Benedict Anderson (1936)

Inhalt dieses Dokuments

London: Verso, 1-7 Seite 2

Zusammenfassung des Buches
Quelle: http://ssr1.uchicago.edu/PRELIMS/Culture/cumisc1.html Seite 3

Theorists of nationalism have often been perplexed, not to say irritated, by these three paradoxes: (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept - in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender-vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality is sui generis. (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. in other words, unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers. […]

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.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. […] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.

The nation is *imagined* as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet.

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living pluralism of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginations of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism.

Quelle: http://ssr1.uchicago.edu/PRELIMS/Culture/cumisc1.html

Chapter 1: Introduction, 1-7

Nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism are cultural artifacts whose creation toward the end of the 18th C was the spontaneous distillation of a complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became "modular," capable of being transplanted to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a variety of political and ideological constellations. Theorists of nationalism have encountered three paradoxes: (1) The objective modernity of nations in the eye of the historian vs. their subjective antiquity in the eye of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept vs. the particularity of its concrete manifestations. (3) The political power of nationalism vs. its philosophical poverty.

In order to address some of these problems, Anderson proposes the following definition of nationalism: it is an imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because members will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. It is limited because it has finite, though elastic boundaries beyond which lies other nations. It is sovereign because it came to maturity at a stage of human history when freedom was a rare and precious ideal. And it is imagined as a community because it is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

Chapter 2: Cultural Roots, 9-36

Nationalism has to be understood not in relation to self-consciously held political ideologies, but the large cultural systems that preceded it. Nationalism arose at a time when three other cultural conceptions were decreasing in importance. First, there were changes in the religious community. Nationality represented a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. The unselfconscious coherence of religion declined after the Middle Ages because of the effects of the explorations of the non-European world and the gradual demotion of the sacred language itself. The older communities lost confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages (the idea that a particular script language offered privileged access to ontological truth), and thus lost confidence in their ideas about admission to membership in the religious community.

Second, there were changes in the dynastic realm. In the older imagining, states were defined by centers, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded with one another. However, in the 17th C, the automatic legitimacy of the sacral monarchy began its decline and people began to doubt the belief that society was naturally organized around high centers.

Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable. In the Middle Ages, time was thought to be simultaneous; the modern idea was of homogeneous, empty time. They idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily through history. These three changes lead to a search for a new way of linking fraternity, power, and time together.

Chapter 3: The Origins of National Consciousness, 37-46

The preceding elements set the conditions for a new form of cultural consciousness. The reason this consciousness took the form of nationalism is due to the half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction
between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity. Capitalism was especially important because the expansion of the book market contributed to the revolutionary vernacularization of languages. This was given further impetus by three extraneous factors: a change in the character of Latin, the impact of the Reformation, which led to the mass production of Bibles, and the spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization.

Print languages laid the foundation for national consciousness in three ways: they created unified fields of exchange and communication; they gave a new fixity to language; they created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. However, the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is not isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print languages; one must also look at the emergence of political entities on the world stage.

Chapter 4: Creole Pioneers, 47-65

Anderson is concerned with determining why it was Creole communities (those formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against who they fought) that developed early conceptions of their nation-ness well before most of Europe. There are 6 factors of Creole history that contributed to this: the tightening of Madrid's control on these areas; the spread of the liberalizing ideas of the Enlightenment; the improvement of trans-Atlantic communication; the willingness of the "comfortable classes" to make sacrifices in the name of freedom; the ability of the administrative units to create meaning through the religious pilgrimage (see Victor Turner); and the internal interchangeability of mean and documents which helped create a unified apparatus of power the rise of the newspaper which implies the refraction of events, even "world events" into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers.

The failure of the Spanish-American experience to generate a permanent Spanish-American-wide nationalism reflects both the general level of development of capitalism and technology in the late 18th C and the "local" backwardness of Spanish capitalism and technology in relation to the administrative stretch of the empire. The Protestant, English-speaking people to the north were much more favorably situated for realizing the idea of "America."

Chapter 5: Old Languages, New Models, 67-82

The close of the era of successful national liberation movements in the Americas coincided with the onset of the age of nationalism in Europe. These "new nationalisms" were different in two respects: 1.) national print languages were of central ideological and political importance, and 2.) the nation became something capable of being consciously aspired to from early on due to the "models" set forth by the Creole pioneers. Vernacular print capitalism is important to class formation, particularly the rise of the bourgeoisie. Prior to this, solidarities were the products of kinship, clientship, and personal loyalties. The bourgeoisie, however, achieved solidarities on an imaginary basis through print capitalism. That is, they didn't know one another because of marriage or proper transactions, but because they came to visualize others like themselves through print. The nobility then were potential consumers of the philological revolution. As soon as the events of the Americas reached the European nobility through print, the imagined realities of nation-states became models for Europe.

Chapter 6: Official Nationalism and Imperialism, 83-111

From about the middle of the 19th C there developed "official nationalism" in Europe. They were responses by power groups threatened with exclusion from popular imagined communities (e.g., Russia, England, and Japan). They were a means for combining naturalization with retention of
dynastic power. The model of official nationalism was also followed by states with no serious power pretensions, but whose ruling classes felt threatened by the world-wide spread of nationally imagined communities (e.g., Siam, Hungary).

Chapter 7: The Last Wave, 113-140

The last wave of nationalism was the transformation of the colonial-state to the national state. This was facilitated by three factors: the increase in physical mobility increasing bureaucratization the spread of modern-style education It was a response to the new-style global imperialism made possible by the achievements of industrial capitalism. The paradox of official nationalism was that it brought the idea of "national histories" into the consciousness of the colonized. In addition, this last wave arose in a period of world history in which the nation was becoming an international norm and in which it became possible to "model" nationness in a more complex way that before.

Chapter 8: Patriotism and Racism, 141-154

Nation-ness is "natural" in the sense that it contains something that is unchosen (much like gender, skin color, and parentage). It has an aura of fatality embedded in history. It is not, however, the source of racism and anti-Semitism. Racism erases nation-ness by reducing the adversary to his/her biological physiognomy. Nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations whose origins lie outside of history. The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than those of nation.

Chapter 9: The Angel of History, 155-162

Revolutions, such as those in Vietnam, Kampuchea, and China, are contemporary exhibits of nationalism, but this nationalism is the heir of two centuries of historic change. Nationalism has undergone a process of modulation and adaptation, according to different eras, political regimes, economies, and social structures. As a result, the "imagined community" has spread out to ever conceivable contemporary society.

Chapter 10: Census, Map, and Museum, 163-185

These three institutions of power profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion. The census created "identities" imagined by the classifying mind of the colonial state. The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one, and only one, extremely clear place. The map also worked on the basis of a totalizing classification. It was designed to demonstrate the antiquity of specific, tightly bounded territorial units. It also served as a logo, instantly recognizable and visible everywhere, that formed a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalism being born. The museum allowed the state to appear as the guardian of tradition, and this power was enhanced by the infinite reproducibility of the symbols of tradition.

Chapter 11: Memory and Forgetting, 187-206

Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of "forgetting" the experience of this continuity, engenders the need for a narrative of "identity."