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**IMAGINED COMMUNITIES AND MODERN NATION  
BUILDING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANDERSON  
AND GELLNER'S THEORIES OF NATIONALISM**

*HAYALİ CEMAATLER VE MODERN ULUS İNŞASI:  
ANDERSON VE GELLNER'İN MİLLİYETÇİLİK TEORİLERİNİN  
KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ*

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**Anahtar sözcükler**

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**Öz**

Milliyetçilik, modern siyasi söylemdeki en güçlü ve tartışmalı ideolojilerden biri olmaya devam etmekte ve dünya çapında ulusların kimliklerini ve siyasi manzaralarını şekillendirmektedir. Bu makale, Benedict Anderson'ın "hayali cemaatler" kavramı ve Ernest Gellner'in modernist yaklaşımı olmak üzere iki temel milliyetçilik kuramının karşılaştırmalı bir analizini yaparak, bu kuramların ulusal kimlik oluşumunun anlaşılmasına katkılarına araştırmaktadır. Milliyetçilik üzerine yapılan kapsamlı çalışmalara rağmen, bu iki etkili teoriyi tek bir çerçevede sistematik olarak karşılaştırma konusunda bir boşluk devam etmektedir. Bu makale, Anderson'ın kültürel ve medya merkezli bakış açısını Gellner'in yapısal ve ekonomik perspektifiyle yan yana koyarak bu boşluğu doldurmayı ve ulusların nasıl oluştuğu ve sürdürüldüğüne dair daha incelikli bir anlayış sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu makalenin metodolojisi, Anderson ve Gellner'in birincil metinlerinin eleştirel bir analizini içermekte ve teorilerini milliyetçiliğin tarihsel ve çağdaş örneklerine uygulayan vaka çalışmalarıyla desteklenmektedir. Bu karşılaştırmalı yaklaşım sayesinde, Anderson ulusal toplulukların hayal edilmesinde ortak kültürel deneyimlerin ve medyanın rolünü vurgularken, Gellner modern endüstriyel devletlerin işleyişi için standartlaştırılmış, homojen kültürlerin yaratılmasını gerektiren sosyo-ekonomik koşulların altını çizmektedir. Bu araştırmanın en önemli sonucu, Anderson ve Gellner'in teorilerinin birbirlerini dışlamak yerine, her birinin karmaşık milliyetçilik olgusunun farklı yönlerini aydınlatarak tamamlayıcı olduklarının kabul edilmesidir. Bu sentez sadece milliyetçilik anlayışımızı geliştirmekle kalmamakta, aynı zamanda giderek küreselleşen bir dünyada ulusal kimlik üzerine yapılan çağdaş çalışmalar için de farklı bir perspektif sağlamaktadır.

**Abstract**

Nationalism remains one of the most potent and contested ideologies in modern political discourse, shaping nations' identities and political landscapes worldwide. This article undertakes a comparative analysis of two foundational theories of nationalism, Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Ernest Gellner's modernist approach, to explore their contributions to the understanding of national identity formation. Despite the extensive scholarship on nationalism, a gap persists in systematically comparing these two influential theories within a single framework. This paper aims to fill this gap by juxtaposing Anderson's cultural and media-centric view with Gellner's structural and economic perspective, providing a more nuanced understanding of how nations are formed and sustained. The methodology of this paper involves a critical analysis of primary texts by Anderson and Gellner, supported by case studies that apply their theories to historical and contemporary examples of nationalism. Through this comparative approach, the paper reveals that while Anderson emphasizes the role of shared cultural experiences and media in imagining national communities, Gellner highlights the socio-economic conditions that necessitate the creation of standardized, homogeneous cultures for the functioning of modern industrial states. This research primarily reveals that Anderson's and Gellner's theories, rather than being mutually exclusive, are complementary, each illuminating different facets of the complex phenomenon of nationalism. This research not only enhances our understanding of nationalism but also provides valuable perspectives for contemporary studies on national identity in an increasingly globalized world.

## Introduction

As one of the most potent and pervasive ideologies of the modern era, nationalism has profoundly shaped the political, social and cultural landscapes of societies around the worldwide. In essence, nationalism is an ideology that seeks to align the political boundaries of a state with the cultural and often ethnic identity of its inhabitants (Çiçek et al., 2017: 39). It promotes the idea that a nation (a distinct group of people who share a common language, culture, history and often religion) should have its own sovereign state. This belief has played a central role in the formation of nation-states and has been the driving force behind both the unification and fragmentation of states throughout history (Çiçek & Taylan, 2023: 421; Weber, 2004: 257). The study of nationalism is of great importance as it helps to understand the fundamental forces driving state formation, conflict and identity politics. As a concept, nationalism is a multifaceted ideology encompassing a range of practices, beliefs and sentiments that vary across time and space. The importance of nationalism in modern political thought cannot be overstated, as it continues to influence contemporary global events, from the resurgence of populist movements in the West to the ongoing struggles for self-determination in various regions of the world. Given the centrality of nationalism in shaping the modern world, researchers have sought to unravel its complexities through various theoretical lenses (Bonikowski et al., 2019; Brubaker, 2020; Eser & Çiçek, 2020). These theoretical approaches offer different perspectives on the origins, nature and consequences of nationalism, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this powerful ideology. The diversity of these perspectives is not only a reflection of the complexity of nationalism but also of the different historical, cultural and political contexts in which scholars have attempted to study it.

Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner are among the most influential theorists in nationalism studies, with their groundbreaking works profoundly shaping its intellectual foundations (Özkırıklı, 2020). Anderson, an expert on Southeast Asian history and politics, is best known for his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1993), in which he argued that nations are socially constructed entities that exist because people believe they do. Anderson's theory emphasizes the role of cultural factors, particularly print capitalism and shared language, in the creation of national consciousness. His approach has been highly influential, offering a cultural and media-centered perspective on the emergence of nationalism that has resonated with interdisciplinary scholars. Ernest Gellner, an Anglo-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist, presents a contrasting view to Anderson in his *Nations and Nationalism* (2018). Gellner's theory is rooted in modernism and argues that nationalism is a product of modern industrial society. He argues that the rise of industrialization required the

creation of standardized, homogeneous cultures in order to maintain social cohesion and ensure the smooth functioning of the modern state. For Gellner, nationalism is not an ancient or primitive sentiment, but a modern phenomenon closely linked to economic and structural transformations in society. By emphasizing the functional and material aspects of nationalism, his work offers a socio-economic explanation for the emergence and persistence of national identities. Anderson and Gellner's contributions to the study of nationalism are important not only because of their innovative ideas but also because their theories challenge and complement each other. Anderson's focus on culture and media as the foundations of national identity contrasts sharply with Gellner's emphasis on economic and structural factors. Together, their theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding nationalism, encompassing both the cultural and material dimensions of this complex ideology.

The aim of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Ernest Gellner's theory of "the construction of the modern nation". By juxtaposing these two influential theories, the study aims to explore the fundamental differences in the way these thinkers conceptualize the origins, nature and consequences of nationalism. This comparison is not merely an academic exercise; it has important implications for how the role of nationalism is understood in both historical and contemporary contexts. This article seeks to answer a key question: How do Anderson's and Gellner's theories diverge in explaining the emergence and endurance of nationalism? To answer this question, the paper examines key elements of each theory and considers how Anderson's emphasis on cultural and media factors contrasts with Gellner's focus on industrialization and socio-economic structures. The analysis also addressed the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and assessed how well they explain the various manifestations of nationalism in different historical and geographical contexts.

The research methodology of this study is based on qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, including Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, as well as academic critiques and commentaries on their work. By engaging with these texts, the paper will critically examine the assumptions, arguments and implications underlying each theory. The study will also include a broader review of the literature on nationalism in order to situate Anderson and Gellner's theories within the wider academic debate. The hypothesis of this research is that Anderson's and Gellner's theories, while seemingly opposed, actually offer a complementary perspective on the nature of nationalism. Anderson's cultural approach provides a detailed understanding of how national identities are socially constructed, while Gellner's

structural perspective emphasizes the material conditions that make nationalism a necessary feature of modern society. Taken together, these theories offer a more holistic understanding of nationalism than each of them could provide alone.

This study also aims to fill a gap in the literature by providing a systematic comparison of Anderson and Gellner's theories. Although both thinkers are frequently cited in debates on nationalism, relatively few academic studies have directly compared their ideas (Halaman, 2021; Mathieu & Bodet, 2019; Özkırımlı, 2020). By addressing this gap, the article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the origins and nature of nationalism and offer new interpretations and insights that can inform both theoretical and empirical research in the field. Ultimately, this article argues that a comprehensive understanding of nationalism requires engagement with both cultural and structural perspectives. Despite their differences, Anderson and Gellner's theories provide a solid framework for analyzing the complexities of nationalism in the modern world. The research will not only contribute to the academic study of nationalism but also have broader implications for understanding the role of national identity in contemporary global politics. As nationalism continues to shape the political landscape both within and across borders, the perspective offered by Anderson and Gellner remains as relevant today as it was when their work was first published.

### **1. Benedict Anderson's Imagined Community as a Key Concept of Nation and Nationalism**

Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" is regarded as one of the most influential theories in nationalism research. Anderson argues that nations are imagined communities (1993: 20-21) because the members of even the smallest nation will never know, meet or hear from most of the other members. Yet the image of unity lives on in the minds of each of them. This central thesis challenges traditional notions of nations as primitive entities with deep historical roots. Instead, Anderson argues that nations are modern constructs, products of specific historical conditions that emerged during the decline of religious authority and the rise of print capitalism.

According to Anderson, print capitalism played an important role in the emergence of national consciousness by enabling the widespread dissemination of information in local languages. The invention of the printing press and the subsequent proliferation of printed materials such as newspapers, novels and pamphlets ensured that people speaking different dialects had access to the same information in a standardized language. This facilitated the creation of a shared national identity among different groups of people who began to perceive themselves as part of a larger imagined community. The daily consumption of the same news and stories in a common language fostered a sense of

belonging and solidarity, the basic components of nationalism (Anderson, 1993: 52-62; Özkırımlı, 2020: 181). Anderson's thesis posits that the nation is a socially constructed entity rather than a natural or eternal one. He argues that the process of imagining the nation is inherently inclusive and exclusive. This thesis also defines who belongs to the community and who does not. Thus, the imagined community is not only a cultural construct but also a political one (Wollman & Spencer, 2020: 75), as it shapes the boundaries of the nation-state and influences how political power is exercised within and beyond those boundaries.

Anderson's theory of imagined communities was profoundly shaped by the socio-political landscape of the late 20th century, especially the anti-colonial movements and the emergence of new nation-states in the aftermath of World War II. Anderson has worked in Southeast Asia and is particularly interested in how nationalism emerged in regions colonized by European powers. His work sought to understand how these new nations with diverse populations and fragmented identities were able to construct a unified national identity in the face of colonial legacies (Anderson, 2007, 2023). Anderson's analysis is based on the historical shift from religious communities to secular forms of community. In pre-modern societies, religious communities and dynastic domains were the primary forms of collective identity. These communities were largely defined by sacred texts written in classical languages that could only be understood by a small group of elites. As print capitalism spread and literacy rates increased, sacred languages began to lose their unifying power and vernacular languages became dominant. This shift laid the foundation for the emergence of nations as imagined communities in which a common language and shared experiences became the basis of national identity, rather than religious or dynastic ties.

Anderson also emphasizes the role of colonialism in the development of nationalism. According to Anderson, in many colonized regions, the introduction of Western educational systems and print media created new social classes literate in the colonial language. These classes, often excluded from political power, began to imagine themselves as part of a larger national community that transcended local identities. The dissemination of nationalist ideas through print media played an important role in mobilizing these groups and fostering a sense of collective identity that ultimately contributed to the rise of anti-colonial movements and the formation of new nation-states (Anderson, 1993: 99-128).

Although Anderson's concept of imagined communities has been widely acclaimed for its innovative approach to understanding nationalism, it has also faced various criticisms and limitations. One of the main criticisms of Anderson's theory is its emphasis on cultural and media factors at the expense of political and economic forces. Critics argue that print capitalism and shared language are important in the formation of national identity, but do

not fully account for the role of political power, state institutions and economic interests in the development of nationalism (Harnita et al, 2019; Köktürk, 2016: 34; Xidias, 2017). For example, some researchers have noted that Anderson's theory tends to ignore the role of the state in actively constructing and promoting national identity (Franco, 2013; Öksüz, 2016: 103-108). Nationalism is not only a bottom-up process driven by cultural factors; it is also a top-down phenomenon in which state actors shape and reinforce the idea of the nation using a variety of tools such as educational systems, legal frameworks and public rituals. The role of the state in the formation of nationalism is particularly evident when governments deliberately seek to homogenize diverse populations through policies of assimilation or suppression of minority cultures.

Another criticism of Anderson's approach is that it may overemphasize the essential of print capitalism in the emergence of nationalism, especially in regions where oral traditions and non-print media play an important role in shaping national consciousness (Öksüz, 2016: 218-219). In some cases, national identity has been constructed and sustained through means other than print media, such as oral histories, religious practices and communal storytelling. These alternative forms of communication can be equally powerful in creating a shared identity and sense of belonging within a community (Billig, 2003). Furthermore, Anderson's theory has been criticized for not paying attention to the economic dimensions of nationalism. While recognizing the role of capitalism in the spread of national consciousness, his analysis does not fully engage with how economic inequalities and class struggles shape nationalist movements. For example, in many cases nationalism has been closely linked to economic grievances. Nationalist leaders have used economic problems to rally support and challenge existing power structures. Anderson's focus on cultural and media factors can, therefore, obscure the complex interplay between nationalism and economic forces (Dieckhoff & Jaffrelot, 2018: 34).

Despite these criticisms, Anderson's concept of imagined communities remains a fundamental theory in studying nationalism. Anderson's thesis provides a powerful framework for understanding how nations are socially constructed through shared cultural practices and media, and his theory on the origins and dynamics of nationalism has been a source of inspiration for numerous researchers. However, as with any theoretical approach, it is important to recognize its limitations and consider how it can be complemented by other perspectives that consider the political, economic and social dimensions of nationalism. In conclusion, Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities has made an important contribution to the study of nationalism by emphasizing the role of cultural and media factors in the formation of national identity. While his approach has

been criticized for its relative neglect of political and economic forces, it nevertheless offers valuable insights into the ways in which nations are imagined and constructed. In the following sections of the paper, Anderson's theory will be compared with Ernest Gellner's theory of modern nation-building and a comparative analysis of the complexities of nationalism will be presented.

## 2. Ernest Gellner: The Building of the Modern Nation

Ernest Gellner, known as the pioneer of the modernist approach, stands out as one of the most influential figures in nationalism studies. Gellner's central thesis is that nationalism is not a timeless or primordial phenomenon, but rather a product of modernity. Contrary to traditional views that view nations as ancient, organic entities, Gellner argues that nations are constructed as a result of specific socio-economic conditions that emerged in the modern era (Gellner, 2018: 93-115). His work radically challenges the idea that national identities are based on deep-rooted historical or cultural continuities and instead argues that they are intimately linked to the transformative processes of industrialization.

Gellner's theory is based on the idea that the rise of industrial society required the creation of standardized, homogenous cultures that could support the efficient functioning of the state. According to Gellner, pre-modern societies were characterized by a high degree of cultural diversity with local identities tied to small, self-sufficient communities. These communities were typically organized around agricultural economies and were largely self-sufficient, with little need for interaction beyond their immediate environment. However, the advent of industrialization led to significant social and economic changes that required the integration of these diverse communities into larger, more cohesive units (Gellner, 2018: 113). According to Gellner, nationalism emerged as a response to the needs of an industrial society. Industrialization required a mobile and literate workforce capable of working within a complex economic system. This necessitated the creation of a standardized education system that could instill a common culture and language in the population. Gellner interprets the nation not as a natural or inevitable product of historical evolution but rather as a structure designed to meet the functional needs of modern, industrial society (2018: 202-203). Thus, for Gellner, nationalism is a byproduct of modernization processes and serves to bring individuals together into a coherent, unified political community that can support the demands of industrialization.

Gellner's analysis places a significant emphasis on the role of industrialization in constructing national identity. He argues that the transition from agrarian to industrial economies radically changed the social structure of societies, leading to the breakdown of local, parochial

identities and the rise of broader national identities. Industrialization has led to increased social mobility, urbanization and the spread of new forms of communication, all of which have contributed to the creation of a more connected and interdependent society. In this context, the state has played an essential role in promoting a sense of national identity by implementing standardized education systems (Gellner, 2018: 114-115). In Gellner's theory, education is the cornerstone of national identity. He argues that the creation of a homogeneous culture, which is essential for the functioning of a modern nation-state, is primarily achieved through education (Gellner, 2018: 131). In pre-modern societies, elites largely monopolized education and had little impact on the wider population. However, the demands of an industrial economy required a literate and skilled workforce, which led to the establishment of mass education systems that could instill a common language, culture and set of values in the population. These educational systems were effective in creating a shared identity and sense of belonging among individuals who might otherwise have had little in common.

Gellner argues that this process of cultural standardization was not only a by-product of industrialization, but a necessary condition for its success. A modern industrial society requires a high level of social cohesion and coordination that can only be achieved when individuals share a common culture and language (Hall, 1998). Without this cultural homogeneity, it would be impossible to maintain the complex economic and administrative functions of the state. Thus, for Gellner, nationalism is not merely an ideological construct but a functional imperative of modernity designed to create the conditions in which an industrial society can flourish. In Gellner's analysis, the importance of a homogeneous culture for the functioning of a modern nation-state cannot be overstated. Gellner argues that the nation-state is the only form of political organization that can support the demands of an industrial economy because it provides the necessary cultural and administrative coherence. This coherence is achieved through the imposition of a standardized culture, disseminated through the education system and reinforced by state institutions. Therefore, in Gellner's view, the nation is not an organic community but a constructed entity designed to meet the specific needs of a modern industrial society (Tambini, 1996).

While Gellner's modernist approach to nationalism has been highly influential, it has also attracted significant criticism. One of the main criticisms is that Gellner's theory emphasizes on structural and economic factors at the expense of cultural and historical elements. Critics argue that Gellner's focus on the functional requirements of industrial society ignores the importance of pre-existing cultural identities and the role of historical memory in the formation of national consciousness. In this view, nationalism is not only a response to the

demands of modernity. Still, it is also based on deep-rooted cultural traditions and historical experiences that cannot be easily reduced to economic or structural factors (Breuilly, 1985: 162; Farhi-Rodrig, 2012; MacFarlane, 1996). For example, scholars such as Anthony Smith have argued that Gellner's theory fails to take into account the continuity of ethnic and cultural identities prior to the modern era. Smith's ethno-symbolist approach argues that nationalism often draws on pre-modern myths, symbols and traditions that resonate with the population and provide a sense of continuity with the past (Smith, 2009). This perspective challenges Gellner's view of nationalism as a purely modern phenomenon, arguing that national identities are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, historical and economic factors.

Another criticism of Gellner's approach is that it may overestimate the role of the state in the construction of national identity. While Gellner emphasizes the importance of state institutions, especially the educational system, in fostering a sense of national identity, critics argue that this perspective underestimates the effectiveness of individuals and communities in shaping their own identities. Nationalism, they argue, is not simply imposed from above by the state, but is also driven by grassroots movements and local initiatives that reflect the aspirations and values of the population (Smith, 1996: 134-137). Furthermore, Gellner's theory has been criticized for its deterministic view that nationalism is an inevitable consequence of industrialization (Kellas, 1991: 44). Critics argue that this perspective does not adequately account for the diversity of nationalist movements and the different forms nationalism can take in different contexts. For instance, the rise of nationalism in agrarian societies or regions with limited industrial development calls into question Gellner's claim that nationalism is primarily a product of modernity (Özkırmı, 2020: 170-171). Moreover, Gellner's focus on the economic and structural dimensions of nationalism may ignore the role of ideology, emotion and identity in driving nationalist movements.

Despite these criticisms, Gellner's theory remains the cornerstone of the modernist school of thought on nationalism. Moreover, his emphasis on the role of industrialization and education in the construction of national identity provides a powerful framework for understanding the emergence of nations in the modern era. However, as with any theoretical approach, it is also important to recognize its limitations and consider how it can be complemented by other perspectives that take into account the cultural, historical and ideological dimensions of nationalism. In conclusion, Ernest Gellner's modernist approach to nationalism offers a convincing explanation of the rise of nations in the context of industrial society. By emphasizing the role of industrialization and standardized education systems,

Gellner offers a functionalist account of how national identities are constructed and maintained. However, his focus on structural and economic factors has been criticized for ignoring cultural and historical elements that also play an important role in the formation of national consciousness. In the next section of the paper, Gellner's theory is compared with Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and a comparative analysis of the complexities of nationalism is presented.

### **3. Comparative Analysis: Imagined Communities and Modern Nation Building**

In this section of the study, a theoretical comparison of Anderson and Gellner's theories is made. The contrasting theories of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner offer different frameworks for understanding the origins and nature of nations. Anderson's concept of "imagined communities/imagined communities" is deeply rooted in a cultural and media-centered view that suggests that nations are socially constructed entities and emerge from shared cultural experiences facilitated by print capitalism. For Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community because it is socially constructed through collective consciousness rather than grounded in material reality. This shared consciousness is developed and maintained through cultural mediums such as literature, print media and language, which create a sense of belonging among individuals who perceive themselves as part of the same community, even if they have never met (Alinaghian, 2022; Sanjinés, 2013). In contrast, Gellner's theory of nationalism emphasizes structural and economic factors, especially the role of industrialization forming of nations. According to Gellner, the rise of nationalism is closely linked to the demands of modern industrial society, which requires the creation of standardized, homogenous cultures to ensure social cohesion and economic efficiency. In this view, the nation is not an imaginary entity but a functional structure that emerged in response to the specific needs of industrialization. Gellner argues that nationalism is a product of modernity, driven by socio-economic transformations that require the integration of diverse populations into a coherent national unit capable of supporting the industrial economy (Stahl, 2017). The conceptual differences between Anderson and Gellner can be reduced to two fundamental oppositions: Anderson sees nations as cultural constructs, while Gellner sees them as products of socio-economic conditions; Anderson emphasizes the role of media and shared cultural experiences, while Gellner focuses on the structural and economic imperatives of industrial society. These differences highlight the different paths that nationalism can take depending on whether cultural or economic factors are prioritized in the formation of national identity.

On the other hand, the debate between Anderson and Gellner mainly revolves around the relative importance of culture and economy in the formation of national identity.

Anderson's theory emphasizes the power of shared cultural experiences in creating a sense of national belonging. He argues that the nation is a cultural artifact constructed through the imagination of a shared community facilitated by the spread of print media. According to Anderson, the cultural dimensions of nationalism (language, literature and media) are central to the imagination process the nation because they provide how individuals see themselves as part of a larger collective (Anderson, 1993). Gellner, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the economic and structural foundations of nationalism. He argues that the rise of nationalism is closely linked to the socio-economic transformations brought about by industrialization, which required the creation of standardized, homogenous cultures to support the functioning of a modern state. For Gellner, the nation is not merely a cultural construct, but a necessary by-product of industrial society, driven by the need for a literate, mobile workforce capable of functioning within a complex economic system. The state's role in promoting national identity through education and cultural standardization can be seen as a functional response to the demands of industrialization (Gellner, 2018). These different perspectives raise important questions about the origins of national identity: Are nations primarily cultural constructs that emerge from shared experiences and collective imagination, as Anderson argues? Or, as Gellner argues, are they the product of socioeconomic conditions shaped by the structural imperatives of industrial society? The answer probably lies in combining both perspectives, with the relative importance of culture and economy varying according to the specific historical and social context.

In many cases, the development of national identity can be driven by a combination of cultural and economic factors, each reinforcing the other in complex ways. For example, the spread of print capitalism and the rise of mass literacy may have facilitated the spread of nationalist ideas, while the economic demands of industrialization provided the material conditions for the creation of a coherent national community. In this sense, Anderson's and Gellner's theories can be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive and offer different but overlapping explanations for the emergence of nationalism.

Anderson and Gellner's theories have important implications for studying nationalism and offer complementary interpretations that can help deepen our understanding of this complex phenomenon. Anderson's focus on the cultural and media dimensions of nationalism emphasizes the importance of shared experiences and collective imagination in the formation of national identity. His theory suggests that nationalism is not only a product of economic or political factors, but is also deeply rooted in cultural practices and narratives that shape how individuals perceive themselves and their

society. By emphasizing the structural and economic foundations of nationalism, Gellner's modernist approach offers a functionalist account of how national identities are constructed and maintained in the context of modern industrial society. Gellner's theory argues that nationalism is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a response to specific socio-economic conditions of modernity. This perspective emphasizes the importance of industrialization, education and state institutions in fostering a sense of national identity. It underlines the role of nationalism in supporting the functioning of modern states.

Table 1: Theoretical Comparison of Imagined Communities and Modern Nation Building

	<b>Imagined Communities of Anderson</b>	<b>Modern Nation Building of Gellner</b>
<b>Conceptual Basis</b>	Cultural and media-centric view	Structural and economic perspective
<b>Origin of Nations</b>	Socially constructed through collective imagination	Emerged due to industrialization and socio-economic needs
<b>Role of Culture</b>	Central to the formation of national identity	Subordinate to economic and structural needs
<b>Role of Economics</b>	Less emphasized, secondary to cultural factors	Primary driver of national identity formation
<b>State's Role</b>	Not central, focus on practices and media	Central, state-driven standardization and education
<b>Criticism</b>	Overlooks economic and political factors	Neglects cultural and historical elements
<b>Application in Contemporary Studies</b>	Cultural globalization, media studies, post-colonialism	Modernization theory, industrialization, state-building

Taken together, Anderson's and Gellner's theories offer a more comprehensive understanding of nationalism than they could offer alone. Anderson's emphasis on culture and media helps to explain how national identities are imagined and sustained, while Gellner's focus on economy and structure offers insight into the material conditions that make nationalism a functional imperative in modern society. The importance of Anderson and

Gellner's ideas extends beyond the study of nationalism to broader debates about identity, culture and power in global politics. In an increasingly interconnected world where national identities are often shaped by global cultural flows and economic forces, Anderson and Gellner's perspectives are as relevant today as they were when their work was first published (Turan, 2022: 29). Their theories provide valuable tools for analyzing how national identities are constructed and contested in different contexts, from the rise of populist nationalism in the West to struggles for self-government in postcolonial societies. Moreover, a comparative analysis of Anderson and Gellner's theories can help bridge the gap between cultural and structural approaches to the study of nationalism. By recognizing the interplay between cultural and economic factors in the formation of national identity, scholars can develop more detailed and comprehensive theories that explain the various ways in which nationalism manifests itself in different historical and social contexts. This approach not only enhances our understanding of nationalism but also contributes to broader debates about the role of culture and economics in shaping political and social life.

In conclusion, Anderson and Gellner's theories offer different but complementary perspectives on the origins and nature of nationalism. Anderson's emphasis on culture and media provides a valuable framework for understanding the illusory nature of national communities, while Gellner's focus on the structural and economic imperatives of modernity offers insights into the material conditions underlying the rise of nations. Together, these theories enrich our understanding of nationalism and highlight the complex interplay between cultural and economic factors in the formation of national identity. As nationalism in its various forms continues to shape the political landscape, the ideas of Anderson and Gellner remain essential tools for analyzing and interpreting the dynamics of national identity in both historical and contemporary contexts. Moreover, beyond theoretical debates, these two thinkers' theories can potentially be the subject of important debates in practice. The next section of the paper deals with the comparison of these two theories in practice.

#### 4. Comparison of Anderson and Gellner's Theories in Practice

Anderson and Gellner's theories offer a deep and complementary perspective on understanding nationalism. Anderson's concept of imagined communities and Gellner's modernist approach to nationalism through industrialization are crucial in analyzing the emergence and evolution of nations. To further explore and validate Anderson's and Gellner's theories, this chapter links the theories with a series of case studies covering postcolonial societies, European nationalism, and contemporary nationalist movements in the context of globalization. In other words, through these case studies, this chapter aims to demonstrate the

practical application of Anderson and Gellner's ideas, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in explaining the complexities of nationalism in different historical and geographical contexts.

#### 4.1. The Rise of Nationalism in Postcolonial Societies

In postcolonial societies, Anderson's concept of imagined communities provides a convincing framework for understanding the emergence of national identities. Anderson argues that nations are "imagined" because they are socially constructed entities in which the members of even the smallest nation will never know, meet or hear from most of the other members, but in the minds of each lives the image of unity. This idea resonates strongly in postcolonial contexts where the construction of national identity often occurs in the aftermath of colonial rule. For example, in countries such as India, Indonesia and Nigeria, the nation-building process involved the creation of a unified national identity from diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups (Bondarenko, 2023; Wuam, 2012). As Anderson argues, print capitalism played an important role in disseminating nationalist ideas through newspapers, pamphlets and books written in local languages. These printed materials helped to create a shared sense of identity among different groups that had previously identified more with their local or ethnic communities than with the larger nation-state (Schatz, 2004; Sèbe, 2017). In this context, the nation is imagined through collective consciousness, fueled by a common language and shared cultural narratives.

Ernest Gellner's theory that nationalism is a product of modernity and industrialization is also applicable to postcolonial states. Gellner argues that industrialization requires the creation of standardized, homogeneous cultures to ensure the efficient functioning of modern states. In the postcolonial context, this theory is particularly relevant for countries that sought to modernize and industrialize rapidly after independence. Countries such as Tanzania under Julius Nyerere or Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah pursued policies of industrialization and modernization as part of their nation-building efforts. These leaders recognized that creating a unified national identity was essential for economic development and political stability (Crutcher, 1969; Etekpe & Okolo, 2010; Swoyer et al, 2011). In these contexts, Gellner's emphasis on the role of education and the state in developing national identity is particularly pertinent. Postcolonial states established national education systems aimed at creating a literate, skilled workforce that could support the demands of industrialization (Bereketeab, 2020; Doran, 2019). This process involved the promotion of a common language and culture, often at the expense of local identities and traditions.

However, the application of Gellner's theory to postcolonial states reveals some limitations. Unlike the European context where industrialization preceded the formation of national identity, in many postcolonial states nation-building took place simultaneously with or even before industrialization. This suggests that Gellner's framework, while useful for understanding the functional role of nationalism in state-building, may not fully account for the complex interplay between culture, identity and economic development in postcolonial societies.

#### 4.2. Nationalism in Europe: Historical and Modern Perspectives

The emergence of nationalism in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries is a critical area where both Anderson's and Gellner's theories can be effectively applied. Anderson's concept of imagined communities is particularly relevant to the development of nationalism in countries such as France and Germany, where the spread of print capitalism and the rise of vernacular languages played an important role in the creation of national consciousness (Mann, 1996). In France, for example, using French as the national language, promoted through education and print media, helped to create a unified national identity from a diverse population with various regional dialects and cultures. Similarly, in Germany, the dissemination of nationalist ideas through literature and newspapers written in the German language facilitated the unification of the nation, which in turn helped to create a common sense of identity among German-speaking peoples (Birnbaum, 1992).

Gellner's theory is also highly applicable to the European context, especially in explaining the relationship between industrialization and the rise of nationalism. In Britain, the Industrial Revolution led to significant social and economic changes that required the creation of a coherent national identity. The British state, through the education system and public institutions, promoted a standardized culture that was essential for the functioning of the modern industrial economy (Triandafyllidou, 2020). The same can be said for Germany and Italy, where the process of industrialization was closely linked to the unification of the nation-state. Gellner's emphasis on the state's in the development of national identity is particularly evident in the case of Bismarck's Germany, where state-led initiatives were vital in fostering a sense of German nationalism.

Comparing Anderson's and Gellner's theories in the European context, it is clear that each offers valuable insights but also has limitations. Anderson's emphasis on cultural and media factors is particularly effective in explaining how national consciousness emerges in countries with strong literary and intellectual traditions (Dieckhoff & Jaffrelot, 2018: 298-300). In Italy, for example, the Risorgimento movement was driven by intellectuals and writers who used print media to promote



the idea of a united Italian nation (Beales & Biagini, 2014; Breuilly, 2009). However, Anderson's theory may be less effective in explaining the role of state institutions and economic factors in the construction of national identity. Gellner's theory, on the other hand, offers a robust explanation of the relationship between industrialization and nationalism, especially in countries such as Britain and Germany. However, it may overlook the importance of cultural and historical factors preceding industrialization. For example, the sense of Scottish or Gaelic identity in the United Kingdom persisted despite the homogenizing effects of industrialization and state-led nationalism (Saylan, 2017). This suggests that Gellner's framework, while useful for understanding the structural and economic foundations of nationalism, may not fully capture the cultural and historical dimensions of national identity.

#### 4.3. The Importance of Anderson and Gellner's Ideas in the Age of Globalization

In the age of globalization, nationalism has taken on new forms and dimensions, raising questions about the continuing validity of Anderson and Gellner's theories. Globalization has brought increasing interconnectedness and the spread of transnational identities, challenging traditional notions of the nation-state. However, nationalism remains a powerful force in global politics, as evidenced by the resurgence of nationalist movements in various parts of the world (Atasoy, 2018).

Anderson's concept of imagined communities remains relevant for understanding how national identities are constructed and sustained in the digital age. The rise of social media and the internet has created new forms of imagined communities where individuals connect and identify with each other across national borders. Online platforms have become spaces where nationalist ideas can be spread and reinforced, creating virtual communities that transcend physical borders (Ahmad, 2022). In this context, Anderson's emphasis on the role of the media in shaping national consciousness is more relevant than ever.

Gellner's theory is particularly relevant in understanding the relationship between nationalism and economic globalization. While globalization has led to the spread of global capitalism, it has also led to economic inequalities and distortions that fuel nationalist sentiments. In many cases, nationalist movements have emerged in response to perceived threats posed by globalization, such as job loss, cultural erosion and the weakening of state sovereignty. Gellner's emphasis on the role of the state and economic factors in the development of national identity can help explain the rise of populist nationalism in countries that feel marginalized by the forces of globalization (Eser & Çiçek, 2020).

To see the continuing relevance of Anderson and Gellner's theories in the contemporary world, it is worth looking at modern nationalist movements. In the United States, the

rise of the "America First" movement under Donald Trump can be seen as an example of nationalism driven by economic factors, which is in line with Gellner's theory. The movement has promoted a vision of nationalism that prioritizes the economic interests of the nation-state by capitalizing on economic concerns and the perceived loss of national sovereignty to global institutions (Ellner, 2010; Ettinger, 2018; Toma, 2018). In contrast, the Catalan independence movement in Spain more closely aligns with Anderson's concept of imagined communities. The movement was driven by a strong sense of cultural identity and historical memory, reinforced by the use of digital media to mobilize support and spread nationalist ideas. The Catalan example shows how nationalism can be imagined and constructed through shared cultural experiences even in the absence of economic factors (Goikoetxea et al, 2023; Jimenez & Garai-Aretxe, 2023). Finally, the Brexit movement in the UK provides a case study where both Anderson's and Gellner's theories are applicable. The Brexit campaign was grounded in cultural narratives of British identity and sovereignty, appealing to a sense of nostalgia for a community imagined in the past. At the same time, the movement was also influenced by economic concerns about immigration and the impact of globalization (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), reflecting Gellner's emphasis on the structural and economic dimensions of nationalism.

Table 2: Anderson and Gellner's Case Studies

	<b>Anderson's Imagined Communities</b>	<b>Gellner's Modern Nation Building</b>
<b>Post-Colonial Nationalism</b>	Focus on the role of print capitalism and shared cultural narratives in constructing national identity	Emphasis on the rule of industrialization and state-led nation-building efforts
<b>European Nationalism</b>	Explains the emergence of nationalism through the spread of vernacular languages and print media	Highlights the link between industrialization and the need for cohesive national identities
<b>Contemporary Nationalism and Globalization</b>	Relevant in analyzing digital nationalism and the role of social media in creating imagined communities	Provides insights into the economic dislocations caused by globalization and the resulting nationalist backlash

In conclusion, the examples presented in this chapter illustrate the practical application of Anderson's and Gellner's theories to various historical and contemporary contexts. Anderson's concept of imagined communities offers valuable insights into the cultural and media dimensions of nationalism, while Gellner's modernist approach provides a solid framework for understanding the structural and economic factors underlying the rise of nations. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of nationalism, emphasizing the complex interplay between culture, economy and identity in the formation and evolution of nations. As nationalism continues to shape global politics in the 21st century, Anderson and Gellner's ideas remain essential tools for analyzing and interpreting the dynamics of national identity.

### Conclusion

This study aims to compare the theories of nationalism presented by two of the most important thinkers in the field of nationalism studies, Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, and to reveal the similarities and contrasts between their theories. Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Gellner's modernist approach offers different frameworks for understanding the origins, development and continuity of nationalism. Anderson emphasizes the role of cultural and media practices, especially print capitalism, in creating a shared national consciousness among people who perceive themselves as part of the same community even if they have never met. Gellner, on the other hand, focuses on the structural and economic imperatives of industrial society, arguing that nationalism emerged as a functional response to the needs of modern industrial states.

A comparative analysis of these two theories reveals both complementary and conflicting aspects. On the one hand, Anderson's theory reveals a detailed understanding of how national identities are imagined and constructed through cultural narratives and media and offers important insights into the subjective experience of belonging to a nation. On the other hand, Gellner's theory draws attention to the material conditions that make nationalism a functional necessity in modern societies and emphasizes the role of the state and economic structures in shaping national identity. While Anderson's approach is more culturally oriented and emphasizes the importance of shared experiences, Gellner's theory is more structural and focuses on the socio-economic forces that drive the formation of nations. These differences illustrate the richness and complexity of theories of nationalism and that no single theory can fully capture the multifaceted nature of national identity. Instead, Anderson's and Gellner's theories should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, each offering valuable insights into different dimensions of nationalism. It should be noted that their contrasting perspectives emphasize the importance of considering

both cultural and structural factors to understand how nations are formed and sustained over time.

Both Anderson and Gellner have made significant contributions to the study of nationalism. Anderson's concept of imagined communities has had a profound impact on the way scholars think about nations and nationalism, shifting the focus of debate from objective factors such as territory and ethnicity to the subjective, imagined nature of national identity. His emphasis on the role of media and cultural practices in shaping national consciousness has opened up new avenues of research, particularly in the study of how national identities are constructed and maintained in different historical and social contexts. Gellner's modernist approach provided a solid framework for understanding the relationship between nationalism and modernity. His theory that nationalism is a product of the socio-economic transformations brought about by industrialization has been instrumental in explaining the rise of nations in the modern era. Gellner's focus on the functional role of nationalism in modern states also contributed to the development of state-centered approaches to the study of nationalism, emphasizing the importance of education, bureaucracy and economic structures in the formation of national identity. Together, Anderson and Gellner's theories continue to shape contemporary debates on nationalism and national identity. Their work has expanded imaginaries of how nations are imagined, constructed and sustained in different contexts. Moreover, by emphasizing the interplay between cultural and structural factors, Anderson and Gellner's theories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complexities of nationalism from its origins in the modern era to its manifestations in the contemporary world.

It can be argued that Anderson and Gellner's ideas in the study of nationalism are enduring and inform even today's debates. In an increasingly globalized world where national identities are often challenged by transnational forces, their theories continue to offer valuable insights into the persistence and transformation of nationalism. Anderson's concept of imagined communities is particularly relevant in the digital age, where the internet and social media have created new forms of imagined communities that transcend national borders. Gellner's emphasis on the relationship between nationalism and modernity also remains relevant, especially in understanding how economic and structural changes continue to shape national identities in the 21st century. There are several areas where future research could build on Anderson and Gellner's theoretical frameworks. For example, further research could explore the effects of digital media and globalization on the construction of national identities, examining how new forms of communication and economic integration are reshaping the ways in which nations are imagined and experienced. Additionally, more work could be done to integrate Anderson and Gellner's theories with other approaches to

nationalism, such as those that emphasize the role of ethnicity, religion or gender in shaping national identity. In conclusion, this study has shown that while Anderson and Gellner offer different perspectives on the origins and nature of nationalism, their theories are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they complement each other in important ways, offering a more holistic understanding of nationalism than either could offer on its own. As nationalism continues to play a central role in global politics, the insights offered by Anderson and Gellner will remain essential tools for scholars seeking to understand the complexities of national identity in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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