

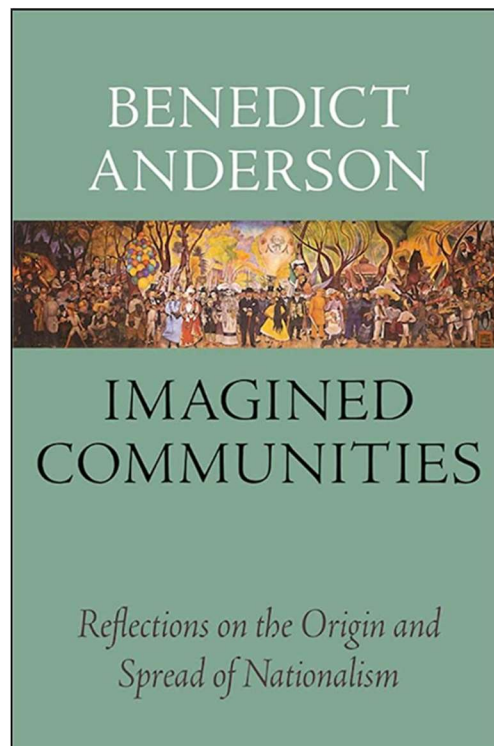


**REVIEW OF BENEDICT ANDERSON'S IMAGINED COMMUNITIES:
REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM. (LONDON:
VERSO, 1991, C. 1983)**

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Anderson's book "Imagined Communities" provides a coherent explanation of nationalism exploring the transition of people's consciousness within time and space. He refers to a nation as "an imagined political community that is sovereign and inherently limited" (p.6). Anderson argues that "the reality is quite plain, the end of the era of nationalisms, so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight- indeed nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time"



(p.3). He traces nationalism to the history of Europe and America, which is emulated as models by countries in the third world. The book which was first published in 1983 is made of eleven chapters. It gives a vivid explanation of how emerging nations see themselves as antique. An essential contribution is made towards factors behind the rise of nationalism. The book makes a significant contribution with regard to the explanation of nationalism. This helps in critically evaluating the underlying causes of most nationalism campaigns celebrated across the world. Anderson's adoption of a method of analysis that is historically evolutionary makes his work relevant to the study of nationalism and historiography at large.

The method used is significant for "Media History" with reference to readings on "The Problem of Journalism History" (cf. Carey, 1974), "Notes Towards a History of Media Audiences" (cf. Douglas, 1992), "Editor's Note: Why Teach Historiography or Study Media History" (2007), and others helps in understanding the significance of historiography in explaining the consciousness of people in the past, and how it relates to and its benefits for the present. It further shows the relevance of cultural history in the analysis of media history and its significance for the present. The book asserts that "nation-ness and nationality are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" (p.4). To explore it effectively, one must understand how and why it historically emerged. Anderson's attempts to make a comparative analysis of nations within time and space make his work more appealing considering the differences that nations may have. In comparison to other loyalties, the reasons why the devotion to a nation becomes so special. With the comparative analysis that Anderson employs, he was able to examine some sequences and commonalities within the rise of nationalism, from which he developed models of nationalism that are to be emulated by developing countries.

In explaining the interplay within the factors behind the rise and spread of nationalism, Anderson saw print nationalism as the key driver of nationalism. He identifies several factors including ethnic affinities, race, linguistics, and their contributions towards bringing national consciousness and unity among people. For instance, it was evident in 18th-century Europe how the waning of religious belief laid the foundations for the age of nationalism. The emergence of relativism in religion as seen between 'our' and 'their' created animosities toward people and communities. Regarding this, Anderson places more focus on print capitalism in light of the



scientific revolution and reformation, with the emergence and spread of administrative and revolutionary vernacularization. It also saw the rise of vernacular lexicography and philology. In addition, the contributions of bilinguals and of grammarians roused nationalism in Europe in the 19th century.

Furthermore, Anderson explores how Creoles came to be the pioneers of nationalism, considering how they became decisive and perilous for the masters. Creoles faced discrimination emanating from the rulers in unifying them. This led to opposition from the Spanish King with a rejection of Madrid's interventions with regard to slave laws. With an outnumbering of the 'Peninsulares' of seventy to one, they represented a deprived majority. From this, "the shared fatality" of transatlantic birth brought a feeling of belongingness to the place of birth, America. Also, an instance of nationalism in relation to the birthplace is the declaration of Bolivar that, "in future, the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives but Peruvians". This is the time when print capitalism had not been introduced to them. Through this, he makes a critical assertion concerning how a new consciousness is to develop the older, which had to disappear creating its own chronicle as observed in terms of "official nationalism". The consciousness was revamped due to the increasing prestige of European nations dating back to the 1820s, in the light of Hohenzollerns as Germans, Romanovs as Russians, and Hanoverians as English. With this system of official nationalism, there emerged nation states with Russification (USSR), Japanification (Japan), and Anglicization (Britain).

Anderson's book makes a significant contribution toward unraveling the roots of nationalism. In tracing the transition of people's consciousness, the book is relevant for explaining the underlying factors behind nationalism and the dynamics that it takes. However, for me, it appears that Anderson was more convinced than he could convince by the explanations provided. For instance, the book begins considering nationalism as "imagined communities", nevertheless, towards the last wave of nationalism, what is seen is a "modular nationalism". Thus, even if the third-world countries took inspiration from the models, it might have been done with varying characteristics that may be different from other nations. So, the question is why does the book label nationalism in these nations as copied?



With a causal relation provided between print capitalism and the market, nationalism, and imperialism, the book emphasizes the significance of industrialization, and modern education introduced by the colonial administration. A point here is that with a focus on print nationalism, the book makes fewer efforts in exploring other factors, for example how illiterates imagined the community. Therefore, the evolution of nationalism is constrained by the histories of Europe and America, that is seen to be emulated as models by third-world countries. To trace the commonalities of nations and confine them with one strand of print capitalism to an extent is arbitral. For Asians, and Indians in particular, nationalism for instance should not just be linked to imperial initiatives, but to the significance of their strong past heritage. The assertion seems somewhat oriental in scope. It is important to attach equal significance to the distinctiveness of the new nations and not just mark them as modular.

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