

# Theories and Practices of Nationalism - Assignment 1

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**Question:** *How are nations like communities? Is there is a difference between the communities which are formed by civic and ethnic nationalisms?*

*(Write an essay (800-1200 words) explaining your answer. Draw on examples of at least two nations and nationalisms other than India.)*

## Introduction

Most widely-accepted notions of nations today have a common grounding in considering them to be *communities* of people: from Stalin and Seton-Watson's definitions to Benedict Anderson's. But the manner of these people "coming together", as it were, also differs from one nation to another. The *conception* of a nation as formed by a particular people affects how the final "community" is. We attempt to explore both the community nature of nations, and how said nature changes with the ideological imagination of it.

## How are Nations Like Communities?

To understand the community aspect, we look at Benedict Anderson's proposed 'working definition' of a nation as an "imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". Why does he define the nation in terms of community? It is observed in the modern nation that most people with nothing in common with each other - language, ethnicity, political affiliation - who may never even meet, consider themselves to be connected in some way due to sharing a nationality by chance of birth. Despite whatever inequality exists, the nation is still conceived as a horizontal 'brotherhood', a comradeship among equals. People go to war, potentially sacrificing themselves for their 'brothers and sisters' of the community, that they will likely never meet. It has some markings of a community, but it is not the traditional *Gemeinschaft* <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1991). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso. Pages 5-7

This begs comparison to the traditional imagining of a community. As discussed in the lecture, the key components of a *Gemeinschaft* are:

- social order based on *personal ties* (of 1000 or so at maximum)
- custom and tradition as the moral code
- family (birth) as the guiding force for social status and economic roles
- fulfillment at the cost of individual movement.

None of these apply to any nation of millions that for all intents and purposes seems more aligned with *Gesellschaft* instead. But on closer examination, this too does not match. There is a distinction between the nation and its call for a sovereign state; social contract and mutual consent is shared among the citizens and the state but not with the 'Nation' itself. So what is this community? Ernest Gellner argues that "it (nationalism) *invents* nations where they do not exist", taking pains to establish the 'falsity' of this community<sup>2</sup>. Anderson opts to call it an 'imagined' community instead, noting that his peer's statement implies the existence of 'true' communities of the scale to be juxtaposed to nations, and also that all communities larger than primordial villages with face-to-face contact are, in fact, imagined<sup>3</sup>.

On that note, a good comparison to align the perspective of national community to is the imagined community of religion.

- Parallel with religious community.
- Consider Kohn: people consider themselves of a place not in a place.

Ernest Gellner claims that "it (nationalism) invents nations where they do not exist"; a claim that Anderson comments implies the existence of "true" communities that can be "advantageously juxtaposed to nations". This, however, on the ground that all communities larger than villages are imagined.

## Points

- How are nations like Communities (Benedict Anderson):
  - Conceived as horizontal
  - Conception of a connect, even if most will never meet
  - Not exactly *Gemeinschaft*. There's millions, not thousands. There is individual movement, and family does not define social status, economic role, etc. We're still in Society, but we imagine there is a connection between random people we will never meet, cannot possibly ever meet, because we're born within the same arbitrary plot of land. Sometimes not even that.
  - Kohn - people consider themselves to be "of" a place, as opposed to "in" a place

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<sup>2</sup>Gellner, E. (1964). *Thought and change* P. 169. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. <http://archive.org/details/thoughtchange0000gell> Emphasis added

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso. Pages 5-7

- Answer: yes.
- First, what I mean by ethnic and civic. Using the definition of “by the constitution” and “by the ethnic nature”, aka a limitation on religion, etc. Why? Because of countries like India, that would fall under “ethnic nationalism” as per Kohn, but is (still) Civic Nationalism in practice.

Noting here that most nations seem to have some sort of naturalization process, but that does not always translate, like in China, hence these will be considered Ethnic.

Basically, I’m not considering here the origin, but the current status of it, how it is considered.

- However, I will be using the original definitions by Kohn to motivate why civic and ethnic nationalisms are different.
- “Western nationalism” As Kohn calls it arises from the Englishman’s need to have liberty. England, the first “new nation”, Nationalism from the religious matrix, the self consideration of “new Israel”. John Milton:

With him nationalism was not a struggle for collective independence from an “alien yoke”; it was the affirmation of individual freedom from authority, the self-assertion of personality is face of its own government or church, “the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition.” Liberty to Milton was religious, political, and personal.

It is founded in a common principle of “liberty” and some unexplained belief that the nation is the ultimate source for the protection of these liberties. There is belief in a code here, the nation is a vessel. The belief is in the written law which is to serve a greater good, and not ethnicity. Not from an outward perspective, anyway.

- Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, is primarily externally motivated - a protest against an existing social structure. It is expanded by propaganda and education (however: France did this too!). And it relies on the image of an “ideal future” based on a non-existent “golden past”

Random thoughts

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- India is a nation due to the political partition by the British?
- Civic nationalism: Follow the Constitution and you’re a national
- Ethnic nationalism: Be something
- Israel allows citizenship by return, descent, naturalization, etc. Exclusionary policy, and many have termed it as such, and UN creation marked it as “Jewish State”. It also allows for nationals from the lands.
- Also, all Jewish people (as defined) can be Jewish nationals easily.
- Kuwaiti law requires one to be muslim. But there are no other restrictions on ethnicity per se.
- Bhutan has a strict citizenship law, immigration is based on parents/long servitude.
- There is an ethnic bleed into the Civic nationalisms
  - WASPs in America, the idea of immigrants not being American, especially if not white.
  - All nations seem to have a constitution allowing for naturalization
- There is a difference of sorts between communities of civic nationalism and communities of ethnic nationalism. Kinda. Now, most modern states have a constitution, but some are significantly more ethnic than others, while some display characteristics of wanting to be ethnic nationalist but are strictly civic till date
  - But america for example is a split community. Half want ethnic considerations? Does “white” count? It’s a request for elimination of other ethnicities from the state. Others abide by the civic model.
- Han Chinese want to be more ethnic? Elimination of non-Han
- China considers all Hans to be chinese.

865 at the start.