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Nation and decolonization

Toward a new anthropology of nationalism

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Abstract

The anthropology of nationalism following Anderson's Imagined Communities depicts nationalism as the culture of modernity, and punctuates time with emphasis on 1776, 1789 and (say some) a contemporary postmodern or millennial crisis. We argue instead that the era of nation-states begins in 1945, an era of formal horizontal symmetries and nations imagined as communities, dominated in fact by American power and its exigencies of 'self-determination', 'open doors' and multilateral trade. Scholarship that projects the nation-state back to the Enlightenment has occluded imperial history, just as depictions of American power as 'neo-imperial' depict it too vaguely, and fail to capture the dilemmas in political dialogics in many localities created by the exigencies of the United Nations era. We seek to relocate ethnographic and critical study of nationalism away from concern with impasses of 'the Enlightenment', 'the West', and 'modernity', in favor of attention to the Second World War as a watershed and decolonization as a beginning, not an end, exit from empires but also entry into a world newly ordered by American power.

Key Words

American power • decolonization • dialogics • Imagined Communities • nation-state

INTRODUCTION

Four things worth naming:

1. The anti-Enlightenment impasse

Partha Chatterjee (1986) made clear the implications of Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities (1991) for the peoples, and especially the intellectuals, of the postcolonial world: that even national liberation is a western-derived project. Anderson is wrong to
dismiss the issue of 'derivative discourses' as a 'bogey' (Anderson, 1998: 117). Following Anderson to identify the nation-state as the politics intrinsic to Europe’s Enlightenment, Chatterjee observes acidly that by this understanding, ‘Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery’ (Chatterjee, 1993: 5). Chatterjee doubts that ‘our imaginations must remain forever colonized’ (1993: 5), but the predicament, constituting a vast nemesis, is more clearly etched than any solution. Recently, David Scott has acutely restated the predicament when he observes that with the failures of socialism, both Soviet and non-aligned, and with the global resurgence of liberalism, ‘it is no longer so clear what “overcoming” western power actually means’ (1999: 14).

2 The lexical enigma
It is not only Chatterjee and Anderson who describe the ‘nation-state’ as the quintessential modern political form and relate its origins to the Enlightenment or even to earlier ‘modern’ developments in Europe. The same representations are made in most dictionary definitions of ‘nation-state’. But the lexical item ‘nation-state’ did not enter English language dictionaries until well after World War II, and the earliest use cited by the Oxford English Dictionary dates back only to 1918.

3 The forgotten project
Future historians of anthropology, observing the vast 1980s and 1990s literature on nations and nationalism in American anthropology, will consider among other things its roots in the history of American anthropology. Any competent future historian will note the intense interest in the US from World War II to the early 1960s in the ‘New Nations’ project and other studies of ‘modernization’ processes, new nations and new states. And any observant historian will find it striking how frequently the anthropologists of the 1980s and 1990s either explicitly abjured any intellectual relationship with these embarrassing ancestors, or else remained silent about them.

4 The IC efflorescence
In contrast, even the dullest among future historians of anthropology will not fail to notice that one book was almost without exception cited with emphasis and enthusiasm in the 1980s and 1990s as the central, crucial work in the study of the nation: Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities.

  We think these four things are tightly related. Anderson provided an extraordinary service to American anthropology in the 1980s. The standard line is to credit him with noting that nations are imagined, not real or natural, not given but made. But McKim Marriott had already declared, in 1963, that the “national culture” of every new state is a product of modern manufacture’ (1963: 56). The whole point of the ‘new nations’ project in the early 1960s was that the world was filling with newly invented nation-states. The explanation for the popularity, the extraordinary popularity of Anderson’s book, cannot lie simply in the theory of nations as imagined, however insightful his portrayal. We think that the service he rendered American anthropology was not merely to provide a new topic or theory, but also a new past. Anderson provided American anthropologists...
with a place to envision nations and nationalism that was entirely and deliberately within a Marxist genealogy, but only in the vaguest ways committed to a Marxist analysis in fact. This allowed American anthropologists to start afresh, unindebted to Cold War complicit local ancestors, instantly distant from American power itself. But in fact, a sad but extremely important fact, Imagined Communities and its legacy have reproduced precisely what was worst about the ‘new nations’ paradigm before it: an unexamined evolutionism, a vague sense of necessity and inevitability to nation-states and national community, and an unfortunate peripheralization of colonial political dynamics. It enabled a rerun of modernization theory. Now the anthropology of nationalism could use an alternative to Imagined Communities.

This essay is obviously going to be an attack on Anderson’s theory. But it will not be a polemical close reading (for which see Kelly, 1998) and its foundation will not be its criticism of particular arguments made by Anderson, but rather an alternative formulation of the political history that has led to the proliferation of the nation-state. We are also offering an alternative theoretical means for punctuating global time and addressing the shape of political history, one that is dialogical, not dialectical. And in the end we will return to reconsider the anti-Enlightenment impasse.

THE LEXICAL ENIGMA

When the 20th century began, the world did not consist of ‘nation-states’. In fact this location was not generally known. ‘Nation-state’ does not appear in the Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia of 1911, though ‘nationhood’ does. It does not appear in Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language in 1938, 1949 or even 1959, though ‘nationhood’ and ‘nationwide’ do. It does not appear in Oxford’s New English Dictionary on Historical Principles of 1888, nor the 1931 Oxford Universal Dictionary. At the beginning of the 20th century the world did not consist of nation-states, but instead was mostly made up of European empires. In that world, liberal and republican conceptions of popular sovereignty were well known, widely distributed, and controversial. Some republics had forced their way to independence from European empires. And liberal reforms had recast many governments in Europe itself into a more democratic order, with or without violent revolutions, and always without the abandonment of their remaining colonies. But other organizing ideas were less disputable. Especially among Europeans, their descendants and those they ruled, debates over the constitution of government were conducted in terms of Enlightenment social and political theories, with the virtues of all political possibilities measured against the realities and necessities of ‘civilization’. It was a world in which conceptions of civilization, race and progress established both the cultural logic of empires and the context for deliberation over the possibilities and limits of democracy and ‘home-rule’. We no longer live in that world.

Dictionaries have their limits as sources of cultural and political information. But in this case they have an interesting story to tell. The 1989 Oxford English Dictionary tracks the lexeme ‘nation-state’ back only to 1918 in J.A.R. Marriott’s treatise, European Commonwealth, published the year of the Versailles Treaty negotiations. But Marriott himself, by 1927, projected the existence of nation-states in England, France, and elsewhere in Europe back to the 15th and 16th centuries (1927: 11), and connected ‘nation-states’ to another key term: the ‘modern’ as in ‘the modern state’, part of Marriott’s 1927 title. Similarly, the next instance cited by the 1989 Oxford English Dictionary, Huxley and
Haddon’s *We Europeans* (1935: 11, 187), also connected the nation-state to Europe, the ‘modern’, and 16th-century origins. Two things are important here: the lateness of the coining of the term, and the quickness with which consensus emerges that it is connected to ‘modernity’ and has early modern roots.1

We are aware that the late arrival of a hyphenated noun into English-language dictionaries is not proof of the non-existence of nation-states in earlier periods. Discussion of the ‘national state’ as a type of state clearly preceded the 20th century, especially in Germany while Germany became one. But these ‘national states’ were far from the states of United Nations era ideology. The young Max Weber articulated the passion of the 19th-century European nations for self-assertion, competition, violence, and domination of each other, their plain advocacy of the interests of a home race in an agonistic world: ‘we believe that those nations which today fail to mobilize their economic future for national greatness do not in fact have a future’ (1989 [1897]: 219). Even by the late 19th century, despite Renan’s now famous dissent, the premise that nations were first of all races and races in a more or less Darwinian competition was close to universal (connecting theorists as diverse as Nietzsche, the bombastic Trenschke and the young Weber). There was no lexical standardization of ‘national state’ in English. According to Hont, there is no standardization of Nationalstaat ‘national state’ even in German until the unification in the second half of the 19th century; for example, Hegel’s expression in the *Philosophy of Right* translated by Knox and then by Nisbet as ‘nation state’ was “das Volk als Staat,” the “people qua state,” and not “nation-state” (Hont, 1995: 228n).

How late, exactly, did this ‘nation-state’ become self-conscious, insistent on its ‘modernity’ and insistent so routinely on its ‘early modern’ roots? The idea of ‘industry’ as complex, machine-driven manufacture, rather than ‘industry’ as individual, bodily exertion, did not arise until well into the 19th century. The idea of an ‘industrial revolution’ was constituted several decades after the alleged event (Triebe, 1981; see also Williams, 1976). But the nation-states alleged emergence, and its lexical routinization, are separated by centuries. This is not just some owl of Minerva flying at dusk. Nor is it merely some post festum, ‘after the feast’ analysis mistaking historical phenomena for universals (cf. Marx on the commodity, 1977: 168). This big blank glossed vaguely as ‘modern’, stretching from the 16th century to the mid 20th, is a motivated amnesia. It is a repression of imperial history.

**NATION AND PERIODIZATION**

In sum, the overwhelming tendency to suture ‘the nation’ to ‘the modern’ occludes imperial history and the significance of decolonization. Consider the connections between decolonization and the inception, both lexically and practically, of the nation-state as the paradigmatic political unit. It is not hard to date the point at which the nation-state was routinized in and for global politics. Before 1945, debates in Europe and America about future political alignments were varied and ideological. The Communist Internationals and others calling for revolution were rivaled by many other visions of ‘the new order’ and ‘the new world order’. Both the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations were major steps toward the realization of the actual future order of nation-states, mutual reliance of nations on states and states on nations. But even after this Europe-focused institutionalization, the principle of national self-determination was widely treated as flawed or limited, fatally abstract, and either temporary (as for
Lenin) or largely unworkable (as for Smuts). The political debates from the 1900s through the 1940s were as Utopian as were the debates about monarchy among philosophers and reformers in France, England, the Atlantic Colonies and elsewhere in the decades leading up to 1776 and 1789. And the final transition from Utopian and ideological imaginaries to institutional realities and necessities was just as clear. The watershed was the end of the Second World War, the inception of the world of the United Nations.

Since 1945, the local is framed by a different global: a global of formal horizontalities and symmetries (one nation-state one vote), and a civility based upon allegations about nature (human rights, needs, freedoms), not culture (or civilization). At issue here is not just the Cold War, but what kept the Cold War cold. War itself had been banished; at least, all legitimate war between nations or states. And once this world was fully routinized, its premises could be rediscovered as new theory. Scholarship on nations and nationalism could even conclude that at core nations were not, as young Weber had it, survivors in a predatory world, groups whose signature was quest for power, but rather, as Anderson concluded, communities, typified by quiescent comradeship, by horizontal symmetries both internal and external.

**DIALOGICAL PROCESSES AND GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS**

For many anthropologists, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides a highly useful global history within which to locate critical study of particular nations and nationalisms. Frequently, ethnographers committed to the irreducible significance of local forces have found Anderson's vocabulary flexible and apparently unconstraining: imagination, community, print capitalism, and a modular form of nation free for pirating. They do not always examine the aspiration Anderson shares with many others, both Marxist and non-Marxist (Fukuyama also comes to mind) to locate the nation as part of some sort of general stage of history. Dialectical accounts of nationalism can be connected to simple or complicated models of modes of production (such as Anderson's print capitalism) or to more intrinsically ideological stages, such as some sort of generalized modernity (an idea lately making a strong comeback, despite withering critiques, notably Tipp 1973, of earlier 'modernization' models). While it might strike some that any periodization of global history must involve some sort of dialectic, some general model of successive social necessities developing out of contradictions in prior stages or eras, we sense more shortcutting and wishful thinking than rigor in most allegations of inevitability, necessity and grandiose causality.

The dialectical tradition is, as we understand it, a scholarly quest for explanatory synthesis by capture of a background causal dynamic with a finite number of interdependent elements (e.g. Marx's forces and relations of production, or Hegel's subject and object). We support an anthropology more dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense. The term 'dialogue' is unfortunately dual and might connote concord too overwhelmingly for some. For Bakhtin and others, history as a dialogical process is an open series, with neither absolute priorities of level nor finite numbers of subjects and objects involved. In a dialogical account, even global history is a series of planned and lived responses to specific circumstances that were also irreducibly constituted by human subjects, creating not a single vast chain of 'the subject' changed by 'the object' and vice versa, but a dense, complex network of individual and collective subjects continually responsive to each
other. These constitutive, irreducibly subjective dialogics add enormous contingency and complexity to what dialectic there is between material realities and human societies. That there is a history of forces of production is obviously true. But even if there is a sense in which, as Marx argued, material conditions and transformations can be separated from ideological forms and described ‘with the precision of natural science’ (1978 [1859]: 5), we still find most felicitous Sahlins’ depiction of their actual dialectical relationship, i.e. as Sahlins puts it, that ‘the cultural design improvises dialectics on its relationship to nature’ (1972: 33).

Critics of dialogicality often argue that the emphasis of dialogical approaches upon subject-subject relations leads to neglect of asymmetries and objectifications of power. Our approach to the dialogics of power takes an important cue from Weber: the importance of routinization. Consider, for example, the routinization of economic exchanges. Of course markets in particular, as human-regulated inventions, never behave just as anyone pleases. But we think Weber identifies far more clearly than Marx the crucial institutional nexus in which societies have so consequently improvised on their relationships with productive forces and processes: coercive apparatuses, especially legal apparatuses that devise and enforce contract law (Weber, 1978: 317–19). This leads to a central irony in our project. Benedict Anderson, a political scientist, has encouraged a turn in scholarship on nationalism toward an ‘anthropological’ vision attending to narrative, imagination, and quotidian experiences. Many scholars have grasped this ‘anthropological’ imaginary as a vague dialectical supplement to materiality, which they see centered in means of production. In our view, the vague dialectic of culture and political economy can be replaced by a more specific tracking of dialogically wrought institutional transformations, precisely by not encapsulating representation in an ‘anthropological’ analysis (in Anderson’s sense). In our view, current theorists can and should reconnect representation to what Weber called ‘means of coercion’, and reconsider especially the constitutive powers and limits of law, and the dialogical processes by which regulations are regulated.

We are quite prepared to accept, in line, generally speaking, with Weber’s conclusion about the relations between law and economy, that a dynamic instability perdures when capital dominates processes of production. Markets in general, and markets in capital in particular, have great use for the calculability that comes with powerful legal regulation, not least to protect great and risk-laden investments. But nevertheless they have also an even greater use for schemes that lead to growth via exploitation, manipulation and other overcoming of legal limitations. Efforts to sustain the former against the endless pressure of the latter, Weber argued, favor a further legal improvisation, ‘the monopolization and regulation of all “legitimate” coercive power by one universalist coercive institution’ (1978: 337). Does this make the nation-state inevitable as capital markets advance? Weber argued that not even ‘the state’ was indispensable, but that this tendency led toward some form of it, and in any case that ‘an economic system, especially of the modern type, could certainly not exist without a legal order with very special features which could not develop except in the frame of a public legal order’ (1978: 336). To put it simply, what form of state? Nation-states? One World Government? Empires? A monopoly on law and order – enforced how? If the tendency is toward unitary coercive institutions, then there is nothing obvious about the breaking up of empires into nation-states. But then again there is much that is not obvious about the actual post World
War II routinization of the nation-state. And in sum, we think it is an emergence that can better be understood dialogically, as fundamentally connected to specific contingent conjunctures in the history of actual individual and collective subjects, rather than as some dialectical determination of inherent tendencies of capital. If it were determined, in any sense, by developing material forces, we would point toward forces of coercion, not forces of production. But we would still see it as, in crucial ways, improvised in its determination.

THE UNITED NATIONS SYNTHESIS

What made the idea of a United Nations, a globe of egalitarian, community nation-states, vitally important? What made deep, horizontal comradeship within and between nations into a necessity, a global moral absolute?

On 26 June 1945, Harry Truman made his first public appearance as President of the United States. Firebombs had already destroyed Berlin and Tokyo. Plans to use atomic weapons were in place. Truman was in San Francisco to sign the United Nations Charter.

They were there, he told the delegates, to keep the world at peace. 'And free from the fear of war', he declared emphatically, both hands chopping the air, palms inward, in rhythm with the words 'free', 'fear' and 'war'. (McCullough, 1992: 401)

Anderson projects back in time the United Nations model of the nation-state, including its premises of symmetry, horizontality and quiescence, precisely because of his dialectical method, trawling the centuries only for the discourse that fits his model. He homogenizes nationalists and all but ignores even the most mainstream criticisms of liberal proposals. In effect, for England he remembers the Liberals but not the Whigs or Tories. Surveying dialogically, we can spot vaguely emergent trends for which we supply the teleology, but also seek specific engagements and rejoinders. This essay cannot inquire into all the specific effects of the interactions of political movements within and across such complex agents as the British Empire, the Communist International, the Indian National Congress and the USA. But, for example, consider a summary of debate within and about the British Empire:

While British Liberal Radicals such as Hume and Wedderburn, who were in the forefront of the Congress cause, strongly believed that liberal political principles were universally applicable and ideally suited to India's situation in the 1880s, the leaders of the Liberal Party in Britain, including Gladstone and Ripon, were less enthusiastic... Conservatives and Unionists, who dominated political office in Britain around the turn of the century, tended to be thoroughly behind Salisbury in his opposition to any recognition of the electoral principle in the selection of legislative councils in India. The key to this dominant line of thinking was pithily expressed by Dufferin when he wrote: 'you cannot apply constitutional principles... to a conquered country [such as India], inasmuch as self-government and submission to a foreign Sovereign are incompatible'. (Moulton, 1991: 249)

The frame of 'a public, legal order', Weber told us, was necessary for a capitalist economy.
British conservatives articulated a clear, imperial vision of public legal order, as when Disraeli confronted Liberal opposition to mobilizing the army in 1878. He described an empire of ‘different races, with different religions, different laws, manners, customs’, some peoples conscious that empire provided them with ‘security for public freedom and self-government’, others bound by faith, blood, or material interest, millions of others ‘bound to us by military sway, and they bow to that sway because they know that they are indebted to it for order and justice’.

But, my Lords, all these communities agree in recognizing the commanding spirit of these Islands that has formed and fashioned in such a manner so great a portion of the globe. (House of Lords Hansard, 8 April 1878: 773–8)

Disraeli’s nation had a duty, he felt, to arm for war and to face the attendant expenses in order to maintain its national rights and the public order of its dominion. Disraeli’s empire was constituted of a wide variety of ‘communities’, complex in its multi-tiered hierarchy and types of political consciousness, but simple in its dependence for order and justice on the great, commanding spirit of a particular nation. The quiescent communities of empire were seen not as nations equal to that at its center, but as perpetually in debt to the ordering power of that Great Britain. In the empires, public order followed from the routinized asymmetry between colonizer and colonized, the perpetually war-ready great power of Europe and the indebted, quiescent communities they ruled.

A dialogical analysis does not lead, inevitably, to an epistemology of mere contingencies, ‘partial truths’ and limitless differences by perspective. Dialogical processes can still lead to definite results with truly global consequences, such as the invention of joint-stock companies, or the ending of the Raj or the nation-states of the United Nations. The empires with their great powers engendered wars between them, which, in time, became world wars. And the outcome of world wars was Harry Truman’s vision of peace in San Francisco and the historical synthesis that, we think, made vital the ‘nation-state’ itself. The aggressive, predatory, Social Darwinist ‘nations’ of the European 19th century had had their day. But the ‘communities’ that empires had worked so hard to render so quiescent would be expected to remain quiescent in Truman’s world, to accept the new formal symmetries, including their place on the map and at the UN table, as ‘nations’ imagined in a new framework.

**DECOLONIZATION AND AMERICAN POWER**

People and polities gradually and sometimes abruptly realigned to new global realities after World War II. Along with the UN, a constellation of intertwined, global institutions emerged quickly after the war, all both political and financial: the World Bank, planned originally in the US Treasury Department in 1944 in order to orchestrate reconstruction loans; the first GATT, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, an idea launched out of the US State Department’s Division of Commercial Policy in early 1943 (Freeland, 1972: 36); proposals for an International Trade Organization and an International Monetary Fund, both launched out of Anglo-American planning sessions of 1945. All these came to embody, in economic policy, the doctrine that the Americans...
were already calling ‘multilateralism’, the principle of general rather than binarily negotiated rules for international trade. The new global institutions were products of literal dialogue among official representatives of the powerful nations of the globe. But the locations of the most significant negotiations and inaugurations - Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, California, chartering a U.N. to be built in New York - suggest the degree to which the United States dominated. The Americans’ multilateralist transformation of the globe was not merely abstractly embodied in these institutions. The Americans had serious leverage over England’s economy after the war via large British war debts and even greater needs for reconstruction loans, and they used it to open wider the doors into the world’s most important protected economic network. Freeland summarizes:

Britain was not only one of the world’s largest international traders, but also the dominant member of the single most important commercial system in the world, the Commonwealth trading bloc (or sterling bloc). This was a network of commercial arrangements or ‘Imperial Preferences’ among the nations of the Commonwealth that enabled them to trade with each other on terms far more favorable than those available to other countries. Prior to the war the sterling bloc and North America had accounted for about one half of the world’s trade. Agreement between the U.S. and Britain could largely determine the future of international commercial practices. The elimination of Imperial Preference by the Commonwealth trading bloc was the single most important commercial objective of the American program for the implementation of multilateralism. (Freeland, 1972: 18)

To get their loans, the British agreed to major reforms of financial policy, especially a new obligation to make profits earned in pounds sterling anywhere in the Empire freely convertible into other currencies. American negotiations with the French, in 1945 a month after those with the British, also linked reconstruction loans to acceptance of multilateralism (Freeland, 1972: 48–9). The European empires faced many anti-colonial political movements, as well as depletion by the World War and this American pressure. It is no wonder, and no mere matter of social evolution, that things fell apart for the British and other European empires so quickly.

The United Nations idea quickened and oriented the anti-colonial movements at least as dramatically as discourses of liberal political economy had improved the case against slavery in Britain in the early 19th century. Perhaps each marked the emergence of a new hegemony, institutional changes purveying a new common sense serving the new dominant class and nation. But ‘hegemony’ stories can be as resistant to real specificity as any other dialecticism. We propose a more specific conclusion. It is time to configure decolonization as more than the end of something, postcoloniality as a space not merely outside something. Decolonization was also the superimposition of something, the reconfiguration of local civil hierarchies into the terms of a new, global plan for political order. And without forgetting that local elements will also intertwine irreducibly in the real constituting of any particular ex-colony nation-state, we want to underline that it was an American plan. It is no paradox to say that the United States, while a minor overseas colonizer, was the world’s leader at decolonizing.

Not everything here was new, and the American plan was certainly not an Adamic
monologue (in Bakhtinian terms), i.e. not a self-contained and self-adequate discourse but rather something organized by its responses to others. The United States sought from very early on to fashion itself as a republic in a world of empires, fearful of domination by outside powers, cognizant of the unstable precedent of the Roman republics and aggressive, even predatory, in its own new ways. Even from the days of the Monroe Doctrine, US leadership voiced skepticism of imperial entanglement, both for others and themselves, and favored innumerable military interventions in the Americas over empire building. Over time, the USA elaborated a clear alternative general plan, combining the sheer real estate acquisitions of ‘manifest destiny’ with a demand for ‘open doors’ everywhere else. The American preference for territories over colonies was well established before the ‘annexation’ of Hawaii in 1898. Even the apparent large-scale exception, the deliberate Republican Party venture into ‘salt water’ imperialism, claiming the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico after picking a fight with Spain, in fact showed clear marks of a particularly American strategy. The predatory military logic of these conquests is incompletely appreciated when treated as generic western imperialism. It is no accident that the United States, when it chose to take possession, went long on geostrategic island groups but never bothered with large, expensive, densely populated insular territories, such as China or even Mexico. In the decade before the acquisitions, Alfred Thayer Mahan vigorously argued for the necessity of expansion of American sea power, especially for a chain of coaling stations across the Pacific (which came to be especially Hawaii, Midway, Guam, Manila) and in the Caribbean, leading to the forthcoming canal. To protect its national right to global trade, Mahan advised the nation to develop its global reach, its power to keep the crucial sea lanes open, and to project military force against enemies. Direct rule over others, or economic exploitation of conquered and governed peoples, was never the crucial element. For example, the Americans, concerned about expense, began their withdrawal from actual governance of the Philippines in the 1930s, long before even the fall of the Raj. But questions of military bases and rights of access were, and still are, always central.

The post-1945 nation-states, then, are efficiencies of long-standing American strategies: self-determination, open doors, limited liabilities. The role of the United States in promoting and provoking decolonization has long been recognized by scholars of international relations (e.g. Louis, 1977), but no theory of nations and nationalism has yet addressed it. Even the most critical anti-American analyses, even the rhetoric of the Vietnam era (see also Anderson, 1991: 148), has tended toward accusations of imperialism and neo-colonialism, accusations less wrong than imprecise roughly as accurate, and illuminating, as it would be to explain the British Empire as kingdomism and neo-feudality.

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE NEW NATIONS PROJECT

To raise Vietnam is to remember the Cold War. The ramifying pressures and dramatic conflicts of the Cold War have distracted scholarship from the more basic features of the new arrangements worked out in the post-war world, arrangements (global GATTs, World Bank or IMF ‘bailouts,’ and so on) now re-emerging as if freshly sprung from the gods. The Cold War interrupted the American plan for the post-war world. On 9 October 1944, while Franklin Roosevelt expressed ‘extreme satisfaction’ with the results of the conference at Dumbarton Oaks drafting the United Nations charter, Winston
Churchill was in Moscow, secretly negotiating the division of the Balkans into Soviet and Anglo-American ‘spheres of influence’. Roosevelt reported to the American public that the plans established at the 1945 Yalta conference ‘spell the end of the system of unilateral action and exclusive alliances and spheres of influence and balances of power and all the other expedients which have been tried for centuries – and failed’ (quoted in Freeland, 1972: 43). It was not quite true, yet.

The 20th century could be described as the collapse of four imperial orders: the one engineered by the British, imagining themselves a new Rome (see Kaplan and Kelly, n.d.), the starkly racial projects of the Germans and of the Japanese and, finally, the Soviet system that imagined itself post-capitalist. Or better, the 20th century could be described as the collapse of these efforts to provide a unitary regulative authority for large segments of our planet and the success of a fifth order, audacious enough to force a plan upon the whole of it. Where the war itself destroyed the Japanese and German plans and the British were forced to abandon ‘imperial preferences’, the Soviets were less impressed and more resistant. The Soviets diagnosed the world economic situation differently from the British or Americans, deploying the kind of political economic analysis, vent theory, that held empires to be necessary to matured, collapsing capitalism. Defending their right to set independent and protective trade policies for their sphere, they argued during and after the war that the real objective of the Americans was to rely on free markets to hinder the industrialization of the rest of the world. Unlike the western European allies, who viewed the US as a lender requiring placation, the Soviets expected the US to wallow in a post-war crisis of overproduction.

Ultimately, for the Soviets things did not go well, but it was not until the 1980s that the Soviets and their allies accepted the virtues of the American planned multilateralism. For final snapshots of the difference between this American plan and all that had gone before it, let us remember not only the ‘Truman Doctrine’ and American anti-Soviet hysteria, but also Churchill’s vision of the Cold War in contrast to Truman’s. By 12 March 1947, Harry Truman officially replaced Roosevelt’s optimism about an end to spheres of influence and balances of power with what soon was named the Truman Doctrine:

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies on terror and oppression . . .

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. (McCullough, 1992: 548)

A year later he specifically identified ‘the Soviet Union and its agents’ as the force that had ‘destroyed independence and democratic character of a whole series of nations in
Eastern and Central Europe' (McCullough, 1992: 608). This Manichean vision treated
the emerging Cold War specifically not as a great power rivalry but as a struggle between
two types of nation, one free and the other under thrall. Even though the term 'totali-
tarian' became ubiquitous in descriptions of the Soviet political system, an umbrella to
smear it by connection to discredited Japanese and Nazi aggressions, the Truman Doc-
trine still asserted, in fact, the permanent existence in every nation of an actual major-
ity favoring the 'free institutions' of the American plan. The 'second way' was always the
work of foreign influences and, at most, an internal minority.

The Truman Doctrine startlingly naturalized the free nation, with its roster of insti-
tutions, both as what any nation would choose if choosing freely, and as what eastern
and central Europe had had before destructive forcible imposition by the Soviets. This
is the script against which Hobsbawm (1990) has emphasized the shallowness of the
actual history of nation-states in eastern and central Europe. But Truman did have a
sense that a new era was making real some new general rules. Where Disraeli raised the
stick to defend empire, Truman broke open the bank. As Truman himself famously put
it, 'We must be prepared to pay the price for peace, or assuredly we shall pay the price
of war'. And when it did come to war, a contrast between Truman's and Churchill's sense
of the issue is most illuminating. On 19 July 1950, Truman told the American public,
on television, of its duty to respond to an 'act of raw aggression'. The North Koreans
had violated the UN charter, and though the US would make the principal effort to save
the invaded nation, the Republic of South Korea, they would fight under a UN
command and flag. And this, he said, was a 'landmark in mankind's search for a rule of
law among nations' (McCullough, 1992: 792). Perhaps not quite for everyone.

Churchill, the man who had brokered spheres of influence with Stalin, parsed the sides
and issues somewhat differently. In January 1952, Churchill apologized for loathing
Truman's leadership in 1945. 'I misjudged you badly. Since that time, you more than
any other man, have saved Western civilization' (McCullough, 1992: 875). In fact, some-
thing important was happening, more generally, to the very concept of civilization, the
great colonial alibi, in the new world order. It was pluralizing into civilizations – thus
Churchill could speak of a specifically western civilization. But it was also becoming a
thing of the past, assimilating with the concept of tradition, against a conception of a
modern, universal present in which everyone, equally, was or wanted to be free.

The Truman Doctrine provided cogent reasons for projecting the nation-state as both
natural and desirable, the natural choice of every people modern and free, past, present
and future. Even before actual decolonization was earnestly under way, the new
Manichean story rivaled the critique of colonial domination itself. The Cold War drama
rivaled decolonization, and with the aid of scholars, especially in the United States,
buried it in stories of tradition versus modernity, in studies of the needs, dangers and
dramas of modernization and development (see also Pletsch, 1981). In anthropology in
particular, even Columbia University materialists, scholars most sensitive to the long,
complex history of European capitalist imperialism, could launch conceptions such as
'deculturation', projecting a vast binary break between a more particularistic, culturally
insular past and a more conscious, disillusioned present. Meanwhile, among self-
proclaimed 'idealists' led by Robert Redfield, the capitalist empires faded from view
altogether, sunk with barely a ripple into the folk-urban continuum, and areas came to
be known by their great and little traditions and degree and potential for modernizing,
a vision dominated explicitly by the tradition–modernity binary. Civilizations, recast as traditions, however great, became the heritage of the past, and capitalist colonial institutions were doubly disguised: if there were chains to be cast off, these traditions were the ultimates, especially after formal decolonization in fact, and the very richness of great traditional heritage in the face of iron cages of modern practical reason enabled new forms of doubt, irony, and regret about all liberations.

The New Nations Project led by Fallers, Geertz and others, clearly the high point of the anthropology of nations and nationalism before Anderson, was not without its insights. But the most influential scholarship of the project embedded the nation in the modernization narrative, especially Geertz’s essay on ‘The Integrative Revolution’, wherein race, the pre-eminent principle of colonial capitalist divisions of labor, re-emerged as a primordialist value of tradition-minded others, in a list with blood, language, locality, religion and tradition. Geertz called them ‘the gross actualities’ that, to a great extent in the new states, ‘their peoples’ sense of self remains bound up in’ (1973: 258). Geertz’s analysis was as unclear on the way a specifically imperial past had bound those peoples’ ‘sense of self’ to a legally and economically rendered gross actuality of race as it was on the specifics of an American plan for a global legal structure that Geertz simply considered ‘modernity’. The point is not merely that the New Nations Project was intertwined in Cold War assumptions about freedom and unfreedom, good and evil, and that this aspect of it embarrasses post-1960s anthropologists and explains our reluctance to examine our connections to it. The more important point is that during the Cold War period American anthropologists elaborated a distinction between tradition and modernity; to the point that the actual dynamics of decolonization were occluded by alleged necessities of modernization, these anthropologists were active participants in the routinization of the nation-state itself.

GETTING OUT OF THE ANTI-ENLIGHTENMENT IMPASSE, OR, TOWARD A NEW ANTHROPOLOGY OF NATIONALISM

At least since Hymes (1969) and Asad (1973), anthropologists have tried in good faith to reconsider critically the connection of their work to colonialism and imperialism. Our suggestion, to put it in simplest terms, is something Bernard Cohn has long been advocating: the need to situate both our anthropology and the dynamics of the postcolonial world in relation to 20th-century American power.

The overwhelming tendency of critical scholarship has been to combine critique of American power and that of the European empires in categories of ‘the West’ and ‘the modern’. In this Benedict Anderson is hardly alone. (In Orientalism, for example, Edward Said portrays Americans as mere neophytes following in European footsteps, declares the ‘parallels’ between European and American imperial projects ‘obvious’, and repeatedly depicts the United States as accidentally achieving power after World War II, ‘when the United States found itself in the position recently vacated by Britain and France’ [Said, 1994: 16, 295, 290].) Some real insights have followed for the study of ‘nations’ instead of punctuating time at 1776, 1789 and 2000 by highlighting their Enlightenment emergence and then a crisis of the late 20th century, whether assessed in terms of ‘postmodernity’, ‘late capitalism’ or ‘globalization’. However, as theorists as diverse as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Max Weber (1949) have emphasized, the reality of scholarly practice is that scholars commit to simplifying punctuations that both
limit and make possible their insights. Our argument is that the anti-Enlightenment
impasse is the product of the continuing commitment of scholars to an unnecessary and
occluding punctuation of global time. If we put more weight on 1945 than on either
‘the Enlightenment’ or alleged crises of the millennium, we get a very different, and we
think more enabling, view of global political forces.

David Scott acutely described the post-Cold War impasse in postcolonial studies,
where ‘it is no longer so clear what “overcoming” western power actually means’ (Scott,
1999: 14). We think that this is true especially when one punctuates time along the lines
of Anderson’s analysis of nationalism. Taking on nemeses like ‘the Enlightenment’,
‘western culture’ and ‘modernity’ can lead one to the mood of Anderson’s conclusion,
sadly contemplating the wreckage at the feet of Walter Benjamin’s angel of history. But
what if ‘American power’ no longer hides within ‘western power’? What if critical
scholarship seeks not the grandest nemesis but the dialogical history of much more par-
ticular, present political power, power still very much intact and alive? An American plan
instituted, in 1945, a network of global institutions that now thrive in a multi-centered
global linkage largely beyond the ken of its inventors. Its inventions have become lived
and contested realities. We argue that critical scholarship on the nation-state could focus
very productively on the era of decolonization and the United Nations, as the horizon
for many real, present departures and initiatives.

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tion to our forthcoming, 2001 book, Represented Communities, University of Chicago
Press.

Notes
1 Examples: Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language,
unabridged, 1961 (G. & C. Merriam Co.), and the 1950 Encyclopedia of World Politics
each briefly narrate the nation-state’s emergence in early modern Europe: ‘a form of
international political organization developing in the 16th century from earlier feudal
units . . . Absolutism paved the way for the modern nation-state marked by sover-
eignty and the repudiation of any superior authority’. Webster’s New World Diction-
ary, second college edition, 1974 (William Collins and World Publishing Co.),
defines ‘nation-state’ as ‘. . . the representative unit of political organization in modern
times’. And yet Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language,
Unabridged, second edition, 1968 (World Publishing Company), had no entry for
‘nation-state’!

2 ‘Nation-state’ and ‘industrial revolution’ are more comparable if, as we propose, the
nation-state begins to replace empire as the paradigmatic unit of global political
culture at Versailles. Then standardization of name follows reality, after all, by mere
decades. An intrinsic, necessary connection between nations and states is there in all
but name in Wilson’s 14th point, proclaiming the need for a League of Nations: ‘A
general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the
purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike' (quoted in Marriott, 1939: 174). The principle of self-determination, the basis of Wilson's program, was not merely a product of American ideology. It was proclaimed by Lenin before Wilson hitched his wagon to its star, though we do not know whether Wilson ever knew that. Lenin led the Communist International to support strongly ‘United Front’ strategic alliances of communists in colonies with emergent bourgeois nationalists against capitalist imperialist great powers. But Lenin saw national liberation as a stage in the ending of oppression on a road leading to the fusion of nations along with abolition of class (Lenin, 1970 [1916]). In contrast, General Smuts, a member of the commission that drafted the Covenant of the League of Nations, viewed ‘barbarian’ populations as unable to rule themselves, and developed for their government the concept of League ‘mandate’. Member states with proven records of success would govern them, no longer by annexation, but instead on the League’s behalf (Smuts, 1920 [1919]).

3 Anderson is not consistent in modeling the nation as a cultural universal, a type of culture, or a stage in global history. He claims to approach nationalism ‘in an anthropological spirit’, and he aligns it with categories such as kinship and religion (1983: 5) that are usually taken to be universal analytic domains. But rather than expecting complex alternative developments within his domain (in kinship, for example, variations in descent, residence, marriage, naming and so on), Anderson gives the nation one universal definition – the nation is a community imagined as limited and sovereign, with deep horizontal comradeship and so on. Then he emphasizes the modern culture of it (1983: 9). Looking at Anderson’s argument as a whole, especially his emphasis on the historic emergence of nations among New World creoles, the development of a European modular form and its global pirating, what predominates is the theme of a stage of history congruent with ‘modernity’.

4 On dialogical theory see also Kaplan and Kelly, 1994. Weber develops the concept of routinization especially in his discussion of how the charismatic authority of religious virtuosos is transformed over time. For us, reconsidering routinization in a dialogical framework, the charismatic break of an ossified structure, routinized into a new ossification, would be an extreme case and not an inevitable one for any period of history. As Kaplan has argued (1995: 208), where Weber saw routinization as the attenuation of charisma, we think it is more often the (retrospective) constitution of it; routinization being a more truly creative process wherein projects constituted dialogically and responsively, such as the American plan for a globe full of quiescent, open-doored republics, get made into obligatory institutional realities.

5 We have more to say than space allows about ‘race’ and ‘community’ as imperial organizing categories, especially in the British Empire, and about complex transformations and incongruities in decolonization as plural, hierarchical fields of multiple ‘races’ and ‘communities’ were constituted into new nation-states. A return to the dictionaries shows that while definitions of ‘nation’ before World War II sometimes connected nations to states, they invariably defined nations as ‘races’ and made the connection to race, not state, primary. Challenges to this linkage of nation and race were available at the time, notably Renan’s 1882 lecture rejecting race, language, and territory as bases for nationality. This argument eventually became famous. But the dictionaries changed only after that crescendo of failure of nations seeing
themselves as races destined to dominate empires, the global catastrophes following the German effort to found an Aryan Third Reich and the Japanese effort to build a Co-Prosperity Sphere with the Yamato race as nucleus. Benedict Anderson deserves credit for insisting upon annihilation of the shared descent definitions of nation, for insistence that the nation is first of all imagined, ideal, and realized in co-dependence with a state. Yet in this, we think, he is the theorist observing at dusk, theorizing the world-order of quiescent nation-states built decades before by the architects of a United Nations in the rubble of the Second World War – and theorizing them not as 20th-century contingencies but as a modern necessity. To Anderson, the disconnection of nation from race or descent group and its connection to the state was, ironically, not an historical development but something intrinsic to the nation. The fact of the Nazis notwithstanding, he found scholarship seeing any connection between nationalism and racism simply ‘basically mistaken’ (1983: 148).

For analyses of the constituting of this aggressive republic see Gustafson (1992), Onuf and Onuf (1993), and Pocock (1975). On its late 19th-century quest for strategic bases and market access, see LaFeber 1998 [1963], who styles the US as ‘an empire which differed fundamentally from the colonial holdings of the European powers’ (LaFeber, 1998: 408).

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