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# Imagined Communities

Reflections on the Origin and  
Spread of Nationalism



BENEDICT ANDERSON

*Revised Edition*



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## Cultural Roots

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No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times.<sup>1</sup> To feel the force of this modernity one has only to imagine the general reaction to the busy-body who 'discovered' the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the cenotaph with some real bones. Sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind! Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings.<sup>2</sup> (This is why so many different nations

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1. The ancient Greeks had cenotaphs, but for specific, known individuals whose bodies, for one reason or another, could not be retrieved for regular burial. I owe this information to my Byzantinist colleague Judith Herrin.

2. Consider, for example, these remarkable tropes: 1. 'The long grey line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, honour, country.' 2. 'My estimate of [the American man-at-arms] was formed on the battlefield many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then, as I regard him now, as one of the world's noblest figures; not only as one of the finest military characters, but also as one of the most stainless [sic]. . . . He belongs to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism [sic]. He belongs to posterity as the instructor of future generations in the principles of liberty and

have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be *but* Germans, Americans, Argentinians . . . ?)

The cultural significance of such monuments becomes even clearer if one tries to imagine, say, a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals. Is a sense of absurdity avoidable? The reason is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism are much concerned with death and immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings. As this affinity is by no means fortuitous, it may be useful to begin a consideration of the cultural roots of nationalism with death, as the last of a whole gamut of fatalities.

If the manner of a man's dying usually seems arbitrary, his mortality is inescapable. Human lives are full of such combinations of necessity and chance. We are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother-tongue, and so forth. The great merit of traditional religious world-views (which naturally must be distinguished from their role in the legitimization of specific systems of domination and exploitation) has been their concern with man-in-the-cosmos, man as species being, and the contingency of life. The extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering – disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death. Why was I born blind? Why is my best friend paralysed? Why is my daughter retarded? The religions attempt to explain. The great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, is that such questions are answered with impatient silence.<sup>3</sup> At the

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freedom. He belongs to the present, to us, by his virtues and his achievements.' Douglas MacArthur, 'Duty, Honour, Country,' Address to the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, May 12, 1962, in his *A Soldier Speaks*, pp. 354 and 357.

3. Cf. Régis Debray. 'Marxism and the National Question,' *New Left Review*, 105 (September–October 1977), p. 29. In the course of doing fieldwork in Indonesia in the 1960s I was struck by the calm refusal of many Muslims to accept the ideas of Darwin. At first I interpreted this refusal as obscurantism. Subsequently I came to see it as an honourable attempt to be consistent: the doctrine of evolution was simply not compatible with the teachings of Islam. What are we to make of a scientific

same time, in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.) In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation. Who experiences *their* child's conception and birth without dimly apprehending a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of 'continuity'? (Again, the disadvantage of evolutionary/progressive thought is an almost Heraclitean hostility to any idea of continuity.)

I bring up these perhaps simpleminded observations primarily because in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought. The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation! If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past,<sup>4</sup> and, still more important,

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materialism which formally accepts the findings of physics about matter, yet makes so little effort to link these findings with the class struggle, revolution, or whatever. Does not the abyss between protons and the proletariat conceal an unacknowledged metaphysical conception of man? But see the refreshing texts of Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism and The Freudian Slip*, and Raymond Williams' thoughtful response to them in 'Timpanaro's Materialist Challenge,' *New Left Review*, 109 (May-June 1978), pp. 3-17.

4. The late President Sukarno always spoke with complete sincerity of the 350 years of colonialism that his 'Indonesia' had endured, although the very concept 'Indonesia' is a twentieth-century invention, and most of today's Indonesia was only conquered by the Dutch between 1850 and 1910. Preeminent among contemporary Indonesia's national heroes is the early nineteenth-century Javanese Prince Diponegoro, although the Prince's own memoirs show that he intended to 'conquer [not liberate!] Java,' rather than expel 'the Dutch.' Indeed, he clearly had no concept of 'the Dutch' as a collectivity. See Harry J. Benda and John A. Larkin, eds., *The World of Southeast Asia*, p. 158; and Ann Kumar, 'Diponegoro (1778?-1855),' *Indonesia*,

glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, 'Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal.'

Needless to say, I am not claiming that the appearance of nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century was 'produced' by the erosion of religious certainties, or that this erosion does not itself require a complex explanation. Nor am I suggesting that somehow nationalism historically 'supersedes' religion. What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.

For present purposes, the two relevant cultural systems are the *religious community* and the *dynastic realm*. For both of these, in their heydays, were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today. It is therefore essential to consider what gave these cultural systems their self-evident plausibility, and at the same time to underline certain key elements in their decomposition.

## THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Few things are more impressive than the vast territorial stretch of the Ummah Islam from Morocco to the Sulu Archipelago, of Christendom from Paraguay to Japan, and of the Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to the Korean peninsula. The great sacral cultures (and for our purposes here it may be permissible to include 'Confucianism') incorporated conceptions of immense communities. But Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and even the Middle Kingdom – which, though we think of it today as Chinese, imagined itself not as Chinese, but as

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13 (April 1972), p. 103. Emphasis added. Similarly, Kemal Atatürk named one of his state banks the Eti Banka (Hittite Bank) and another the Sumerian Bank. (Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 259). These banks flourish today, and there is no reason to doubt that many Turks, possibly not excluding Kemal himself, seriously saw, and see, in the Hittites and Sumerians their Turkish forebears. Before laughing too hard, we should remind ourselves of Arthur and Boadicea, and ponder the commercial success of Tolkien's mythographies.

As late as 1914, dynastic states made up the majority of the membership of the world political system, but, as we shall be noting in detail below, many dynasts had for some time been reaching for a 'national' cachet as the old principle of Legitimacy withered silently away. While the armies of Frederick the Great (r. 1740–1786) were heavily staffed by 'foreigners', those of his great-nephew Friedrich Wilhelm III (r. 1797–1840) were, as a result of Scharnhorst's, Gneisenau's and Clausewitz's spectacular reforms, exclusively 'national-Prussian.'<sup>29</sup>

### APPREHENSIONS OF TIME

It would be short-sighted, however, to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing religious communities and dynastic realms. Beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation.

To get a feeling for this change, one can profitably turn to the visual representations of the sacred communities, such as the reliefs and stained-glass windows of mediaeval churches, or the paintings of early Italian and Flemish masters. A characteristic feature of such representations is something misleadingly analogous to 'modern dress'. The shepherds who have followed the star to the manger where Christ is born bear the features of Burgundian peasants. The Virgin Mary is figured as a Tuscan merchant's daughter. In many paintings the commissioning patron, in full burgher or noble costume, appears kneeling in adoration alongside the shepherds. What seems incongruous today obviously appeared wholly natural to the eyes of mediaeval worshippers. We are faced with a world in

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29. More than 1,000 of the 7,000–8,000 men on the Prussian Army's officer list in 1806 were foreigners. 'Middle-class Prussians were outnumbered by foreigners in their own army; this lent colour to the saying that Prussia was not a country that had an army, but an army that had a country.' In 1798, Prussian reformers had demanded a 'reduction by one half of the number of foreigners, who still amounted to about 50% of the privates. . . .' Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, pp. 64 and 85.



which the figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural. Christendom assumed its universal form through a myriad of specificities and particularities: this relief, that window, this sermon, that tale, this morality play, that relic. While the trans-European Latin-reading clerisy was one essential element in the structuring of the Christian imagination, the mediation of its conceptions to the illiterate masses, by visual and aural creations, always personal and particular, was no less vital. The humble parish priest, whose forebears and frailties everyone who heard his celebrations knew, was still the direct intermediary between his parishioners and the divine. This juxtaposition of the cosmic-universal and the mundane-particular meant that however vast Christendom might be, and was sensed to be, it manifested itself *variously* to particular Swabian or Andalusian communities as replications of themselves. Figuring the Virgin Mary with 'Semitic' features or 'first-century' costumes in the restoring spirit of the modern museum was unimaginable because the mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present.<sup>30</sup> Bloch observes that people thought they must be near the end of time, in the sense that Christ's second coming could occur at any moment: St. Paul had said that 'the day of the Lord cometh like a thief in the night.' It was thus natural for the great twelfth-century chronicler Bishop Otto of Freising to refer repeatedly to 'we who have been placed at the end of time.' Bloch concludes that as soon as mediaeval men 'gave themselves up to meditation, nothing was farther from their thoughts than the prospect of a long future for a young and vigorous human race.'<sup>31</sup>

Auerbach gives an unforgettable sketch of this form of consciousness:<sup>32</sup>

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30. For us, the idea of 'modern dress,' a metaphorical equivalencing of past with present, is a backhanded recognition of their fatal separation.

31. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, pp. 84-86.

32. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 64. Emphasis added. Compare St. Augustine's description of the Old Testament as 'the shadow of [i.e. cast backwards by] the future.' Cited in Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, p. 90.

If an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised and the latter 'fulfills' . . . the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension . . . It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding . . . the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is *simultaneously* something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.

He rightly stresses that such an idea of *simultaneity* is wholly alien to our own. It views time as something close to what Benjamin calls Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present.<sup>33</sup> In such a view of things, the word 'meanwhile' cannot be of real significance.

Our own conception of simultaneity has been a long time in the making, and its emergence is certainly connected, in ways that have yet to be well studied, with the development of the secular sciences. But it is a conception of such fundamental importance that, without taking it fully into account, we will find it difficult to probe the obscure genesis of nationalism. What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.<sup>34</sup>

Why this transformation should be so important for the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in

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33. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 265.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 263. So deep-lying is this new idea that one could argue that every essential modern conception is based on a conception of 'meanwhile'.

Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper.<sup>35</sup> For these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.

Consider first the structure of the old-fashioned novel, a structure typical not only of the masterpieces of Balzac but also of any contemporary dollar-dreadful. It is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time,' or a complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'. Take, for illustrative purposes, a segment of a simple novel-plot, in which a man (A) has a wife (B) and a mistress (C), who in turn has a lover (D). We might imagine a sort of time-chart for this segment as follows:

Time:	I	II	III
Events:	A quarrels with B C and D make love	A telephones C B shops D plays pool	D gets drunk in a bar A dines at home with B C has an ominous dream

Notice that during this sequence A and D never meet, indeed may not even be aware of each other's existence if C has played her cards right.<sup>36</sup> What then actually links A to D? Two complementary conceptions: First, that they are embedded in 'societies' (Wessex, Lübeck, Los Angeles). These societies are sociological entities of such firm and stable reality that their members (A and D) can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected.<sup>37</sup> Second, that A and D are

35. While the *Princesse de Clèves* had already appeared in 1678, the era of Richardson, Defoe and Fielding is the early eighteenth century. The origins of the modern newspaper lie in the Dutch gazettes of the late seventeenth century; but the newspaper only became a general category of printed matter after 1700. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 197.

36. Indeed, the plot's grip may *depend* at Times I, II, and III on A, B, C and D not knowing what the others are up to.

37. This polyphony decisively marks off the modern novel even from so brilliant a forerunner as Petronius's *Satyricon*. Its narrative proceeds single file. If Encolpius bewails his young lover's faithlessness, we are not simultaneously shown Gito in bed with Ascyltus.

embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers. Only they, like God, watch A telephoning C, B shopping, and D playing pool all at once. That all these acts are performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers' minds.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.<sup>39</sup> An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.

The perspective I am suggesting will perhaps seem less abstract if we turn to inspect briefly four fictions from different cultures and different epochs, all but one of which, nonetheless, are inextricably bound to nationalist movements. In 1887, the 'Father of Filipino Nationalism', José Rizal, wrote the novel *Noli Me Tangere*, which today is regarded as the greatest achievement of modern Filipino literature. It was also almost the first novel written by an 'Indio'.<sup>40</sup> Here is how it marvellously begins:<sup>41</sup>

Towards the end of October, Don Santiago de los Santos, popularly known as Capitan Tiago, was giving a dinner party. Although,

38. In this context it is rewarding to compare any historical novel with documents or narratives from the period fictionalized.

39. Nothing better shows the immersion of the novel in homogeneous, empty time than the absence of those prefatory genealogies, often ascending to the origin of man, which are so characteristic a feature of ancient chronicles, legends, and holy books.

40. Rizal wrote this novel in the colonial language (Spanish), which was then the lingua franca of the ethnically diverse Eurasian and native elites. Alongside the novel appeared also for the first time a 'nationalist' press, not only in Spanish but in such 'ethnic' languages as Tagalog and Ilocano. See Leopoldo Y. Yabes, 'The Modern Literature of the Philippines,' pp. 287-302, in Pierre-Bernard Lafont and Denys Lombard (eds), *Littératures Contemporaines de l'Asie du Sud-Est*.

41. José Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (Manila: Instituto Nacional de Historia, 1978), p. 1. My translation. At the time of the original publication of *Imagined Communities*, I

contrary to his usual practice, he had announced it only that afternoon, it was already the subject of every conversation in Binondo, in other quarters of the city, and even in [the walled inner city of] Intramuros. In those days Capitan Tiago had the reputation of a lavish host. It was known that his house, like his country, closed its doors to nothing, except to commerce and to any new or daring idea.

So the news coursed like an electric shock through the community of parasites, spongers, and gatecrashers whom God, in His infinite goodness, created, and so tenderly multiplies in Manila. Some hunted polish for their boots, others looked for collar-buttons and cravats. But one and all were preoccupied with the problem of how to greet their host with the familiarity required to create the appearance of longstanding friendship, or, if need be, to excuse themselves for not having arrived earlier.

The dinner was being given at a house on Anloague Street. Since we do not recall the street number, we shall describe it in such a way that it may still be recognized—that is, if earthquakes have not yet destroyed it. We do not believe that its owner will have had it torn down, since such work is usually left to God or to Nature, which, besides, holds many contracts with our Government.

Extensive comment is surely unnecessary. It should suffice to note that right from the start the image (wholly new to Filipino writing) of a dinner-party being discussed by hundreds of unnamed people, who do not know each other, in quite different parts of Manila, in a particular month of a particular decade, immediately conjures up the imagined community. And in the phrase 'a house on Anloague Street' which 'we shall describe in such a way that it may still be recognized,' the would-be recognizers are we-Filipino-readers. The casual progression of this house from the 'interior' time of the novel to the 'exterior' time of the [Manila] reader's everyday life gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical time.<sup>42</sup> Notice too the tone. While Rizal has not the faintest idea of his

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had no command of Spanish, and was thus unwittingly led to rely on the instructively corrupt translation of Leon Maria Guerrero.

42. Notice, for example, Rizal's subtle shift, in the same sentence, from the past

readers' individual identities, he writes to them with an ironical intimacy, as though their relationships with each other are not in the smallest degree problematic.<sup>43</sup>

Nothing gives one a more Foucauldian sense of abrupt discontinuities of consciousness than to compare *Noli* with the most celebrated previous literary work by an 'Indio', Francisco Balagtas (Baltazar)'s *Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Cahariang Albania* [The Story of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania], the first printed edition of which dates from 1861, though it may have been composed as early as 1838.<sup>44</sup> For although Balagtas was still alive when Rizal was born, the world of his masterpiece is in every basic respect foreign to that of *Noli*. Its setting – a fabulous mediaeval Albania – is utterly removed in time and space from the Binondo of the 1880s. Its heroes – Florante, a Christian Albanian nobleman, and his bosom-friend Aladin, a Muslim ('Moro') Persian aristocrat – remind us of the Philippines only by the Christian-Moro linkage. Where Rizal deliberately sprinkles his Spanish prose with Tagalog words for 'realistic', satirical, or nationalist effect, Balagtas unselfconsciously mixes Spanish phrases into his Tagalog quatrains simply to heighten the grandeur and sonority of his diction. *Noli* was meant to be read, while *Florante at Laura* was to be sung aloud. Most striking of all is Balagtas's handling of time. As Lumbera notes, 'the unravelling of the plot does not follow a chronological order. The story begins *in medias res*, so that the complete story comes to us through a series of speeches that serve as flashbacks.'<sup>45</sup> Almost half of the 399 quatrains are accounts of Florante's childhood, student years in Athens, and subsequent military exploits, given by the hero in conversation with

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tense of 'created' (*crió*) to the all-of-us-together present tense of 'multiplies' (*multiplica*).

43. The obverse side of the readers' anonymous obscurity was/is the author's immediate celebrity. As we shall see, this obscurity/celebrity has everything to do with the spread of print-capitalism. As early as 1593 energetic Dominicans had published in Manila the *Doctrina Christiana*. But for centuries thereafter print remained under tight ecclesiastical control. Liberalization only began in the 1860s. See Bienvenido L. Lumbera, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898, Tradition and Influences in its Development*, pp. 35, 93.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Aladin.<sup>46</sup> The 'spoken flashback' was for Balagtas the only alternative to a straightforward single-file narrative. If we learn of Florante's and Aladin's 'simultaneous' pasts, they are connected by their conversing voices, not by the structure of the epic. How distant this technique is from that of the novel: 'In that same spring, while Florante was still studying in Athens, Aladin was expelled from his sovereign's court . . .' In effect, it never occurs to Balagtas to 'situate' his protagonists in 'society,' or to discuss them with his audience. Nor, aside from the mellifluous flow of Tagalog polysyllables, is there much 'Filipino' about his text.<sup>47</sup>

In 1816, seventy years before the writing of *Noli*, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi wrote a novel called *El Periquillo Sarmiento* [The Itching Parrot], evidently the first Latin American work in this genre. In the words of one critic, this text is 'a ferocious indictment of Spanish administration in Mexico: ignorance, superstition and corruption are seen to be its most notable characteristics.'<sup>48</sup> The essential form of this 'nationalist' novel is indicated by the following description of its content:<sup>49</sup>

From the first, [the hero, the Itching Parrot] is exposed to bad influences—ignorant maids inculcate superstitions, his mother indulges his whims, his teachers either have no vocation or no ability to

46. The technique is similar to that of Homer, so ably discussed by Auerbach, *Mimesis*, ch. 1 ('Odysseus' Scar').

47. 'Paalam Albaniang pinamamayanan  
ng casama, t, lupit, bangis caliluhan,  
acong tanguan mo, i, cusa mang pinatay  
sa iyo, i, malaqui ang panghihinayang.'  
'Farewell, Albania, kingdom now  
of evil, cruelty, brutishness and deceit!  
I, your defender, whom you now murder  
Nevertheless lament the fate that has befallen you.'

This famous stanza has sometimes been interpreted as a veiled statement of Filipino patriotism, but Lumbera convincingly shows such an interpretation to be an anachronistic gloss. *Tagalog Poetry*, p. 125. The translation is Lumbera's. I have slightly altered his Tagalog text to conform to a 1973 edition of the poem based on the 1861 imprint.

48. Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature*, p. 34.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36. Emphasis added.

discipline him. And though his father is an intelligent man who wants his son to practise a useful trade rather than swell the ranks of lawyers and parasites, it is Periquillo's over-fond mother who wins the day, sends her son to university and thus ensures that he will learn only superstitious nonsense... Periquillo remains incorrigibly ignorant despite many encounters with good and wise people. He is unwilling to work or take anything seriously and becomes successively a priest, a gambler, a thief, apprentice to an apothecary, a doctor, clerk in a provincial town... These episodes *permit the author to describe hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries*, while at the same time driving home one major point – that Spanish government and the education system encourage parasitism and laziness... Periquillo's adventures several times take him among Indians and Negroes...

Here again we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. This picaresque *tour d'horison* – hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes – is nonetheless not a *tour du monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded: it is that of colonial Mexico. Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of *comparable* prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the oppressiveness of *this* colony.<sup>50</sup> (Contrast prisons in the Bible. They are never imagined as *typical* of this or that society. Each, like the one where Salome was bewitched by John the Baptist, is magically alone.)

Finally, to remove the possibility that, since Rizal and Lizardi both wrote in Spanish, the frameworks we have been studying are somehow 'European', here is the opening of *Semarang Hitam* [Black Semarang], a tale by the ill-fated young Indonesian communist-nationalist Mas Marco Kartodikromo,<sup>51</sup> published serially in 1924:<sup>52</sup>

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50. This movement of a solitary hero through an adamant social landscape is typical of many early (anti-)colonial novels.

51. After a brief, meteoric career as a radical journalist, Marco was interned by the Dutch colonial authorities in Boven Digul, one of the world's earliest concentration camps, deep in the interior swamps of western New Guinea. There he died in 1932, after six years confinement. Henri Chambert-Loir, 'Mas Marco



*It was 7 o'clock, Saturday evening;* young people in Semarang never stayed at home on Saturday night. On this night however nobody was about. Because the heavy day-long rain had made the roads wet and very slippery, all had stayed at home.

For the workers in shops and offices Saturday morning was a time of anticipation – anticipating their leisure and the fun of walking around the city in the evening, but on this night they were to be disappointed – because of lethargy caused by the bad weather and the sticky roads in the kampungs. The main roads usually crammed with all sorts of traffic, the footpaths usually teeming with people, all were deserted. Now and then the crack of a horse-cab's whip could be heard spurring a horse on its way – or the clip-clop of horses' hooves pulling carriages along.

Semarang was deserted. The light from the rows of gas lamps shone straight down on the shining asphalt road. Occasionally the clear light from the gas lamps was dimmed as the wind blew from the east. . . .

A young man was seated on a long rattan lounge reading a newspaper. He was totally engrossed. His occasional anger and at other times smiles were a sure sign of his deep interest in the story. He turned the pages of the newspaper, thinking that perhaps he could find something that would stop him feeling so miserable. All of a sudden he came upon an article entitled:

#### PROSPERITY

A destitute vagrant became ill  
and died on the side of the road from exposure.

The young man was moved by this brief report. He could just imagine the suffering of the poor soul as he lay dying on the side of the road . . . One moment he felt an explosive anger well up inside. Another moment he felt pity. Yet another moment his anger was directed at

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Kartodikromo (c. 1890–1932) ou *L'Education Politique*, p. 208, in *Littératures contemporaines de l'Asie du Sud-Est*. A brilliant recent full-length account of Marco's career can be found in Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926*, chapters 2–5 and 8.

52. As translated by Paul Tickell in his *Three Early Indonesian Short Stories by Mas Marco Kartodikromo (c. 1890–1932)*, p. 7. Emphasis added.

the social system which gave rise to such poverty, while making a small group of people wealthy.

Here, as in *El Periquillo Sarmiento*, we are in a world of plurals: shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps. As in the case of *Noli*, we-the-Indonesian-readers are plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape; some of us may well have walked those 'sticky' Semarang roads. Once again, a solitary hero is juxtaposed to a socioscape described in careful, *general* detail. But there is also something new: a hero who is never named, but who is frequently referred to as 'our young man'. Precisely the clumsiness and literary naivety of the text confirm the unselfconscious 'sincerity' of this pronominal adjective. Neither Marco nor his readers have any doubts about the reference. If in the jocular-sophisticated fiction of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe the trope 'our hero' merely underlines an authorial play with a(ny) reader, Marco's 'our young man,' not least in its novelty, *means* a young man who belongs to the collective body of readers of *Indonesian*, and thus, implicitly, an embryonic Indonesian 'imagined community.' Notice that Marco feels no need to specify this community by name: it is already there. (Even if polylingual Dutch colonial censors could join his readership, they are excluded from this 'ourness,' as can be seen from the fact that the young man's anger is directed at 'the,' not 'our,' social system.)

Finally, the imagined community is confirmed by the doubleness of our reading about our young man reading. He does not find the corpse of the destitute vagrant by the side of a sticky Semarang road, but imagines it from the print in a newspaper.<sup>53</sup> Nor does he care the slightest who the dead vagrant individually was: he thinks of the representative body, not the personal life.

It is fitting that in *Semarang Hitam* a newspaper appears embedded

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53. In 1924, a close friend and political ally of Marco published a novel titled *Rasa Merdeka* [Feeling Free/The Feel of Freedom]. Of the hero of this novel (which he wrongly attributes to Marco) Chambert-Loir writes that 'he has no idea of the meaning of the word "socialism": nonetheless he feels a profound malaise in the face of the social organization that surrounds him and he feels the need to enlarge his horizons by two methods: *travel and reading*.' ('Mas Marco', p. 208. Emphasis added.) The Itching Parrot has moved to Java and the twentieth century.

in fiction, for, if we now turn to the newspaper as cultural product, we will be struck by its profound fictiveness. What is the essential literary convention of the newspaper? If we were to look at a sample front page of, say, *The New York Times*, we might find there stories about Soviet dissidents, famine in Mali, a gruesome murder, a coup in Iraq, the discovery of a rare fossil in Zimbabwe, and a speech by Mitterrand. Why are these events so juxtaposed? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or of what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition (a later edition will substitute a baseball triumph for Mitterrand) shows that the linkage between them is imagined.

This imagined linkage derives from two obliquely related sources. The first is simply calendrical coincidence. The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection – the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time.<sup>54</sup> Within that time, ‘the world’ ambles sturdily ahead. The sign for this: if Mali disappears from the pages of *The New York Times* after two days of famine reportage, for months on end, readers do not for a moment imagine that Mali has disappeared or that famine has wiped out all its citizens. The novelistic format of the newspaper assures them that somewhere out there the ‘character’ Mali moves along quietly, awaiting its next reappearance in the plot.

The second source of imagined linkage lies in the relationship between the newspaper, as a form of book, and the market. It has been estimated that in the 40-odd years between the publication of the Gutenberg Bible and the close of the fifteenth century, more than 20,000,000 printed volumes were produced in Europe.<sup>55</sup> Between 1500 and 1600, the number manufactured had reached between

54. Reading a newspaper is like reading a novel whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot.

55. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 186. This amounted to no less than 35,000 editions produced in no fewer than 236 towns. As early as 1480, presses existed in more than 110 towns, of which 50 were in today’s Italy, 30 in Germany, 9 in France, 8 each in Holland and Spain, 5 each in Belgium and Switzerland, 4 in England, 2 in Bohemia, and 1 in Poland. ‘From that date it may be said of Europe that the printed book was in universal use.’ (p. 182).

150,000,000 and 200,000,000.<sup>56</sup> 'From early on . . . the printing shops looked more like modern workshops than the monastic workrooms of the Middle Ages. In 1455, Fust and Schoeffer were already running a business geared to standardised production, and twenty years later large printing concerns were operating everywhere in all [sic] Europe.'<sup>57</sup> In a rather special sense, the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity.<sup>58</sup> The sense I have in mind can be shown if we compare the book to other early industrial products, such as textiles, bricks, or sugar. For these commodities are *measured* in mathematical amounts (pounds or loads or pieces). A pound of sugar is simply a quantity, a convenient load, not an object in itself. The book, however – and here it prefigures the durables of our time – is a distinct, self-contained object, exactly reproduced on a large scale.<sup>59</sup> One pound of sugar flows into the next; each book has its own eremitic self-sufficiency. (Small wonder that libraries, personal collections of mass-produced commodities, were already a familiar sight, in urban centres like Paris, by the sixteenth century.)<sup>60</sup>

In this perspective, the newspaper is merely an 'extreme form' of the book, a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 262. The authors comment that by the sixteenth century books were readily available to anyone who could read.

57. The great Antwerp publishing house of Plantin controlled, early in the sixteenth century, 24 presses with more than 100 workers in each shop. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

58. This is one point solidly made amidst the vagaries of Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* (p. 125). One might add that if the book market was dwarfed by the markets in other commodities, its strategic role in the dissemination of ideas nonetheless made it of central importance to the development of modern Europe.

59. The principle here is more important than the scale. Until the nineteenth century, editions were still relatively small. Even Luther's Bible, an extraordinary best-seller, had only a 4,000-copy first edition. The unusually large first edition of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* numbered no more than 4,250. The average eighteenth-century run was less than 2,000. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, pp. 218–20. At the same time, the book was always distinguishable from other durables by its inherently limited market. Anyone with money can buy Czech cars; only Czech-readers will buy Czech-language books. The importance of this distinction will be considered below.

60. Furthermore, as early as the late fifteenth century the Venetian publisher Aldus had pioneered the portable 'pocket edition.'

Might we say: one-day best-sellers?<sup>61</sup> The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing – curious that one of the earlier mass-produced commodities should so prefigure the inbuilt obsolescence of modern durables – nonetheless, for just this reason, creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. (Contrast sugar, the use of which proceeds in an unclocked, continuous flow; it may go bad, but it does not go out of date.) The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull.<sup>62</sup> Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in

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61. As the case of *Semarang Hitam* shows, the two kinds of best-sellers used to be more closely linked than they are today. Dickens too serialized his popular novels in popular newspapers.

62. 'Printed materials encouraged silent adherence to causes whose advocates could not be located in any one parish and who addressed an invisible public from afar.' Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, 'Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought,' *Journal of Modern History*, 40: 1 (March 1968), p. 42.

63. Writing of the relationship between the material anarchy of middle-class society and an abstract political state-order, Nairn observes that 'the representative mechanism converted real class inequality into the abstract egalitarianism of citizens, individual egotisms into an impersonal collective will, what would otherwise be chaos into a new state legitimacy.' *The Break-up of Britain*, p. 24. No doubt. But the representative mechanism (elections?) is a rare and moveable feast. The generation of the impersonal will is, I think, better sought in the diurnal regularities of the imagining life.

everyday life. As with *Noli Me Tangere*, fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the specific origins of nationalism, it may be useful to recapitulate the main propositions put forward thus far. Essentially, I have been arguing that the very possibility of imagining the nation only arose historically when, and where, three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds. The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres – monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. Human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.

The slow, uneven decline of these interlinked certainties, first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, 'discoveries' (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history. No surprise then that the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.

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## The Origins of National Consciousness

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If the development of print-as-commodity is the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity, still, we are simply at the point where communities of the type 'horizontal-secular, transverse-time' become possible. Why, within that type, did the nation become so popular? The factors involved are obviously complex and various. But a strong case can be made for the primacy of capitalism.

As already noted, at least 20,000,000 books had already been printed by 1500,<sup>1</sup> signalling the onset of Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction.' If manuscript knowledge was scarce and arcane lore, print knowledge lived by reproducibility and dissemination.<sup>2</sup> If, as Febvre and Martin believe, possibly as many as 200,000,000 volumes had been manufactured by 1600, it is no wonder that Francis Bacon believed that print had changed 'the appearance and state of the world.'<sup>3</sup>

One of the earlier forms of capitalist enterprise, book-publishing

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1. The population of that Europe where print was then known was about 100,000,000. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, pp. 248-49.

2. Emblematic is Marco Polo's *Travels*, which remained largely unknown till its first printing in 1559. Polo, *Travels*, p. xiii.

3. Quoted in Eisenstein, 'Some Conjectures,' p. 56.

felt all of capitalism's restless search for markets. The early printers established branches all over Europe: 'in this way a veritable "international" of publishing houses, which ignored national [sic] frontiers, was created.'<sup>4</sup> And since the years 1500–1550 were a period of exceptional European prosperity, publishing shared in the general boom. 'More than at any other time' it was 'a great industry under the control of wealthy capitalists.'<sup>5</sup> Naturally, 'book-sellers were primarily concerned to make a profit and to sell their products, and consequently they sought out first and foremost those works which were of interest to the largest possible number of their contemporaries.'<sup>6</sup>

The initial market was literate Europe, a wide but thin stratum of Latin-readers. Saturation of this market took about a hundred and fifty years. The determinative fact about Latin—aside from its sacrality—was that it was a language of bilinguals. Relatively few were born to speak it and even fewer, one imagines, dreamed in it. In the sixteenth century the proportion of bilinguals within the total population of Europe was quite small; very likely no larger than the proportion in the world's population today, and—proletarian internationalism notwithstanding—in the centuries to come. Then and now the bulk of mankind is monoglot. The logic of capitalism thus meant that once the elite Latin market was saturated, the potentially huge markets represented by the monoglot masses would beckon. To be sure, the Counter-Reformation encouraged a temporary resurgence of Latin-publishing, but by the mid-seventeenth century the movement was in decay, and fervently Catholic libraries replete. Meantime, a Europe-wide shortage of money made printers think more and more of peddling cheap editions in the vernaculars.<sup>7</sup>

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4. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 122. (The original text, however, speaks simply of 'par-dessus les frontières.' *L'Apparition*, p. 184.)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 187. The original text speaks of 'puissants' (powerful) rather than 'wealthy' capitalists. *L'Apparition*, p. 281.

6. 'Hence the introduction of printing was in this respect a stage on the road to our present society of mass consumption and standardisation.' *Ibid.*, pp. 259–60. (The original text has 'une civilisation de masse et de standardisation,' which may be better rendered 'standardised, mass civilization.' *L'Apparition*, p. 394).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 195.



The revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism was given further impetus by three extraneous factors, two of which contributed directly to the rise of national consciousness. The first, and ultimately the least important, was a change in the character of Latin itself. Thanks to the labours of the Humanists in reviving the broad literature of pre-Christian antiquity and spreading it through the print-market, a new appreciation of the sophisticated stylistic achievements of the ancients was apparent among the trans-European intelligentsia. The Latin they now aspired to write became more and more Ciceronian, and, by the same token, increasingly removed from ecclesiastical and everyday life. In this way it acquired an esoteric quality quite different from that of Church Latin in mediaeval times. For the older Latin was not arcane because of its subject matter or style, but simply because it was written at all, i.e. because of its status as *text*. Now it became arcane because of what was written, because of the language-in-itself.

Second was the impact of the Reformation, which, at the same time, owed much of its success to print-capitalism. Before the age of print, Rome easily won every war against heresy in Western Europe because it always had better internal lines of communication than its challengers. But when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel-door in Wittenberg, they were printed up in German translation, and 'within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country.'<sup>8</sup> In the two decades 1520–1540 three times as many books were published in German as in the period 1500–1520, an astonishing transformation to which Luther was absolutely central. His works represented no less than one third of *all* German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525. Between 1522 and 1546, a total of 430 editions (whole or partial) of his Biblical translations appeared. 'We have here for the first time a truly mass readership and a popular literature within everybody's reach.'<sup>9</sup> In effect, Luther became the first best-selling author *so known*. Or, to put it another way, the first writer who could 'sell' his *new* books on the basis of his name.<sup>10</sup>

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8. *Ibid.*, pp. 289–90.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 291–95.

10. From this point it was only a step to the situation in seventeenth-century

Where Luther led, others quickly followed, opening the colossal religious propaganda war that raged across Europe for the next century. In this titanic 'battle for men's minds', Protestantism was always fundamentally on the offensive, precisely because it knew how to make use of the expanding vernacular print-market being created by capitalism, while the Counter-Reformation defended the citadel of Latin. The emblem for this is the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* – to which there was no Protestant counterpart – a novel catalogue made necessary by the sheer volume of printed subversion. Nothing gives a better sense of this siege mentality than François I's panicked 1535 ban on the printing of *any* books in his realm – on pain of death by hanging! The reason for both the ban and its unenforceability was that by then his realm's eastern borders were ringed with Protestant states and cities producing a massive stream of smugglable print. To take Calvin's Geneva alone: between 1533 and 1540 only 42 editions were published there, but the numbers swelled to 527 between 1550 and 1564, by which latter date no less than 40 separate printing-presses were working overtime.<sup>11</sup>

The coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism, exploiting cheap popular editions, quickly created large new reading publics – not least among merchants and women, who typically knew little or no Latin – and simultaneously mobilized them for politico-religious purposes. Inevitably, it was not merely the Church that was shaken to its core. The same earthquake produced Europe's first important non-dynastic, non-city states in the Dutch Republic and the Commonwealth of the Puritans. (François I's panic was as much political as religious.)

Third was the slow, geographically uneven, spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization by certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs. Here it is useful to remember that the universality of Latin in mediaeval Western Europe never corresponded to a universal political system. The

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France where Corneille, Molière, and La Fontaine could sell their manuscript tragedies and comedies directly to publishers, who bought them as 'excellent investments in view of their authors' market reputations. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 310–15.

contrast with Imperial China, where the reach of the mandarin bureaucracy and of painted characters largely coincided, is instructive. In effect, the political fragmentation of Western Europe after the collapse of the Western Empire meant that no sovereign could monopolize Latin and make it his-and-only-his language-of-state, and thus Latin's religious authority never had a true political analogue.

The birth of administrative vernaculars predated both print and the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century, and must therefore be regarded (at least initially) as an independent factor in the erosion of the sacred imagined community. At the same time, nothing suggests that any deep-seated ideological, let alone proto-national, impulses underlay this vernacularization where it occurred. The case of 'England' – on the northwestern periphery of Latin Europe – is here especially enlightening. Prior to the Norman Conquest, the language of the court, literary and administrative, was Anglo-Saxon. For the next century and a half virtually all royal documents were composed in Latin. Between about 1200 and 1350 this state-Latin was superseded by Norman French. In the meantime, a slow fusion between this language of a foreign ruling class and the Anglo-Saxon of the subject population produced Early English. The fusion made it possible for the new language to take its turn, after 1362, as the language of the courts – and for the opening of Parliament. Wycliffe's vernacular *manuscript* Bible followed in 1382.<sup>12</sup> It is essential to bear in mind that this sequence was a series of 'state,' not 'national,' languages; and that the state concerned covered at various times not only today's England and Wales, but also portions of Ireland, Scotland and France. Obviously, huge elements of the subject populations knew little or nothing of Latin, Norman French, or Early English.<sup>13</sup> Not till almost a century after Early English's political enthronement was London's power swept out of 'France'.

On the Seine, a similar movement took place, if at a slower pace.

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12. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, pp. 28–29; Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, p. 75.

13. We should not assume that administrative vernacular unification was immediately or fully achieved. It is unlikely that the Guyenne ruled from London was ever primarily administered in Early English.

As Bloch wryly puts it, 'French, that is to say a language which, since it was regarded as merely a corrupt form of Latin, took several centuries to raise itself to literary dignity',<sup>14</sup> only became the official language of the courts of justice in 1539, when François I issued the Edict of Villers-Cotterêts.<sup>15</sup> In other dynastic realms Latin survived much longer – under the Habsburgs well into the nineteenth century. In still others, 'foreign' vernaculars took over: in the eighteenth century the languages of the Romanov court were French and German.<sup>16</sup>

In every instance, the 'choice' of language appears as a gradual, unselfconscious, pragmatic, not to say haphazard development. As such, it was utterly different from the selfconscious language policies pursued by nineteenth-century dynasts confronted with the rise of hostile popular linguistic-nationalisms. (See below, Chapter 6). One clear sign of the difference is that the old administrative languages were *just that*: languages used by and for officialdoms for their own inner convenience. There was no idea of systematically imposing the language on the dynasts' various subject populations.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the elevation of these vernaculars to the status of languages-of-power, where, in one sense, they were competitors with Latin (French in Paris, [Early] English in London), made its own contribution to the decline of the imagined community of Christendom.

At bottom, it is likely that the esotericization of Latin, the Reformation, and the haphazard development of administrative vernaculars are significant, in the present context, primarily in a negative sense – in their contributions to the dethronement of Latin. It is quite possible to conceive of the emergence of the new imagined national communities without any one, perhaps all, of them being present. What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between

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14. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, p. 98.

15. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 48.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

17. An agreeable confirmation of this point is provided by François I, who, as we have seen, banned all printing of books in 1535 and made French the language of his courts four years later!

a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.<sup>18</sup>

The element of fatality is essential. For whatever superhuman feats capitalism was capable of, it found in death and languages two tenacious adversaries.<sup>19</sup> Particular languages can die or be wiped out, but there was and is no possibility of humankind's general linguistic unification. Yet this mutual incomprehensibility was historically of only slight importance until capitalism and print created monoglot mass reading publics.

While it is essential to keep in mind an idea of fatality, in the sense of a *general* condition of irremediable linguistic diversity, it would be a mistake to equate this fatality with that common element in nationalist ideologies which stresses the primordial fatality of *particular* languages and their association with *particular* territorial units. The essential thing is the *interplay* between fatality, technology, and capitalism. In pre-print Europe, and, of course, elsewhere in the world, the diversity of spoken languages, those languages that for their speakers were (and are) the warp and woof of their lives, was immense; so immense, indeed, that had print-capitalism sought to exploit each potential oral vernacular market, it would have remained a capitalism of petty proportions. But these varied idiolects were capable of being assembled, within definite limits, into print-languages far fewer in number. The very arbitrariness of any system of signs for sounds facilitated the assembling process.<sup>20</sup> (At the same time, the more ideographic the signs, the vaster the potential

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18. It was not the first 'accident' of its kind. Febvre and Martin note that while a visible bourgeoisie already existed in Europe by the late thirteenth century, paper did not come into general use until the end of the fourteenth. Only paper's smooth plane surface made the mass reproduction of texts and pictures possible – and this did not occur for still another seventy-five years. But paper was not a European invention. It floated in from another history – China's – through the Islamic world. *The Coming of the Book*, pp. 22, 30, and 45.

19. We still have no giant multinationals in the world of publishing.

20. For a useful discussion of this point, see S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, chapter 5. That the sign *ough* is pronounced differently in the words although, bough, lough, rough, cough, and hiccough, shows both the idiolectic variety out of which the now-standard spelling of English emerged, and the ideographic quality of the final product.

assembling zone. One can detect a sort of descending hierarchy here from algebra through Chinese and English, to the regular syllabaries of French or Indonesian.) Nothing served to 'assemble' related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market.<sup>21</sup>

These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.

Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. As Febvre and Martin remind us, the printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially. It was no longer subject to the individualizing and 'unconsciously modernizing' habits of monastic scribes. Thus, while twelfth-century French differed markedly from that written by Villon in the fifteenth, the rate of change slowed decisively in the sixteenth. 'By the 17th century languages in Europe had generally assumed their modern forms.'<sup>22</sup> To

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21. I say 'nothing served . . . more than capitalism' advisedly. Both Steinberg and Eisenstein come close to theomorphizing 'print' *qua* print as the genius of modern history. Febvre and Martin never forget that behind print stand printers and publishing firms. It is worth remembering in this context that although printing was invented first in China, possibly 500 years before its appearance in Europe, it had no major, let alone revolutionary impact—precisely because of the absence of capitalism there.

22. *The Coming of the Book*, p. 319. Cf. *L'Apparition*, p. 477: 'Au XVIIe siècle, les langues nationales apparaissent un peu partout cristallisées.'

put it another way, for three centuries now these stabilized print-languages have been gathering a darkening varnish; the words of our seventeenth-century forebears are accessible to us in a way that to Villon his twelfth-century ancestors were not.

Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form. 'Northwestern German' became Platt Deutsch, a largely spoken, thus sub-standard, German, because it was assimilable to print-German in a way that Bohemian spoken-Czech was not. High German, the King's English, and, later, Central Thai, were correspondingly elevated to a new politico-cultural eminence. (Hence the struggles in late-twentieth-century Europe by certain 'sub-'nationalities to change their subordinate status by breaking firmly into print - and radio.)

It remains only to emphasize that in their origins, the fixing of print-languages and the differentiation of status between them were largely unselfconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity. But as with so much else in the history of nationalism, once 'there,' they could become formal models to be imitated, and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit. Today, the Thai government actively discourages attempts by foreign missionaries to provide its hill-tribe minorities with their own transcription-systems and to develop publications in their own languages: the same government is largely indifferent to what these minorities *speak*. The fate of the Turkic-speaking peoples in the zones incorporated into today's Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the USSR is especially exemplary. A family of spoken languages, once everywhere assemblable, thus comprehensible, within an Arabic orthography, has lost that unity as a result of conscious manipulations. To heighten Turkish-Turkey's national consciousness at the expense of any wider Islamic identification, Atatürk imposed

compulsory romanization.<sup>23</sup> The Soviet authorities followed suit, first with an anti-Islamic, anti-Persian compulsory romanization, then, in Stalin's 1930s, with a Russifying compulsory Cyrillicization.<sup>24</sup>

We can summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation. The potential stretch of these communities was inherently limited, and, at the same time, bore none but the most fortuitous relationship to existing political boundaries (which were, on the whole, the highwater marks of dynastic expansionisms).

Yet it is obvious that while today almost all modern self-conceived nations – and also nation-states – have 'national print-languages', many of them have these languages in common, and in others only a tiny fraction of the population 'uses' the national language in conversation or on paper. The nation-states of Spanish America or those of the 'Anglo-Saxon family' are conspicuous examples of the first outcome; many ex-colonial states, particularly in Africa, of the second. In other words, the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages. To account for the discontinuity-in-connectedness between print-languages, national consciousness, and nation-states, it is necessary to turn to the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838, all of which self-consciously defined themselves as nations, and, with the interesting exception of Brazil, as (non-dynastic) republics. For not only were they historically the first such states to emerge on the world stage, and therefore inevitably provided the first real models of what such states should 'look like,' but their numbers and contemporary births offer fruitful ground for comparative enquiry.

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23. Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism*, p. 108. It is probably only fair to add that Kemal also hoped thereby to align Turkish nationalism with the modern, romanized civilization of Western Europe.

24. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 317.