

Theorys on what is nationalism sociology essay



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Nationalism is a concept that is not easily defined. There are numerous definitions and forms of what is nationalism, and many of these definitions even overlap. However, there is no one definition that is more adequate than another. Keeping in mind that these definitions are constantly evolving, with thorough analysis and the juxtaposition of arguments set out by eight prominent scholars, a clearer definition of nationalism can be attained.

To begin with, the most well know definition today is from Professor Anthony Smith. He states that nationalism is simply ' an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential " nation" (Anthony Smith, Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History, 2001, p. 9).

In this definition, Smith reveals what he believes the three main goals of nationalism are: autonomy, national unity, and national identity. Even Smith's profound definition has not been available for very long considering he was born in 1933. Although there is much argument on the definition of nationalism, Smith agrees that there is one main point of agreement and that is that the term nationalism is a modern phenomenon (Smith, Anthony 2001). Civic nationalism is basically defined as a group of people which have a certain loyalty to civic rights or laws and pledge to abide by these laws.

Ethnic nationalism is basically a group that possess a common culture, language, land, etc. It is more specific in terms of who can be in it (McGregor 2010). Smith (1991) writes that " every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized" (Smith, Anthony 2001).

Smith's most important argument features civic and ethnic types of nationalism as opposed to eastern and western types. . Even more specifically, Smith makes the distinction between both civic and ethnic nationalisms. He also believes that " Many modern nations are formed around pre-existing, and often pre-modern, ethnic cores" (Theories of Nationalism Smith). Smith is claiming that nations had pre-existing-origins prior to their ' new origins' of their new nation. One of the most popular arguments by critics is that the civic and ethnic viewpoint of nationalism collapses too much on the ethnic category. (<http://cps.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/35/5/554>). Smith's definition seems to be the foundation for nationalism. Other scholars go in to more detail on certain elements of the definition, but most relate back to Smith's original definition.

On the contrary to Anthony Smith's definition of nationalism pertaining to the civic and ethnic type, Hans Kohn has argued that the two main types of nationalism are eastern and western. His definition is, " Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state." (Hans Kohn, Nationalism, 1965) His argument includes both eastern and western types of nationalism which refer to eastern and western Europe. " Eastern nationalism conceived the nation as an organic community, united by culture, language and descent (McGregor 2010)." This could possibly be related to Smith's ethnic type of nationalism. " Western nationalism conceived the nation as a political and civic community, held together by voluntary adherence to democratic norms (McGregor 2010)." Again, western nationalism could be perceived as a civic type of nationalism. This can be recognized as two similar classifications on two unfamiliar

grounds. Kohn believes that nationalism relates directly with the eastern and western Europe and that it is also where the 'state of mind' of nationalism originated. The main criticism of Kohn's classification of nationalism is him being over simplistic. He certainly does not go into as much detail as Smith on the definition and relates only towards Europe which most likely is why he is being identified as over simplistic.

Carlton J. H. Hayes' definition of nationalism states, "Loyalty and attachment to the interior of the group (namely the nation and homeland) are the basis of nationalism." In this definition, a common cultural background and common cultural group are considered the main factors in forming a nation. That remains true with most of the definitions of nationalism. Hayes definition of nationalism seems to be more specific to the 'ethnic' ties toward nationalism. (<http://www.al-islam.org/islamandnationalism/5.htm>). Hayes is basically saying that land, language, and blood are the basis of nationalism. . He is saying that nation is something to be proud of. Hayes also believe that these 'ethnic' qualities are the most important; even religion does not compare. "It is attachment to nationality that gives direction to one's individual and social postures, not attachment to religion and ideology. A human being takes pride in his national achievements and feels dependent on its cultural heritage, not on the history of religion and his faith (<http://www.al-islam.org/islamandnationalism/5.htm>)." This quote further proves Hayes view on nationalism and how it relates to one's culture and past, and specifically not related to religion at all. The reason Hayes definition is unique from others, is his emphasis that religion is not a factor in forming a nation. To further specify Hayes definition on nationalism he says,

“ What distinguishes one human being from another are not their beliefs, but their birth-place, homeland, language and race. Those who are within the four walls of the homeland and nation, belong to it, and those who are outside it, are aliens. It is on the basis of these factors that the people have a feeling of sharing a single destiny and a common past.” ([http://www. al-islam. org/islamandnationalism/5. htm](http://www.al-islam.org/islamandnationalism/5.htm)). This quote goes hand in hand with Hayes’s definition of nationalism and just further explains it.

According to scholar Benedict Anderson nationalism is, “ a new emerging nation imagines itself to be antique.” This is similar to how Anthony Smith and Hayes defined nationalism. It is mostly like the Smith’s ethnic nationalism, which focuses more on the origin of the nation. Anderson focuses more on modern Nationalism and suggests that it forms its attachment through language, especially through literature. Of particular importance to Anderson’s theory is his stress on the role of printed literature. In Anderson’s mind, the development of nationalism is linked with printed literature and the growth of these printed works. People were able to read about nationalism in a common dialect and that caused nationalism to mature. (CITE). Anderson’s definition of nationalism and nation differ greatly from other scholars. He defines nation as “ an imagined political community.” He believes this because “ the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” Not only is Anderson’s theory distinctive because of the printed literature theory, but also the “ imagined political community.”

Peter Alter states, " Nationalism is a political force which has been more important in shaping the history of Europe and the world over the last two centuries than the ideas of freedom and parliamentary democracy or, let alone, of communism." His argument is similar to John Breuilly in the sense that there is a strong emphasis on nationalism being a " political force." Alter is saying that it has everything to do with being a political movement instead of the idea of freedom. In reference to nationalism, Alter states, " It can be associated with forces striving for political, social, economic and cultural emancipation, as well as with those whose goal oppression." His outlook on nationalism seems much broader than other scholars. This particular reference virtually sums up many scholars definitions together. Alter does not seem to have a specific argument on nationalism, as in civic vs. ethnic or western vs. eastern but just an acceptance that nationalism could be based on all of these arguments. Again, Alter says, " It can mean emancipation, and it can mean oppression... dangers as well as opportunities." There is no precise argument when he tries to define nationalism even though he does have the idea that nationalism is directly related to a political force. Alter also states that nationalism was important to shaping Europe, but most scholars agree with that statement to begin with.

Scholar Ernest Gellner states that, " nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". Gellner has been considered the " father of nationalism studies" and was a teacher of Anthony Smith. Although most scholars would agree that nationalism appeared after the French Revolution, Gellner further argues that nationalism became a " sociological necessity in the modern

world." His argument is similar to the uniqueness of Benedict Anderson's "printed literature" theory, but Gellner focuses more on the industrialization of work and cultural modernization to explain how nationalism expanded. Gellner believes that "states only exist where there is division of labour, therefore the state comes before nationalism ([http://www. people. fas. harvard. edu/~plam/irnotes07/Gellner1983. pdf](http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~plam/irnotes07/Gellner1983.pdf))." Like other scholars, Gellner believes that nationalism is a political force. There are many criticisms to Ernest Gellner's theory, including Anthony Smith saying, "It misreads the relationship between nationalism and industrialization (Smith 1998)."

Historian John Breuilly defends a more modern theory of nationalism. He concludes, "The rise of the modern state system provides the institutional context within which an ideology of nationalism is necessary." Breuilly argues that the process of "state modernization provides an important factor in understanding historical signs of nationalism ([http://www. cjsonline. ca/reviews/nationalism. html](http://www.cjsonline.ca/reviews/nationalism.html))." Breuilly argues that nationalism does not have much to do with ethnicity or ethnic background, rather more to do with political motivation. This is not the first scholar who believed that ethnic background had nothing to do with nationalism. In fact, Breuilly's definition relates well to Gellner in the sense that they both argue for political motivation. "Nationalists are seen to create their own ideology out of their own subjective sense of national culture." (John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1982). This particular quote is quite similar to Anderson's "imagined political community" theory. Breuilly does not support the ethnic side of nationalism nearly as much as

others and, like Benedict Anderson favors nationalism as just a political force. Breuilly criticizes most scholars due to the fact that they believe in national culture because he believes there is no such thing. He believes that the political component of nationalism is by far the most important.

Michael Hechter defines nationalism as a, " collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit (M. Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, 2000)." He further explains, " Nation and governance can be made congruent by enacting exclusive policies that limit full membership in the polity to individuals from one more favoured nations." In Hechter's book, *Containing Nationalism*, he expresses his belief that the reason nationalism occurs is because of " self-determination." Hechter explains how there are two different types of nationalism. The first one is sort of the ideology of freedom and he gives the example of the French Revolution. The second form is " xenophobic or even goes as far as genocide" (Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, 2000). This explains where the different views of nationalism come in; civic vs. ethnic or eastern vs. western. Most importantly, Hechter defines many specific forms of nationalism to go beyond his original definition. These definitions include: state-building nationalism, peripheral nationalism, irredentist nationalism, and unification nationalism. (Hechter, Michael. *Containing Nationalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Each scholar's definition seems to have its own uniqueness to it; from Anthony Smith's ethnic nationalism. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Political, cultural, ethnic, civic, eastern, western

Summary Vast diversity of aims and aspirations, including unification, separation, cultural/linguistic preservation, territorial expansion, protection of external co-nationals, overthrow of foreign domination, establishment of national homeland

Vast diversity of forms and styles, from aggressive and militaristic to peaceable and inward-looking

Nationalism is inherently particularistic, but at the same time constitutes an ideology of general application

People can not agree on the definition....