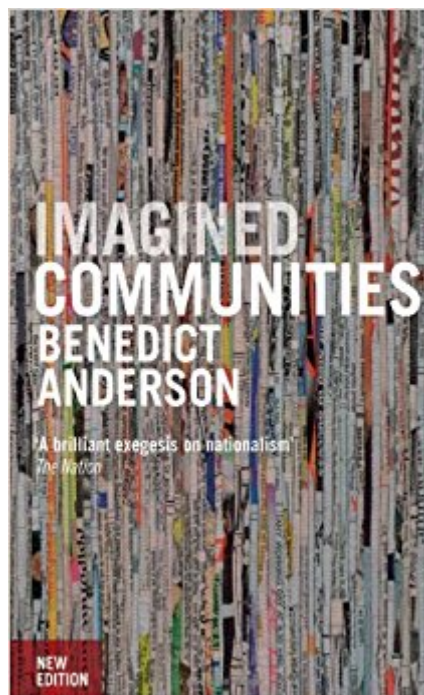


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By Benedict Anderson - Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism (New Edition) (Rev. Ed) (8.12.2006)



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great on Nationalism as a finished modular Euro-Western product. Weak on the Afro-Asian aspect. Modernist prophet of nationalism of the gang of four: Gelner, Bedourie, Hobsbawm.

The thesis: "Nations" are imagined communities. They don't exist per se, as we will never know the overwhelming majority of our fellow compatriots. Nations don't respect ethnicity, religion, or preferences. They are not entities formed out of voluntary association. They are not optional at birth. They are political concoctions, perceived as limited and sovereign. Independently of the existing inequalities, they are conceived as horizontal fraternities. This book traces the development of this very recent and peculiar concept, unknown during the greater part of human history. It sprung from the vanishing of two preceding principles of organization as such: religion and dynasty. It owes its existence to the capitalist press's expansion, and its necessity of a uniform and general language, as well as to the art of the novel and its expression of the simultaneity of time for different local communities. Capitalism and its expansive force were central to the creation of Nationalism which, as an idea, was born in America, created by Europeans born already there, but without a history and in need of creating identities that would permit them keep power from the indigenous masses and the slaves or former slaves. In Europe, by contrast, Nationalism was basically linguistic, but never before had language been strictly identified with territory or race. Truly national languages were created by the press, and the threat of dissolution of empires created Official Nationalism as a defense mechanism of dynastic powers. In the European colonies, the census, maps, and museums created by the metropolises awakened (invented) in the various subjugated countries a national "conscience", which created nations there where the concept had no meaning, with the disastrous results we are witnesses to every day, mostly in Africa and the Middle East. There was no such thing as "Israel" and "Palestine". "Irak", "Kuwait", "Saudi Arabia" and many other "nations"

are in reality nothing but partitions of former colonial territories. Especially in Africa, tribes were divided and ancestral enemies piled together without their consent into artificial nations. This is an excellent book, well written and documented, with abundant examples and original and convincing theses. In the end, "nations" are nothing but inventions by politicians eager to keep their power, and it is likely that the model will change as communications, travel, immigration, supranational entities, and other developments affect the way communities organize around the globe. It will be (it is being) an exciting and interesting phenomenon to watch.

College textbook. Well written

I know Anderson has done more work in the area since the original publication of this work, but I have not read it yet. I hope that work refines his original thesis a bit which seems to simplistic on the chain of causation from material base to the effect of nationalism. Perhaps he simplified to stretch his model over more examples, but I would be interested to see Anderson's take on post-Soviet Europe and Asia. A solid recommend, but not a breezy read by any means. One thing that does annoy me is when authors have chunks of text and notes in untranslated foreign language. In this text the Asiatic languages receive a translation, but the western European languages are left to the reader to interpret. I can read most French but no German, leaving me at a deficit in some cases in the text.

A classic work that has lost nothing over the years - a rare phenomenon. JGB

Its a seminal read for anyone trying to understand nations and post nations. Best recommendation for scholars and students of politics, sociology and contemporary modern societies

Very informative. This book presents a unique hypothesis regarding the history of nationalism. However, this book is not for the faint of heart. It is dense, highly academic, and includes numerous references that aren't made clear internally. Have a dictionary and google close at hand, unless you speak every language that Anderson includes without translation. The writing could be much clearer, but it is a very compelling read.

If you want a scholarly introduction to nationalism and its history, this is an excellent book to start with. Anderson begins with a discussion of how the concept of the nation first came into being, with

emphasis on the factors that enabled people to imagine communities beyond their immediate surroundings. He then brings in more abstract concepts such as spatial/temporal relations and its relation to maps and museums... well, you'll have to read the book, since he explains it much better than me. My only complaint is that he did focus much more on Western nationalism than on Eastern- two very different topics. Nonetheless, this is a wonderful introductory text.

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