

Lecture 4: Nation and Nationalism

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Nation

- Latin origin, *natio* from *nasci*: to be born, conveying idea of common blood ties (yet the Romans never designated themselves as a *natio*, reserved for ‘community of foreigners’), derogatory connotation; *nationem*: referring to breed or race
- late 13th century introduced into English meaning blood related group, later relating to inhabitants of a country
- medieval universities: communities of students; gradually changing the meaning of the word to a community of opinion, purpose
- ecclesiastical councils of the late Middle Ages, the word lost all derogatory connotations; becoming a synonym for ‘people’
- the word ‘nation’ in wide use from the 18th century
- the word ‘nationalism’, in contrast, much more recent

What is the difference between ethny and nation?

- nation is a self-defined rather than other-defined grouping; nation is a self-aware, self-defined ethnic group
- **ethnies** are cultural communities much older than nations, on which nations are based
- difference between ethnies and nations is that **nations** have a delimited territory, a unified legal and economic system, and a public culture, but ethnies lack those elements (A. D. Smith)
- it is the political element that sets the two apart

Defining the nation

- definitions abound, the most fundamental conceptual divide being **objective** vs. **subjective** definitions
- several problems with ‘objective’ definitions mean that scholars nowadays use objective markers in conjunction with subjective factors

Defining the nation

- **Objective definitions:**
- language, ethnicity, religion, territory, common history, shared descent (ancestry, kinship), common culture, etc.
- for example: “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin)

Defining the nation

- **Subjective definitions:**
- solidarity, self-awareness, loyalty, collective will, etc.
- for example: “a soul, a spiritual principle” (E. Renan) or
- “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own” (M. Weber) or
- “a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related” (W. Connor) or
- “a relatively large group of genetically unrelated people with high solidarity” (M. Hechter) etc.

Defining the nation

- Probably the most famous definition is by **Benedict Anderson**: “a nation is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”
- Very useful when studying intergroup relations: “... when analysing sociopolitical situations, what ultimately matters is not *what is* but *what people believe is*. And a subconscious belief in the group’s separate origin and evolution is an important ingredient of national psychology” (Walker Connor)

Nationalism studies

- questions accompanying the definition of the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’
- attempts to identify the historical point when nations first emerged
- how did nations and nationalism develop and how and why they are a part of our existence

Are nations ancient or modern?

- One side sees the nation as a purely **modern** phenomenon; it is a product of capitalism or industrialism and bureaucracy, an outcome of modernisation – *nationalism comes before nations* (modernists)
- In opposition, the so-called primordialists see nations as ‘**forever there**’ entities that have existed for centuries, if not for ever – *nations come before nationalism*
- Somewhere in between stands the position of the ethnicists: they believe the modernists put too much emphasis on the modernity: they exaggerate the impact of industrialism, capitalism, bureaucracy on the modern state and nationalism.
- The first position (the modernists) fails to acknowledge the deep roots that nations have in ethnies, they do not see the earlier ethno-symbolic base of modern nations.

So, what is the nation?

- every attempt to answer this unresolved question depends on the belief that nations are real entities - BUT
- “Everyone agrees that nations are historically formed constructs.” (Brubaker)
- in contemporary writings nation is no longer regarded as unchanging and primary social entity

So, what is the nation?

- Miroslav Hroch is convinced that nations are real (note: not eternal) and should be defined as including: remembered common past of the group, linguistic or cultural ties enabling social communication within the group, perceived equality of all who belong to the group
- **Ernest Gellner** decided to omit definition of the nation; “nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism”

Theorising nationalism

- the modern study of nationalism began with Ernest Gellner in the mid-1960s
- most scholars (historians) agree that nationalism is a modern phenomenon:
- as an ideology and discourse N became prevalent in North America and Western Europe in the second half of the 18th century

Nationalism

- “a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Ernest Gellner) – also all modernists, cf. Eric Hobsbawm, John Breuilly...
- “nationalism is, above all, political” (Michael Hechter)
- “nationalism is a political doctrine” (John Breuilly)

Nationalism

- nationalism is “an ideology which imagines the community in a particular way (as national), asserts the primacy of this collective identity over others, and seeks political power in its name, ideally ... in the form of a state for the nation” (Spencer & Wollman)
- nationalism is a social and political movement
- Michael Billig: ‘banal nationalism’ – everyday affirmation and perpetuation of national identity (cf. Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, a set of social arrangements which have been internalised)
- one can understand nationalism as an organising political principle that requires national homogenisation and gives absolute priority to national values and ‘interests’ in aiming to achieve ‘national goals’

Nationalism and ‘nation-state’

- a nation “only exists when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed” (Anthony Giddens)
- the ideas of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ have been so successfully merged that we usually treat them as synonymous
- the term ‘nation-state’ implies that the cultural and the political correspond; that the ‘people’ who are ruled by the institutions of the state are culturally (ethnically) homogeneous – when in fact:
- only nations which have their own state can be described as ‘nation-states’ and the reality is that these are very few!

Nationalism and ‘nation-state’

- The modern ‘nation-state’ owes its current predominance to the historical fact that its Western European antecedents were militarily and economically so successful – an ‘example’ that others followed.
- The predominance and ongoing persistence of the term is indebted to the two hundred years-long state-building process of Western Europe.

Nationalism and ‘nation-state’

- Connor: only 12 of 132 states he examined were sufficiently ethnically and culturally homogeneous to be ‘justifiably’ described as nation-states.
- Connor: nation-states “are those relatively rare situations, characterized by an extremely homogeneous population, where a nation has its own state”.
- A. D. Smith: nation-states are states *claiming* to be nations

What do nationalists want?

- nationalist doctrine has 3 main claims:
- nations are distinct and unique
- loyalty to the nation is more important than other interests and values
- the nation should have its own state

Readings for Lecture 5:

- *Race* and *racism* – understanding the meaning of the two terms/concepts
- Look up in dictionaries
- Find out which categories are used by the Census (or Statistical Office) of your country