become thinkable and for many nation-states to actually form, but Anderson does not mean to argue that every nation must be unified by language, or that speaking the same language or reading the same publication *actually makes* two people more alike or gives them some interest in common.

CENTRALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND POWER

Anderson argues that contemporary nations have been profoundly shaped by the unique means by which they can project power. Nationalism's rise both coincided with and further encouraged endless advancements in technology, the spread of capitalism around the globe, and governments' rapid expansion through bureaucracy. These structures of power make modern states' sovereignty unprecedentedly strong and yet also paradoxically more diffuse, since they're supposedly run by *the people* on their *own* behalf rather than by and for any specific ruler. Anderson shows how this relationship is mutually reinforcing. Nationalism relies on a variety of administrative practices that allow people, territory, and history to be understood as controllable by the power of a centralized state. In turn, these practices become seen as natural and inevitable elements of statecraft: at the same time as nationalism purports to give power to the people, then, it also increases the power of state institutions at their expense.

Anderson shows how power first became more centralized under the states and empires that preceded modern nations. His account begins with the European colonial empires, which extended the relation between king and subject over huge

geographical spaces for the first time to create a realm of rulers (the colonizing country) and a realm of inferiors (the colonies themselves). For the first time, power was centralized on a global scale, and important decisions were made continents away from the places they affected. One important indicator of this growing power was the journey Anderson calls the colonial **pilgrimage**, which is his term for the trips administrators or students would have to make between different regions of an empire. These journeys allowed them to experience the vastness of empire and the centralization of its power in the site of work or school (usually the capital). Then, they could communicate their firsthand experience to others they meet back home. Accordingly, these pilgrimages not only *reflected* the centralization of power in European empires, but also *enacted* it: first, returned pilgrims would make it clear to people at home that they were being ruled by strange people on another continent, and secondly, these pilgrims were often themselves the agents of imperial power (when they worked for the government, at least). Over time, these pilgrimages multiplied because of technological factors like improvements in trains and ships, which shrank the time needed to reach the imperial center. In short, technology drove further centralization by reducing the work needed to mediate (whether physically, socially, culturally, or emotionally) between the centers of power and the places they controlled.

In fact, the scale of centralization even determined when and where nation-states could form. Anderson specifically compares American colonies. The 13 British colonies in North America were well-connected, with integrated government pilgrimages, markets, and transportation, publishing, and legal systems, and these shared, centralized institutions helped the colonies revolt together and form the United States. Meanwhile, Spain's Latin American empire was relatively decentralized, and Anderson thinks this is why it broke up into so many different countries. In other words, the scale of centralization became the scale of the nation. Anderson's other primary example is the difference between Indonesia, on the one hand, and French Indochina and West Africa, on the other. Despite Indonesia's enormous diversity, all its elites had to study in either Jakarta or Bandung, which contributed to a sense that those cities were the "center" of the colony. In contrast, the French built more schools in smaller, regional cities that later became hubs for their surrounding areas, bases of nationalist movements, and capitals of independent states. While Indonesians saw their nation as enormous, spread out, and centered on Jakarta and Bandung, French colonial elites imagined their native lands as bound to the smaller "feeder" territory of each colonial school.

Finally, Anderson shows how modern nations adopted the tools, structures, and techniques of power in order to govern themselves, which leads to a sort of paradox: the nation has to *centralize* its levers of power in order to democratically *decentralize* decision-making about how to use them. The tenth chapter looks specifically at three techniques of sovereignty in Southeast Asia: the *census*, which allowed nations to gain ostensibly complete knowledge of the *people* under their rule; the *map*, which did the same for *territory*; and the *museum*, which did something similar for *history*, *monuments*, and *culture*. In all cases, the state wanted to have complete information in order to exert complete control: to guide the population's demographics, portion out land and determine what would be done with it, and decide what counts as the nation's "official" history and heritage. In the distant past, governments would have lacked the means to do this (even though kings certainly would have had fewer qualms about abusing their subjects). Anderson uses these examples in Southeast Asia to make a broader point about all nations: power becomes more centralized and tools of social control become more sophisticated at the same time as it grows less acceptable for states to use them arbitrarily. But importantly, nations use these apparatuses specifically to promote nationalist ideas: to declare who is a legitimate citizen and to decide what places, narratives, and monuments people should use to define their country and national identity. This creates a positive feedback loop between nationalism and power: the centralization of power in certain places and on certain scales makes the idea of a bounded nation possible and appealing, which leads people to continue giving power to the places where it is already centralized, and to allow this power to be deployed in a way that further justifies its own centralization.

Anderson does not criticize nationalism for using the tools available for it: any government, presented with the technology and information now available to modern states, would use them to advance its own interests. But what is unique about advanced technology's relationship to nationalism is that nationalism centralizes power while professing a belief in *de*centralization, government by and for all members of the imagined community.

PIRACY AND THE USES OF HISTORY

Anderson emphasizes that nationalism has taken diverse forms as a result of differences in culture, historical changes in technology and markets, and perhaps most of all, the availability of historical precedent. Anderson highlights this last factor, which he calls "piracy," because it has been relatively underemphasized in scholarly work on nationalism: after nationalism's birth in the Americas, the rest of the world followed suit in converting monarchies and colonies to nations, but they envisioned what a nation was and could be through the lens of the nations that already existed. Ironically, many of the differences in nationalism across history are the products of nations trying to do the same things; that is, different ways of adapting history have resulted in a diversity of nations and nationalisms. This shows the

contingency at the heart of nationalism: although many nationalists believe their nations to be destined for greatness, in fact most nationalist governments cobble their programs together as they go, taking history as a model and often repeating the errors of those they idolize. Anderson uses these examples to make an argument about the role of history itself: it can help people see that the future is not determined, and that citizens and governments have control over their own futures—including whether they conceptualize themselves through the framework of nationalism.

Anderson emphasizes that nations repeatedly copy one another, "pirating" off of one another's histories. This creates a paradox: nations look backwards, judging themselves by the standards of the past and trying to replicate history, even as they trudge forward and make the history of the future. Anderson notes that, after the first independent American nations formed as republics, virtually all other newly independent countries followed suit (at least in name). Once the precedent was set, it was seen as absolute, first by the European nations that formed in the 1800s and early 1900s, and later by the African and Asian ones that formed after World War II. But Anderson sees a less uniform, more selective version of this phenomenon behind the 1978-1979 wars between Vietnam, Cambodia, and China: although all three countries had very similar ideologies, they followed different models: Cambodia copied Russia and China, and Vietnam was influenced by the ethno-nationalisms of Europe. Anderson thinks that the war resulted from these differing models, not from the countries' political philosophies (which were similar). This begins to show how nationalism and other political forms are historically contingent, as much the product of circumstance and accident as leaders' explicit intentions or goals. Most of all, they are certainly not based in anything like fate or inevitability. Japan offers an extreme example of misinterpreting history. Following after European colonialism, it built one of the most brutal empires ever—this shows the danger in seeing history as destiny (since so many empires were expanding, Japan thought, there would be no other way to survive in the future), and the error in assuming that history was always morally justified. Indeed, Anderson emphasizes that many nationalist movements—despite being themselves historically contingent products of particular social, economic, and cultural circumstances—tend to valorize history as the sum of fate or destiny, think of their nations as timeless entities with some primordial right to territory or power, and selectively "remember/forget" their own national histories in order to create a more positive narrative. When turned into official policy, this can become dangerous, in part because it can lead people to try and repeat events that never really happened, or to develop a deeply distorted vision of their own country and ignore the lessons of history. What these examples of piracy all have in common is a kind of uncritical, token deployment of history as a political strategy, which is based on appealing to people's nostalgia as a justification for repeating the same mistakes.

In contrast, Anderson also sees another, positive side to piracy: it allows nations to learn from history, not just idolize or copy it, and so makes it possible to constantly refine the potential of the nation as a political form. In some cases, piracy was effective: for instance, by copying European diplomatic strategies and infrastructure construction policies, Thailand successfully dissuaded England and France from colonizing it. In other words, it became one of the *very* few non-European countries to escape European colonialism by successfully communicating to European powers that it was willing to and capable of meeting their standards of nationalism. This shows how states can selectively deploy lessons from history in order to *break* rather than repeat historical trends. Similarly, Anderson notes, many nations embrace this paradox through official nationalism: they valorize the past and the idea of the nation, but only as a strategy to improve their nations in the long run (for instance, by offering the next generation a vision worth fighting for). Indeed, Anderson's whole book is a long argument for the historical contingency of nationalism, which he thinks is neither inevitable nor going away anytime soon: he sees nationalism as the product of specific economic, political, and social factors that, though entrenched, *can* be eliminated or changed. This means that what nations choose to do can shape the future of the nation-state model, and that part of their freedom to shape the future lies precisely in their decisions about which histories to valorize.

As nations consciously look backwards to other nations for examples and inspiration, Anderson notes, the concept of the nation is at once apparently fixed—because leaders are looking to the past—and constantly evolving—because leaders' attempts to repeat the past in new contexts are inevitably, if often accidentally, innovative and novel. For Anderson, the solution is for scholars and political leaders to recognize this paradox for what it is: they must learn from the past while planning for and adapting to the future, treating the past as a case study full of trial and error rather than as a model to reproduce.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PILGRIMAGE

Anderson uses anthropologist Victor Turner's analysis of the *pilgrimage* to represent one way in which the administrative structure of European empires contributed to the structure of nationalist movements in former colonies. He sees the creole classes' travels as a crucial

factor in the development of a geographical consciousness: by going to the capital to work or study, people gained an awareness of their specific national, linguistic, and cultural characteristics in comparison to those of others who make the same pilgrimage. The pilgrimage also allows Anderson to show the continuity between nations and other cultural phenomena, like religions or rituals, which all exist primarily on the level of *imagination* and *emotion*. As a ritual, the pilgrimage transforms people's identities by offering them a symbolic sense of home—loyalty and belonging to the place from whence they come. Anderson takes up a handful of specific examples of the pilgrimage. For one, the fact that creole bureaucrats in the Spanish Empire could never get jobs outside their own territories was one of the most important reasons that this empire broke up into more than a dozen different sovereign states after gaining independence from Spain—while, in North America, 13 separate colonies with close geographic, administrative, and economic ties were able to declare independence as a collective entity (the United States). Secondly, under Dutch rule, future Indonesians all had to go to Batavia (Jakarta) or Bandung if they wanted to get a university degree, and as a result the educated classes developed a concept of a large, unified nation centered on these cities. In contrast, in Indochina and West Africa, the French built schools in smaller cities, which became the regional hubs for their surrounding areas and eventually the capitals of the multiple independent states that emerged.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Verso edition of *Imagined Communities* published in 1998.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Almost every year the United Nations admits new members. And many "old nations," once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by "sub"-nationalisms within their borders—nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the "end of the era of nationalism," so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening pages of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson points out that nationalism has become a virtually universal, unquestionable value in the contemporary international sphere. These two examples illustrate this fact. First, the most important international political body, one capable of affecting policy in any corner of the globe, is called the "United Nations." It is conceived as a supra-national organization—in other words, it is defined through its relationship to the nation-state, and in turn it serves to reinforce and justify the dominance of the nation-state form. Secondly, separatist movements show that even those *opposed* to their countries' nationalisms end up thinking about their own freedom in terms of the nation-state: they at once understand that the nation-states that are supposed to include them fail to do so, and then propose establishing new ones to resolve the problem created by the old ones.

So while many people have come to see nationalism as inevitable, these revolutionaries and UN diplomats included, Anderson's point is precisely that there is a long history behind this assumption. In fact, this is arguably the central motivation behind his book: he wants to understand *how* and *why* nationalism became so dominant, and he hopes to show that nations have not always existed and need not always continue to do so. Nevertheless, he acknowledges here that other scholars have hoped to do the same, as they see "the era of nationalism" as nearing its end and begin imagining alternatives beyond it. Anderson instead wants to show how the history and character of nationalism dash these scholars' hopes: namely, nationalism's very dominance, which results from its extraordinary character as a cultural phenomenon, means that it should not be expected to fade anytime soon, but also that it should be conceptualized from a new perspective.

The aim of this book is to offer some tentative suggestions for a more satisfactory interpretation of the "anomaly" of nationalism. My sense is that on this topic both Marxist and liberal theory have become etiolated in a late Ptolemaic effort to "save the phenomena"; and that a reorientation of perspective in, as it were, a Copernican spirit is urgently required. My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became "modular," capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. I will also attempt to show why these particular cultural artefacts have aroused such deep attachments.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

After introducing the topic of nationalism, Anderson turns specifically to his goals for this book. Specifically, he wants other scholars to profoundly change the way they think about what nationalism actually *is*: he conceives of it as a cultural phenomenon, not an ideological one. It creates and propagates ideologies when it is "modular[ly …] transplanted," but does not originate from them, and so scholars are wrong to try and combat it on the level of ideology alone.

This is the "Copernican" spirit in Anderson's work—this quote is a reference to the Renaissance astronomer who famously argued that the sun, not the earth, was at the center of the solar system. In contrast, other astronomers of the time invented elaborate, improbable explanations to try and justify the data they observed (or "save the phenomena"). So, just as Copernicus extrapolated an entirely new theory of the cosmos from the data he observed, Anderson wants to build a new vision of nationalism from the history he unearths. This is, in fact, the central argument of his work, even if it remains better remembered for the specific definition of the nation that he provides and references in the title.

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5-6

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson's famous definition of the nation, which is "anthropological [in] spirit" because it sees the nation as a cultural fact rather than a natural organism or a realization of a specific political ideology, contains four important analytical concepts.

First, Anderson emphasizes that the nation is *imagined*. This does not mean that nations do not actually exist, but rather that they are created in and sustained by the minds of the people who live in them. So, beyond being unnatural, nations are not even physical: there is no difference between the air on one side of a border and the other; nationality is not in people's DNA; and not all members of a nation know each other or can necessarily tell who does and does not belong to their same community.

This—community—is the second part of Anderson's definition. Specifically, it means that the members of a nation conceive of themselves as political equals: despite the material inequalities between them, in their capacity *as citizens* and rational human beings, they are supposed to be equal members of a nonhierarchical community. This means that the people elected as representatives are not seen as inherently better or worse than the rest of the citizenry: everyone is supposedly subject to the same laws (except, of course, those who are not citizens) and everyone supposedly has the potential to serve in the government.

Anderson's third and fourth components of the nation are complementary and much less revolutionary concepts: nations are "limited and sovereign." They are limited because they have borders; of course, this does not mean they lack the potential to supersede these borders. And they are sovereign because their governments, and usually other nations, believe themselves to be the only legitimate power within their borders. That is, one nation's law does not hold within another's borders, and the government of

each nation paints itself as—and, according to all the theory, is supposed to be—a legitimate representation of the people and their wishes.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical," the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, "Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal."

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11-12

Explanation and Analysis

In his second chapter, Anderson argues that nationalism was able to become so prominent as a cultural form because it was particularly advantageous in a specific social, political, and religious context. Namely, while the Enlightenment led to dramatically advances in science, technology, and philosophy, it also impoverished people's sense of spiritual connection to the world and sapped their feeling that their lives, labors, and sacrifices were meaningful. While one might have previously believed one's actions were a way of getting oneself to heaven, after religion stopped holding together the human social and political fabric, these actions started to look meaningless. In turn, people needed a new way to make sense of their lives, and Anderson thinks that nationalism stepped in to fill this gap. Rather than sacrificing oneself to serve God, one would instead make sacrifices for the nation and government. And rather than hoping to be immortalized in paradise, one can hope to join the history of their supposedly "eternal" nation.

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In the middle of his second chapter, Anderson explains why nationalism benefited from and rose in conjunction with a new concept of temporality, one he calls "homogeneous, empty time." In short, while people in the time before nationalism often thought of the past, present, and future as decided by God, relatively independent of one another, and generally out of human control, the Enlightenment brought a new concept of time that emphasized the cause-and-effect relationship between conditions and events in the past and those of the present and future. In other words, people started to imagine themselves as being in control of their history, and they did this on the scale of the nation: specifically, they imagined their national communities "moving calendrically through" history and into the future. This ostensibly shared history both allows different members of the nation who have never met each other to develop some sense of what unites them and encourages people to see their actions and futures as bound up with those of other people.

Chapter 3 Quotes

It remains only to emphasize that in their origins, the fixing of print-languages and the differentiation of status between them were largely unselfconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity. But as with so much else in the history of nationalism, once "there," they could become formal models to be imitated, and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In his third chapter, Anderson focuses on how the rise of the publishing industry—a process he names "print-capitalism" because it combined the technological innovation of the printing press with the profit motive of modern capitalism—made it possible for communities of readers to think of themselves as united by common interests and a shared language and, eventually, in turn conceive themselves as a nation.

Here, he repeats that this process was unintentional—"largely unselfconscious" at first—but notes that, like almost every other contributing factor to and practice emblematic of nationalism, those in power soon learned about it and began to intentionally manipulate it in an attempt to expand and secure their power over those they governed. For instance, although printers first pinned down a standardized version of vernacular languages in order to expand their potential audience, later governments began intentionally taking control of the standardization process in order to force minorities under their rule to assimilate, or to make the ruling classes seem more in line with the populace.

This switch from "unselfconscious" to "Machiavellian" is a crucial motif throughout Anderson's book, because it shows how, over and over, nationalism turns from a historical development into a copiable template that is eventually replicated enough to become an accepted norm in the world.

Chapter 4 Quotes

As noted earlier, the strange physical juxtaposition of Malays, Persians, Indians, Berbers and Turks in Mecca is something incomprehensible without an idea of their community in some form. The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: "Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?" There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: "Because *we* … are Muslims." There was, to be sure, always a double aspect to the choreography of the great religious pilgrimages: a vast horde of illiterate vernacular-speakers provided the dense, physical reality of the ceremonial passage; while a small segment of literate bilingual adepts drawn from each vernacular community performed the unifying rites, interpreting to their respective followings the meaning of their collective motion. In a pre-print age, the reality of the imagined religious community depended profoundly on countless, ceaseless travels. Nothing more impresses one about Western Christendom in its heyday than the uncoerced flow of faithful seekers from all over Europe, through the celebrated "regional centres" of monastic learning, to Rome.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Anderson introduces *the pilgrimage*, a concept that becomes central to his analysis of how the administrative structure of colonial empires made the rise of postcolonial nations possible. His example of the religious pilgrimage is instructive: in short, it shows how travel creates identities by forcing people to encounter others who are unlike them and reconcile their particularity in a world of difference. And specifically, pilgrimages expose people not only to their wide-ranging differences from others, but also to of the similarity that unites them—religion, in the case of the pilgrimage to Mecca, or community membership in a nation, in the case of colonial administrators traveling to the capital.

But Anderson also makes a second argument in this passage: he shows how elites were always making pilgrimages of this sort, which both revealed and affirmed their status at the top of the social pyramid. Much like colonial administrators, religious elites responsible for presiding over the masses maintained a network of

connections tied to their power and literacy, which in turn gave them a distinct identity. And specifically, these leaders (in the Christian case) made similar pilgrimages to Rome, which allowed them to effectively govern and formulate their sense of identity.

> For the new functionary, however, things are more complex. Talent, not death, charts his course. He sees before him a summit rather than a centre. He travels up its corniches in a series of looping arcs which, he hopes, will become smaller and tighter as he nears the top. Sent out to township A at rank V, he may return to the capital at rank W; proceed to province B at rank X; continue to vice-royalty C at rank Y; and end his pilgrimage in the capital at rank Z. On this journey there is no assured resting-place; every pause is provisional. The last thing the functionary wants is to return home; for he has no home with any intrinsic value. And this: on his upward-spiralling road he encounters as eager fellow-pilgrims his functionary colleagues, from places and families he has scarcely heard of and surely hopes never to have to see. But in experiencing them as travelling-companions, a consciousness of connectedness ("Why are *we* … *here* … *together*") emerges, above all when all share a single language-of-state.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55-56

Explanation and Analysis

As Anderson begins to apply the theory of the pilgrimage to the specific case of colonial administrators, he notes one major difference between these administrators' travels and those of religious leaders and worshippers: whereas religious pilgrims go in one direction, from the periphery to the center, administrative pilgrims constantly go back and forth, only to different peripheral places every time. This is crucial, Anderson argues, because it specifically instills a territorial imagination in the minds of these bureaucrats and functionaries: they come to see the capital as the only important place with "inherent value" and the rest of the territory as empty space governed by it. They come to see themselves and their hometowns as interchangeable, provincial, and important only because of their subservience to the same capital. In other words, they begin to imagine the borders of what will become their nation and the concentration of its power in what will become the capital. Meanwhile, they also imagine *themselves* as a fraternal community, or rather as belonging to two different ones: the people of this territory and the class that governs it.

> At the same time, we have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even "world events" into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time. Such a simultaneity the immense stretch of the Spanish American Empire, and the isolation of its component parts, made difficult to imagine. Mexican creoles might learn months later of developments in Buenos Aires, but it would be through Mexican newspapers, not those of the Rio de la Plata; and the events would appear as "similar to" rather than "part of" events in Mexico.
> In this sense, the "failure" of the Spanish-American experience to generate a permanent Spanish-America-wide nationalism reflects both the general level of development of capitalism and technology in the late eighteenth century and the "local" backwardness of Spanish capitalism and technology in relation to the administrative stretch of the empire.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

As he continues to ask how nationalist sentiment was born and spread in the Americas, Anderson turns specifically to newspapers. First, the people who published them created a vibrant class of readers, centered around each capital city and bound by the territorial constraints (distances and terrain) that separated each capital from the next one (except for in the relatively densely settled United States). These groups of readers followed the same information, shared interests, and began to imagine themselves as communities. And secondly, Anderson thinks that newspapers themselves presented a particular view of "world events," interpreting or "refract[ing]" them for each specific community of readers and making it possible for these communities to imagine themselves as existing alongside other, analogous communities in other places.

This theory allows Anderson to specifically explain the differences between the development of nationalism in

Latin America and in the present-day United States: namely, because Latin America was less integrated physically, economically, and geographically, its reading classes began thinking of themselves as a network of parallel communities, rather than one unified one.

❝ What I am proposing is that neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create *in themselves* the *kind*, or shape, of imagined community to be defended from these regimes' depredations; to put it another way, none provided the framework of a new consciousness—the scarcely-seen periphery of its vision—as opposed to centre-field objects of its admiration or disgust. In accomplishing this specific task, pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen played the decisive historic role.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

As he sums up his fourth chapter's central thesis, Anderson emphasizes that the rise of nationalism in the Americas cannot be attributed to any single factor. Instead, he sees particular intellectual movements as providing the content of the earliest nations, and imagined communities based in new technologies and economic developments providing their form. This is an excellent example of his "Copernican" or revolutionary thinking: he shows that, while ideology and explicitly reasoned-out philosophies played an important part in the rise of nations, they do not actually *underlie* nations and did not *cause* them to come into being. Instead, they helped nationalists focus their revolutionary ire on the empires that ruled them, and ultimately create nations. But these people were nationalists to begin with, Anderson explains, united by concrete social and economic conditions that most scholars of nationalism have neglected. With this chapter, then, Anderson shows the consequences of his unprecedented theory of the nation.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ An illiterate nobility could still act as a nobility. But the bourgeoisie? Here was a class which, figuratively speaking, came into being as a class only in so many replications. Factory-owner in Lille was connected to factory-owner in Lyon only by reverberation. They had no necessary reason to know of one another's existence; they did not typically marry each other's daughters or inherit each other's property. But they did come to visualize in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language. For an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable. Thus in world-historical terms bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

The rise of nationalism in Europe, according to Anderson, coincided specifically with a radical shift in Europe's class structure under the earliest forms of industrial capitalism. In short, societies were no longer dominated by the traditional aristocratic upper classes, but instead by the property-owning bourgeoisie that increasingly controlled the continent's economies. Economic capital was replacing cultural capital as the basis for political power, and this in turn reshaped political power itself.

Anderson specifically argues that the bourgeoisie—who managed their wealth through documents and their workers through contracts—had to be literate. Beyond eventually making literacy a sort of requirement in politics, the bourgeoisie also defined itself *as a class* through the written word: specifically, the newspapers they read. This is why Anderson says that "bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis." He means to say that all previous ruling classes existed concretely: aristocrats all knew each other, and anyone outside their social circle was by definition ineligible to partake in their kind of power. This is not true of bourgeoisies, which are united because of their homologous relationships to property (which they own), workers (whom they control), and the economy (which they largely run). This is important because nations formed in the same way: through "essentially imagined" connections among people who would never meet one another. In addition to largely directing nationalist revolutions against European monarchies, then, the bourgeoisie also helped cement the

structure of future nationalist identities.

The overwhelming and bewildering concatenation of events experienced by its makers and its victims became a "thing"—and with its own name: The French Revolution. Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a rounded boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a "concept" on the printed page, and, in due course, into a model. Why "it" broke out, what "it" aimed for, why "it" succeeded or failed, became subjects for endless polemics on the part of friends and foes: but of its "it-ness", as it were, no one ever after had much doubt.

In much the same way, the independence movements in the Americas became, as soon as they were printed about, "concepts," "models," and indeed "blueprints."

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80-81

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Anderson takes one of his first looks at the way that history itself—its writing, interpretation, and reproduction—shapes not only people's understandings of nationalism, but also the way that nations themselves form in the wake of important events. He points out that events like "The French Revolution" are never named or recognized as bounded units (with beginning and end dates, key actors, and a fixed territorial extent) until long after the fact. Rather, they are complex, heterogeneous, and even noncontinuous series of actions and events that are later reimagined as smooth, singular processes. In other words, the commemoration of events through circulated writing (newspapers, pamphlets, books, and more) profoundly shapes history because it creates "a 'concept' on the printed page" that people can use to understand events outside their immediate experience (almost always everything considered newsworthy) and that future generations can use to understand the past. As soon as events gets written down, Anderson suggests, they become more concrete (a single configuration of stories and information told from an ostensibly objective viewpoint) but also potentially distorted and subjective (due to the very processes that compile events into "stories"). This explains how something like "The French Revolution" could become inspiration for similar events on the other side of the world.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Insofar as all dynasts by mid-century were using some vernacular as language-of-state, and also because of the rapidly rising prestige all over Europe of the national idea, there was a discernible tendency among the Euro-Mediterranean monarchies to sidle towards a beckoning national identification. Romanovs discovered they were Great Russians, Hanoverians that they were English, Hohenzollerns that they were Germans—and with rather more difficulty their cousins turned Romanian, Greek, and so forth. On the one hand, these new identifications shored up legitimacies which, in an age of capitalism, scepticism, and science, could less and less safely rest on putative sacrality and sheer antiquity. On the other hand, they posed new dangers. If Kaiser Wilhelm II cast himself as "No. 1 German," he implicitly conceded that he was *one among many of the same kind as himself*, that he had a representative function, and therefore could, in principle, be a *traitor* to his fellow-Germans (something inconceivable in the dynasty's heyday. Traitor to whom or to what?).

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

In the 19th century, Anderson notes, the nation became established enough to inspire many imitators—not only revolutionaries who wanted to create nationas, but also monarchs, aristocrats, and imperial bureaucrats who deliberately imitated the strategies of nationalism to try and prevent genuine populists from taking over the government. In other words, they feigned nationalism in order to prevent it from taking hold, at least in the short term—Anderson recognizes here that this kind of "official nationalism" was a double-edged sword for ruling dynasties precisely because it suggested to the people that they might have the power to rule themselves one day.

But Anderson's primary focus in this passage is the fact that many such nondemocratic governments put language at the center of their "official nationalist" campaigns. In many cases, the implications of such policies were deeply ironic: to take just one example, the Romanovs spoke French, not Russian, which is why they had to "discover" the ethnic identity that they so proudly championed. These identities were manufactured and imposed on heterogeneous, multilingual populations, and dynastic states who understood that national communities are imagined deliberately combined standardized print-languages and nationalist rhetoric in order to consolidate their power over

their subjects (and importantly, by extension, also their sovereignty over their territory).

Chapter 7 Quotes

Some of the peoples on the eastern coast of Sumatra are not only physically close, across the narrow Straits of Malacca, to the populations of the western littoral of the Malay Peninsula, but they are ethnically related, understand each other's speech, have a common religion, and so forth. These same Sumatrans share neither mother-tongue, ethnicity, nor religion with the Ambonese, located on islands thousands of miles away to the east. Yet during this century they have come to understand the Ambonese as fellow-Indonesians, the Malays as foreigners.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120-121

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson employs this specific example from Southeast Asia (his area of academic expertise) in order to show how quickly and profoundly nationalism can change people's perceptions of themselves. Sumatra now belongs to Indonesia, and the Malay Peninsula is the population and political center of Malaysia. Despite their clear historical kinship ("they are ethnically related, understand each other's speech, have a common religion, and so forth"), the people divided by the Strait of Malacca remade their identities after they were forced into two separate countries, and now the national identities that divide them supersede the ethnic ones they have shared for centuries. This attests to not only the incredible power of nationalist thinking, but also to the extreme changeability of human political and cultural formations and the complete penetration of government sovereignty and ideology throughout most contemporary states' territory. Since being colonized by different European powers (Indonesia by the Dutch and Malaysia by the British), politics conducted (mostly) many hundreds of miles away has become more important than visible similarities and a shared language for people living in this region.

Nothing suggests that Ghanaian nationalism is any less real than Indonesian simply because its national language is English rather than Ashanti. It is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them—as *emblems* of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest. Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Although Anderson shows that language is an incredibly important uniting force in many nations—in some cases (like Indonesia's) rising to become nationalists' most significant symbol of their identity—he also emphasizes that it is absolutely not necessary for nations to form, and that there is no need for a nationalist language to be indigenous to the place that speaks it (indeed, Indonesian is not native to the vast majority of the archipelago).

Through this argument, Anderson draws an important distinction between "*emblems*" and *techniques* of national identity. Most nationalists think in terms of the former: they turn certain images or ideas into symbols that represent their country (for example, national animals, important buildings, or a specific vision of the ideal patriotic citizen). But Anderson sees the same "*emblems*" in terms of *what they do*, not what they are—they bind people together into a sense of community—and more specifically, he thinks language is unique because, while nationalists sometimes try to make it into an emblem, its real value is that it is the *medium through which* nationalism can take hold. For Anderson, language is the medium, not the message: it matters primarily because it gives people the capacity to communicate with one another, both to strategize political action and to begin imagining themselves as united. Therefore, while it often does serve this function, it is not *the only thing* that can do so, and Anderson accordingly tries to show that its relevance is often overblown.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Something of the nature of this political love can be deciphered from the ways in which languages describe its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*) or that of home (*heimat* or *tanah air* [earth and water, the phrase for the Indonesians' native archipelago]). Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied. As we have seen earlier, in everything "natural" there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era—all those things one can not help. And in these "natural ties" one senses what one might call "the beauty of *gemeinschaft*". To put it another way, precisely because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Anderson addresses the controversial topic of nationalism's relationship to racism and discrimination. The core of his argument is that nothing *inherently* links the two ideologies, even though nationalists are quite often racists and vice versa (in part because racism happens to be a convenient way for nationalists to draw a hard line between citizens and noncitizens). He focuses instead on the *inclusive* dimension of nationalism: it makes people who would never meet each other in real life care deeply about one another's fates. This is not to say that nationalism is without problems, but merely that it creates a love people take as natural. Indeed, many of its problems stem from the same sense that the nation is a natural and inevitable unit, but nevertheless, citizens care about one another and often take responsibility for one another in a way that people living under other forms of political organization (subjects of the same king, for instance) seldom did in the past. In demonstrating Anderson's unique and controversial scholarly perspective, this passage reminds the reader that his analysis of the imagination and construction of nations is not necessarily a criticism of nations' falsity—rather, he thinks there are positive and negative dimensions to the nation, as to any other political formation.

The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson does not dismiss the resonances between racism and nationalism, but he does reject the notion that nationalism *causes* people to be more racist. Rather, he thinks that what is particularly powerful about nations is that they are fundamentally *open*: any nation at least theoretically makes it possible for foreigners to become citizens through naturalization, for instance, and because nationalists' community is always imagined, the characteristics that make someone a legitimate member of that community are always changeable in the long term. He agrees that many nationalists and members of ruling classes use racism as a proxy for prejudice against those they consider outside the nation. Still, the fact that this racism is ultimately expressed in national terms seems to suggest, at least to Anderson, that it is an improvement over the more explicit and unforgiving racisms of the past.

Chapter 9 Quotes

In much the same way, since the end of the eighteenth century nationalism has undergone a process of modulation and adaptation, according to different eras, political regimes, economies and social structures. The "imagined community" has, as a result, spread out to every conceivable contemporary society. If it is permissible to use modern Cambodia to illustrate an extreme modular transfer of "revolution," it is perhaps equitable to use Vietnam to illustrate that of nationalism.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, the conclusion to the first edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson returns to the example he used at the beginning of the book: the wars between Vietnam, Cambodia, and China, which seem to suggest that nationalist sentiment has grown far more powerful than governments' explicit political ideologies. Throughout his eight previous chapters, he has established all the crucial building blocks for this argument: he showed that

nationalism is cultural rather than ideological, he explained the role of print-capitalism and various techniques of sovereignty in its rise, and most relevantly to this passage, he explained how nationalism has grown into its contemporary form through nations' ruthless "piracy" of one another's innovations. In short, not only is it remarkable that the Marxist countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and China have failed to cooperate on economic goals, but it is also notable they have actually implemented their nationalisms in opposite ways. Anderson sees this as a result of their following disparate models and basing their politics more on the previous actions of other countries than their own explicit goals. This is particularly important because it shows how practice gradually "drifts" away from theory over time, and how the differences in various countries' nationalisms paradoxically come from their attempts at imitating their predecessors.

❝ Thus the model of official nationalism assumes its relevance above all at the moment when revolutionaries successfully take control of the state, and are for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions. The relevance is all the greater insofar as even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Here Anderson points out another paradox at the heart of nationalism: even the most radical revolutions are never as populist as they profess to be, but rather use populism as a political strategy to amass and legitimate their power. Indeed, as soon as revolutionaries win, they become the establishment and their nationalism becomes official—and usually virulent, because they seek legitimacy for their rule. And they are often forced in some capacity to continue the policies of the regimes they overthrew.

This argument is significant because it points to the broader sense in which Anderson sees continuity among all stages of government: he sees nationalists employing previous techniques of sovereignty, especially when postcolonial states inherit the institutions of European colonialism (which he highlights in the next chapter's discussion of the census, map, and museum). Additionally, he sees nationalism's original rise as connected to an attempt to revive a sense of meaning into governance and collective life after the Enlightenment made old forms of statecraft look increasingly untenable. In short, the constant he sees over time is states' Machiavellian expansion of their own power, of which official nationalism—an imitation of the populace in order to subdue them—is the clearest and most sinister expression.

❝ China, Vietnam, and Cambodia are not in the least unique. This is why there are small grounds for hope that the precedents they have set for inter-socialist wars will not be followed, or that the imagined community of the socialist nation will soon be remaindered. But nothing can be usefully done to limit or prevent such wars unless we abandon fictions like "Marxists as such are not nationalists," or "nationalism is the pathology of modern developmental history," and, instead, do our slow best to learn the real, and imagined, experience of the past.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of his original edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson once again implores his fellow scholars to take nationalism seriously—which means taking it as a cultural fact and discarding the idea that its time is up, as well as engaging with its moral and practical complexity rather than assuming that its lack of inner logic destines it to failure. Specifically, he is talking to Marxist academics whose political commitments he thinks might turn out to be self-undermining: by trying to defend Marxist nations and philosophies as superior to mere nationalists, these scholars underestimate the power of nationalism and fail to take the accelerating threats to Marxism seriously. Indeed, he clearly sees this scholarly misperception as just as ideological as nationalists' own reappraisals of history, and perhaps even the result of a similar process: the uncritical imitation of what came before. This explains his final plea for professional scholars and responsible citizens alike to take the study of history seriously and strive to embrace its complex lessons rather than absorb the most accessible narratives about it.

Chapter 10 Quotes

In the original edition of *Imagined Communities* I wrote that so often in the "nation-building" policies of the new states one sees both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm, and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth. My short-sighted assumption then was that official nationalism in the colonized worlds of Asia and Africa was modelled directly on that of the dynastic states of nineteenth-century Europe. Subsequent reflection has persuaded me that this view was hasty and superficial, and that the immediate genealogy should be traced to the imaginings of the colonial state. At first sight, this conclusion may seem surprising, since colonial states were typically *anti*-nationalist, and often violently so. But if one looks beneath colonial ideologies and policies to the grammar in which, from the mid nineteenth century, they were deployed, the lineage becomes decidedly more clear.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson's final two chapters are notable because he added them later, to the book's second edition, in an attempt to correct what he saw as errors in his original argument. Here, he argues that the historical course of contemporary nationalism should be traced from the Americas to Europe through European colonialism to Asia and Africa, whereas his earlier argument omitted the final step. The fact that "colonial states were typically *anti*-nationalist" shows that, despite a radical break in formal ideology, nationalists still use the same institutions and techniques of power as their (mostly imperial) predecessors—in this chapter, he speaks directly about the techniques of censuses, maps, and museums.

But, beyond the specifics of his argument, Anderson's addition is important because it points to his interest in remaining as objective as reasonably possible, leaving his argument open to be swayed or challenged by historical evidence. In other words, he practices the vision of history he preaches, and he does not claim to have the definitive answer about the origin or development of the nation.

Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map and the museum illuminate the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain. The "warp" of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable. (The comic classificatory and subclassificatory census boxes entitled "Other" concealed all real-life anomalies by a splendid bureaucratic *trompe l'oeil*). The "weft" was what one could call serialization: the assumption that the world was made up of replicable plurals. The particular always stood as a provisional representative of a series, and was to be handled in this light. This is why the colonial state imagined a Chinese series before any Chinese, and a nationalist series before the appearance of any nationalists.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Anderson explains what unites the three figures of colonial and postcolonial control he has focused on in this chapter: the census, the map and the museum are all evidence of governments' attempts to make things susceptible to sovereignty. By subjecting "peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth" to a common framework ("totalizing classificatory grid") the state not only created a completely regular, quantifiable picture of what was under its control—which allowed it to exercise absolute power over everything within its limited sovereignty—but also set theoretical frameworks for personal, territorial, and historical identities within its borders, which in many cases translated into realities. In other words, the state teaches its official "style of thinking" to all its citizens, hoping to make them adopt it too. And most do, as proven by the very fact that nearly all people take citizenship and nationality as inherent facts of the world and inalienable elements of personal identity. (Indeed, nationality is considered such an essential personality trait that even a person who formally renounces the citizenship of the country where they grew up is likely to still be considered by family, friends, and acquaintances as having that country's nationality—the social dimension of national identity goes even deeper than the political one.)

Chapter 11 Quotes

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to "remember" the consciousness of childhood. How many thousands of days passed between infancy and early adulthood vanish beyond direct recall! How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be "remembered," must be narrated. Against biology's demonstration that every single cell in a human body is replaced over seven years, the narratives of autobiography and biography flood print-capitalism's markets year by year.

Related Characters: Benedict Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

Although Anderson emphasizes throughout the book that nationalism is in large part a story that a large group of people tell themselves about their relations to one another, their territory, a shared history and future, and a set of emblems and monuments, in this last chapter he suggests that nations are also defined by what people *do not* tell themselves: the facts they leave out of their stories due to the "characteristic amnesias" of all history, including any transmitted through the written word. He compares the nation to an individual because, as he has pointed out throughout the book, nations consider themselves as "social organisms" somewhat like individuals. He emphasizes the process of remembering the past in order to show that any nation's history is constantly changing, depending on how its people choose to remember and recount it. The "documentary evidence"—for people, old photographs and records, and for history, primary sources—are always disjointed and incomplete, which Anderson sees as a reminder that, first, it is impossible to ever get at the complete truth of the past, and secondly, life is neither experienced nor recorded as a narrative (but rather only assembled into one after the fact). Just as people can be astonished to remember they were once a "naked baby," who would initially strike them as radically different from the selves they now know, nations might be surprised to learn about the rather non-nationalist conditions under which they really started and began imagining their identities as sovereign, limited political communities. Anderson does not mean to encourage or dissuade people from filling in the gaps that separate the hard evidence—he merely points out that it is an inevitable process (even he does it throughout this book) and that it must be taken into account by anyone who wants to understand what they are really doing when they think about the past.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Anderson begins by describing the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and China between December 1978 and March 1979, which he considers significant because they involve independent Marxist governments invading each other. China invaded Vietnam, which had just invaded Cambodia. Although they have the same goals, Marxist countries are not necessarily on the same side of conflicts because "since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms"—and, indeed, specifically national*ist* ones. This tendency shows no signs of slowing: the concept of the nation is now a "universally legitimate [political] value." But there is little agreement about what "nation, nationality, [and] nationalism" actually mean and no good theory about where they come from. Because it is "an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory," Marxists usually ignore the problem of individual nations—and yet Marx wrote that "the proletariat of each country must first settle matters with its own bourgeoisie."

Although it might seem abrupt or out-of-context on first glance, Anderson's opening example allows him to make a crucial point about nationalism: it is simply unlike other political ideologies. It is more powerful and seems to be omnipresent, even in Marxist nations that usually hope to collaboratively transform the international *economy. For those born since this book's publication, who never lived through the wave of post-World War II national independence movements in the Global South, it is even harder to see the nation as a contingent form than it was in Anderson's day—in the 21st century, it is difficult to conceive of any country as anything but a* nation *to which citizens feel loyalty and inherent connection. So Anderson's first move is critical for contemporary readers, who can now see that their understanding of what a country* is *relies on the unanalyzed assumption that the nation is a normal, natural, and inevitable form of political organization. Instead of giving in to that same assumption, Anderson wants to ask* why *nations have become so popular as to be the default: what made them possible, and what makes them so powerful?*

Anderson's goal in *Imagined Communities* is "to offer some tentative suggestions for a more satisfactory interpretation of the 'anomaly' of nationalism." He thinks that the concept needs a "Copernican" rethinking, and that "nation-ness [… and] nationalism are cultural artefacts" with a specific history rooted in the late 18th century, and which are so powerful in part because of the emotions they arouse in people.

Anderson defines the purpose of his book: he wants to look at the nation as a cultural form, one that arose because of particular historical events and transformations. When he calls nationalism an "anomaly," he is referring to its dominance, and the way most other scholars have no good explanation for why nationalism is so powerful (so they simply consider its rise "anomalous"). And Anderson references Copernicus (the astronomer who first argued that the Sun, not the Earth, was at the center of the universe) in order to show how his own thinking is similarly revolutionary (and controversial), forcing people to totally change their perspective about what kind of thing a nation actually is.

Under the heading "Concepts and Definitions," Anderson first looks at "three paradoxes" inherent to defining the *nation*. First: nations are a new phenomenon to historians, but an old one according to nationalists themselves. Secondly: the nation is both a universal concept—in the sense that "everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality"—and an "irremediabl[y] particular[]" one, in the sense that there is no fundamental rule for what it means to have one nationality and not another. Thirdly: nationalism is powerful as an emotional and political concept, but it is logically and philosophically absurd—because of this, it has no "grand thinkers" and most serious academics look down on it as meaningless or even insane. One of these academics' errors is to assume that all nationalism is the same—Anderson thinks it is a diverse group of phenomena, more like "'kinship' and 'religion'" than like "'liberalism' or 'fascism.'"

Anderson's three paradoxes allow him to emphasize his two principal arguments about the nation. First, it is not concrete: one's citizenship is nowhere written in one's DNA, the world did not come with preestablished borders, and what nation a person or slice of territory belongs to is, in many ways, arbitrary. So the nation is an idea, not a thing. And secondly, it is not an intellectual idea, but an emotional one—the paradoxes show that the nation is, at heart, quite illogical. Most academics are wrong to see the first half but not the second: they see that nations are a fiction but do not understand why they are so powerful. So Anderson's "Copernican" shift is showing that nations are cultural *and* emotional *phenomena, not concrete or intellectual ones.*

Anderson presents his "definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." The community "is *imagined* because the members […] will never know most of their fellow-members," but they still consider those invisible fellows part of their own same group. Being imagined does not make communities false—any community bigger than a village must be imagined. What matters is *how* people imagine their communities, whether as extensions of kin, as members of the same class, or, of course, as fellow citizens.

Having explained his motivations for rethinking nationalism and the primary differences between his theory and others, Anderson now explicitly outlines his definition. Although his definition has four parts (imagination, community, limits, and sovereignty), his book largely focuses on the process of imagining *the community—both the factors that make the community possible as a thinkable unit and the consequences of defining one's national community in various ways. Here, he is careful to explain that he does not contrast "imagined" with "real"—rather, it would be more accurate to say he contrasts "imagined" with "natural" or "inherent." In other words, Anderson is saying that the nation is a social and cultural product, not one inscribed in nature or biology (even if many nationalists want to make that seem like the case). So Anderson's insight that nations are created through a process of collective imagination is not, as many of his critics think, a way of declaring them "false"—it is just a description of where they come from.*

Next, Anderson explains, no nation claims to encompass everyone, and so all nations are *limited* and recognize their borders. Moreover, nations consider themselves sovereign because, historically, they arose when political power replaced the imagined power of God. And finally, citizens imagine themselves as sharing "a deep, horizontal comradeship"—as being a fraternal *community*—even when nations themselves are unequal. To close his Introduction, Anderson asks the provocative question at the center of his investigation: how does nationalism, which is only 200 years old, "generate such colossal sacrifices?"

While the ideas of limited territory and sovereign power are conventionally associated with nations—to the point that many maintain that these two characteristics alone define the nation—Anderson shows how the concept of community among citizens is intimately tied to the nation's mode of sovereignty: in nationalism, it is supposed to be the people themselves *who are sovereign over themselves, their relations, and their territory. In other words, the sovereignty of nations is not continuous with the sovereignty of kings and God: rather, its logic fundamentally relies on the very concept of the community.*

CHAPTER 2: CULTURAL ROOTS

"Tombs of Unknown Soldiers" are a prime symbol of nationalism: they are meaningful only *because* the identity of the deceased is unknown, and because they stand for the efforts of a community. This shows that nationalism takes an obsessive interest in "death and immortality"—much like religion and completely unlike Marxism and Liberalism. Everyone dies, but religion gives meaning to people's death and suffering—it "transform[s] fatality into continuity" by, for instance, linking death to rebirth. So it is no coincidence that nationalism emerged around the same time as the Enlightenment overturned the dominance of religion in Europe. Anderson does not mean to say that the decline of religion caused nationalism, or that nationalism is a superior form of religion, but merely that nationalism should be thought of as not a "self-consciously held political ideolog[y]," but as a "large cultural system[]" like "the *religious community* and the *dynastic realm*."

The "Tombs of Unknown Soldiers" are quite literally monuments to nothing, the graves of no one in particular. This shows the sense in which nationalism is fundamentally hollow and based on the abstract idea of the citizen, which the concrete community of citizens are then supposed to believe in and model themselves after. The unknown soldiers can only stand in for the nation because they have no particular individual identity, and therefore represent the epitome of martyrdom: negating one's own existence for the sake of the larger (national) community. Nationalism's status as a "large cultural system[]," which provides people with a sense of meaning just like religion does, suggests that it is in some sense a defining ideology of the contemporary world, the paradigm through which almost everyone defines themselves and their place in relation to others (much like empires and religions in many cases in the past).

In the section "The Religious Community," Anderson suggests that religions could create a sense of community across the globe through "a sacred language and written script"—Latin, Chinese, and Classical Arabic allowed people from different language communities to communicate through writing. Each community considered its language sacred, such that outsiders could become more "civilized" by learning it, and each believed its own language offered a privileged door into the truths of being and the divine, which made "conversion [of outsiders] through the sacred language" an important goal. People in these communities believed in a strict hierarchy, with the literate minority "mediat[ing] between earth and heaven."

Anderson's analysis of religion offers a more familiar example of how shared values, symbols, communicative mechanisms, and institutions help bind people together into communities. He introduces the relationship between language and identity, showing here how communities coalesced around and defined themselves by particular dialects. The prestige of each sacred language became the vehicle for each religion to coalesce a community around itself, and scholars used their languages' prestige to centralize power and authority in their own hands. Whereas Anderson later argues that language helps consolidate "horizontal," at least theoretically egalitarian communities in nations, then, here he shows how language helped religious communities form and sustain "vertical" hierarchies.

But Anderson argues that "the great religiously imagined communities" declined from the end of the Middle Ages onward. He mentions two of the most important reasons for this. First, intercontinental travel put people with different beliefs into contact—Anderson uses Marco Polo and an 18th-century "Persian traveler" as examples of the increasing association of religion with territory. And secondly, "the sacred language" became less important and the vernacular gradually became the primary language of publishing.

Both of these transformations made it increasingly difficult for religious communities to remain self-contained bubbles. First, seeing others revere their own leaders, books, and gods made it more difficult for members of any given religious community to continue believing that their system transmitted the singular, absolute truth. And secondly, when "sacred language[s]" lost their prestige, it became possible for common people to rise to the positions of power and participate in public deliberations, both of which were previously monopolized by a scholarly elite.

In the section "The Dynastic Realm," Anderson outlines how drastically foreign a dynastic or purely monarchical government would be to contemporary people. The monarch's power comes from divinity, those who live under the crown are subjects, not citizens, and there are no clear borders. To consolidate rule over different peoples, ruling families married into one another, or kings kept concubines.

Dynastic rule would seem completely alien to the modern reader, even though it was an accepted—even unquestionable—structure at the time. Anderson implies that nationalism creates a parallel situation: although it is essentially taken as the normal and natural order of things in the contemporary world, to people living in other eras it would be strange and alien. This shows that, fundamentally, the nation is a contingent, historically particular political formation that could be superseded under the right conditions.

This "sacral monarchy" started waning in the mid-1600s, and by the late 1700s it was no longer the default paradigm for state power, but merely "a semi-standardized model." While in the early 1900s many governments remained formally dynastic (and some even do today), these have mostly sought to justify themselves in the terms of nationalism.

Anderson emphasizes that there is a difference between what states call themselves and how they act—even supposed monarchies (like the U.K., Malaysia, and Bhutan, just to name a few) in the modern day largely operate as republics and encourage their populations to think of themselves as citizens *of a* nation *(rather than subjects of a king or queen).*

Anderson begins the long section titled "Apprehensions of Time" by arguing that there is one more "fundamental change"—a change in how people understood time—that "made it possible to 'think' the nation." For example, Medieval Christian painters often depicted Jesus and the Virgin Mary as people from their own place or culture because, in that era, people lacked a "conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or a [sense] of radical separations between past and present." Rather, they believed that Judgment Day could come at any moment, and that the past, present, and future were all predetermined by God's will (and therefore existed simultaneously). This understanding of time was replaced by the current one, "homogeneous, empty time," which sees time as a linear, measurable, empty container, with one thing causing another and the future remaining uncertain.

Anderson's complex analysis of the change in people's conception of time also plays a central role in his argument about the role of history in nationalism (as well as that of nationalism in history). "Homogeneous, empty time" is the basis of the discipline of history, which tracks people, places, institutions, etc. as they have changed throughout time as the result of circumstances both inside and outside human control. In other words, historians and nationalists see the future as uncertain and changeable, whereas the previous understanding of time took it as fixed by God's will. The notion that people could make their own histories and control their own destinies was an important impetus for nationalist revolutions, therefore, but also for scholars' very attempt to document and understand history.

Anderson next argues that this transformation in concepts of time can be well understood through "the novel and the newspaper," which became important vehicles for "'re-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation." In novels, readers can see different characters doing different things at the same time, and understand the connections among different characters who may never actually meet in the book. The characters comprise "a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time," just like a nation. To illustrate this complex argument, Anderson uses four examples from different contexts.

Anderson uses the cultural forms of the novel and newspaper not only to show how representations of time enabled the formation of nations but also to emphasize the sense in which nations are fundamentally cultural constructs. Novels jump around in time in order to illustrate relations of cause and effect, and they portray all the characters as a community even if they never meet. By highlighting these aspects of the novel form, Anderson shows that the novel contains the ingredients of the imagined community, which is likely what makes it such a powerful vehicle for the formation of nationalist movements.

Anderson's first example is the opening passage of Filipino writer José Rizal's 1887 novel *Noli Me Tangere*, written in Spanish (the colonial language), in which anonymous people around the capital Manila (an imagined community) share gossip and the narrator directly addresses future Filipinos. In contrast, a similarly illustrious work written in the indigenous Filipino language, Tagalog, a few decades before is distinctly oral in character, proceeds through "spoken flashback[s]," and never addresses the reader.

The anonymous collective of Manila residents in Rizal's novel represents a microcosm of the Philippine nation—despite never having met one another, they clearly have common interests and are even imagined as creating a new generation that will share those interests. The other, contrasting work is written from a first-person perspective that is more concerned with people's individuality and their specific relations to one another, rather than using an omniscient narrative voice that treats people as a collective that persists through history.

Anderson's third example is Mexican writer José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's 1816 novel *El Periquillo Sarniento*, which criticizes the Spanish colonial government by following a Mexican the government fails to educate as he visits "hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries," and more. The Mexican nation "is clearly bounded" geographically, and the implication is that the colonial government has failed *this nation* as a whole. His final example is the Indonesian nationalist Marco Kartodikromo's *Semarang Hitam*, which opens with scenes of the city Semarang all narrated as "a world of plurals" and then turns to an unnamed young man—nameless because he might stand for any Indonesian—who reads a newspaper about the death of a similarly anonymous vagrant and grows angry at the colonial government.

Fernández de Lizardi's novel adds an explicitly geographical dimension to the imagination of communities—he portrays Mexico as a territorial entity, made of various places and the diverse ways of life within them. Kartodikromo's picture of Semarang, like the "Tombs of Unknown Soldiers," points out the dependence of nationalism on an abstract ideal of citizenship by putting anonymous figures of colonial suffering and resistance at its center. And both show how formerly colonized nations imagined themselves as unified in part through a collective response to the empires that ruled them.

Anderson asks what makes "the newspaper as cultural product" distinctive. There is something strange in putting news from all around the world on the same page. These stories end up there because of two "imagined linkage[s]." First, the stories have happened at the same time, and secondly, the newspaper will be read by people all around the same city, at roughly the same time, on the same day when it is published. (Anderson suggests that the book, and newspapers as "an 'extreme form' of the book," was the first truly self-contained commodity popularized under industrial capitalism.) The newspaper therefore "creat[es] that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations."

Anderson's analysis of the newspaper—which, again, looks at familiar, taken-for-granted objects through an anthropological lens—shows how the publications simultaneously rely on and create the idea of a unified readership with common interests—in other words, an imagined community of the reading classes. It also suggests, of course, that the spread of newspapers and similar print forms might have played an important role in encouraging national identities to leap off the page and into people's personal senses of identity (an argument he takes up in more depth in the next two chapters).

In closing, Anderson summarizes the findings of this chapter. According to him, "the very possibility of imagining the nation" required three ideas to move from paradigmatic to obsolete: the sacred written language, dynastic rule by a divine monarch, and the religious view of time that made "the origins of the world and of [humans] essentially identical." Together, the shifts away from these three ideas separated "cosmology and history," erasing the sense that "the everyday fatalities of existence" had some greater meaning. This opened the door for nationalism to take religion's place. Anderson notes that this successfully happened most of all because of "print-capitalism," which is the subject of his next chapter.

In his conclusion to this chapter, Anderson reemphasizes the sense in which nations serve a cultural *and* narrative *function for their citizens, helping them identify themselves within the broader world and in relation to others. Nations both rely on and facilitate new concepts that fill in for all three of the ones that were lost: sacred written languages were replaced by popular vernacular ones; dynastic rulers were replaced with elected ones; and the old view of time and history was replaced with one that emphasized human agency and possibility.*

CHAPTER 3: THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Anderson opens this chapter by arguing that the rise of printing supported the formation of "horizontal-secular, transverse-time" national communities because of capitalism. Hundreds of millions of books were printed in the 1500s, which brought reading to the masses and turned publishing into a huge, profitable business that hinged, of course, on selling as many books as possible. After cornering the proportionally small Latin-language market, therefore, book-sellers began publishing in the vernacular. This trend was bolstered by three factors: the academization of Latin (which grew closer to the Roman standard and further from the Catholic Church); Martin Luther and other Protestants' use of print to fight a "religious propaganda war" and create new readers in the vernacular language; and governments' turn to local "administrative vernaculars" that were more convenient to use than Latin. While none of these three was alone enough to "dethrone" Latin, they all made significant impacts.

Now, Anderson turns to the way that novels and newspapers' modern representations of time and community were able to spread and influence the thinking of those they reached. The profit motive was crucial, because it incentivized those in possession of printing technology to seek out a wide audience and promote literacy to the masses. In a sense, books had to become marketable commodities before they could change the world. So Anderson sees the conjunction *of print technology and capitalist market structures as crucial, which is why he and those influenced by his work often talk about "print-capitalism" as a crucial figure in the rise of nationalism. Again, however, Anderson emphasizes that change resulted from the combination of various, layered causes, rather than singular developments or actions.*

Human language is inevitably diverse, and the whole world will never speak the same language. But print helped consolidate diverse dialects into common *standardized versions* of languages, "'assembl[ing]' related vernaculars" through mechanical reproduction and dissemination. These first standardized vernaculars, which lay somewhere between spoken dialects and Latin on a spectrum of formality, showed speakers that they shared a language with thousands or millions of other people. Unlike books hand-copied by scribes, printed books did not evolve over time, and this made language itself start changing less quickly throughout the centuries. And dialects closer to the printed vernacular gained prestige, while those further from it came to be seen as inferior.

Despite vernacularizing the literary world, publishers did not necessarily publish in the same dialects common people spoke—in fact, that would have made their products even less *accessible to large parts of their audiences. So at the same time as print diminished the prestige of old-school sacred languages of Latin, it also put new prestige languages in their place, choosing certain potentially widely comprehensible forms of the vernacular in order to allow as many people as possible to read published works. This process of simultaneous centralization and decentralization—selecting and enforcing rigid linguistic norms in order to make language as widely accessible as possible—foreshadows and parallels the way nationalist policies often have to centralize and expand authority in order to ostensibly serve the people, controlling every*thing *in the name of every*one.

Although the creation of prestige through print was always unintentional at first, "once 'there,'" this process became an easy tool for governments seeking to repress minorities and impose a sense of uniform national consciousness. Now, every state has a national language, but this does not mean that each state has its own language that all of its people speak—rather, many countries share the same national languages, and many national languages are scarcely spoken or understood by their countries' common people. The Americas saw this happen first, for they contained the first true nation-states.

Crucially, although the spread of vernacular languages might have initially seemed like an unconditional good, Anderson emphasizes that actors with opposite intentions also use it to create the appearance of unity by erasing difference. He later calls this kind of policy "official nationalism" and he frequently notes that nationalism constantly runs the risk of denying the rights and humanity of those it deems to be "outside" the nation or less-than-"ideal" citizens. So he implies that vernacularization, like so many other political and cultural tools available to the state, can be used for good or evil depending on the context.

CHAPTER 4: CREOLE PROCESSES

Anderson finds two things distinctive about the states that formed in the Americas during the 18th and 19th centuries: they shared a language with their colonizers and their independence movements were led by wealthy elites, not by the masses. In fact, these elites were *worried* about violent rebellion from the masses, especially enslaved and indigenous people, rather than sympathetic to their grievances. Many leaders of the independence movements in Venezuela and the United States, for example, were motivated by a desire to *preserve* slavery, which European powers were beginning to turn against.

Anderson makes these two observations because they both show a difference between most people's theoretical picture of a nation and the way that the first nations actually formed. While citizens and philosophers might imagine that a nation is supposed to be distinguished by its language and run by its common working people, neither of these was actually true of the first nation-states, which were about an elite class seizing power from another elite that was merely more powerful and more distant. This implies that Anderson is skeptical of so many nations' claim to be created by and for the people—although this could certainly be the case in some situations and is clearly a valuable goal.

And yet it is still notable that these colonized elites started thinking in national terms *before* anyone in Europe. In the Spanish Empire, two well-known reasons were the monarchy's increasingly strict policies and the "rapid and easy transmission of" European philosophies to the Americas. In part as a result, every Latin American country but Brazil immediately formed a republic upon independence, taking the United States and France as models. But the aforementioned reasons do not sufficiently explain the remarkable formation of so many distinct states in the Americas, nor the fact that due to independence "the upper creole classes […] were financially ruined" in the short term (although independence surely benefited them in the long term).

Although Anderson was merely following chronology, his argument faced significant opposition in late 20th century European and American academia, which were reluctant to admit that something as important as nationalism might have started outside of Europe, or even with nonwhite people. (Anderson's point implies that, in some sense, the achievements of European nations are derivative of those of the American nations whose revolutions they copied.) Anderson emphasizes that European Enlightenment thinkers had a significant influence on these "New World" movements, but for him it is clear that Europe actually represented the previous political form—empires ruled by monarchs—and was resistant to nationalism until much later.

Anderson thinks the real explanation for the quick rise of national identity in each newly-independent segment of Spanish territory was that each of these areas was an administratively independent colony. Divided by difficult terrain, long distances, and a prohibition on trading with any territorial entity but Spain—including one another—the various colonies quickly developed senses of their own distinctiveness. But this is not all.

Anderson sees a continuity in the scale of territorial governance between the Spanish empire and the independent states that formed in its wake: in some sense, postcolonial states were able to take advantage of the political apparatuses and identities formed by the colonial process. Especially when combined with the fact that most Latin American revolutions were led by the elite, this means that readers should not assume there was a radical break between colonial and postcolonial political or administrative structures.

Another important factor in the rise of independent states in Latin America is "the ways in which administrative organizations create meaning." Anderson looks at esteemed anthropologist Victor Turner's analysis of the journey, using **the pilgrimage** as a prototypical kind of journey. Pilgrimages serve to unify religious communities: for example, on a pilgrimage to the holy city Mecca, "Malays, Persians, Indians, Berbers and Turks" meet one another and realize that they are united by all being Muslims. This is just like bureaucrats' journey from their homes to the capital. When they arrive, they meet fellow bureaucrats from other parts of the country, ask "Why are *we* … *here* … *together*?," and gain a sense of collective identity as members of the same country, empire, or nation.

Again, Anderson emphasizes the narrative and cultural dimensions of political power and draws an explicit comparison between nationalism and religion. His analysis of the pilgrimage combines the insight that nations are imagined and the historical fact that creole elites led the American revolutions: colonialism forced these creole elites to travel and then imagine themselves as unified because of the fact that they all traveled in the same way, to the same place, for the same reason.

Even though they were culturally identical to Spaniards, creole bureaucrats born in Spain's Latin American colonies were prohibited from rising to posts beyond their own colonies' capitals. For example, a creole from Peru could get work in the local capital Lima, but never in Madrid. This meant identity formed not on the level of the empire as a whole, but rather on that of individual colonies, with creoles born in the same colony able to collectively lament their shared subjugation to the Spanish. The creoles were an important class because they at once held significant power as their colonies' ruling classes, helped Spain control and exploit local native populations, and were subjugated to Spain itself. Around the globe, white creoles also intermarried and had children with locals, creating a mixed-race population. This worried European overlords, who responded with an emphatic racism that also conveniently facilitated the global growth of slavery.

Anderson sees this policy of limited bureaucratic mobility as another important factor that determined the scale of postcolonial nations: "creole" (European-descended but colonial-born) elites from different colonies were unlikely to interact, and those from various rural provinces would congregate in the capital, which they came to understand as the center of their area (the territory that would later proclaim independence). The creoles' indeterminate or liminal status between Europeans and natives contributed to their role in the revolution because they both believed they had a right to rule and exploit natives as did the Spanish and felt they were deprived of this right. In other words, they wanted an equal right to oppress the masses. Again, this allows Anderson to emphasize that, while American nationalisms were certainly not condoned by European monarchies or aristocracies, they were still fundamentally elitist and self-serving movements at first.

In the Spanish colonies in the Americas, printing presses "remained under the tight control of crown and church" until the end of the 1600s. The next century, however, saw a rapid expansion of independent newspapers, which initially "began essentially as appendages of the market." Information was newsworthy if it spoke to the economic interests of the elite who participated in "the colonial administration and market-system." A newspaper thus "created an imagined community among [...] fellow-readers." Moreover, readers in one Latin American city seldom read newspapers from others, and this news from elsewhere took a long time to arrive.

The newspapers both created possibilities for revolution within each Spanish colony and, through their limited regional circulations, divided these colonies from one another, helping each construct a separate identity that eventually became the basis for its claim to independence. In other words, like administrative pilgrimages, newspapers helped fix the scale on which nationalism formed. Again, Anderson shows that the precursors to national imagined communities were imagined communities of bourgeois readers who followed the news because it concerned their personal and collective interests.

Anderson concludes that this specific configuration of "capitalism and technology"—developed locally, but never integrated across the empire—prevented "a permanent Spanish-America-wide nationalism" from emerging. The British colonies that became the United States offer a contrasting example. Their total area was tiny—"smaller than Venezuela, and one third the size of Argentina"—and their principal cities, full of avid readers and merchants, were "bunched geographically together." As a result, the thirteen colonies easily developed a collective identity and unified sense of nationalism. To close the chapter, Anderson summarizes his argument: independence movements in the Americas from 1760-1830 took "plural, 'national' forms" because capitalism and technology allowed specific imagined communities to develop in each territory. "Economic interest, Liberalism, [and] Enlightenment" were not enough to set the scales and borders of these imagined communities, although they played an important part in convincing the colonies to revolt against empires.

Anderson's contrasting example of the United States reinforces his theory that nations in former colonies emerged on the scale of existing economic, administrative, and technological integration, because all these tools defined the communities imagined by those living within these territories. He contrasts these factors to "Economic interest, Liberalism, [and] Enlightenment" because those three are based on explicit, rational thought, not on a sense of community with others. Instead, imagined communities exist prior to these rational calculations, in many cases as foundation on which they can function—economic goals, individual rights, and equality became important guiding principles for a group that was already defined from the outset.

CHAPTER 5: OLD LANGUAGES, NEW MODELS

Anderson moves on from American nationalisms between 1760-1830 to European nationalisms from 1820-1920, which he says had two distinctive characteristics: the importance of "national print-languages" and the ability to model after previous revolutions and "consciously aspire[]" to nationhood.

Anderson outlines the thesis of his chapter, explicitly shifting to another era and combining the insights of his previous three chapters: language *and* history *continue to be important forces shaping the contours of nationalist thought and politics. But both take on a new character here, as nationalists deliberately use language as a unifying strategy and intentionally copy the examples of history.*

The notion that language, territory, and nation could be linked grew out from the historical creation of a distinction between antiquity and modernity, which, like the "'discovery' of grandiose civilizations" in Asia and the Americas, made it "possible to think of Europe as only one among many civilizations, and not necessarily the Chosen or the best." Language studies revealed that non-European languages were older and made it clear that Europe's "old sacred languages" were really just like any other. "Since now none [of the languages] belonged to God," Anderson explains, "their new owners [were] each language's native speakers—and readers." This allowed vernacular languages to gain official and even literary status in place of Latin and Greek, due to the efforts of not only grammarians and lexicographers but also fiction writers, classical composers, and of course the "reading classes" themselves.

Europe's inability to continue wholeheartedly believing in its inherent superiority to the rest of the world is very similar to the way people began rejecting religious hierarchies after meeting people from other faiths. Although Anderson seems to be repeating his earlier argument about the vernacularization of European languages, there is a crucial difference here: before, it was only the (market-oriented and new) publishing industry that advanced the vernacular. But during this period, he argues, important institutions like academia shifted over, which gave vernacular languages a more formal stamp of approval and helped them overtake all spheres of linguistic power (as opposed to just the world of publishing).

These "reading classes" were fairly small for most of the 19th century but grew substantially because of two factors. First was the bureaucratization of European governments, which meant many middle-class people had to read in order to work as colonial administrators. Second was the creation of a capitalist bourgeoisie, which, unlike the old aristocracy, did not define itself by personal or blood relations, but rather by recognizing its members' shared economic interests, even if they lived across the country from one another. They could maintain these connections only through print, and so while "an illiterate nobility could still act as a nobility," in contrast "an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable."

Both of Anderson's examples again show how literacy and nationalism were always inextricably intertwined. The expansion of the "reading classes" clearly foreshadows the expansion of the concept of sovereignty to all citizens through nationalism. This parallel illustrates the paradoxical way that streamlining and centralization (the standardization of language, the homogenization of labor, and the reorganization of society around material resources rather than and familial ties) ultimately helped promote acknowledgement, respect, and protection for difference and diversity.


Of course, "the philological revolution" did not equally affect all these groups in every instance, but it still did mean that Latin was effectively replaced by vernaculars across Europe. This happened more quickly in Western European countries that were more linguistically homogeneous and quicker to repress minority languages, and more slowly in places like Austria-Hungary, where various groups fought to advance their vernaculars at the expense of others. Similarly, each nationalism formed with the influence of its local upper classes, which varied greatly in the source and magnitude of their power. The most common formation "was a coalition of lesser gentries, academics, professionals, and businessmen, in which the first often provided leaders of 'standing,' the second and third myths, poetry, newspapers, and ideological formulations, and the last money and marketing facilities." And in general the spread of literacy allowed the masses to join the nationalist revolution.

"The philological revolution" is Anderson's term for scholars' sudden decision to take vernacular languages seriously (philology is a discipline similar to historical linguistics). This recognition that European languages were historically and culturally significant enabled language to in turn become a basis and proxy for identity, in a way that it almost never was in the Americas. In turn, the concept of the political community began to shift: people began to see themselves as members of defined groups—imagined communities—competing for recognition and political power. And much like in the Americas, those best poised to make a grab for power—social and economic non-aristocratic elites—ended up leading nationalist revolutions.


In closing, Anderson returns to the second factor he introduced at the beginning of this chapter, which will be the subject of the following one: piracy, essentially meaning that Europeans copied the "'model' of 'the' independent national state" provided by previous revolutions and widely available by the middle of the 19th century. An important facet of this piracy was the notion that "the ultimate locus of sovereignty" would be the people themselves—*all* of them—which helped account for "the 'populist' character of the early European nationalisms."

Anderson's emphasis on "piracy" reflects his interest in how nationalists themselves have interpreted and put to use the history of nationalism: although, on the one hand, they can learn from and improve on past efforts, on the other, they can also get stuck in a cycle, repeating the mistakes and assumptions of past nationalists.

CHAPTER 6: OFFICIAL NATIONALISM AND IMPERIALISM

Anderson begins by noting that ethnicity had nothing to do with 19th-century monarchies—virtually every one ruled over ethnic groups besides its own—and that each dynasty turned the local vernacular into its administrative language as "a matter of unselfconscious inheritance or convenience." In parallel, languages became the basis of specific imagined communities. So the same language could be at once the dynasty's "universal-imperial" language and the people's "particular-national" one, and dynasties had to choose between promoting different languages and satisfying the groups who spoke them. When they moved toward a single language and "a beckoning national identification," becoming representatives for their populations rather than untouchable rulers, each dynasty gained both legitimacy and a possibility of being ousted. Of course, this whole process was a response to "the popular national movements" that grew from the 1820s onward, and ultimately was merely "the empire [trying] to appear attractive in national drag."

The rise of nationalism, Anderson emphasizes, also meant the rise of ethnicity as a politically relevant category. Although many contemporary readers might assume that old European monarchies never had to deal with ethnicity because they were homogeneous, in fact this was not at all the case: monarchies and empires were often diverse, but because there was no question of the people ever ruling themselves, it never mattered whether the people shared ethnic ties with one another or their rulers. Here, Anderson begins to separate two strains of nationalism: top-down "official" policy (which turned vernacular languages into "universal-imperial" symbols of the state and its power) and bottom-up "popular" movements by people who wanted to take power into their own hands (and who saw their language as representing their "particular-national" identity, the imagined community on the basis of which they claimed independence). Anderson notes that the first, official nationalism, strategically stole the tools of the second, popular nationalism, which posed a threat to it. That is, when the people demanded representation, monarchies and empires did everything possible (including adopting the people's language) to make it look like they *were the representatives that were being called for (even though they clearly were not). Official nationalism, then, is a sinister example of what Anderson calls "piracy": states copied revolutionaries to paint themselves as the solution rather than the problem.*

Anderson offers a few examples of official nationalism in European empires. As of 1832, the Russian Empire was full of various languages and ethnicities, with (for example) many provinces dominated by German, while the St. Petersburg court spoke French. Over the next century, it gradually "Russified" itself and its subjects through policy changes that eliminated other languages over the course of some 70 years, attracting rebellions in response.

The Russian Empire switched from French to Russian in an attempt to keep up with the times and recast its absolute monarchs as legitimate representatives of the people. But it is clear that both the "people" themselves and the monarch's status as a "representative" for them were tenuous, constructed realities at best: there was no unified "Russian" people ruled by the "Russian" Empire, whose rulers did not even speak Russian.

Secondly, Anderson looks at the British Empire. On the one hand, Scotland inadvertently Anglicized itself by learning English, suppressing native Gaelic languages, and linking its economy, governance, and education system to London. On the other hand, the elite classes from the British Empire's "grab-bag of primarily tropical possessions"—including even the majority-white ones—were unable to do this and were instead confined to work in their own colonies, despite being forced to learn British ways and educate themselves in England first. For Anderson, this is damning proof of "the inner incompatibility of empire and nation."

The British Empire is like the Russian Empire because both forced a language on the peoples they ruled—the British forced Scotland and many of their overseas colonies to speak English. But the British Empire is also distinct because it elevated Scotland above virtually all the rest of its colonies (to the point that Scotland, along with Wales and Northern Ireland, became an integral part of the "United Kingdom" after the end of the Empire). Anderson thinks "empire and nation" are fundamentally "incompatible" because the nation relies on the idea of a people governing itself, and the empire relies on the idea of a single group governing a large number of different and distant ones.

Anderson's third and final example of official nationalism is the restoration of the Meiji oligarchy in Japan, which retook power in 1868 and immediately began dissolving class distinctions and trying to unify what later became the national territory. In a matter of decades, their success "turn[ed] Japan into an independent military power" on par with those of Europe. Japan's homogeneity and isolation contributed to its sense of a danger from Europe's growing empires, and its desire to copy these European dynasties led it to "aggressive imperialist" policies that ravaged Asia. At the turn of the 20th century, after all, "great nations" were understood as synonymous with "global conquerors."

Japan's sincere desire to "pirate" nationalism—to follow in the footsteps of its European official nationalist predecessors both in order to establish itself and in order to defend itself against possible encroachment—led it to build a brutal, expansionist empire. This sequence of events exemplifies the dangers of assuming a political strategy is justified, correct, or effective just because it is common or accepted. The collective imitation of European empires not only made "great nations" mean "global conquerors," but it also prevented governments from seeing, criticizing, or stopping the ways these empires brutally violated the sovereignty of non-European peoples.

Anderson next turns from "these three varied cases of 'official nationalism'" to two smaller states that followed in these larger empires' footsteps in order to defend themselves. First, the king of Siam (Thailand) built up his diplomatic position and began importing Chinese laborers to build infrastructure. His British-educated son took over in 1910 and turned against the Chinese, who were moving away from the dynastic model. These two monarchs used nationalism to prevent their "marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community" (the Empires forming around them).

Thailand, like Japan, copied European nationalism—but on a much smaller scale, in an attempt to maintain its independence. This again reinforces Anderson's thesis that nationalism is a cultural form: Thailand needed to win respect by speaking the language of European empires, as it were, by showing them that it was capable of keeping up with them and governing itself in ways they considered legitimate.

Similarly, the ethnic Hungarian (Magyar) elite running their province under German rule spent 60 years uncertain about whether to allow Hungarian to become their principal language, and only a few years after they successfully made it so, a popular nationalist rebellion overthrew them. The "official" imperial nationalists regained power after a few years, and trouble at the capital in Vienna gave them much more autonomy in Hungary, which they in turn used to ensure the ethnic Hungarian gentry had all the government jobs. "Later than almost anywhere else," the ruling Hapsburgs continued to believe their dynasty was sanctioned by God, and they even allied with socialists who wanted a "United States of Great Austria" (in part because its territorial continuity with the empire would lend it legitimacy).

The Magyars copied other European empires by using the tools of official nationalism despite their provincial status and relative lack of power. Of course, the fact that they lost their power shows that popular and official nationalism are essentially opposite, even if they use comparable strategies. But once they reestablished power, they effectively finished the transition from monarchy to (monarchy-approved) nation, all within the context of the Hapsburgs' relatively backward concept of their own power and desire to hold onto the structure of empire.

Anderson concludes this chapter by summarizing his argument. The "official nationalisms" followed "popular linguistic-nationalisms" as "power-groups" tried to hold onto their control when faced with the rise of "popular imagined communities." These official nationalisms arose beyond Europe and beyond the major empires, but always "concealed a discrepancy between nation and dynastic realm." The rulers tried to tell their subjects that they were all the same, even if the rulers were British and the subjects were Indian, for example. Ultimately, the subjects always ended up knowing better, and since their colonies have achieved their independence, the old ruling classes in the imperial center have admitted that their "official nationalism" was self-serving and strategic but continued to fantasize about running empires.

In all, Anderson's argument about piracy has two primary forms: first, some countries copied others' forms of nationalism, and second, governments copied popular nationalisms to hold onto power and challenge the political potential of revolutionary movements. Anderson's emphasis on the inherent contradiction between nationalism, on the one hand, and monarchy, empire, and dynasty, on the other, indicates that the former has always been bound to overtake the latter (as his next chapter will address). But Europeans' nostalgia for empire also shows that, for those in power, accepting or erasing this contradiction is straightforward—one can easily learn to believe that one's own group deserves popular sovereignty as a nation, while other groups are inferior and should be ruled by external powers.

CHAPTER 7: THE LAST WAVE

After World War One, the old dynastic order was replaced by the League of Nations (an earlier organization similar to the present-day United Nations); after World War Two, "the nation-state tide reached full flood," and in the 1970s the last (and first) of the empires—the Portuguese—finally fell. In this chapter, Anderson looks at the specific traits of nations that formed after World War Two, which were mostly outside Europe but still used European languages in government. They combined popular nationalism with official nationalism, and are still largely works in progress. And they preserved the borders drawn by colonial powers due to "the geography of all colonial **pilgrimages**" from colony to Europe, in the same way that Latin America did, even though they lacked the "real problems of communication and transportation" that hampered Latin America two centuries before.

Although he again jumps nearly a hundred years ahead to an important new wave of national independence movements, Anderson of course does not mean to erase the numerous revolutions and new nations that were born in between the primary examples he considers. Nevertheless, the post-World War Two period was particularly important for a number of reasons, for instance because many European empires could no longer afford to hold onto colonies, and because many Asian and African colonies sent their populations to fight in the War alongside Europeans, then realized they lacked the same rights they were fighting for. (In a sense, this participation in war can be interpreted as a kind of pilgrimage.)

But Anderson notes that, for three significant reasons, many more Africans could make colonial **pilgrimages** to the imperial center during the 20th century. First, transportation technology (trains and ships) caused an "enormous increase in physical mobility." Secondly, because the European empires and bureaucracies were so large when operating in Africa, they recruited not only creoles, but also bilingual natives. And thirdly, the spread of education made travel to Europe more accessible and bilingualism among natives much more widespread than before. Bilingualism in turn meant they could write back directly to their overlords, and that they learned about European struggles for independence and revolutionary philosophies. What's more, they learned these histories through the lens of nationalism, even when that was not the goal of the original actors' freedom struggle.

Anderson returns to the primary factors he saw as driving Latin American nationalism, which here he sees in hyperdrive because their two central causes—capitalism and technology—were in a more advanced state after World War Two. Africans made more pilgrimages and were more integrated into the fabric of empire, both political and intellectual. And their strategy of reading nationalist intentions into historical movements—ones that unintentionally *produced nations—suggests how Anderson sees the study of nationalism and past independence movements as possibly fruitful for future revolutionaries (whether nationalist or not).*

This wave of nationalists was also uniformly young, which "signified dynamism, progress, self-sacrificing idealism and revolutionary will." It also meant a generational gap between the young who were educated in the colonial language and the old who never learned it. Indonesia, an incredibly diverse set of ethnic groups, religions, and histories living on thousands of islands, is a prime example. Indonesians came to think of themselves as countrymen in part because of the "colossal, highly rationalized, tightly centralized hierarchy" of colonial schools. These schools taught everyone the same things with the same materials and also forced students to move to progressively larger population centers to continue their educations, first from villages to provincial towns for secondary school, and then to only two cities—Batavia (Jakarta) or Bandung—for university. This "gave the maps of the colony which they studied [...] a territorially specific imagined reality."

Anderson is suggesting that nationalists' youth made it easier for them to imagine communities, perhaps because their previous forms of self-identification were less fixed and certainly because of their fervent, idealistic, creative energy. But their youth also explains why the school became as important a site for pilgrimage as the state: the centralized curriculum of Indonesian schools helped diverse students see a commonality—or communality—among themselves, and the geographical centralization of these schools created a concept of a unified territory centered on Jakarta and Bandung, even though that territory comprised numerous, otherwise unrelated islands. Although he scarcely mentions it, Anderson specializes in the history and politics of Indonesia, making his insights here particularly significant (and explaining why he generally speaks with more authority and less reliance on other scholars' work here).

Another important factor in Indonesia was that the Dutch colonial power derided and hated all native Indonesians equally, which led those natives to think of themselves as a collective, especially when the Dutch started treating non-native non-Europeans living in Indonesia more favorably (and even Japanese people as "honorary Europeans"). This racist concept of the "native" did not have the same equalizing force everywhere, however, in large part due to the differences in bureaucratic structures.

Anderson confirms that imagined national communities can also consolidate around a common enemy, which was certainly always present in territories suffering European colonialism. The added element of racism also enabled the diverse Indonesian population to see themselves as ethno-racially linked, and to tie their national identity to this racialized image of the citizen. So in both these senses, nationalism formed as a mirror image to colonialism, affirming that which the colonizers rejected.

In French West Africa, education was initially centered in Dakar, the present-day capital of Senegal, which forced elites from the whole region to make **pilgrimages** to the city. But later, when schools were built around the region, Dakar lost its status. And even more importantly, Dakar was never as important administratively as Jakarta was in Dutch Indonesia, which meant that though West Africans educated there had a general sense of transnational solidarity, they also identified specifically with their own future nations.

In contrast to Indonesia, French West Africa's smaller-scale regional schools created a system of hub-cities around the enormous territory, much like in Spanish Latin America until the 19th century. In turn, the students who made pilgrimages to these cities from the surrounding areas came to see those cities as the "centers" of their nations-in-the-making. So again, the scale of administrative (here, educational) centralization under the colonial government set a template for the scale of national identification during the era of revolutions. This was a remarkably powerful force in French West Africa, enough that it overwhelmed the ethnic group identities and divisions that were largely unrelated to colonial borders.

In Indochina—a territory that now comprises the sovereign states of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—the ruling French remodeled the education system to distance Laos and Cambodia from Thai cultural influences, tear Vietnam away from Chinese ones, and teach French to elites everywhere. As in Indonesia, higher education funneled people to regional centers: there were only two lycées (government high schools), in Saigon and Hanoi, and the only university was in Hanoi.

The case of French Indochina is parallel to French West Africa, although with a crucial difference: ethnic boundaries ultimately translated into political ones in Indochina. This was largely intentional, however, since France worked hard to "divide and conquer" by making different groups see themselves as distinct and opposed to one another. So it is hard to say whether ethnic boundaries created political ones, or vice-versa, since cultural influences and identities were apparently more mixed and blurry until the French began exploiting differences.

But, for a few reasons, "Indochinese" identity never formed as a composite. One reason was the parallel creation of bilingual schools, first in French and Vietnamese and later in French and the native Cambodian language Khmer, which later led to the creation of a third lycée in Cambodia's largest city, Phnom Penh. Both split the region on the basis of locals' native languages. And unlike other empires, the French allowed some natives to work in other colonies—specifically, Vietnamese bureaucrats were allowed to work in Laos and Cambodia.

Although there was only one university in Indochina, Anderson seems to conclude that the educational fragmentation of Indochina—particularly because of its linguistic *fragmentation—was enough to prevent Khmer, Vietnamese, and Lao speakers from seeing eye-to-eye. Unlike in Indonesia, the French treated some of the people they colonized as superior to the others, which made it more difficult for these colonized peoples to develop a collective identity against the common enemy of the colonizer.*

As a result, Vietnamese bureaucrats were probably the only ones to think of French Indochina as a unified whole. In contrast, people from Laos and Cambodia formed distinct identities, and it is no coincidence that Cambodians educated in the French bilingual schools and then denied opportunities at the expense of the Vietnamese became the leaders of Cambodia's independence movement. While there were historical conflicts between the Vietnamese and Cambodians, there were similar conflicts in Indonesia, and Indonesian nationalism easily put them on the backburner. This was possible because Batavia (Jakarta) never lost its central role, and because people from throughout the archipelago could travel there.

After making the differences between Indochina and Indonesia clear, Anderson notes that there were nevertheless similar ethnic tensions in Indonesia as in Indochina. This is in part his way of reminding the reader that historical events are reliant on various factors and are seldom black-and-white. And it is also a way of pointing to the relatively greater importance of the outside forces that promoted coherent political units (at first, colonies, which made nations possible), as opposed to existing internal forces that, while important to a nation's people, were not initially couched in the vocabulary or ideology of nationalism. Finally, here it is worth recalling the example Anderson cites at the beginning of his book—Vietnam has just invaded Cambodia—which is further evidence that the divisions sown between Vietnam and Cambodia, combined with their splicing into different nations, created lasting rivalry and conflict.


The fascinating "accident" of the Indonesian language was another major contributor to Indonesia's unity. The Dutch never spread their own language, unlike the French, but instead governed through the common trade language of Malay, which quickly became the major language of print and turned into "the national(-ist) language *bahasa Indonesia*" that still dominates all but the most local forms of communication in the country. Anderson emphasizes that this does not make Indonesian nationalism more "real" or "authentic" than nationalisms that used colonial European languages—rather, he simply wants to show how this shared language was a crucial tool for "generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*" among diverse peoples in the Indonesian context. European languages can do the same thing in other contexts. In general, he argues, what is important for nationalism is the *fact* of a shared, written language, rather than the details of which language gets selected.

The extraordinary story of bahasa Indonesia, *a nonnative language turned national language, is another reason the archipelago became imaginable as a unit to the people living within it. This reaffirms the power of language to both symbolize people's national identity and open lines of communication throughout the nation, creating possible connections among citizens who would otherwise have virtually nothing in common. At the same time as Indonesia is an extraordinary testament to the power of language, Anderson is again careful to emphasize that language is not a necessary feature for nations to form. The comparison to European languages in former colonies is instructive: both Indonesian and these European languages perform all the necessary functions of connecting citizenry, but the European languages are unlikely to become sources of national identity in the way Malay/Indonesian has in Indonesia.*

Indeed, Anderson contends, while Indonesian has become a first language in many parts of Indonesia, the same thing need not happen for a language to truly become national. For example, technology makes it possible for multilingual populations to receive the same news, and leaders are also aware of how to use "systems modelled on official nationalism's; elections, party organizations, and cultural celebrations" to make people feel like citizens. Although language can be an important contributor to the formation of national consciousness, then, it is not essential at all, especially from the 20th century onwards. To illustrate this point, Anderson turns to one final example: Switzerland.

From a contemporary perspective, Anderson's argument about technology's communicative function and the potential obsolescence of monolingual nations is intuitive or even obvious. In order to emphasize again that history is open and changeable rather than fixed and formulaic, Anderson very clearly distinguishes powerful nationalist tools (like language) from conditions necessary for nations to form (which are very few: just the existence of a community imagined as sovereign and limited).


Multilingual Switzerland did not become an integrated nation until the end of the 19th century. Its shell of a government was the structure left behind by a French occupation in 1798, it was a poor and "overwhelmingly *rural*" place full of peasants, and it was ruled by a "loose coalition" of aristocrats. Religion was a far more important dividing factor than language until 1848, and basically nobody could understand each other besides the bureaucrats who worked in French. So as to not get trampled by one of its more powerful neighbors, Switzerland chose to make German, Italian, and French equal. But none of this happened until roughly the same time as Asian nationalisms at the turn of the 20th century, "in that period of world history in which the nation was becoming an international norm."

Anderson seems to imply that Switzerland became a nation as though by default: a highly decentralized rural society, it only unified after another power (France) took an interest in it for the first time. In a sense, this parallels narratives of postcolonial sovereignty. The relative unimportance of language as a source of identity (as compared with religion) in Switzerland also indicates that language need not matter very much for nations to be successful: it is not always a determining factor. And there are, of course, numerous other examples of successful multilingual nations, spanning all the eras and waves of nationalism (such as Canada, Belgium, India, and South Africa).

Anderson ends the chapter by summarizing his argument: "The 'last wave' of nationalisms, most of them in the colonial territories of Asia and Africa, was in its origins a response to the new-style global imperialism made possible by the achievements of industrial capitalism." As print spread, empires and their bureaucracies grew too large, and school and administrative systems in turn created **pilgrimage** systems in colonies. These factors created classes of "bilingual intelligentsias," who started imagining creating their own nations based on American and European "models of nation, nation-ness, and nationalism," which could be refined for their own needs. Through improved communications technology, they could get the nationalist message out faster than ever before, to a wider and more multilingual audience.

Anderson's conclusion helps clarify this chapter's complex argument, which shows how a variety of tools and techniques allowed the imagination of communities in the formerly-colonized world, and how models of previous revolution allowed these imagined communities to make political claims on the empires that ruled them. Asian and African nationalisms are excellent examples of how oppressed peoples can productively use the histories of nations to their advantage—and in turn reshape that history, creating new models for nationalism in the future. This offers an optimistic counterexample to previously discussed cases of piracy and imitation, like the Japanese Empire.

CHAPTER 8: PATRIOTISM AND RACISM

Anderson explains that the next section of his book turns from the "social change and different forms of consciousness" that made nations possible to the sense of "*attachment* that peoples feel for" their nations, and their willingness "to die for these inventions." He points out that, while most intellectuals associate nationalism with racism and "hatred of the Other," in fact nationalism also creates "profoundly self-sacrificing love," a sentiment much more commonly expressed than hatred in nationalist writing, music, and art. To illustrate this point, he looks back at the writings of Filipino nationalist José Rizal, and specifically his last poem, an optimistic ode to his country that does not condemn the Spanish who are about to execute him.

Having established that nationalism is an emotional phenomenon, Anderson now takes a detailed look at its emotional consequences. This is Anderson at his most controversial, especially in a contemporary context that continues to grapple with the conciliatory and xenophobic dimensions of nationalism. The latter remains more strongly associated with the phenomenon, to such an extent that Anderson's defense of nationalism as nonracist might surprise readers today. This is partially because contemporary readers simply take it for granted that members of the same nation care about one another even if they never meet—whereas Anderson sees the creation of this solidarity as one of nationalism's innovative characteristics.

Indeed, people talk about their countries using "the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*)" or ties to land, pointing to the naturalness of "something unchosen" and making nation seem like another thing that "one can not help." Academics have shown that family is a power structure made to *seem* natural, but this way of thinking is "foreign to the overwhelming bulk of mankind," who feel their family is a quintessentially important, natural structure. People feel the same way about nations, which are also seen as a "domain of disinterested love and solidarity" that can force people to make even unwanted sacrifices, up to and including that of their lives. There is something more profound about "dying for one's country" than dying for a political party or even international organization, because "one can join or leave" such bodies—but not one's country, which is considered morally "fundamentally pure."

Anderson emphasizes the parallel between family and nation for two reasons: first, it shows the extent to which a sense of care for one's fellow citizens is conceived as natural and unchangeable, and secondly, it allows him to show how these "natural" formations are actually socially constructed. Through this observation, Anderson draws a parallel between his academic project and those of previous scholars, especially anthropologists, who have sought to examine the way concepts of family and kinship are formed in different social contexts. Like families, then, nations have a powerful reality and emotional force despite being constructed.

Anderson "return[s] once more to language," which leads him to a fundamental contradiction in the character of nations. Languages appear primordial, older than anything else human and capable of carrying intelligible meaning across long spans of time. And they allow people to create "a special kind of contemporaneous community" by, for instance, reading a nationalist poem or singing a national anthem together. Therefore, language is a means of imagining a community and rooting it in a potentially endless, ahistorical, ancient primordialism. And yet nations are also undeniably "embedded in history," with peoples joining them and individuals naturalizing into them over time. As a result, Anderson explains, "Seen as both a historical fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed."

Anderson looks first at how language, like the family, can serve as a useful metaphor for the nation. Languages, families, and nations are all defined by a contradiction: they are historically-constructed, contingent products of human social life, but to humans themselves, they look natural and timeless. Then, Anderson turns to the way nations harness this paradoxical feature of language in order to consolidate their own power: by popularizing a national anthem or poem, for example, they create something that seems timeless, exploiting both the changeability of language and its apparent eternalness and power. This helps explain Anderson's argument in the first chapter: nationalism is a fundamentally illogical ideology with no "great thinkers" because of its internal contradictions, like this "present[ation of] itself as simultaneously open and closed."

Offering as examples a beautiful nationalist poem and a passage of history in English, and then a passage from a famous Indonesian nationalist story that is plainly indecipherable to anyone who does not speak the language, Anderson argues that the only limit to learning new languages is "one's own mortality," which lends "a certain privacy to all languages." The powerful often use racist epithets to talk about the same oppressed people they force to learn their own powerful language, but Anderson thinks this is proof that nationalism does not *cause* racism: he notes that all these epithets are powerful precisely *because* they deny their targets the dignity of "nation-ness," usually by reducing them to biology.

Anderson plays on his readers' linguistic prejudices to show how English nationalism is potentially attractive to them, but Indonesian nationalism is nonsensical. However, they can see how it might become *sensical to them: they would merely need to learn Indonesian. This allows him to extend the parallel between nations and language communities, both of which are closed in practice (because not everyone has the time, access, or resources to join them) but open in theory (anyone who puts in the effort* could *join). The core of Anderson's argument here is that nationalists use the tools of racism when they are really discriminating based on nationality: they say, for instance, that some races are inferior* because they are not members of the nation *(not, for instance, that some foreigners are inferior for being of different races).*

Anderson turns more broadly to the relationship between nationalism and racism. Whereas "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, […] racism dreams of eternal contaminations" and hates people no matter what nation they belong to. Racism, Anderson argues, is actually about class—an obsession with bloodlines and purity *within* nations. In empires, racism arose when the upper classes tried to replace popular nationalism with official nationalism, and because the bourgeoisie could pretend to be nobility in colonies, performing "capitalism in feudal-aristocratic drag" (which is neatly illustrated by the difference between the professional, soulless armies kept in Europe and the ragtag mercenary ones kept in the colonies). And, of course, Europeans from different empires saw themselves as equally superior to native peoples in any empire.

Contemporary readers, potentially armed with the more elaborate and nuanced understanding race and politics developed since Anderson published this book, are of course free to disagree with these points, which are nevertheless pertinent to any understanding of nationalism in the 21st century. It is worth noting that Anderson agrees that nationalists use racism to their advantage, that racism was central to the spread of European empires, and that nationalism creates other, related prejudices based precisely on nationality. But he also thinks that nationality-based prejudice is more flexible than race-based prejudice (which might have both positive and negative implications—excluded people can perhaps find inclusion, but it can also be easier to exclude new groups of formerly-included people).

In contrast, colonized people virtually never insulted their former colonizers on racial grounds, but rather consistently emphasized equality, lauding the contributions of groups deemed inferior by whites, without turning against whites themselves. Although these forms of love for the nation rely on linking it to "'imagined'" objects, so does every other form of love. Language is, of course, the medium by virtue of which all this imagining is possible.

Anderson looks at how colonized people responded to their colonizers in order to show that they began thinking in national terms rather than racial ones, seeking freedom on the basis of an imagined national identity rather than a similarly-imagined racial one. He takes this as evidence that nationalist thinking is somehow more evolved and less inherently prejudicial than earlier racial thinking, although he continues to emphasize that it is far from perfect.

CHAPTER 9: THE ANGEL OF HISTORY

In this chapter, which was the conclusion to the book's original version, Anderson returns to the place where he started: the wars among China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. He cites historian Tom Nairn's argument that the "impersonal" British state became the basis for subsequent ones that copied it and applies this idea to the thinking of Marxist states, who copy one another's models of revolution—if only because they are the only available models, and even if they are relatively unsuccessful. Specifically, these models are Russia and China. Cambodia is "an extreme modular transfer of [such a concept of] 'revolution,'" and Vietnam of "nationalism," as demonstrated by the country's name. There was early debate over whether it should be "Nam Viet" (South Viet) or "Viet Nam" (South *of* Viet), with "Viet" referring to the Southern Chinese province of Yueh. The latter name stuck, with people conveniently forgetting its original, derivative meaning.

Although this chapter was originally Anderson's conclusion, nearly all editions of Imagined Communities *include the two chapters he inserted in the second edition. Nevertheless, this chapter still concludes the primary argument of the book—the two additional chapters just cover two issues Anderson felt went insufficiently addressed in the first version. Here, Anderson returns to his example from the beginning of the book to show the reader how his insights on nationalism can help explain the situation that initially seemed absurd—three Marxist internationalist states invading one another. Beyond showing why this set of conflicts exemplifies nationalism, he also emphasizes that it reveals how much of the contemporary world order is based on countries copying one another—fighting to outcompete each other in pursuit of goals they may not even completely understand. Cambodia and Vietnam's "piracy" of opposite traditions, then, layered atop their cultural and political divisions caused by French colonial policy, turned the countries into enemies even though their governments theoretically agree on their visions for the international future.*

Ultimately, Vietnam and Cambodia's revolutions both seemed to spring out of nowhere and were possible only because of piracy—following in other nations' footsteps in "'planning revolution' and 'imagining the nation.'" Just as Cambodia's genocidal atrocities were largely the result of its government replicating Soviet models, "official nationalism" has become a standard state policy whenever a new regime takes power. This allows new regimes to distinguish themselves from the old, even when they use the old regime's buildings, institutions, and records. And in fact new regimes also imitate and elevate old dynasties. Anderson makes sure to distinguish between the *leaderships* of nations and the comparatively powerless people in whose name the leaderships so often claim to speak.

Anderson now reinterprets the utter dominance of nationalism that he noted in the first chapter—everyone is part of a nation, the United Nations is the most important international organization, etc.—through the lens of "piracy." In short, because everyone else was doing it, new states often immediately pursued policies of official nationalism, shaping the future of each nation by insistently copying the past.

Anderson concludes that "China, Vietnam, and Cambodia are not in the least unique," and that as a result it is only logical to expect that "inter-socialist wars" will continue. Resting on platitudes about Marxist countries' inevitable solidarity or opposition to nationalism only hides the truth and gets in the way of "learn[ing] the real, and imagined, experience of the past." In closing, Anderson cites the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, who described history as an angel being blown away from heaven, looking backwards at the "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" that is human history, and which he is powerless to change. "The Angel is immortal," Anderson concludes, "and our faces are turned towards the obscurity ahead."

Anderson's conclusion is undeniably pessimistic for politically-committed academics who hope to see particular shifts away from nationalism in the near future—he effectively encourages them to catch up and face the unpleasant reality. At the same time, he has also suggested that the reality of nationalism is not as bleak as many have made it out to be. Anderson's modified reference to Benjamin's "angel of history" captures this mix of optimism and pessimism, reminding people that they are both incapable of changing history and perfectly capable of referring to it in order to shape the future.

CHAPTER 10: CENSUS, MAP, MUSEUM

In this chapter, the first of the two added in the revised edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson begins by throwing out his previous argument that African and Asian official nationalisms were "modelled directly on that of the dynastic states of nineteenth-century Europe." Instead, he thinks "the imaginings of the colonial state" are more responsible, even if these were the same colonial states that rejected nationalism. The three institutions from the chapter's title—the census, the map, and the museum—are key indicators of the continuity between empires and postcolonial states. Anderson closes his introduction by noting that in this chapter he will "confine [his] attention to Southeast Asia," his area of expertise.

It is important to note that this chapter, added in the second edition of Imagined Communities, *is disconnected from the argumentative structure and temporal organization of the rest of the book, and it is largely independent of Anderson's central points. Nevertheless, it is an important attempt to correct his theory and provides valuable insight into the mechanisms by which states—specifically, but not exclusively, postcolonial "official nationalist" states in Southeast Asia—consolidate their sovereignty concretely. As Anderson goes on to explain, states do this by bringing land, people, and history under their rule as* the territory, the *population, and* the story of the *nation. Anderson's central revision is therefore that he thinks the "third wave" of postcolonial nationalism was based more on colonialism itself than on the somewhat temporally and geographically distant "second wave."*

The first of the three institutions is the Census. Anderson cites a recent study that shows how colonial census-makers in Malaysia transformed "identity categories." The study argues that these categories grew "more and exclusively racial," rather than religious. Over time, the census-makers eliminated most complexity, reducing a wide variety of identities to just four: "'Malaysian,' 'Chinese,' 'Indian,' and 'Other.'" Anderson notes that the category "Malay" came to *include* various other ethnic groups in Malaysia, but in Indonesia, it stands alongside those other groups as an equal category.

Anderson looks at the census because it shows how states made their populations legible and understood the people under their control. The gradual consolidation of categories in Malaysia indicates that the Malaysian government began thinking that race was the most important dividing line among its people and imagining a narrow, schematic view of what "race" meant in its country. The "Malay" group includes many of the nation's indigenous peoples, and therefore collapses ethnic distinctions within the country's boundaries, as though to promote the nation itself as the correct or proper basis for identity.

Anderson takes up two more examples of colonial censuses to compare. First is the Spanish census in the Philippines, which "imagined" into being a unified society where there were really just independent landowners "mostly unaware of one another's existence in the huge, scattered, and sparsely populated archipelago." And second is an interesting court case in 17th century Indonesia, which reveals that "the [native] Cirebonese court classified people by rank and status, while the Company did so by something like 'race.'" Unaware that China was an incredibly diverse place, the Dutch decided all its people were "Chinese" and "began to insist that those under its control whom it categorized as *Chinezen* [Chinese people] dress, reside, marry, be buried, and bequeath property according to" this racial category.

The Spanish census is important because it shows how the colonial government began conceiving of a territory as unified, even when, in reality, it was not this way at all. Again, this shows that the consolidating energy of imagination precedes and makes possible the actual consolidation of territory under sovereign power. And the Indonesian example shows what happens when different understandings of identity come into conflict. The Dutch won out and began consolidating their rule around the racial schema of identity, which eventually became dominant in the Indonesian context.

For Anderson, these colonial censuses were novel because of "their systematic *quantification*." Earlier native censuses counted potential draftees and taxpayers, but now, for the first time, *everyone* was counted and the whole bureaucracy was organized around "ethno-racial hierarchies." Colonial administrators ignored religion, about which they could do nothing. Places of worship became "zones of freedom" and were important sites of nationalist resistance to colonialism, as they continued to grow despite the colonial government's best attempts to limit religious freedom.

The quantification of colonial censuses shows how governments attempted to encompass a totality, *which points to important transitions in concepts and modes of sovereignty during this period. Rather than using force where and when it deemed necessary, the state began trying to develop the tools to (at least theoretically) control* everything *within its borders. At the same time, the absolute attention to "ethno-racial" identity at the expense of religion meant that colonial administrators and the people who lived under them thought according to two very different frameworks, with "zones of freedom" in places of worship representing the disconnect between the two: colonized people could continue freely doing what was most important to them (worship) only because the colonizers did not understand (or care about) the colonized enough to try and control this vital aspect of their lives.*

The second important institution discussed in this chapter is the Map. When introduced in its European form to Southeast Asia, it changed the way locals were able to imagine places near and far. Anderson cites Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul, who showed how Thai maps before 1851 did not include borders or represent "a larger, stable geographic context" outside Thailand. While borders were marked physically in some places, they were really just rocks that showed the end of a Thai territorial claim, and borders were not considered as falling on "a continuous map-line" that separated one zone of sovereignty from another. Around the turn of the 20th century, a massive investment in geography education completely overhauled this, and indeed even changed the language used in the political sphere, introducing the rise of the word for "country," which quickly became dominant.

The transition in thinking about borders shows how states gradually filled blank space, extending their sovereignty as far as they possibly could before inviting conflict. After states became imagined through maps, no zones were left that did not have a ruler, at least in theory. So drawing the lines on the map was, for the state, both an exercise of power and a way of preparing for possible future exercises of power. Crucially, Anderson focuses on the way maps shaped their readers' imaginative capacities*: rather than thinking of Thailand as a kingdom whose cultural, economic, and political influence spread a certain distance from Bangkok, Thais began thinking of their country as a territorial totality, defined by its limits rather than its center. In short, this shows how nations become imagined as at once sovereign and limited in their citizens' eyes.*

"Totalizing classification" is the key link between the census and the European map, which forced the whole planet into "a geometrical grid" of "measured boxes." Although theoretically maps are supposed to represent a preexisting geographical reality, in Thailand they became, in historian Winichakul's words, "a model for, rather than a model of, what [they] purported to represent." Construction projects, military movements, and administrative divisions were decided on a map before they were created in reality, and the map even became the basis for census ethnic categories that were now defined as having strict geographical origins.

Maps performed a similar function for territory as censuses did for people: the map's "geometrical grid" is just like the grid of ethnic groups and other identity markers from which a citizen is forced to choose when being counted in the census. And just as censuses became the basis for ethnically-oriented policies in the future, maps became the basis for shaping real territory after an imagined ideal—much like nations are first imagined and then, with more or less success, put into practice.

Anderson sees "two final avatars of the map" as crucial precursors to post-independence official nationalisms. First is the way Europeans used maps to justify their rule, claiming to have legally taken over "the putative sovereignties of [defeated] native rulers." They in turn began reconstructing historical maps of their empires, and post-colonial states adopted this practice and the "political-biographical narrative of the realm" it created in order to justify their own territorial claims and write their own national myths.

Here, Anderson is specifically talking about the maps many young students see in school, in which the size of a country or empire can be seen as expanding and contracting over time. He notes that these maps naturalize and sanitize colonialism: they usually do not make any distinctions about how *territory is won or governed but merely show* what *places belong to* whom*, which makes conquest look justifiable and lands seized by force look like equal, homogeneous parts of an empire. When not highlighted as part of an (almost always European) empire, these territories are usually blank, portrayed as "empty" or "lawless" rather than full of the people and leaders who actually lived and ruled in them.*

The second crucial form is "the map-as-logo," the transformation of a country's boundaries into a symbol of its nationhood, with its internal geography and relationship to bordering states erased. The map became "an infinitely reproducible," "instantly recognizable, [and] everywhere visible" symbol of a country. For instance, the half of New Guinea nominally occupied by the Dutch was "utterly remote," irrelevant to the nationalist struggle, and completely unfamiliar to the movement's leaders. But it became an important symbol of nationalism when revolutionaries were imprisoned there, and "logo-maps" of Indonesia began to show the island oddly cut in half, "*with nothing to its East.*"

"The map-as-logo" is now so common as to be the most direct and self-evident symbol of any nation: to many people, a country is intuitively seen as being identical to the sum of its territory, or its shape on a map. (Cyprus and Kosovo, for instance, even have maps of themselves on their flags.) Indonesia's map is worth a critical look: although the country is entirely comprised of islands, it ends in an abrupt vertical line in New Guinea (and also has both the islands of Borneo and Timor split in the middle, where Indonesian sovereignty ends).

West New Guinea has transformed into a symbol of Indonesia's independence and an integral part of the nation as an imagined community, even though its local residents are reluctant to identify with Indonesia, a country that badly oppresses them. Anderson notes that West New Guineans, a stunningly diverse group only able to communicate after the government forced them all to learn Indonesian, turned Indonesian into the language of a revolutionary nationalist struggle—*against Indonesia*. Indeed, this diverse group only became an imagined community capable of a unified national struggle because a map lumped them into the same province, helping them see a shared cause and leading most Indonesians from elsewhere to assume that all West New Guineans share the same culture.

The story of West New Guinea is clearly ironic for a number of reasons. First, it shows how imagined *dimensions of national identity are often more important than* real *ones; the government turned the region into a rallying cry for Indonesians on other islands, while completely ignoring the wishes or interests of New Guineans themselves. In turn, these New Guineans used Indonesia's own techniques against it: they used the shared language it forced on them to strategize against its colonial rule. Although many New Guineans have very little in common with one another, then, the tools of nationalism—a map that united them in the same region, as well as linguistic and ethnic schemas that ignore their diversity—ended up giving New Guineans the one political purpose that actually brought them together. Just as European colonialism created imagined communities in colonies, then, the Indonesian occupation of New Guinea created a kind of nascent national consciousness there.*

Finally, Anderson turns to the Museum, which—like "the museumizing imagination" that makes it possible—is "profoundly political," and in Southeast Asia shows how postcolonial states inherit the political mindset of their former colonizers.

Although it seems very different from the map and census, according to Anderson the museum is actually analogous because it represents the government's sovereign control over national history.

During a short span of time in the mid-19th century, Europeans went from not at all caring about Southeast Asia's monuments to obsessively cataloguing, studying, and displaying them. Anderson sees three principal reasons for this. First was the push for education in colonies, during which conservatives saw education about monuments and history as a way for "the natives to stay native." Second was that the monuments served Europeans' continual quest to prove the natives' cultural inferiority: by attributing monuments to nonnative invaders or a past golden age, colonizers suggested that natives had always been ruled by "greater" peoples, or that their time had come and gone. Third is that protecting monuments let colonial governments position themselves as the protectors of tradition, which they did by transforming religiously important sites into reproducible logos, "regalia for a *secular* colonial state."

After a few centuries of colonialism, Europeans realized that they could further control colonized people's sense of identity by shaping and seizing the symbols of their history. In other words, monuments were turned into the plot points of a colony's history, and since Europeans controlled these monuments (both physically and narratively), they ensured that the stories told about colonized places favored European interests. This is like official nationalism in reverse: colonizers positioned themselves as the "true" patriots for their colonies—the only ones capable of saving, civilizing, or preserving a class of barbarians who could not take care of themselves.

Independent postcolonial states only continued this tendency. For instance, the Indonesian government hung identical paintings in schools throughout the country, including one that erased absolutely everything distinctive about Borobudur, the famous Buddhist temple, replacing its unique sculptures with a "completely white" outline and its usual crowds with "*not a single human being*." This is a depiction of Borobudur "as a sign for national identity," not of the temple itself.

Unsurprisingly, the colonial regime's determination of history easily gave way to a more conventional "official nationalism" after independence, which seized on the same narratives of national identity that were already available to it. When Borobudur was turned into a symbol of Indonesia, Anderson notes, everything about it was erased and hollowed out (much like the outline version of a country's map). This again proves that nationalism relies on erasing complexity and fixing the meaning of signifiers, all in order to take control of the way things are narrated or imagined *(for the imagination is the level on which the nation primarily exists).*

In conclusion, Anderson turns to the significance of the census, map, and museum, which all "illuminate the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain." This thinking hinged on the creation of a "totalizing classificatory grid" that could be used to control any people, living anywhere, speaking any language, and possessed of any history. This meant making everything countable—including the "Other[s]" who did not fit into the available categories. The census, map, and museum let the colonial government fit people, places, and history (respectively) into these absolute, black-and-white systems of classification. Maps and monuments were emptied of their specific history to become logos for colonies. And after independence, they in turn became logos for nations that inherited their colonizers' totalizing projects, which reduced history to an archaeological "album of its [national] ancestors."

Anderson's conclusion emphasizes that late-colonial and early-postcolonial governments were unified in their attempts to extend sovereignty by developing a set of tools (the "totalizing classificatory grid") for controlling people, places, and historical narratives. This is, of course, a good explanation for why so many governments function through bureaucracy: everyone and everything has to be subject to the same system of classification and regulation, which often leads to maddeningly elaborate and inefficient structures that ironically fail to impose the absolute sovereignty they are designed to make possible.

CHAPTER 11: MEMORY AND FORGETTING

Under the heading "Space New and Old," Anderson begins by asking why Europeans started naming places like "New York, Nueva Leon, Nouvelle Orléans," and so many others, "as 'new' versions" of the places they came from. In much of the rest of the world, it was normal to name something "new" after the "old" version of a place had been destroyed. But in these cases, "new" and "old" exist at the same time, in "homogeneous, empty time." This is because the concept of "living lives *parallel* to those of other[s]" became possible during the colonial era.

Anderson's final chapter again turns to a new subject related to, but fundamentally separate from, the core argument of his book. Building on his earlier analysis of piracy and nations' mutual influences on one another, he turns here to the question of how nations themselves narrate history in order to shape citizens' understanding of themselves and the places they live. This is closely related to his discussion of museums and monuments at the end of the last chapter. The "new" and "old" cities, like the novels of José Rizal, for instance, are historical indications of a psychological break in people's picture of the world between the Middle Ages and the age of colonialism. This break, Anderson believes, is in part what allowed people to think of sovereignty as changeable and achievable through human action, rather than a natural condition bestowed by God.

Unlike the huge numbers of Chinese and Arab migrants to other parts of Asia during this period, who usually assimilated into the places to which they moved, European migrants in the New World "successfully established coherent, wealthy, selfconsciously creole communities subordinated to a great metropolitan core." This was an important reason why nationalism began in the New World, not the Old. The creole elites who led American independence movements wanted not to take control *over* the imperial center, but rather to "safeguard their continuing parallelism." They maintained their family and emotional ties to Europe, and frequently rebuilt "close cultural, and sometimes political and economic" ties as soon as possible after independence.

Anderson suggests that the conception of sovereignty developed in Europe—one that allowed Europeans to think of themselves as superior to and justified in dominating other peoples—got exported to the New World and spurred revolution there. He sees the American revolutions as representing, in a sense, elite creoles pirating off of concepts of sovereignty and techniques of power developed in Europe. As a consequence, New World revolutionaries conceived the states they formed as analogous to European ones, not radically opposed to them. In other words, the New World creoles never questioned their supposed "right" to exert their rule over natives and territory an ocean away from where they began.

Under the next heading, "Time New and Old," Anderson argues that the concept of New World nations as "*parallel and comparable*" to European ones gained new steam with the American Declaration of Independence, which was both "absolutely unprecedented" and "absolutely reasonable." The Declaration offered a vision of republican government for revolutionaries around the globe to follow. Crucially, it did not appeal to history, but rather to the future, and the revolutions of this age all saw themselves as, one might say, "blasting open [...] the continuum of history." At the same time, the accelerating manufacture of watches, newspapers, and novels contributed to the transition to "homogeneous empty time," and the academic discipline of History was being formed. This shift in perceptions of time contributed to the sense of "an historical tradition of serial continuity" in the spread of nationalisms.

Anderson's characterization of the Declaration as "absolutely unprecedented" but also "absolutely reasonable" suggests that, in its time, political and philosophical thought had far surpassed states' actual politics and ideologies: there was little overlap between what was "absolutely reasonable" from a theoretical perspective and what was actually politically normal. If Anderson is interpreted as suggesting that the political sphere is always somehow caught in this kind of inertia, it would be reasonable to think he believes his work could be in a similar position relative to the nationalisms of the contemporary world: namely, that he is trying to push "absolutely reasonable" ideas that are nonetheless "absolutely unprecedented" in practice so far. Just as Anderson showed in the last chapter how colonial empires and postcolonial states took control over a linear, causal narrative of "history" in order to define the meaning of their nations, here he shows how emerging republics entirely rejected the previous notions of history in order to put this linear, causal concept of it in place.

During the next wave of nationalisms, from roughly 1815-1850, leaders began looking backwards rather than forwards, using the metaphor of "awakening from sleep" to describe the sudden surges of national sentiment in their countries. This sleep metaphor explained both how the Americas got to nationalism first and why European elites suddenly embraced vernaculars they had rejected for generations.

This shift demonstrates how the nation transitioned from being a new idea to being a default or copiable template: nations were no longer using logic in an attempt to explicitly justify their existence as nations *(rather than as empires or monarchies), but rather now trying to give their populations a sense of what the nation meant for them by retroactively projecting the nation into the past, as though it had always existed on some deep level of identity.*

In the Americas, on the other hand, there was no ancient order to restore and no vernacular to rehabilitate, so nationalists turned to History. Anderson cites Jules Michelet, a prominent historian of the French Revolution, who conceived his discipline as a means of giving meaning to the acts of the dead, especially those of patriots who died in service of the nation (whether they knew they were serving it or not). In this vein, people throughout the Americas spoke for the dead—whether for the martyrs who died in their revolutions or for the indigenous civilizations that were largely destroyed by the conquest.

Michelet's argument specifically illustrates the kind of thinking that lies behind things like Tombs of Unknown Soldiers: he and nationalist thinkers like him understood that nationalism was a narrative and cultural identity rather than a natural or inherent one, and they manipulated this fact in order to actively construct a narrative of sacrifice and create a sense of pride in the French Revolution. (Tangentially, this raises an interesting question for the reader: how much does knowing that nationalism is artificially constructed actually change people's nationalist feelings?)

Under his penultimate heading, "The Reassurance of Fratricide," Anderson contrasts the notion that History is about remembering what has been forgotten with the idea that nationhood *requires* collectively forgetting certain aspects of a shared history. Specifically, he looks at the controversial French scholar Ernest Renan's peculiar argument that people should "have already forgotten" certain massacres from French history that they probably never learned about in the first place. Anderson argues that Renan's argument is a means of reinterpreting long conflicts through the language of nationalism and national identity, concepts which did not exist at the time of the original events.

While Anderson sees "History" as valorizing certain dates, events, and lives (even ones that never existed, like that of the Unknown Soldier) in order to give meaning to the essentially hollow entity that is the nation, he also sees that nationalist storytelling means hiding and erasing parts of the truth. By citing Renan, he clearly points out that there is a danger in this: it can lead people to unknowingly celebrate evil. In other words, the erasure of history through nationalism is yet another technique that nations and institutions can use to maintain ideological and political power over people.

As a parallel, Anderson discusses how Americans are urged "to remember/forget" the Civil War as a conflict "between 'brothers' rather than between—as they briefly were—two sovereign nation-states." And Brits learn to see a Frenchman who spoke no English—William the Conqueror—as their "great Founding Father." He cites many other examples, including the so-called Spanish Civil War that involved people from around the world; the way that slaughter of Native Americans in the United States is commemorated by fiction portraying them as white people's friends and allies; and the erasure of racial violence in the American South through novels like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. By rewriting conflict as fraternity, Anderson argues, historians and novelists attempted to hold the nation together by narrating it retroactively in an era "when it was no longer possible to experience the nation as new."

Anderson uses the example of the United States Civil War to show the profound effects of the fact that history is written by the victors: the official narrative assumes that the North and South were somehow "destined" to remain together, therefore portraying the current state of affairs (the North and South are united) as somehow "natural" or "correct." Similarly, Anderson suggests that The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn *used an image of racial harmony to try and make readers think the legacy of slavery and racism had magically disappeared. The fact that this and Anderson's other examples run contrary to "common sense" shows how much this "common sense" is based on ideological narrative rather than facts; curious readers should start wondering not only whether the stories they learned about their nations' histories* are true, *but perhaps more importantly, what these stories* try to say *about the nation and whom they* benefit.

In his final section, "The Biography of Nations," Anderson argues that "All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias" from which in turn "spring narratives." This is much like the way people can never remember how they felt as children because their memories are colored by their experiences of growing up, and so they narrate chronological stories to fill in the gaps among the evidence they do have, like photographs and dates. Nations too, Anderson argues, recognize they are "imbedded in secular, serial time," which means their histories are linear. But they do not remember these histories and so tell narratives to make sense of their own identities. The main difference is that people are born and die—they have specific start and end dates—but nations do not. National histories are written in retrospect, going as far back as their authors deem proper.

Anderson's argument has quite radical consequences for the discipline of history: he not only contends that much commonly-accepted official history is incorrect, but he actually thinks that people have a disincentive *to seek out and believe in the truth (because it is often inconvenient or challenging). Of course, this is a good reason to value and prioritize disinterested historical scholarship, but by showing that history narrated in "secular, serial time" is also constructed and ideological, he forces the reader to challenge what objective scholarship would actually look like.*

In closing, Anderson makes an interesting comment on "the deaths that structure the nation's biography." While one kind of history can highlight the "myriad anonymous events" that allow people to try and understand what life was like at some given time, national histories are written "against the going mortality rate" and highlight deaths for the sake of the nation: "exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts" that are made to be "remembered/forgotten as 'our own.'"

Anderson ends by even further complicating the relationship between official and true histories: the former selects data out of narratives, and the latter makes the construction of narratives possible by recovering data. He sees that there is always a risk of nations exploiting historians' work for political ends. This is important because it further reinforces his argument against scholars who mistakenly believe that exposing nations and nationalism as hollow will somehow challenge their dominance. If nations are narrative and cultural, just like history and identity, then what is needed is not logical arguments against or counterexamples to nationalism's excesses, but rather counternarratives to them.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jennings, Rohan. "*Imagined Communities*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 30 Sep 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jennings, Rohan. "*Imagined Communities*." LitCharts LLC, September 30, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/imagined-communities.

To cite any of the quotes from *Imagined Communities* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities. Verso. 1998.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities. New York: Verso. 1998.