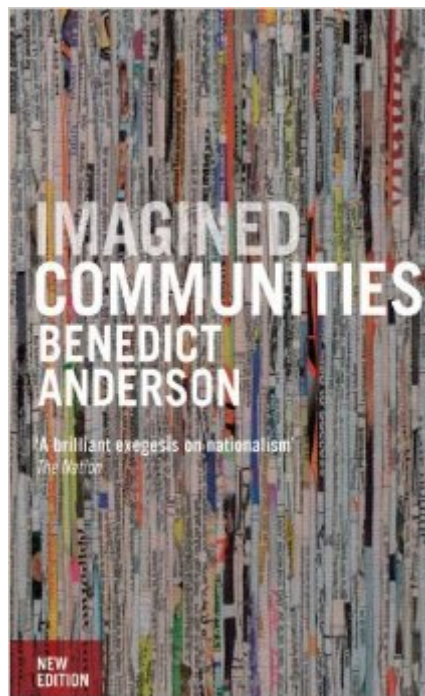


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By Benedict Anderson - Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism (New Edition) (Rev. Ed) (8.12.2006)



Book Information

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While ostensibly a modernist, Anderson's "Imagined Communities" differs from his peers as he, like the primordialists before him, believes that language is central to creating a sense of community or nationalism, although language was not necessarily a decisive factor or the most essential. For Anderson, nationalism is an anomaly which is not accounted for by either Marxian or liberal theory. Instead, nationalism is bound up in mortality, religion, language and culture. While acknowledging the centrality of language, Anderson also proposes there are three sequential causes resulting in the rise of nationalism: "print-capitalism," the rise of new elites (particularly in the Americas), and the bureaucratic "weld" or grafting of nations onto empires (particularly as with Great Britain, Russia, and France). The nationalism that flourished in the Americas was marked by its hostility of their colonial elites towards the authority centers or metropolises in Europe. Nationalism in the decolonization era was marked by the same hostility towards the European metropolises, but emphasized the use of indigenous languages and class consciousness by nationalists to create communities where none had existed before, such as in Indonesia, or to shore up diverse multi-ethnic entities as in China or Vietnam. Anderson differs most markedly from other modernists, such as Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, by countering that nationalism is not so much about ideology as it is an anthropological phenomenon, hence Anderson's use of the term "Imagined Communities." While nationalism to Anderson is the product of modernity, it is an inclusive rather than exclusive phenomenon, driven by ever-changing factors which varied from region to region, and from age to age, focusing on what diverse peoples have in common.

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