

Benedict Anderson

What is a "Nation"?

Key Concepts: Origin of Nationalism

Key Works: *Imagined Communities* (1983)

The Age of Globalization (Under Three Flags) (2005)

A) Has a sense of 'nationhood' always exist? (B) Is the idea of 'the nation' a modern (18thC) invention? (C) Or is it a curious mix of both?

A Nation is an "imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"

(Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, P 6-7.)

"imagined" NOT 'imaginary'

The nation is 'imagined because, while you will never meet every member of your nation, you can nevertheless imagine that you are linked to other, unseen and unknowable people (past, present, and future).

It is a 'community' because "regardless of inequality and exploitation" in any country, it is "conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship." People are willing to kill and (more importantly) die for their nation.

It is 'limited' because even the largest nation has "boundaries, beyond which lie other nations." In other words, it doesn't dominate the entire world!

Sovereign because it doesn't operate under the constraint of any outside force (another country, a religion, etc.)

Nationalism is a 'Cultural Artefact of a particular kind'. It is more like a **religion** that "commands a profound emotional legitimacy" than an 'ideology'.

This results in the idea that Nationalism is: **"Emotionally Strong, but Philosophically Weak"**

What Does Anderson identify as the social, cultural, and economic changes that brought about our sense of modern nationalism?

There wasn't one specific cause for the rise in nationalism, but rather a series of linked changes. Think of the ideas listed below as being "necessary, but not sufficient" to bring about change:

- Decline in the unifying power of the Church in the period after the Reformation, particularly dominant political communities
- Decline in the power of Latin as a transnational language, not just in the church, but also as a language of administration
- Rise in the publication of vernacular languages, particularly the rise of newspapers which offered a fixed set of ideas that people who had never met could all share in
- The rise of capitalism in tandem with printing ("the convergence of capitalism and print technology")
- A new sense of time – Standardization of time and calendars (bringing about the idea that you can experience events 'simultaneously' with other members of the imagined community)

How does any of this help me to think about the world around me now?

- If the church is replaced by other 'supranational organizations (like the EU) how does that impact our sense of national identity?
- If English (or Mandarin Chinese) becomes the dominant global language, does that shift how people feel about their own 'nation'?
- Does a country without a unique national language deserve the title of a nation? (Think of Pádraig Pearse's "*Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam*")
- If nations have sovereign limited territory, what about Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement (1998)? Who should Rory McIlroy represent in the Olympics – Team Ireland or Team GB & NI?
- Do shifts in 'media consumption' have an impact on how we view our nation? If you share an 'imagined community' with other unknown people on FB or Twitter does that undermine or strengthen your idea of the nation?
- What place is there for the 'Diaspora' in the Nation? Should Irish emigrants be allowed to vote in Irish elections or pay Irish tax?

Writing about Nationalism? How does Anderson help me?

When thinking of issues of “identity”, ‘nationalism’ is often seen as a dirty word. Anderson helps us to rebalance this view. He wrote:

‘In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism—poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts—show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles.’

Therefore we have to ask “Does a strong sense of nationalism enhance or diminish us as people, or make interaction with others more positive or negative in its character?” “At what point does the positive view of Ireland have a negative impact on others?” “It may be considered benign to cheer for your country in a sporting contest, but where’s the ‘red line’ that, once crossed, makes nationalism a dangerous force?”

Consider writing paragraphs with the following **Thesis Statements**: (you’ll need to adapt them as necessary, depending on the question...)

1. Understanding the origins of nationalism has helped me to better understand how I view my own country and my own identity...
2. Oftentimes Irish identity is constructed ‘negatively’, where it’s easier to say what it “isn’t”, rather than what it actually is...
3. Ireland’s dramatic shift in demographic make up has made it essential to think more self-consciously about what it means to be Irish...
4. Ireland’s place in the European Union has changed how we understand our sense of nationalism, though not as strongly as in ‘Brexit’ Britain...

Criticisms of Anderson’s ‘modern’ view of nationalism as emerging in the late 18th Century...
The 3rd Bowl of Porridge: Some theorists and historians have argued that ‘proto’ nations (sometimes called *ethnies*) are the basis upon which the modern version of nationalism emerged. This **synthesises** the two previous ideas touched on above.
“Post-18th-Century nationalism is indeed a modern phenomenon, but that in very many cases it is a force built upon, constrained by and deriving from earlier expressions of its associated nation.”

If you’re really motivated to get your teeth stuck in dig in to Richard English’s exploration of the history of nationalism and the degree to which those differing theories fit the Irish context by reading “*Irish Freedom – The History of Nationalism in Ireland*” (2006), particularly pages 483-506.

Remember: Your opinion as to many ideas about Irish Nationalism, whether it’s our relationship with Britain and Northern Ireland, our relationship with the EU, or the wider world, or even our own Diaspora, must (to some degree) be dependent on your opinions on how nationalism has emerged. A politician can’t lie to you about what it means to be “Irish” if you have a firm foundation upon which you have built your own ideas...!

Jingoism: _____
Isolationism: _____

Chauvinism: _____

What does an 'Irish Identity' mean to you?

What are the positive aspects of YOUR experience of Nationalism?

What are the positive stereotypes that you enjoy because of your nationality?

In what scenarios do you feel that your sense of "National Pride" is experience most strongly?

How do you convey your sense of "national pride" to (a) visitors to Ireland, and (b) when travelling abroad?

To what extent do you experience a sense of shared identity with the Irish 'imagined community' in parts of the country that you have never visited?

What positive contributions do you perceive the following groups make to Irish identity? (Interrogate and justify the reasons for your claims)

- (a) The Irish Diaspora
- (b) Non-Irish EU Citizens living in Ireland
- (c) Non-Irish/Non-EU Citizens living in Ireland

What are the negative aspects of YOUR experience of Nationalism?

What are the negative connotations of Irish Stereotypes?

Are there times that you have been embarrassed or ashamed about the actions of your nation?

Are there other nationalities that you feel an inherent bias against, particularly if it's only a vague feeling? What motivates that animosity?

Are there ways in which your sense of "national pride" have led to a negative outcome for you individually, or to broader groups of Irish citizens?

To what extent (if any) do you feel that your Irish identity has been negatively influenced by Irish involvement in Europe?

What negative contributions do you perceive the following groups make to Irish identity? (Interrogate and justify the reasons for your claims)

- (a) The Irish Diaspora
- (b) Non-Irish EU Citizens living in Ireland
- (c) Non-Irish/Non-EU Citizens living in Ireland

Thinker's Background

- Born in China (1936) to an Irish father and English mother. Educated in Eton and Cambridge in England. Extensive academic career in USA (Cornell) where he taught "International Studies, Government & Asian Studies". Carried an *Irish passport!*
- Particular expertise in Indonesia, where he '**debunked**' the official Indonesian Government's story of the failed '**coup d'état**' and the subsequent anti-communist **purges**
- This account led to him being **expelled** from Indonesia in 1972 – he didn't return until after President Suharto resigned in 1998
- ***Indonesia was a former Dutch colony, therefore, the idea of a **post-colonialism** was central to Anderson's work. i.e. He realized that there had been no great 'thinkers' (like Marx or Hobbes) that focussed on the idea of Nationalism. This then became the core of his work***
- Fluent in multiple South-East Asian and European languages
- Died in East Java in 2015

Personal Response

(A.) What aspects of other LC subjects might this be relevant? (Which specific aspects of History, Geography, Religion, English....?)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

(B.) To what aspects of your daily life might the ideas of Benedict Anderson be relevant?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Links to other aspects of the course

List different aspects of the course to which you think Anderson might be relevant. (can you list 3-4) This list will not be *definitive*, but can be added to over time...!

1. Think particularly about how this might relate to the role of different 'Civilizations' in the work of Huntington?
2. How do you 'square' this view of nationalism with Kwame Anthony Appiah's view of Cosmopolitanism?
- 3.
- 4.

Look up the meaning of the words highlighted in **bold** type above: '**Purges**' – are a way that leaders get rid of those who oppose them (See Stalin's purges of the 1930s). They could just be fired, but might also be imprisoned or even executed. '**Expelled**' -

Reading Tip: If you do decide that you want to read some of *Imagined Communities*, go to the last 1-1½ pages of each chapter. There's a short summary of the main ideas of each chapter there. It'll help you keep the big ideas in your mind, before you get bogged down in all the detail...

Favourite Moment: In one interview, the interviewer concluded by asking Anderson which 'nation' he would be prepared to 'die for'? He was unable to answer the question, but argued that it would depend on the situation. How would you answer the question? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNJuL-Ewp-A>)

