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# Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*: a symposium

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## Introduction

Benedict (Ben) Anderson died in Java on 12 December 2015 at the age of 79. His book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (henceforth IC) is the best known single work in nationalism studies. In this symposium six academics consider the impact of IC upon different disciplines. Here I establish background with brief remarks on Anderson's life and academic career and about IC.

Anderson was born in August 1936 in Kunming, south-west China, on the eve of the Japanese invasion of northern China.<sup>1</sup> His father, James Carew O'Gorman Anderson, was a senior official in the Chinese Maritime Customs.<sup>2</sup> In 1941 Anderson, his wife and their three children started back for his native Ireland but were stuck in the USA until 1945 when the journey home was completed. His father died in 1946. Schooling in Ireland was followed by Eton and then Cambridge where Ben Anderson took a degree in classical studies. He moved to Cornell University in Ithaca, NY – initially as a teaching assistant – where he soon found his vocation as a political scientist specialising in the study of Indonesia. After he and colleagues wrote a (not very) confidential analysis of General Suharto's 1965 coup, Anderson was barred from Indonesia (with one short unauthorised visit in 1972) until after Suharto fell from power in 1998. Anderson shifted his attention to other countries such as Siam/Thailand and the Philippines. In his autobiography he ironically thanks Suharto for compelling him to research more than one state in the region, thus taking him into comparative studies.

Until 1983 Anderson was known mainly to the specialised academic community working in the field of Southeast Asian Studies.<sup>3</sup> The region acquired a more than specialised interest in the USA with the Vietnam War, though most of Anderson's work focused on countries allied to the USA.

There is a connection between Anderson's specialised field and the writing of IC, as he asserts that it was war between the 'socialist' states of Vietnam, China and Cambodia in the late 1970s that made him become aware of the importance and little understood nature of nationalism. He adds, both in IC and his autobiography, that debates between UK intellectuals at that time clarified

his ideas. Anderson sympathised with how Tom Nairn (a close collaborator and co-author on *New Left Review* with Perry Anderson) took up a pro-Scottish position in *The Break-Up of Britain* (1978) and disagreed with Eric Hobsbawm's assault on that book, including the assertion that a Marxist could not be a nationalist. Anderson also took against the 'Eurocentric' bias of writing on nationalism. IC's first set of cases are drawn from late 18th century colonial America on the grounds that nationalism originated there and subsequently spread to Europe. Later chapters use Southeast Asian examples, distinguishing IC from most general studies of nationalism with their European focus.

It was with the publication of IC in 1983 that Anderson came to the attention of a wide readership. With about 64,000 citations to date (May 2016) on Google Scholar, *IC* is the fifth-most cited book in the social sciences and by far the most cited text in the study of nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The book has gone through three English language editions (1983, 1991, 2006) which have sold a total of about half-a-million copies to date, an extraordinarily high figure for an 'academic' book.<sup>5</sup> This excludes sales for the many translations.

The 1991 edition was expanded by two chapters: one on maps, censuses and museums; the other on 'memory and forgetting'. The 2006 edition added an afterword chronicling the translations of the book into 29 different languages published in 33 different countries. In our contemporary academic culture with its fixation on 'metrics' to estimate the 'impact' of 'outputs', such figures suggest an enormous impact. A 'UoA' (Unit of Assessment) that could lay claim to Ben Anderson and *IC* in the REF<sup>6</sup> would be very happy.

However, such measures raise more questions than they answer, even at the metric level. Take translations, for example. There were none before 1987. Between then and 1991 came four translations of the first edition (Japanese, Portuguese, German, Serbo-Croat) plus a 1992 Korean pirated translation. Between 1992 and 1999 there were 15 further translations from the second edition. These include a surge in the late 1990s of east European translations made possible by financial support from the billionaire Georg Soros. There were nine further translations between 2000 and 2006. Sometimes there was a second translation into a particular language, especially if the first was unauthorised and/or bad.<sup>7</sup>

This suggests that the biggest impact came in the late 1980s and through the 90s. Unfortunately Verso do not have information on sales of each of the three English editions, let alone annual figures that could enable us to plot a sales trajectory. However, my guess would be that the peak period was in the decade from the late 1980s. This tallies with the 'rise of nationalism studies' measured in other ways. Social scientists in the 1960s, 1970s and the early 1980s were not interested in nationalism as a distinct subject. The slow decline and then rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and communist regimes throughout east and central Europe is the most obvious reason for a surge in interest. Certain academic specialisms (Cold War studies, Kremlinology) were suddenly marginalised. The shift to 'hot wars' following the end of super-power imposed 'peace' was accompanied by ethnic conflict and violence (e.g. former Yugoslavia, Rwanda,

the Middle East). Even where change came about fairly non-violently, as in most of the former Soviet Union, it led to the replacement of one empire by numerous 'nation-states'. The supranational divisions of the Cold War and class divisions of nation-states were apparently displaced by those between nation-states and between ethnic groups in many of those states.

Academics and others turned to existing studies to help understand these 'new' subjects. A clutch of books published in the early 1980s had advanced theories of 'nationalism'.<sup>8</sup> The outstanding year was 1983 in which along with IC was published *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner and *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. These were key text within a new 'field of debate' centred on whether nation and nationalism were modern phenomena and whether nationalism was an expression of prior national identity or distinct from, even a determinant of nation-formation. The debate polarised into one between 'primordialists/perennialists' and 'modernists'.<sup>9</sup> Most of the political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, policy analysts and others moving into the nationalism studies field were drawn to the modernist position.<sup>10</sup>

These 1983 books became the main ones to cite, plus Hobsbawm's 1990 book on nationalism. Repeatedly the holy trinity of Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm are invoked, and Anderson far more frequently than the others.<sup>11</sup> One superficial explanation is the title: 'Imagined Communities' captures the imagination in a way 'Nations and Nationalism' does not, although this is less true of 'Invention of Tradition'. Many citations of Anderson do little more than quote the title. However, the huge disparity between citations of IC and others in that cluster of 'theories of nationalism' texts surely goes beyond this. We must consider Anderson's distinctive arguments and why these have attracted so much more attention than any others.

In this symposium we do this by relating IC to distinct disciplines. One outstanding feature of IC and of Anderson's academic life and writings generally is that these have been lived 'beyond boundaries'. A political scientist who did ethnographic fieldwork, including studies of dance and theatre; a master of many languages, European and Asian; a literary scholar who used novels and poetry extensively (indeed, making them a key part of his argument); a contributor to left-wing journals such as *New Left Review*; a man active in the politics of the countries he studied (witness his expulsion from Indonesia); a creative historian; a voracious reader across numerous subjects and regions: Ben Anderson's work, especially IC, has been appropriated by various disciplines and in many different ways.

We have focused on impact or influence.<sup>12</sup> The very success of IC means that it has been subject to numerous reviews and critiques. Every survey of literature in the field of nationalism studies includes accounts, often extensive, of the content and arguments of the book. It is doubtful that we could have added anything new to this.<sup>13</sup> However, there has been little consideration of how IC has shaped the study of nationalism. This seemed a particularly appropriate way for a journal devoted to the study of nations and nationalism to pay tribute to Ben Anderson.

The disciplines considered are modern history, divided roughly into ‘western’ (Breuilly) and ‘non-western’ (Green); sociology (Hearn); anthropology (Eriksen); literary and cultural studies (Leerssen); Southeast Asian studies (Sidel). Green and Sidel also write as political scientists. This was the disciplinary label attached to Anderson’s department in Cornell University and often attached to him as a scholar.

A couple of disclaimers are in order. None of the contributors can claim their account is definitive. There are different perspectives within every discipline; disciplines are not hermetically sealed boxes; the sheer volume of citations makes systematic analysis impossible. Nevertheless, there are characteristically different ways of writing about Anderson’s influence that might be related to the different ways these disciplines ‘see’ the subject of nationalism.

In an interview of 2005 Anderson compared his relationship to IC to that of a father ‘..as to a daughter who has grown up and run off with a bus driver: I see her occasionally but, really, she has gone her own merry way. I can wish her good luck, but now she belongs with someone else.’<sup>14</sup> This symposium considers some of the merry ways IC has gone.

### **Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ben Anderson: the anthropologist**

The impact of Benedict Anderson’s most famous book on social and cultural anthropology was immediate and has later proven to be enduring and significant. Anderson’s rich literary style and his facility with powerful metaphors were reminiscent, for many anthropologists who read him, of another great Indonesianist, namely Clifford Geertz. His appeal was such that many students mistook Anderson for an anthropologist. At least until they actually read the book. If they did.

For it is doubtless true that many of those who quote Anderson have not read *Imagined Communities* properly. Some seem not to have made it beyond the title, while others gave up before they reached the passage on page 5 where the author makes it clear that any community beyond face-to-face interaction has to be imagined. There are many kinds of imagined communities. Anderson then goes on to say that what distinguishes nationalism is the *style of imagination*: ‘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.’ (Anderson 1992: 5–6)

Another common misunderstanding consists in misreading ‘imagined’ as ‘imaginary’. This confusion is so widespread that the anthropologist Richard Jenkins once titled a book chapter ‘Imagined, but not imaginary’. Perhaps much misguided criticism of the social constructivist perspective developed in the book could have been avoided if he had titled it *Abstract Communities*, but as he pointed out when I mentioned it to him, it would then have been far less evocative and seductive. He is nevertheless crystal clear when he links ‘invention’ not to fabrication and falsity, but to imagining and creation (p. 6).

The work of the imagination, here, consists not in making things up but envisioning something that we cannot see, but which is nonetheless real.

Anderson's appeal to anthropologists is easily understandable. He likened nationalism to kinship and religion, emphasised the importance of symbols for political identity and gave a credible account of the transition from small-scale to large-scale society through the medium of printing, or print capitalism as he called it. Even more significantly, he spoke explicitly of *the cultural roots* of nationalism. In this brief appreciation of *Imagined Communities* from an anthropological perspective, I have singled out four key dimensions of the book that have had a special appeal to anthropologists and that also speak to theoretical insights developed by anthropologists. However, many anthropologists also warmed to Anderson's refreshingly non-Eurocentric perspective. Whereas Ernest Gellner (2006), whose major work on nationalism was published at the same time as the first edition of *Imagined Communities*, saw nationalism exclusively in European terms, Anderson draws extensively on his area of specialisation, Southeast Asia, as well as Latin American material, in his narrative. In the chapter retitled 'Creole pioneers' in the second edition, Anderson speaks disparagingly about 'provincial European thinking about nationalism' (1991: 47) before arguing that modern nationalism as a movement with political consequences arose first in the New World.

### **Culture and communication**

If the main character in Gellner's account of the origins of nationalism is the industrial revolution, Anderson's cast prominently features the print revolution and subsequent print capitalism. In one of the early chapters, he famously shows how the realistic novel would make the imagined community of contemporaries come alive to the reader, through its depiction of familiar cityscapes and social environments, recognisable but infinitely interchangeable characters, expressions and activities with which the reader could identify, yet at the same time they were as 'ghostly', imagined and abstract as the tomb of the unknown soldier.

The cognitive revolution made possible by the print revolution was more comprehensive and had far greater political consequences than the much earlier invention of writing, about which the anthropologist Jack Goody (another great scholar who left us in 2015) wrote copiously in his work on early literacy and on the contrasts between the oral and the written (Goody 1977, Goody and Watt 1963). Questions raised by anthropologists since Victorian times concerning the conditions for social cohesion at different systemic levels were thereby engaged with by Anderson, who provided an answer located more on the cultural than the social side; it was through people's newfound ability to conceptualise abstract others as their equals, as metaphorical kinsfolk, that the imagined community of the nation was made possible. Admittedly drawing extensively on earlier work on print and literacy, notably Febvre and Martin's



*The Coming of the Book* (2010 [1958]), Anderson added an appreciation of transnational connectedness (paper came to Europe from China, via the Arabs) and a linkage of mass literacy to state formation on the one hand, emotional attachment to the nation on the other.

The fast spread of the printing press and the subsequent growth of literacy rates implied the possibility of a magnification of existing ties through technology; replicating, as it were, the *Gemeinschaft* in an abstract *Gesellschaft* through the force of the imagination aided by the book, pamphlet and newspaper. Anderson, himself a voracious learner of languages, emphasised the role of the vernacular in enabling people to imagine the nation as 'inherently limited'. Many nations are even today best described as mainly linguistic communities.

Anthropologists had, of course, always been interested in the dynamics of scale in social cohesion, studying and comparing societies of varying scales, from the family-based to the transnational. Anderson's interest in the importance of technology in forging ties between the state and the person seemed (at least to me) to connect McLuhan's view of communication technology leading to a 'global village' (1964) with the more conventional social science approaches to mechanisms of cohesion. While linguistic anthropologists had been interested in the relationship between linguistic diversity and cultural variation, it took a political scientist to describe, mainly with non-European examples, the way in which a reading community (as opposed to a speech community) could envision something as big as a nation. A national language may well begin as a dialect backed by an army and a navy, but it grows richer, denser and more clearly bounded by the day when it is being used daily in written communication and supported by the state.

Of course, most states are plurilingual; to Anderson, this does not preclude a strong national identity so long as key groups can communicate in a shared language. Knowledgeable about the Americas, Europe and Southeast Asia, he does not discuss the African countries, with their myriad vernaculars and colonial languages as vehicles of common communication; they might have proved an excellent testing ground for the thesis.

### **Ritual and symbols**

The relationship of scale to communication is one major theme in *Imagined Communities* to which it is easy to relate for anthropologists. Another concerns the significance of rituals and symbols. Very recently, as I was supervising a graduate student whose dissertation concerns the firm, but tenuous boundaries surrounding Melilla, the Spanish enclave in northern Morocco, we spoke about the significance of the still standing Franco statue on the coast, looking towards mainland Spain, but firmly footed on the African continent. A bizarre boundary-marker today, the Fascist monument speaks to the chapter on the census, the map and the museum in the second edition of *Imagined Communities*: it is a frozen moment, condensing symbolic meaning and power,

and reminds us anthropologists simultaneously of Claude Lévi-Strauss' description of myths as *machines pour la suppression du temps* and of Victor Turner's seminal and immensely useful perspective on ritual symbols (Turner 1967). Turner, whose work was empirically based in a small ethnic group, the Ndembu of North Rhodesia (Zambia), argued for a necessary duality in ritual symbols, combining existential meaning and social integration at once. His notions of the multivocality of symbols and the fusion of cohesion and meaning have been hugely influential in the anthropology of symbols in social life. Anderson, interestingly, acknowledges his debt to Turner but quotes him just once (1991: 53), and then not on symbolism, but instead on liminality and transition. Yet there seems to be an almost perfect fit between the literary hermeneutics of the political scientist, who never fails to remember the power structures framing meaning-making, and the social anthropologist breaking out of the straitjacket of structural-functionalism by showing that symbolic meaning had to be studied in its own right.

The convergences between *Imagined Communities* and the social anthropology of symbols and cohesion are striking and sometimes unacknowledged. A.P. Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), while not dealing with the significance of print and the media, is a book about the dual function of symbols as vessels of meaning and justifiers of power. It belongs to the same realm of discourse as does Anderson's book, as do many – if not most – other anthropological studies of meaning and community.

### **The construction of the past**

Like the chapter about the census, the map and the museum – frozen abstractions representing the nation – the chapter about memory and forgetting was written for the second edition of *Imagined Communities*. Just as we have to imagine our consociates for the community to become real and 'inherently limited', the creation of a shared past entails hard work and difficult collective decisions, only some of them conscious. Anderson quotes Renan's perceptive 1882 essay 'Qu'est-ce que une nation?' (1991: 191) to the effect that having a nation entails remembering the same things, but also agreeing on what to forget. This insight eventually leads to the conclusion that 'All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias' (1991: 204). Some nations celebrate their victories, whereas others celebrate their defeats; but even future-oriented nations such as Australia or the USA have built myths of origin enabling a narrative that is simultaneously legitimating and meaningful. The anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, writing about kinship and lineages among the Nuer (1940), speaks in a similar way of structural amnesia as a means of creating continuity: For functional reasons, Nuer lineages vanish after six generations, by which time they cease to have a bearing on the operative political entity of the lineage. Interestingly, Southall (1976) criticised Evans-Pritchard's concept of 'the Nuer nation' in a very Andersonian



way by pointing out that in a society with neither script nor state, with no common institutions nor a large-scale division of labour, it was inconceivable for its members to imagine themselves as part of an abstract nation. (With the emergence of South Sudan as an independent state, this has changed.)

The manipulation of duration for purposes of creating a collective identity or legitimating a power structure has been a staple activity for anthropologists. Even Lévi-Strauss, whose lack of interest in power and politics was legendary, devoted a chapter in *La pensée sauvage* (1962) to the archive. Arguing against Sartre's view that nonliterate people had no history, Lévi-Strauss went to great lengths to show that what myth does to the small peoples, history does to the state peoples, and that the tasks they perform are similar.

Would Anderson have been on the side of Lévi-Strauss here, or would he have gone with Sartre? There is arguably a sense in which historical consciousness changes when, as Goody has also argued (1977), multiple sources are available and can be subjected to criticism. On the other hand, history does perform the same tasks as myth in so far as the past changes, sometimes subtly, when present demands change.

### **A final word**

Though very different in their intellectual orientations, Anderson's explanation of the origins of nationalism was compatible with Gellner's, almost uncannily so. Together, they made a heady brew. Although he was the card-carrying anthropologist of the two, Gellner was also a quintessential Central European intellectual, arguing with the likes of Wittgenstein and Popper, while Anderson's intellectual habitus was in fact closer to that of anthropology, the hermeneutic, holistic scholar who looked for those fragile connections that make up our lives, always acutely aware of the necessity for the social order of a symbolic, meaningful foundation.

I have found myself meandering in and out of a dialogue with Anderson's work for thirty years, from the time when, as a postgraduate, I struggled to understand national identity in ethnically complex Mauritius (Eriksen 1988) to a fairly recent project on flags and national identity with Richard Jenkins (Eriksen and Jenkins 2007) to some even more recent work on migration and social cohesion in Oslo (Eriksen 2015). In the 1990s, several of us took inspiration from Anderson when we began to look at implications of the internet for social integration and the cultural imagination. If the spoken word created small-scale societies, writing without print feudal empires and print capitalism, the modern nation, what kind of community would the internet engender? Retrospectively, it is easy to see that in spite of its deterritorialised character, the internet has not seriously challenged national identities, nor has deterritorialised television. Does this observation weaken Anderson's argument about print capitalism and nationalism? Not really, but it reminds us of the fact that Anderson's is an historical account. Transformations of collective

identities do not usually happen overnight, and besides, communication and public ritual are not all that matters in keeping a nation going. Of Anderson's later writings, his lecture 'Long Distance Nationalism' (Anderson 1992), modestly published but widely cited, suggests as much. This article has been especially inspiring to a recent anthropological concern with identity and cohesion, which to a great extent has superseded and replaced the interest in nationalism typical of the 1990s, namely the study of transnationalism, hybridity and identity politics. In this lecture, Anderson shows that when there is a disjuncture between communication and social life, the results can be dismal. His message to the separatists in exile seems to be that being engaged in national politics in a nation where you do not live is generally a bad idea. His Creole pioneers understood as much. But do we?

### **Jonathan Hearn, The impact of *Imagined Communities* on sociology**

The first point this exercise brought home to me was that I do not normally think about the influence of major figures like Anderson in disciplinary terms. I think of him influencing a loosely defined cross-disciplinary field called nationalism studies (leaving aside his area studies impact). But once posed, it is an interesting question. The second point is that 'influence' or 'impact' is an elusive thing – it depends on how you define it. If it means appearing somehow in the works of others, the ripples of *Imagined Communities* have travelled far and wide. If it means penetrating into the very conception of nationalism, as widely expressed, the evidence is more equivocal, which leads to my third opening point, which is a question. Did Anderson have a theory, or was it a collection of conceptual touchstones, brought together at a critical moment, in a beguiling form? I think this comes closer to the mark.

A quick informal survey of some major sociological outlets since 1983, *Annual Reviews of Sociology*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *British Journal of Sociology* and *Sociology*, bears on my second point. Across these journals, although the term appears hundreds of times in the full texts and references, it only occurs in three article titles. And it is being stretched beyond its national remit, for instance 'schools as imagined communities' and 'imagined global community'. My sense is that in the wider field of sociology, the image of imagined communities has been as popular for its transposability as for its applicability to nationalism. It is standard in discussions of Anderson's key idea to note his acknowledgment that all communities are 'imagined' to some degree (1991: 6). But sociologists seem to have made the most of this fact.

Limiting ourselves to those who are both sociologists (for the most part) and addressing nationalism, we can make a rough and ready distinction between three types of contexts in which *Imagined Communities* appears: historical comparativist treatments that offer long-term accounts of nationalism; surveys of major works in the field of nationalism studies; and exercises in theory building.

## Historical comparativism

*Imagined Communities* is itself a loose-jointed work of historical comparativism. It offers an account of what kind of social phenomenon nationalism is, how it arose and how it spread around the globe. As suggested above, it does not so much present and test a theory, as lay out a collection of striking, and, at least when first formulated, often counter-intuitive conceptualisations with which to get a handle on this phenomenon. Nations are 'imagined communities', real in their fictiveness. They crystallise at a particular historical moment, through the mechanism of 'print-capitalism'. People in a particular social position, 'creole pioneers', are the privileged articulators and carriers of the new worldview. Once formulated in the Americas, this new worldview morphs and adapts to multiple new contexts. And it is a 'worldview' entailing not just the imagining of community but a reimagining of spatial and temporal relationships around the world, as abstract bearers of repeated forms of nation-ness. *Imagined Communities* is a 'grand' narrative of this historical process, suspended between these striking conceptual formulations.

Given the historical comparative nature of the original argument, it is striking that in this field of sociology Anderson's influence seems modest and piecemeal. An unsystematic survey helps illustrate my point.

Throughout his four volumes of *Sources of Social Power*, Michael Mann is more likely to mention brother Perry than Benedict, only citing a less known *New Left Review* article on democracy in the Philippines (Anderson 1988) in volume three (Mann 2012). In *The Dark Side of Democracy* (2005) he briefly connects the imagined communities concept to his own conception of 'ideological power'. The place where he most fully engages Anderson is in his chapter on 'the emergence of modern European nationalism' (Mann 1992), where he draws on Anderson's print-capitalism thesis to amend Gellner's argument about the role of industrialisation in the formation of nationalism, suggesting that an earlier florescence of 'discursive literacy' in the context of commercial-agrarian states was instead the crucial factor.

Indeed, the print-capitalism thesis seems to be the main thing that more historically oriented sociologists have picked up on from Anderson. Josep Llobera's *The God of Modernity* (1994) briefly mentions 'imagined communities' but pays more attention to 'print-capitalism' as a peculiar thesis about the uneven development of capitalism. More recently, in his historical overview of *States and Power* (2010) Richard Lachmann also touches on the 'print-capitalism' concept as crucial for the formation of modern citizenries. Apart from a footnote (2000: 188–9) where he takes issue with Anderson's notion of the reason why people are willing to die for the nation, which clashes with his own more rational choice perspective, Michael Hechter also mostly invokes ideas of communication and print capitalism in connection to Anderson in his *Containing Nationalism*. This prominence of print-capitalism is perhaps not surprising, given that among Anderson's set of 'touchstones', this is the one that is most like a causal mechanism, designed to explain historical change. I

think the general narrative of replication and spread from a European or Euro-American core is so widely accepted that is not likely to be attributed specifically to Anderson.

A few other historically oriented sociologists are also notable for their sparse reference to Anderson's ideas. Siniša Malešević mentions several key ideas from *Imagined Communities* in passing in *Nation-States and Nationalisms* (2013), but not to deploy them in any systematic way. In three major books (1992, 1996, 2004) Rogers Brubaker never seems to discuss Anderson or *Imagined Communities*. Liah Greenfeld, in a footnote in the Introduction to *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992: 496–7), castigates Anderson as offering an example of a 'materialist' approach, to which her highly idealist reading of Max Weber is theoretically opposed.

So, it is not possible to say that Anderson generated an influential paradigm for describing and analysing the historical emergence of nationalism. At most it seems appropriate to say that one of his key concepts, print-capitalism, has been broadly taken up as nicely encoding an important and consequential material and cultural development, bearing on the emergence of nationalism.

### Surveys of major works

Obviously, there is something paradoxical about taking books that survey the field as evidence of the influence of *Imagined Communities*, because its presence in such books supposedly acknowledges its influence, rather than being instances of the same. There is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy at this point. At any rate, many of the most extended treatments of Anderson's ideas are found in such books. Again, a few examples from sociologists help illustrate.

The very idea of nations as 'imagined communities' provides an obvious point of departure for Craig Calhoun's 'discursive' conception of nationalism, presented in *Nationalism* (1997). Here, in ways I am not sure he would have welcomed, Anderson tends to get aligned with Foucault, in a conception of nationalism as discursive form of thought and practice. This form has a specific history but is rather detached from a notion of a general causal relationship between the material and the ideational, which I think was basic to Anderson's rather flexible relationship with Marx. This is one of the interesting points about Anderson, the way *Imagined Communities* blithely stood on a cusp between modernist and postmodernist ways of thinking. In the last chapter Calhoun turns to Anderson's ideas of creole pioneers and the modular spread of nationalism, but again with the accent on nationalism as a discursive form, which leads into Partha Chatterjee's (1996) well-known critique of this part of Anderson's thesis.

David McCrone's *The Sociology of Nationalism* (1998) raises Anderson's concept of imagined communities at the outset as a good starting definition, and especially to contrast it, as Anderson did himself, with Gellner's rather more instrumentalist sounding 'invention' of nations. He also finds Anderson's

thoughts on the construction of space and time in the chapter on 'census, map and museum', added to the second edition, helpful for grappling with arguments about the invention of the nation. In chapter six he emphasises the way Anderson's creole pioneers hypothesis and notion of nationalism as a uniquely modular political form provided a corrective alternative to the dominant neo-Marxist world systems theories in which nationalism was largely epiphenomenal to the dynamics of evolving global capitalism and its divisions of labour. Throughout this book Anderson's ideas provide counter arguments to those who would minimise the importance of nationalism, because they see it more as an effect of other more fundamental causes. However imagined, Anderson's nations, and world of nations, are causal processes in their own right, which cannot be easily reduced to others.

Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman's *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (2002) provides an overview of Anderson's ideas (pp 37–40) and draws especially on him in their discussion of the role of culture in politics. True to their title, however, they express reservations about Anderson's admitted sympathies for nationalism and suggest that an analysis of nationalism must also be a critique of nationalism. For my own part, where I can speak more reflectively, when I wrote *Rethinking Nationalism* (Hearn 2006) I was aware that Anderson could not be ignored in this context, even though he does not figure prominently in my other work on nationalism. There I emphasised the fact that Anderson seems to deploy a very complex notion of culture, not the usual bundle of symbols and meaning attached to particular societies, but something more like a worldview, which has both highly particularistic and highly general manifestations. But I think of Anderson more as a provocative foil for reflections on nationalism, than as a progenitor of a theory, or a concise concept of the nation.

### Theory building

What about Anderson's impact on more general social theory building in relation to nationalism? Anthony Giddens' *The Nation-State and Violence* (1985) was perhaps too early to be affected by the first 1983 edition of *Imagined Communities*, of which it did not take any notice. But it is worth noting that modern modes of communication were quite central to Giddens' conception of the administrative power of the nation-state. This suggests to me that reconsiderations of the role of communication in nation building were generally 'in the air' at that time, but also that Giddens' rethinking of historical materialism, despite the profound difference of analytic style, was akin to Anderson's more humanistic, Walter Benjamin-influenced reconfiguration of Marxist ideas.

Paul James, though perhaps only a quasi-sociologist, is worth mentioning because in *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (1996) he uses Anderson's imagined communities concept as a point of departure for developing his own more heavily theorised notion of nations as a modern form of 'abstract community'. James is looking for an analysis of

nationalism, and of abstraction, that avoids idealist-materialist dualisms, in which the abstraction of the nation is nonetheless a very concrete process. For him Anderson's version of 'imagined' inadvertently leans towards idealism and subjectivity, despite the attention to material conditions such as print-capitalism. So James's work is partly an effort to correct that bias.

One of the most recent major theory building exercises in this area is Andreas Wimmer's *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (2013), a book with a remit much wider than just nations. Much like Rogers Brubaker's work, there is a call to question naturalised ethnic categories and redirect analytic attention onto processes of boundary making. For present purposes, it is interesting to note that the term 'imagined communities' is mentioned three times in a long book, but only the first time in connection with Anderson. Thereafter, it occurs as a commonly recognised term of art. Perhaps this is the tail end of influence.

To conclude, we should remember that influence itself is an historical process, with a logic and an arc. Reviewing various texts, I am struck by the way that when it first came out, and still in the revised 1991 edition with the additional chapters, *Imagined Communities* was providing a fresh counterpoint and alternative to more orthodox Marxian and liberal conceptions of nationalism, as either false consciousness or ethnic regression. It is now more like a grand old *Coupe de Ville*, standing alone in a field, admired for its beautiful design, and routinely raided for its parts, its disruption of earlier orthodoxies slowly fading from memory.

### **Joep Leerssen, Community and imagination: Anderson and literary studies**

Benedict Anderson's impact on literary and cultural study is, for better or for worse, largely rubricated under the notion of the Imagined Community: singling out one short book in a rich and varied oeuvre, and, even more reductively, its formulaic title. Those two words were like a small pebble that helped set a theoretical avalanche in motion. To understand why this should be so, it is useful to recall the state of literary studies around 1983, after two decades of sustained, anti-historicist and anti-essentialist revisionism.

For much of the 20th century, literary studies had either been in the Leavisite mode of ethical-cum-aesthetic appreciation (with a left-wing outlier in the tradition of the Frankfurt School) or else stuck in a positivistic, factualist groove inventorising the biobibliographical details of writers and their works. In both cases, the 'meaning' of literature is dependent on its inherent axiological powers, its 'meaningfulness', which it was the task of critics and scholars to assay.

In the 1970s, the impact of hermeneutics and of Foucault-style anti-essentialism led to a vogue of radical critical relativism. The notion of the writer's 'work' was replaced by that of a disembodied praxis of 'writing'; 'meaning' became a subjective function of reader expectations and sociohistorical epistemes. Even Marxist critics became deconstructionists or Lacanians in their own way. There are still persistent traces of this interpretive subjectivism;



problematizations include Culler 1976, Newton 1986 and Eco 1992. In literary studies, 'critical' still means first and foremost the power to generate fresh, unexpected and original interpretations against the grain of prima-facie appearances. Meanwhile, in the historical sciences, the *Annales* school's focus on deep patterns and economic determinants also served to widen the gap between the study of culture and the historical method.

And then... along came Anderson. He was not alone. Edward Said's 1978 *Orientalism* had, if nothing else, placed the social and political-ideological function of cultural production back on the agenda, carefully balancing what culture means to present-day readers with what it had meant in the political context of origin and locating 'meaning' between cognitive understanding and social function. 'New historicists' followed his lead and, like Said, took recourse to Foucault (and to the mentality-historical tradition inspired by him). The social embedding of literary creation was, then, first and foremost, one of ideological criticism and in the event became closely linked to feminist and postcolonial thought. What Anderson (who himself had powerful postcolonial credentials) added to all this was, crucially, the social embedding of literature, not as a poetical creation or ideological expression, but as a material production and as a communicative praxis.

In this respect, and from hindsight, it is impossible not to read *Imagined Communities* in the light of earlier work on the public sphere and on public opinion, notably, of course, Habermas (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962) and, before him, Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887; *Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung*, 1922). Literary scholars immediately realised the title's ambivalence: To begin with, the community of the nation was not a sociological fact-of-life, or an ethnic 'given', but something that was brought into being by an act of imagination, something virtual, poetical or fictive as much as actual. The nation-state and its institutions as a product of the imagination rather than as its framework, not as *donnée* but as *construit*: that insight was grist to the mill of literary and cultural historians, who besides Anderson could also invoke that other important 1983 publication, Hobsbawm/Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*.

Moreover, what was imagined into being was not a society but a community (to unlock Tönnies's distinction underlying Anderson's title): a large-scale, modern, mediatised society seeing itself, through its imagination, as a cosy, traditional, face-to-face-bonded community. The role of print media, and not in the last place of print literature (the novel no less than the newspaper), was astutely observed by Anderson, and for literary studies this proved a powerful stimulus. Around the same time critics were beginning to see fiction as a poetical form of gossip (swapping interesting stories about absent third parties): Patricia Meyer Spack's *Gossip*, which came out in 1985, identified the praxis both as a communitarian bonding/exclusion mechanism and as a modality of literary fiction.

All these views Anderson helped clarify and crystallise; hence his immense inspiring value for literary studies (even if it be only in the form of that short-hand cipher, the 'IC' phrase). Like a conceptual enzyme, it allowed scholars to come to grips with the twofold nation-building powers of literature. For

one thing, the narrative genres (whether in the theatre, on the printed page or on screen) weave a web of stories and personal interest that can unify a far-flung diversity of readers into a reading community. At the same time, the freely creative sanctuary of narrative fiction, with its 'as if'-reality of stories drawing readers into a sympathetic suspension of disbelief, works as a conceptual nursery for the formulation and propagation of new, alternative ways of being in the world. Literature helps us to imagine other lives, different social relations – from Harriet Beecher Stowe to José Rizal; and it can mobilise passion as well.

The agency of literature in creating a reading community and feeding it original thought and prospects of different worlds proved a highly inspiring notion, which caught the wind in its sails from two quarters: post-Bourdieu cultural sociology and a new orientation towards the material book in literary studies. Cultural sociology came to scrutinise the position of intellectuals and cultural practices as agencies in their own right (rather than as the mere by-products of underlying circumstances), and this in turn allowed for a more transnational approach looking at the networks and communicative exchanges between intellectuals across the borders of their societal home base. The comparative (i.e. cross-border) preoccupation with transnationalism, cultural transfers and entangled histories was well established as a literary approach well before it inspired historians and historical sociologists, and their cross-fertilisation at present is a new force in literary studies. While the autonomously creative artist of Arnoldian or Leavisite vintage has lost credence, the writer as intellectual or as social agency is now back as a useful focus or lens of literary analysis, and while Anderson cannot take all the credit for that shift, his acknowledgement of the agency of literature in establishing the nation as an imagined community was an important contributing factor. Even to ask the question how Anderson's impact outside the English-speaking world was distributed is to apply a new comparatism, which he helped to facilitate. (For the record: *Die Erfindung der Nation* appeared in 1988, *L'imaginaire national* in 1996, and the translated titles bespeak tellingly different emphases, as does the time-lag between the two dates.)

Anderson saw the narrative, imaginary aspects of literature firmly within the material embedding of print culture, linking the novel to non-fictional or non-narrative print media like periodicals and newspapers. Paramount in his analysis is their power to establish readerships and to enfold them in the shared experience of sharing their reading material, of reading together (albeit virtually so). This focus, not on the mental contents of literature but on its material medium, coincided with the rise of periodicals history and book history as fields of research. Again, the investigation of books as a historical phenomenon dates back to other sources besides Anderson, namely Lucien Febvre (Febvre and Martin 2010 [1954]) and Roger Chartier (Chartier 1992; Chartier and Martin: 1983–86), but the function of the book market as a national bonding agent (witness William St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, 2004) was heralded by Anderson. In turn, book history has been a transformative influence in literary studies: the available corpus has been re-inventorised without

the *a priori* mortgage of literary canonicity (with its burden of implicit presuppositions and inherited value judgements), allowing for a more balanced inclusion of genres and markets hitherto neglected: almanacs, broadsheets, cook-books, devotional and juvenile literature, etcetera. In addition, an approach in literary studies known as the ‘new materialism’ is paying fresh attention to the interpenetration of textual production and material artefacts, e.g. souvenirs produced for the literary tourist market. All this may be summarised as a shift of attention to what Ann Rigney calls the ‘social life of texts’ and the ‘afterlives’ of authors and their works (Brillenbug Wurth and Rigney 2006; Rigney 2012).

In the final analysis, Benedict Anderson’s book called attention to how literature, both in its production and its diffusion, functions as a social bonding agent and how it not only reflects social realities but also creates conditions for their transformation. Nowadays, this seems almost commonsensical (although literary scholars, while acknowledging the principle as a matter of course, often struggle to accommodate it in their actual work). But Anderson intervened at a moment when the insight was needed, when literature was either seen as an autonomous, poetically self-enclosed mental pursuit (a hide-and-seek game between text and reader), or as a passive reflection of the conditions in which it was generated (a ‘mirror to society’ rather than an active part of it). Anderson’s vision helped to break through that bifurcated vision, situating literature squarely as a two-way conduit between the world of mental reflection and the world of social action. Unlike many theoretical interventions from its period, *Imagined Communities* has not yet been relegated to the status of ‘what used to be cool back then’; its insights have been supplemented, but not supplanted, by subsequent studies. Such a shelf-life puts a book into the league of Auerbach’s *Mimesis* or Ernst Robert Curtius’s *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* and gives *Imagined Communities* the status of a classic.

### **John Breuilley, *Imagined communities* and modern historians**

Historians are for the most part untheoretical creatures. They rarely use ‘their’ historical subject to support a theory or take a theory and ‘apply’ it to ‘their’ case. Here is a typical observation:

Over the years there have been many distinguished books on nation-making by theorists of nationalism and historians of political thought, and I have learnt much from them. But purely abstract analyses and a concentration on the ideas of intellectual elites can lead to the rich, messy and discordant – but scarcely unimportant – views of the vast majority of human beings in the past being glossed over or tidied into excessive uniformity and rationality. Colley 2003: 12.

The implication, common among historians is that ‘theory’ is abstract, uniform and rational while ‘history’ is rich, messy and discordant. ‘Theorists’ would dispute this view, arguing that without concepts like nation, nationalism and patriotism, landed, middle and working classes (all terms in Colley’s index)

one would be unable to 'see' such political sentiments and their social referents in the historical sources. Furthermore, without ideas as to how these concepts connect – 'theory' – it is difficult to see how the evidence organised under such concepts could be combined into accounts of the development of nationalism or a sense of national identity.

Early in the book is the following passage:

I am aware that in referring to Great Britain as a nation, I may bewilder, and even offend those who are accustomed to thinking of nations only as historic phenomena characterised by cultural and ethnic homogeneity. My reply would be that, if we confine our use of the term "nation" to such pure, organic growths, we will find precious few of them available in the world either to study or to live in. By contrast, if we accept Benedict Anderson's admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as "an imagined political community", and if we accept also that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties. [Colley 2003]

Colley emphasises the role of war in bringing Britons together as Protestants against Catholic enemies, adding a second 'theoretical' point about '... the territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other'.

I quote this text in some detail because it exemplifies various ways in which Anderson 'influences' modern historians.

First, Anderson, and especially that phrase 'imagined communities' belong to a group of ideas and associated authors cited by many historians, and which one can characterise as modernist and constructivist. Modernist is the argument that national identity, extending across a wide range of groups within a particular territory, has only developed fairly recently, in this case from the 18th century. Constructivist in that this development is seen not as arising from some deeper, long-enduring identity (even assuming such exists) but from specific situations in which 'Self' and 'Other' are mutually constituted.

Second, Anderson's phrase 'imagined communities' especially attracts historians. Partly, as Colley makes clear, the very looseness of the phrase is regarded as a virtue. However, this also means that the historian can take the phrase and use it in ways detached from Anderson's own argument. In the quotation above, Colley segues within a single sentence from 'imagined community' to 'invented nation'. I wish to show that this pattern of citation of 'imagined community' followed by a rapid move away from Anderson's own use of it is common in many texts, to consider why this is so and what this tells us about Anderson's 'impact' or 'influence'.

Let us begin with the citing of Anderson as one of a small group of writers presenting a modernist and constructivist argument about nationalism and/or national identity. Edward Arnold has published a book series entitled 'Inventing the Nation'.<sup>15</sup> Each volume has as its title the name of a specific nation: Germany, Italy, Russia, Ireland, China and a double title for India and Pakistan.

The short preface by Keith Robbins, the general editor, to each volume begins with three identical paragraphs that stress that nationalism is often seen positively or negatively, that it is necessary to trace how particular nations have come into existence, that the concept of 'invention' is one way of doing this but that such modernist concepts have been challenged, for example, by primordialist arguments. In short compass Robbins equates the history of nationalism with that of nation-formation and remains on the fence about different approaches. The final paragraphs make general points about the particular book in question.

So far we have not got beyond labels, and in this case 'inventing' is preferred to 'imagining'.

However, it is soon apparent that the dominant tendency is to assimilate inventing with imagining, constructing, forging, narrating and other such terms into a general modernist and constructivist position.

Thus, Tolz writes of Russian national identity as a modern construction from the 18th century, though one that largely fails due to the tension between Russian identity and Tsarist, later Soviet imperial identity. Tolz quotes Anderson's definition of the nation and then asserts:

Most scholars agree that such an idea of a nation first emerged in the late 18th century and swept across Europe as a result of the triple revolution: socio-economic (the advent of capitalism), military-administrative (universal military conscription and bureaucracy) and cultural-educational (publishing in the vernacular and mass secular education). [Tolz 2000:5–6].

So Anderson is placed in a broader, looser interpretative tradition.

In a similar way Doumanis 2000 starts by asserting that the Italian nation is a 'relatively recent invention', a 'subjective construct', and historians are breaking with the earlier practice of treating the nation as natural and long-enduring, a tradition associated with a nationalist approach to history.

Likewise, Comerford 2003 begins by questioning the idea of 'natural' nations and the futility of prescriptive approaches (e.g. whether Ulster Protestants are part of the Irish nation or a distinct nation). He suggests that Anderson's *title* (my emphasis) offers us an escape from these dead-ends '.. with its implication that the nation is a "construct" and not a "given"'. [1]. Within a page other modernists – Gellner, Hobsbawm, Kedourie – are cited.

Harrison does something similar:

Historians such as Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm have argued that the idea of the nation-state was a new ideology of government which emerged in Europe from about the 18<sup>th</sup> century. [Harrison 2001:1]

She refers to arguments that China is an ancient nation identified with a state or a civilisation but asserts the modernist position against such arguments.

... although China was, to use Anderson's term, an imagined community, that community was not coterminous with the state. [Harrison 2001:2]

Here is Berger on Germany:

From Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's *Invention of Tradition* collection to Benedict Anderson's hugely influential *Imagined Communities* and Homi Bhabas's *Nation and Narration*, those writing on national identity today are increasingly starting from the assumption that national identities are "inventions". [Berger 2004:3]

There is no suggestion that these historians were coordinating their texts or being guided by Robbins. Rather I suggest that what is happening here might be called a 'paradigm shift', although that term is perhaps too precise for historical writing as opposed to natural scientific research. Historians from the 1980s came to see the limits of national historiography tracing the nation back centuries. These general texts provide them with an alternative starting point.

One might object that this is a large conclusion to hang on to observations taken from a book series called 'Inventing the Nation', but one can find similar passages in numerous other texts on national identity and nationalism written since the late 1980s. For example, the book edited by Baycroft and Hewitson (2006) is concerned primarily with the validity of the distinction between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nations and nationalisms. Nevertheless, it begins by citing four modernist authors: Hobsbawm and myself as focusing on politics and ideology; Gellner and Anderson on culture and identity. One could accumulate many more such examples.

Anderson then is the most cited of a small group of texts taking a general modernist and constructivist approach towards nationalism. How influential have been his specific *arguments* on modern historians is another matter.

One must start by making some claims about what Anderson is and, equally important, is not arguing. His 'imagined community' is in the first instance a societal process, not an elite project. He uses the idea of print capitalism, in particular the impact of specific kinds of writing, such as newspapers and novels, to argue that these inadvertently generated new ways of envisioning social ties – as a series of parallel, 'horizontal' communities co-existing in 'empty' time and space.

Hardly any historian who cites Anderson takes this whole argument on board. Very often they quickly shift to one or both of two other related but distinct arguments. So far as 'nation formation' is concerned, they refer to a societal transformation associated with print capitalism but also with urban and industrial growth, mass conscription, popular electoral politics, the welfare state, etc.<sup>16</sup> Taken together these bind large numbers of people together, identifying nationally with or against the territorial state, which is one outcome of such transformation. This approach connects to a longer tradition of modernisation theory, which in relation to nationalism was elaborated above all by Karl Deutsch in *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1953) and in an historical text most influentially in Eugene Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1979). So far as the small group of early 1980 texts are concerned, it is Gellner who is the clearest exponent of such an argument.



Sometimes such work, both theoretical and empirical, shifts towards the idea of nation-formation as an elite project. One finds it in the 'nation-building' literature associated with US modernisation theory of the 1950s and 1960s. Weber sometimes presents the modernisation of France as the work of a republican elite.

However, a new emphasis in the key texts of the early 1980s is not on nation-building as a societal project but as 'invention'.<sup>17</sup> Many historians simply elide 'imagined communities' with 'invented nations'.<sup>18</sup> Print capitalism becomes just one medium through which such elite projects are pursued. Anderson himself permits of this reading when he writes of the 'pirating' of nationalist ideas and 'official nationalism' but it is not the argument he puts for the *origins* of nationalism.

Finally, many historians who cite Anderson quickly shift to arguments that directly *oppose* his own. Thus, Baycroft and Hewitson argue that the origins of nationalism are to be found in western Europe, while Anderson located this in the colonial territories of British North America and Spanish South America. Many historians describe the nation as an imagined community but find this in various pre-modern societies, claims that contradict Anderson's arguments about print-capitalism and new conceptions of space and time.

The historians who have engaged with Anderson in the most detailed way are those of colonial America, especially Spanish America, on which Anderson based his first case study chapter, arguing that 'creole nationalism' that led the independence movements was the original form that became a model for later forms, including European ones. However, this engagement usually concludes by rejecting Anderson's account. The alternative views vary widely. Lomnitz projects a form of creole nationalism back to the 16th century, stressing the different stages it then went through. Van Young argues strongly against any significant national(ist) sentiment or even imagination at popular level until after independence. In an essay co-authored with Doyle, an historian of North America, the argument is developed that the oppositional movements against both Spanish and British rule were not nationalist in any meaningful sense (Doyle and Van Young 2013, Lomnitz 2001, Van Young 2006). They also take issue with the mechanisms Anderson invoked – namely print capitalism and the 'administrative pilgrimages' that supposedly excluded elite creoles from the metropolitan centre while tying them into colonial administrative units.<sup>19</sup>

This concern with particular ways in which nationalism has been shaped takes us to the final and perhaps most significant way in which Anderson has influenced historians of nation-formation and nationalism. That resides in his capacity to develop a series of striking and original ideas that work more as images or metaphors than as concepts or arguments. Thus, the 1991 second edition contained two new chapters. The one on memory and forgetting has not had a distinctive impact as it draws on Ernest Renan and was already being pursued by historians, above all in the influential French volumes edited by Pierre Nora. However, the chapter on museum, census and maps has stimulated and influenced detailed work on those subjects. John Sidel's

contribution to this symposium makes that clear for Southeast Asian studies. However, one can cite a good deal of work in modern European history.<sup>20</sup>

This is characteristic of how Anderson 'influences' historians and compares interestingly with Gellner. Gellner's work on nationalism was part of a broader theoretical concern about the nature of modernity. That in turn has stimulated the publication of monographs, articles and edited books considering Gellner's theories.<sup>21</sup> There is no equivalent literature on Anderson. In contrast to Gellner, Anderson works with images, historical cases and brilliant insights and arguments. Historians attracted to modernist and constructivist understanding of nationalism are drawn especially to Anderson's ways of developing that understanding, although often reading different meanings into them. Such uses of Anderson are then taken up by yet more historians. In this way his is the most influential of texts on nationalism for historians, though trying to pin down just what that 'influence' is is very difficult.

### **Elliott Green, *Imagined communities and nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial world***

As noted in Breuilly (2016)'s introduction, Anderson (1991)'s *Imagined Communities* (henceforth *IC*) is by far the most cited text in the study of nationalism. However, Anderson's work has arguably drawn very little critical reflection: to quote one historian of the colonial United States, 'rarely has a critical best-seller been so popular *and* so ignored at the same time' (emphasis in original) (White 2004: 50). In the rest of this essay I will summarise Anderson's argument and assess to what degree it has been helpful in understanding the emergence of nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial world.

Anderson's main thesis is easy to describe. The confluence of capitalism and new technologies of printing brought about 'print-capitalism' in early modern Europe (also referred to as 'print-language' and 'print-literacy' in the text), which allowed for widespread propagation of both novels and newspapers. These two media were particularly important in the way in which they allowed readers to conceive of other readers as moving simultaneously together through 'homogenous, empty time' as members of national 'imagined communities'. Anderson argues that print-capitalism allowed for the birth of national consciousness in three ways: (1) it created simple means of discourse and communication between members of a given 'language-field' thereby creating awareness of such fields as actual communities; (2) it standardised languages and thereby allowed future members of the language-field to identify with the past; and (3) it elevated certain languages to print form and not others, thereby prioritising certain language fields (Anderson 1991: 44–45).

Anderson suggests that the role of print-capitalism goes far in explaining the rise of nationalism in Europe but argues that the process was slightly different in the colonial world. More specifically, he places great importance on the role of 'creole pioneers' in the creation of national consciousness in colonial

North and South America, particularly via administrative pilgrimages undertaken by civil servants as well as print-capitalism. The initial impetus thus came from the fact that civil servants from the colonies could circulate within their own territories but were largely blocked from taking up positions outside their home territory and thus began to see themselves as distinct from both the coloniser as well as from other colonial territories. As important as this growing sense of national consciousness was among colonial functionaries, it 'had no decisive consequences... until the arrival of print-capitalism' allowed these units to be 'imagined as nations' (Anderson 1991: 61). Thus, the arrival of newspapers in the colonial world of the Americas 'created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers' via the same mechanisms found in Europe (Anderson 1991: 62).

Of course, the 'creole nationalism' that Anderson identifies in the 18th century Americas requires some updating if it is to explain the emergence of nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial world of the 20th century. He updates his story in two ways. First, instead of administrative pilgrimages, it is educational pilgrimages that were able to bring the colonial youth together but also block their progress beyond their home territories. Second, 'advances in communications technology, especially radio and television, give print allies unavailable a century ago. Multilingual broadcasting can conjure up the imagined community to illiterates and populations with different mother-tongues' (Anderson 1991: 135). Indeed, in an essay from 2001 Anderson emphasised 'the role of the electronic media, which for most people now exercise an even more powerful influence than print, the original mother of nationalism' (Anderson 2001: 42).

Having summarised Anderson's argument, I now examine the degree to which his work has had an influence on the study of nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial world. Remarkably, despite both *IC*'s high number of citations and the prominent place that colonialism takes in the book, it has received very little real critical attention in the study of nationalism across Africa, South Asia, East Asia and Latin America, other than to cite *IC* in passing as one of the key modernist texts on nationalism.<sup>22</sup> This lack of interest in *IC* sharply contrasts with the ongoing debate on Gellner's (Gellner 2006 [1983]) argument about the role of industrialisation in the formation of modern nations, despite the fact that Gellner's book has far fewer citations overall than *IC* (with 'only' 15,933).<sup>23</sup> The question thus remains why Anderson's work has found relatively little resonance in the study of nationalism in the post-colonial world. I consider two possible answers, which I detail below.

One possible reason is that Anderson's argument has much to say about the origins of nationalism in global terms but actually very little to say about the variation in the strength of national identity, especially in the developing world. Indeed, as Gupta 2007: 277 correctly points out, *IC* is much more concerned with the origins of nationalism rather than nationalism as a process, specifically the process by which national identity becomes more salient for the masses than other types of identity. This has meant that Anderson's argument is not particularly relevant when discussing both when and how

national identities become relevant for people in new post-colonial states and when and how these identities lead to conflict and war.

This distinction between the origins of nationalism and nationalism as a process may not be particularly important in understanding the development of national consciousness in the colonial United States, where adult male literacy levels were around seventy per cent in rural areas in the late 18th century, or higher than anywhere in Europe at the same time with the sole exception of Scotland (Grubb 1990: 458).<sup>24</sup> In sharp contrast, adult literacy levels were incredibly low in African colonies upon independence in the late 20th century, especially in former French colonies such as Niger (1.2 per cent in 1960), Mauritania (2.5 per cent in 1960) and Mali (4.5 per cent in 1960), but also in former British and Portuguese colonies like Sudan (4.4 per cent in 1956), Mozambique (6.5 per cent in 1975) and Tanzania (9.8 per cent in 1961). Nor was the situation radically better in Asia, where India and Pakistan had literacy rates of 17.3 per cent and eleven per cent respectively upon independence in 1947.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, there was very little potential for print capitalism to penetrate among the masses in these countries relative to its historical role in North America and Europe.<sup>26</sup>

While it is true that the electronic media, especially radio, has had noticeably greater penetration than the print media in colonial and post-colonial Africa and Asia, there is still little evidence that radio listening has helped the masses to imagine new nations. Part of the problem lies in the fact that both print and electronic media both before and after independence tended to be controlled by the government, which meant that many Africans in particular only listened to radio for music and would avoid news bulletins or current affairs programs, which they would instead get from international sources such as the BBC or Radio France Internationale (Ellis 1989: 326). Yet Anderson's thesis relies heavily upon the propagation of news, not music or entertainment, from locally produced radio stations or newspapers, such that listeners/readers imagine themselves as part of a single community. It is thus hard to see how listening to music on local radio stations or getting one's news from the BBC World Service could in any way produce a new national imagined community.

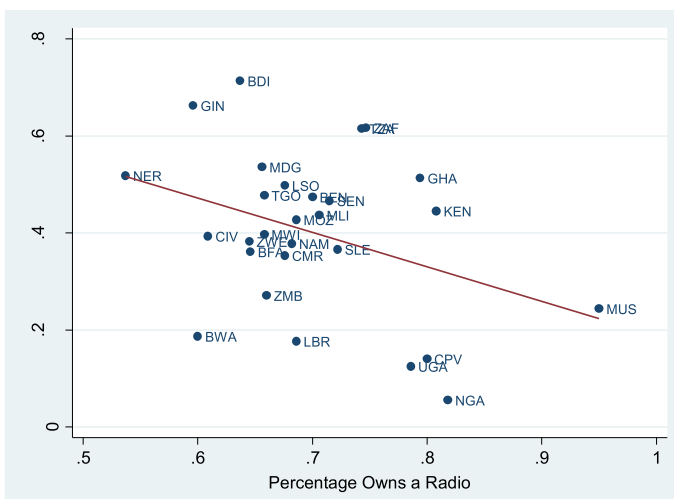
A second possible reason why *IC* has been discussed so little in the post-colonial world is simply that Anderson's theory does not adequately explain variation in national consciousness across Asia, Africa and Latin America. First of all, there is now increasing evidence of the existence of nations in the pre-colonial world, despite the lack of print-capitalism (Green 2010; Hastings 1997). Secondly, there is very little evidence that the administrative/educational pilgrimages upon which Anderson places so much emphasis have directly led to the rise of national identities (Cooper 2005: 53). Thirdly and perhaps most importantly for Anderson's theory, however, there is very little to suggest that either print or electronic media have helped the masses in the colonial or post-colonial world to imagine themselves as members of a national community.

One way to assess the veracity of Anderson's thesis is to use data from the Afrobarometer project, which has been conducting surveys across dozens of

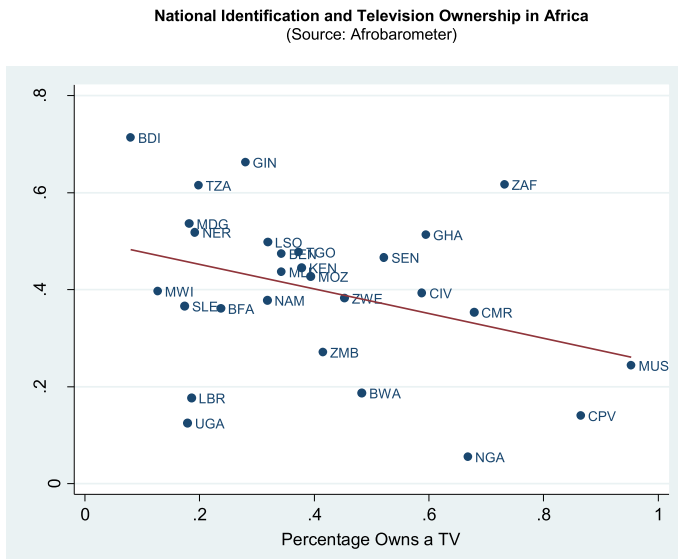
African countries since 1999. What makes the Afrobarometer useful for this purpose is that, for a number of years, it has asked African respondents the so-called ‘Moreno question’,<sup>27</sup> namely whether one identifies more with one’s ethnic group or one’s nation. The answer is coded from 1 (identification only with the ethnic group) to 3 (equal identification with the ethnic group and nation) and 5 (identification only with the nation). I use round 5 of Afrobarometer data, which is the most recent round with full data availability and which was collected between 2011 and 2013. The round yields data from 28 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>28</sup> which makes it the largest regular survey in the world asking respondents about their national identification.<sup>29</sup>

As noted, Anderson updates his focus on print-capitalism as the source of national consciousness to the contemporary role of the electronic media. As such it is suitable to examine the relationship between national identification and both radio and television ownership, as well as internet usage, with data from the Afrobarometer. In Figures 1–3 I plot the percentage of respondents who claim they only identify with the nation on the vertical axis against the percentage who owns radios or televisions or who claims to access the internet one or more times per month, on the horizontal axis. What is interesting is that, far from providing evidence for Anderson’s thesis, the data point to a *negative* relationship between media access and national identification and are actually statistically significant with the data on internet usage.<sup>30</sup> Thus, there is no evidence that access to the media has had any effect in promoting national identification; instead, evidence at the individual level broadly supports (Gellner 2006 [1983])’s emphasis on the role of industrialisation via

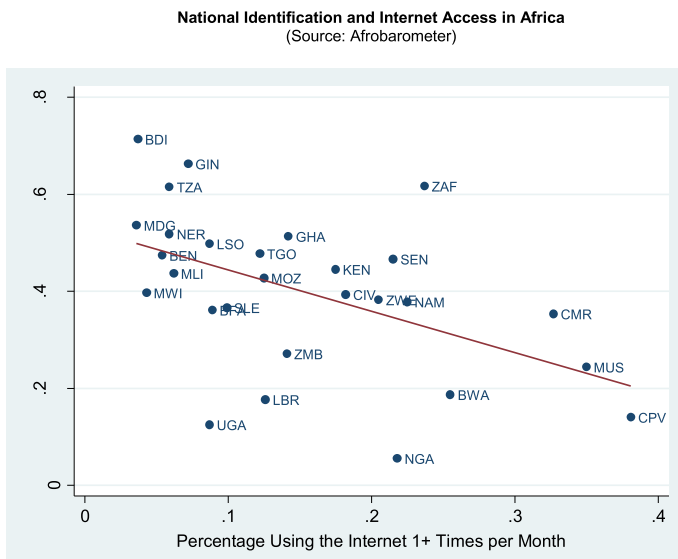
**National Identification and Radio Ownership in Africa**  
(Source: Afrobarometer)



**Figure 1.** National identification and radio ownership in Africa. (Source: Afrobarometer).



**Figure 2.** National identification and television ownership in Africa. (Source: Afrobarometer).



**Figure 3.** National identification and internet access in Africa. (Source: Afrobarometer).

such mechanisms as education, urbanisation, formal job creation and rising GDP/capita (Green 2013; Robinson 2014).

To conclude, in this essay I critically examined Anderson’s argument about the role of print-capitalism in the rise of nationalism, with the purpose of



explaining why his argument has not found a great deal of active support within the literature on nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial world. I argued that two reasons might potentially explain this lack of interest: first, that Anderson's focus is more on the origins of nationalism as an idea than on nationalism as an ongoing process, and second, that Anderson's thesis on the role of print-capitalism has very weak empirical support. Further research on this topic may, however, wish to critically examine in more detail Anderson's argument with a broader array of evidence.

### **John T. Sidel, *Axial twist: the impact of imagined communities on the study of nationalism in Southeast Asia***

Among friends and former students of Ben Anderson, his sudden death in December of last year gave rise to an outpouring of expressions of grief and loss, while also inspiring a range of reminiscences and reflections on the enormity of all that he had imparted over the years to us, to Southeast Asian Studies, and to others who had the good fortune to encounter him and his work. Ben's death marked the passing of an era of scholarship in which interdisciplinary erudition trumped methodological technique and the resources and recognition accorded to Area Studies still allowed for serious immersion and sustained engagement – linguistically, intellectually and politically – in countries like Indonesia or Thailand rather than today's short-term, air-conditioned sorties to Jakarta or Bangkok for 'data collection' and development industry consultancies. There is much, too much, to be mourned in his passing.

In the case of Southeast Asian Studies, moreover, it is very difficult to disentangle the impact of *Imagined Communities* from the broader legacy of Ben Anderson's writings, teaching and supervision of PhD students working on the region. His earlier work dates back to the mid-1960s, with a focus first on Indonesia and later on Thailand, but with enormous influence on the study of the entire region of Southeast Asia, at least after the publication of his landmark essay 'The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture' in 1972. Over the decades since the publication of *Imagined Communities* in 1983, moreover, Anderson made a wide range of contributions to the study of the region in ways that transcended his magnum opus, as seen most clearly in his work on the Philippines.

Nonetheless, if we focus on the arguments and analytical framework developed in *Imagined Communities*, it is possible to identify at least three major ways in which the book itself has profoundly shaped the study of nationalism in Southeast Asia. First of all, over the past three decades, *Imagined Communities* has provided the inspiration for a raft of studies that have demonstrated the essential role of late colonial-era state institutions in the making of nationalist consciousness and new nation-states across the breadth of the region, very much along the lines suggested in the book itself. While this kind of 'constructivist' understanding of the modern (state) origins of nationalist consciousness and nationhood

has been less than controversial in 'island'/'archipelagic'/'maritime' Southeast Asia (i.e. Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore), it has represented a major challenge to the deeply ingrained 'essentialist' understandings of ethnically defined nationalism in the mainland states of the region (i.e. Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam). Here, for example, Anderson's explicit argument that French colonial rule had begun to make a unified Indochinese nation imaginable by the middle of the 20th century has been explored and largely affirmed in a brilliant monograph by Christopher Goscha 1995, as has his related suggestion that it was French institutional, linguistic and religious policies that provided the basis for embryonic Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese alternative nationalisms, both by Goscha and by other scholars such as Penny Edwards 2007 and Søren Ivarsson 2008. More generally, the past few decades have also witnessed succeeding waves of revisionist revisiting of Vietnamese history, from the Lý Dynasty of the 11th century to the siege of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, challenging established nostrums about the historical origins, geographical extent and political autonomy of Vietnamese national identity and nationalist struggle, especially vis-à-vis influences and interventions from neighbouring China. Insofar as *Imagined Communities* was written in the shadow of the 'Third Indochina War' and its opening pages articulated Anderson's arguments about nationalism with specific reference to Vietnam and Cambodia, it is quite fitting that the book has had such a demonstrably powerful and productive impact on the study of these countries of mainland Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, alongside these largely independent explorations and extensions of the arguments developed in *Imagined Communities* by scholars working on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, there has been a parallel development of revisionist scholarship on Thailand in large measure inspired by the chapter on 'official nationalism' and later acknowledged and extended in the chapter on 'Census, Map, Museum' in the 1991 edition of the book. Anderson had already triggered an intellectual earthquake along these lines in his paradigm-shifting – if still unpublished – 1978 essay 'Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies' by undermining faith in the hitherto unchallenged narrative of a Thai nation preserved and promoted by the modernising and nation-building heroics of the Thai monarchy. But *Imagined Communities* helped to inspire and inform Thongchai Winichakul's brilliant *Siam Mapped: The History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (1994), which chronicled the transformations of conceptions of space, territorial control and identity accompanying the onset of European imperialist encroachments and entanglements with the Siamese monarchy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Subsequent studies have continued to explore the emergence, evolution and intensifying internal contradictions and tensions of royalist official nationalism in Thailand. Here, it is worth noting in particular the alternative account of Thai nationalism provided in Matthew Copeland's eye-opening (but still sadly unpublished) 1993 ANU Ph.D. thesis. Following Anderson, Copeland shows how the protagonists of the 1932 overthrow of the monarchy – rather than successive Chakri monarchs – served as the counterparts to other Southeast Asian

nationalist icons like Aung San, Ho Chi Minh and Soekarno, thus foreshadowing the irrepressibly republican challenges, which have begun to surface in Thailand since the turn of the 21st century.

Meanwhile, it must be noted that *Imagined Communities* has had a parallel impact on scholarship focused on the 'separatist', 'secessionist' or 'national liberation' struggles for other, at least partially imaginable but as yet still unrealised nation-states across the breadth of Southeast Asia. Here, following Anderson, scholars have shown how such struggles have emerged not out of pre-existing ethnic identities or other 'primordial' solidarities but rather out of specific administrative arrangements and educational institutions dating back to the late colonial and early post-independence periods. Thus, for example, the making of movements for 'Moro' independence in Muslim areas of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago and for 'Igorot' autonomy in the Cordillera mountains of northern Luzon has been traced back not only to the limitations of Spanish colonisation efforts but also to the peculiar state institutions and school systems that emerged in the American period in these areas of the Philippines, as well as the intrusions and abuses of the martial law period under Marcos in the 1970s and early-mid 1980s. Studies of the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or *GAM*) and the Free Papua Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or *OPM*) have likewise stressed the peculiarities of the historical processes and institutional arrangements through which these regions were integrated into the Netherlands East Indies and, after independence, Indonesia. But this body of scholarship has also followed Anderson in locating the limitations and internal tensions of these nationalist projects within the historical and institutional context of Dutch and later Indonesian state formation, as compared with the more impressive and eventually successful nationalist struggle against Indonesia's invasion and occupation and for national independence in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. At the same time, *Imagined Communities* has also served to stimulate and shape developments in scholarship on the seemingly more self-evidently ethnic nationalist forms of mobilisation mounted in Burma, as seen in Mandy Sadan's magisterial account of *Being and Becoming Kachin* (2013), with its focus on the impact of (indirect) colonial rule and Christian missionary schools on the making of new ethnic identities and aspirations for independence outside what the British once called 'Burma proper'.

Beyond all its success in linking ethnic and national identity formation across Southeast Asia to the legacies of modern, late colonial-era state formation, *Imagined Communities* has also left a second major footprint on scholarship on the region, through the attention it drew to the importance of print capitalism and print culture, newspapers and novels, and, beyond media and literature, *language*. The book inspired a diverse array of studies of the emergence of Southeast Asian newspapers and other new kinds of publications in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while informing a parallel efflorescence of scholarship on the transformations of authorship, audience and literature in various parts of the region during the same period. Among the most

noteworthy of such studies is the 1997 book *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* on the late colonial Netherlands East Indies by Anderson's close colleague and friend Jim Siegel and the more recent translations and treatments of the idiosyncratic interwar Vietnamese writer Vũ Trọng Phụng by Anderson's former student Peter Zinoman 2013. Here, it is also worth noting the broader scholarly interest in the educated intellectuals and schoolboy networks comprising the nationalist intelligentsias highlighted in *Imagined Communities* and the authors and publishers of the novels and newspapers identified by Anderson as both emblematic and productive of the rise of nationalist consciousness in the region in the late colonial era. Rudolf Mrázek's iconoclastic account of such 'late-colonial dandies' in his 2002 book *Engineers of Happy Land* is perhaps the most illuminating and enjoyable example of this genre.

But the attention paid to language in *Imagined Communities* was also one that combined with the theoretical influences of Derridean deconstructionism and various strains of post-structuralism to stimulate a number of extremely interesting explorations of what Danilyn Rutherford in her book *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua* (2012) memorably termed 'the frontiers of the lingua franca'. Alongside Rutherford, it has been another former student of Anderson and Siegel, Vince Rafael, who has pursued questions about language and identity most assiduously and interestingly over the years in his writings on the Philippines. From his first book *Contracting Colonialism* (1988) to his most recent *Motherless Tongues* (2016), Rafael has shown how the contradictions, tensions and limitations of translation across languages – Latin, Castilian Spanish, Tagalog and American English – have informed and inflected the history of the Philippines from the early Spanish colonial period up to the present. Following Siegel, Rutherford, Rafael and others have shown how the importance of language for nationalism flagged by Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (and already explored by him as early as the mid-1960s) requires close attention to the workings – and failures – of specific constellations of language, power and identity in discrete and diverse historical contexts across Southeast Asia.

Beyond the impact of its arguments about the importance of states, schools, print capitalism and language, moreover, *Imagined Communities* left a third, final and perhaps most important legacy to Southeast Asia Studies, one that a wider range of scholars – including Anderson himself – have belatedly begun to explore over the past decade and a half since the turn of the 21st century. *Imagined Communities*, it is worth emphasising, was notable not for the strength and significance it ascribed to nationalism in Southeast Asian history, but rather for the dramatic narrowing of the temporal, sociological and analytical claims on behalf of nations and nationalist consciousness in the study of the region. The implications were enormous: if Vietnamese history could only – and partially – be understood as really 'Vietnamese' since the early-mid 20th century, then what about the preceding millennium? If only the small, sheltered and rather dandyish Andersonian intelligentsias – schoolboys, authors of novels, readers of newspapers and the like – of the region were capable of imagining themselves as members of a Burmese, Filipino, Indonesian or

Vietnamese nation on the eve of independence, then how did anti-colonial struggles attract and enlist the millions of illiterate, unschooled, unwashed subaltern masses of Southeast Asia in the revolutions that forced decolonisation across the region in the 1940s and 1950s?

Against this backdrop, *Imagined Communities* has eventually stimulated a rich new body of scholarship that stresses – and celebrates – the strength and significance of diverse forms of what might be termed ‘cosmopolitanism’ across the breadth of Southeast Asia. Much as the book itself suggested, the region is still marked by the historical depth and geographical breadth of ‘classical’ forms of cultural, linguistic and religious cosmopolitanism, as reaffirmed in recent studies of the ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’ and the ‘Arabic Cosmopolis’ by Sheldon Pollock 2011 and Ronit Ricci, respectively, and further revealed in recent ethnographies of Pali-language Buddhist monastic school networks across mainland Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, a raft of studies by scholars like Michael Laffan 2013 and Eric Tagliacozzo 2013 have highlighted the extent and importance of linkages between Southeast Asia and centres of Islamic pilgrimage and learning in the Middle East, especially in the age of the ‘steamboat Hajj’, even as other scholars have traced the legacies of such linkages through the rise of the *Sarekat Islam* on Java in the 1910s, the Indonesian *Revolusi* of 1945–49, and beyond. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the emergence of a huge body of literature on the crucial role of immigrant merchants and diasporic networks – especially those of the Hadhrami Arabs and the Cantonese-, Hakka-, Hokkien- and Teochiu-speaking ‘Chinese’ – in the history of Southeast Asia, including the new forms of modern associational activity, cultural and linguistic production and political mobilisation, which had previously been confined to a narrowly ‘nationalist’ historiography. Meanwhile, studies of the emergence and evolution of major port cities of Southeast Asia from the mid-19th century up through the 1930s revealed the extent of both their interconnectedness with a broader archipelago of entrepôts across the Indian Ocean and their cosmopolitan composition and popular culture, as perhaps most evocatively rendered in Matthew Cohen’s account of the movement of Parsi theatre performances known as Komedi Stamboel from Bombay to Penang to Surabaya in the 1890s.

Beyond these forms of religious, linguistic and cultural cosmopolitanism, recent scholarship has begun to highlight the extent and importance of various ‘internationalisms’ for struggles previously subsumed within the narrowly nationalised teleologies of various Southeast Asian (official) national(ist) histories. The ‘Vietnamese Revolution’, for example, is now understood with interwar Paris, the Comintern and both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party in view. A similarly de-nationalised, transnationalised and internationalised picture of the Philippine Revolution has also come into view, in no small measure thanks to Anderson’s own research and writings on José Rizal and Isabelo de los Reyes, most notably his 2007 book *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*. These revisionist shifts in Vietnamese and Philippine historiography come decades after the end of the Cold War and more than forty years since the publication of Anderson’s

own path-breaking rewriting of the history of the Indonesian *Revolusi*. His first book, *Java in a Time of Revolution, Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (1972) showed how the *Revolusi* had been enabled and impelled less by elite nationalist leaders like Soekarno, Hatta and Sjahrir favouring *diplomasi* than by the youthful energies and emancipatory aspirations championed by the likes of dissident Communist leader Tan Malaka, the tireless advocate of *perjuangan* (struggle) who was condemned to imprisonment and execution by Republican leaders and then decades of demonisation in the (harshly anti-communist) Indonesian official historiography of the *Revolusi*.

Thus, through *Imagined Communities* Ben Anderson succeeded not only in helping scholars and students of Southeast Asia to see the making of nationalist consciousness and new nation-states across the region in new ways but also in helping them to see beyond the narrow confines of nationalism as well. For those of us who had the privilege and pleasure to join Ben in seminars, in the archives, at home, at play, or on the road, it was always a source of amazement (and at times amusement) that someone with such poor eyesight could have such finely developed analytical lenses with such immense and intense illuminative power. But he did. He lived with eyes wide open, eagerly absorbing so much of the world around him, even if he sometimes needed to squint at closely held documents to read them in the archives, or occasionally failed to notice a cherished colleague or student on the path, or, if deprived of his spectacles, might gleefully savour ‘the surf’ on a fully placid beach. He and his work opened up new vistas and new ways of seeing Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, which we should stop and squint at and scrutinise further as we mourn his passing and honour his legacy in the years ahead.

## Endnotes

1 For the details of Anderson’s life, see his autobiographical work (2016).

2 For their father’s life in China, see the memoir by Anderson’s younger brother Rory (better known as Perry) (1998).

3 Anderson argues that this region ‘emerged’ in 1943 as a political term used by western powers ‘with the creation of Louis Mountbatten’s South-East Asia Command’. The term was defined by the fact that a single power, Japan, controlled this territory. Subsequently, refinements of ‘area studies’ in this region, how it was studied, how well such studies were funded, can be linked to changing US strategic interests. Anderson 1998 [3–18] and 2016, especially chapter 3, ‘Interdisciplinary’.

4 The most cited (leaving aside textbooks) is Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (about 81,000). My thanks to Elliott Green for these details. By contrast Ernest Gellner’s book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983, 2nd ed., 2006), another landmark text in nationalism studies, had about 15,000 citations. See Green 2016.

5 Information from Verso, the publisher.

6 Research Excellence Framework: an evaluation and ranking of every university department in the country carried out roughly every five years that is used to determine the allocation of a major portion of public funding for research.

7 The first Portuguese translation of 1989 was published in Brazil, the second of 2005 in Lisbon. The 1992 pirated Korean translation was followed by an authorised translation of the 1991 edition in 2005.

8 Anderson refers to this cluster of publications as setting a new standard for understanding nationalism in the preface to the second edition of IC. For suggestions as to why this was so see



my chapter on modernism and historical writing in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, edited by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (forthcoming).

9 The key figure framing the debate in these terms was Anthony Smith who elaborated an intermediate position that has come to be known as ‘ethno-symbolism’.

10 A cynic might observe that modernism could apparently absolve one from the need to engage with complex history.

11 When I wrote an introduction to the second edition of Gellner’s book, I had a figure from the publisher, Wiley-Blackwell, of 160,000 sales of the first English edition, which is for the period 1983–2006. That is very large for an academic book but not in the same league as Anderson’s book.

12 These in turn are somewhat different. ‘Impact’, the fashionable subject of current research assessments, implies an immediate and direct relationship; ‘influence’ a slower and less direct one. But to my knowledge no one has sought to work out these distinctions carefully, and we cannot embark on that task in this symposium.

13 For such accounts see, for example, Smith 1998: 131–140, and Ozkirimli 2010, pp 105–113.

14 Quoted in Ozkirimli 2010, p. 107.

15 Talbot 2000, Tolz, Doumanis, Harrison, Comerford, Berger. Two other titles at least were announced – for the USA and France – but have not yet been published.

16 See Tolz, pp 5–6 with her reference to a ‘triple revolution’: socio-economic, military-administrative, cultural-educational.

17 Nation-building was generally seen positively, in contrast to ‘nationalism’, which had been defeated in 1945. The 1980s texts, including on ‘invention’, did not operate with this moral distinction but applied to ‘nationalism as a whole’.

18 The titles of translations of Anderson are revealing. The German *Die Erfindung der Nation* – the invention of the nation – is misleading on two counts, and there are better alternatives available such as *Die vorgestellte Gemeinschaft*. The French translation *La nation imaginaire* also uses nation instead of community, while ‘imaginaire’ means ‘imaginary’ with the implication ‘unreal’, the precise opposite of what Anderson meant with his word ‘imagined’. I leave it to someone else to research the accuracy of the 25 or so other translations of ‘imagined communities’!

19 This latter argument has been much more widely accepted for 20th century colonial nationalism where it was first and most strikingly asserted in general terms in Kedourie 1960 and 1970. Another critique of Anderson on his ‘own’ ground of Southeast Asia is Henley 2013 who admittedly subjects all the other general theories to a searching critique as well.

20 For a recent example see Hansen (2015) and the many further references he provides in his introduction.

21 See, for examples, Hall 1998, Hall and Jarvie 1996, Hall 2010 and Meadwell 2015.

22 The most prominent exception here is Chatterjee (1986).

23 See for instance (Cederman and Girardin 2007; Laitin 1998; Wimmer 1997), all of whom actively engage with Gellner’s work but not *IC*.

24 Literacy rates were undoubtedly lower in late colonial Spanish America than in North America but were not, however, radically lower than literacy rates back in Spain at the time.

25 All of this data come from the Cross-National Time Series Data Archive.

26 Anderson anticipates this criticism to some degree in the case of Vietnam, weakly arguing that ‘even if 10% of the Vietnamese-speaking population was literate by the late 1930s, this was a proportion unprecedented in the history of this people’ (Anderson 1991: 128). While this is certainly true, Anderson nonetheless never asks what sorts of collective imagining, if any, took place among the other 90% of the population, which had no access to print media at the time.

27 The question is named after the Spanish political scientist who pioneered its use in Catalonia and Scotland.

28 Other countries in North Africa were surveyed but were not asked about their ethnic vs. national identification.

29 The World Value Survey formerly asked respondents about national identity but stopped doing so after its fourth wave (1998–2000).

30 The relationship between internet usage and national identification is not, however, statistically robust at the individual level using a hierarchical model.

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