

Mon. Sept. 28, 2009

5 and 6 NATION AND NATIONALISM I, II

Read: Eriksen, 2002. Nationalism. In Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (2nd ed.). London: Pluto Press: 96-120
Simon Harrison, 1999. Identity as a scarce resource. *Social Anthropology* 7 (3), 239-251

- I. “Nation” as linked to a state is a NEW idea
 - A. The modern sense of the word is no older than the 18th century
 1. The word and related words have been around
 2. **DISCUSS:** other meanings?
 - a. What does “Indian nation,” “Cherokee Nation” suggest to you?
 - b. Can we say “American nation”? Why or why not?
 - c. “United Nations”, “Wealth of Nations”?
 - 1) Could the UN just as easily be “United Countries”? Or “United States”? (except that one’s taken)
 - B. “Nations” themselves are also new
 1. **DISCUSS:** “nation,” “state,” “country,” “nation-state”
 2. **DISCUSS:** provide examples of actual nation-states—states that contain only one nation, one “people”
 - a. There really aren’t many
 - b. Dominican Republic (unusual for Caribbean)
 - c. Japan almost qualifies (non-Japanese: Ainu, Koreans)
 - d. Some Gulf states (usually called emirates) contain only one “people”
 - C. How can we define “nation”?

1. One author, Eric Hobsbawm, says we can't characterize nation-states by providing an *a priori* (established beforehand), objective set of distinctions that allows us to distinguish a nation from other entities
 2. Each nation is the product of particular, localized, or regional historical conjunctures
 3. It's not like classifying birds or lizards, where you can work out *a priori* criteria
 4. The criteria themselves are fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous (language, ethnicity)
- D. Similarly, the vocabulary of nationalism today may mean very little
- E. So, no *a priori*, objective characterization is possible
1. Hobsbawm:
 - a. Defining a nation by its members' consciousness of belonging to it
 - b. Is tautological (a circular argument), and provides only an *a posteriori* (afterwards) guide to what a nation is
 2. But, Hobsbawm says that an initial working assumption might be:
 - a. Any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a "nation"
 3. **DISCUSS:**
 - a. Exceptions (apart from point above about non-homogeneity of citizens of most states)?
 - b. How is Ireland an exception?
 - c. Israel?
 - 1) Is Israel a "Jewish state"? If so, why?
 - 2) Is Israel a "Jewish nation"? If so, why?
 - 3) Can you think of other examples like Israel?

- 4) Gladney: if Tibet were a free state, there would be similarities in how that state and its citizens would be conceptualized—Tibetan—would be close to a nation-state

d. **DISCUSS:** Other examples you can think of?

II. History of the concept of nation

A. Root meaning of word: naissance, origin, descent (ancient French dictionary)

1. “*Nación*” was an aggregate of the inhabitants of a **territory**
2. Could be a province, a country, a kingdom
 - a. Was used when speaking of foreigners
3. *Patria, tierra*, usually “homeland” place, township, land where one is born
 - a. Territory of origin—*pays natal* (Old French)

B. Themes in the languages that used that word (in some form):

1. In German it meant foreigner (a loan word, contrasted with *volk*)
2. Territory of origin
3. Common descent group...ethnicity
4. Speaking the same language
5. We could consider Castile, in Spain to be one of the earliest European kingdoms approximating the “nation-state” idea—Castilian language

C. In the 19th century Europe nation and nationalism developed in stages:

1. Originally seen as something purely cultural, literary and folkloric, not political
2. Then a body of pioneers and militants promoting ‘the national idea’ and beginnings of political campaigning for this idea
3. Then nationalist programs start to acquire mass support

D. This process sometimes occurs

1. *Before* the creation of a national state: Ireland

2. Sometimes afterwards: “We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians”
 3. Sometimes never
 - a. **DISCUSS:** Third World examples of #3?
- E. The meaning changed over the 19th century to include notion of a political body
1. Common government
- III. Eighteenth century ideas about “the people”
- A. American and French revolutions: Ideas about “one nation” and one state
1. American colonists were distinguished from King George and his supporters neither by ethnicity nor language
 2. So, at that time, many of the modern meanings of “nation” simply didn’t hold (e.g., ethnicity, common language, religion, territory, common historical memories shared by those seeking to establish themselves as a separate state)
- B. Always present: the element of citizenship and mass participation
1. And *desire* to be a national state
- IV. In 19th century:
- A. The principle of nationality, whose primary meaning was political, developed: that a “people” should constitute a state (under some conditions)
- B. Eric Hobsbawm¹ discusses major arguments
1. Had to be viable (culturally, economically, size)
 2. During that century in Europe many arguments were made about size
 - a. “Ridiculous” that Belgium and Portugal be states
 - b. **DISCUSS:** examples of very small states today? Problems?

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, Introduction. Nation as Novelty. pp. 1-45 in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge, 1990.

3. After World War I, the “principle of nationality” appeared in peace treaties
 - a. Produced a Europe of 26 states (27 if we add Irish Free State)
 - b. None of these were then, nor are now, nation-states (i.e., a single “people”)
 - 1) A recent study of regionalist movements in W. Europe alone counts 42 of them

4. Notion of self-determination
 - a. Yes in independence movements (Latin America) during the century
 - b. Empire was still very much present in Europe
 - c. The notion of each “people” needing to be independent and sovereign was evolving during the late 19th and early 20th century

C. But how to establish criteria for “a people”?

1. French “people” did not all speak French, by any means
 - a. The requirement that they speak French became a characteristic of French state-building
 - b. Nor did all the British
 - c. **DISCUSS:** examples of language and language loyalty?

V. Ideology of state = nation = people continued to develop

A. Why this evolution from empires?

1. **DISCUSS:** examples of empires
 - a. British, French, Hapsburg, Ottoman
2. An optional reading for Wednesday’s (Sept. 30) class by Segal and Handler contends that this development is intricately tied to colonial activity in the rest of the world
3. It is clear that “nation” ideology closely linked to the development of modern states

4. A great deal of literature is concerned with this issue²
- B. Empires did not see the need for a single “people”
1. In fact, they exploited these differences: worked to increase divisions between subjects
 - a. For example, the idea of “ethnic soldiering”—bring in soldiers from a different ethnicity/country to reduce the likelihood of alliances between civilians and military
 - b. At times use soldiers belonging to an ethnic group that’s the traditional enemies of the population
- C. The idea emerged that strong states need citizens who think alike, share identity in various ways
1. Notion of right to rule conferred by divinity was losing legitimacy
 - a. All states claim a monopoly on use of legitimate force
 - b. But is very costly if force is the main way of maintaining rule
 2. Citizens of a state ideally would embrace one language, one heritage, one religion, etc.
 - a. Loyalties to other groups came to be seen to compete with loyalty to the nation-state
 - b. Familiar idea?
 - 1) **DISCUSS**: current examples?
 3. During the 19th century many subject populations made this “a people need to be sovereign” argument
 4. Newly recognized states’ legitimacy was based on concept of nation
 - a. Belgium, Serbia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria
 5. Liberal philosophy aided this evolution of the “principle of nationalism”

² See Benedict Anderson, 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, Verso. Ernest Gellner, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- a. We will be discussing the idea of “liberal” philosophy at various points in the course
 - b. Era of triumphant bourgeois liberalism, approx. 1830-1880
 - 1) **DISCUSS**
6. Changes in economic system also supported the shift
- a. Each territorially circumscribed state tended to pursue mercantilist policies as a unified whole
 - b. Extra-territorial, transnational units have played a larger role both prior to the nation-building period and currently
 - 1) Earlier: Hanseatic League in Northern Europe is an example³
 - 2) **DISCUSS**: international markets, international trade agreements, European Union?
 - a) Examples of controversies that you know about?
 - c. Note that empires were still very much present
 - 1) But they were colonial empires
 - 2) *If* we ignore the fact that various populations in Europe continued to feel they were under colonial rule

VI. As notion of nationalism grew

A. Nationalist movements gained in strength

1. National unification or expansion

a. Germany, Italy, Greeks

- 1) At the moment of Italy’s unification, 2½ % of the population spoke Italian

B. Hobsbawm points out that the concept of “nation” was manipulated

³ An alliance of trading guilds existing from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period (from the 13th to 17th centuries) that monopolized trade in the Baltic and some parts of the North Sea.

1. There was no historical precedent whatever for the formation of Yugoslavia
2. No one questioned existing states' multinationality—Britain, France, Spain
 - a. **DISCUSS:** what are the “nations” within these states?
 - b. What these minority people felt didn't matter very much
 - 1) And many individuals belonging to these groups did favor unification
 - c. Many felt they were better off—bigger is better
 - 1) How, it was asked, could the Slovenes possibly manage by themselves?
3. Evolutionary ideology very strong: these small groups, languages, were seen to be doomed as civilization progressed
 - a. **DISCUSS:** examples of “doomed” European languages you know about?
 - b. Evolution to larger units was seen as following natural law—inevitable
 - c. Society was to evolve from family and tribe to country
 - 1) Development of nations clearly seen to be a stage in this evolution
 - d. From the local to the regional, the national and eventually global
 - 1) Idea that at the next phase in human evolution, ethnic and national barriers will melt and dissolve
 - 2) Attempts to construct artificial world languages (e.g., Esperanto) are an example
 - e. Some of this philosophy was seen as applicable to the European empires' colonies' progress, some of it did not
3. Folklorization processes of cultures and languages
 - a. Campaigns to preserve the dialects

- b. A new idea that contradicted the notion that these variants should be eliminated, in order to foster national unity through a single standardized language
 - 1) Spaces opened up for thick Irish and Scottish accents on the stage...so long as safely reduced to appendages (Hobsbawm)
 - 2) Songs in Neapolitan became positively valorized
- b. Folk museums; anthropologists hired to recover oral traditions, etc.

VII. Conclusions

A. Role of liberal ideology?

1. Evolution and progress
2. The familiar slogans French Revolution: “liberty, equality, fraternity”
 - a. **DISCUSS:** how does the U.S. Declaration of Independence put it?
3. Conservatives and traditionalists were opposed
 - a. Tories loyal to the British Crown in colonial America are an example
4. But don't equate this meaning of “liberal” with its current meaning of progressive, on the left
 - a. For example, nationalists may want ethnic cleansing (very un-liberal)
 - 1) Despite being politically liberal in some ways
 - a) E.g., anticlerical (anti-religious)
 - (1) Against religious institutions having a great deal of power
 - b. Another example: nationalism and eugenic reasoning may go together
 - 1) Idea of strengthening the nation, and so may be against birth control, abortion

2) **DISCUSS:** any examples you know of?

B. Characteristics of nationalism⁴:

1. Is primarily a principle that holds that the political and national unit should be congruent
2. “Nation” is not primary nor an unchanging social entity...is historically grounded, the “nation-state” meaning emerged fairly recently
 - a. Although nationalist sentiment may contend that “a people” (a nation) have lived a long time in the same place
 - 1) **DISCUSS:** Examples?
 - b. Nations are not natural, God-given, etc.
 - 1) This is why nationalists are so interested in what historians are up to
 - 2) Example of anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou’s research on Greek Macedonians speaking a Balkan language⁵
 - 3) She was denounced by the Greek Parliament, and received death threats from Greek nationalists living in New York city
 - 4) Harrison discusses Greek feelings about use of the word “Macedonia”
3. Nationalism sometimes takes preexisting cultures and turns them into nations
 - a. Sometimes invents them
 - b. Often obliterates pre-existing cultures
 - c. **DISCUSS:** Examples from Eriksen?
 - d. **DISCUSS:** China and nationalism in Gladney

⁴ Hobsbawm agrees with Gellner (1983) in the list above that follows.

⁵ Karakasidou, Anastasia N., 1997. *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4. Nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms, but the other way around.
 5. Nationalism emerges only at a point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation
 - a. Particular stage of technological and economic development
 - b. Standard languages cannot emerge before printing, mass literacy and hence, mass schooling
- C. So, nations are dual phenomena
1. Constructed by political forces
 2. But any analysis must include John Stuart Mills's notion of desire (see Eriksen chapter)
 - a. The role of ordinary people's assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests in the process
 - b. By no means do nationalist activists always accurately represent these feelings
 - 1) **DISCUSS:** Examples you can think of?
 - 2) Chechnya: with the repression they suffered under the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia
 - 3) Who knows what non-activist people feel at present?
 - 4) It is difficult for a researcher to get at these feelings

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21A.226 Ethnic and National Identity
Fall 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.