

Why Do the Imaginary and Imaginary Communities Emerge in Social Theory? National Imaginary in the Context of Globalization

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The author wonders why and when the theorization of the imaginary begins, what kind of reality this concept reflects. The end of modernism questions reality and its theoretical description, and various attempts of postmodern rethinking of the social emerge—from denial, assertion of the disappearance of the social to its salvation through radical rethinking. Theorizing around the imaginary emerges and continues as a result of this rethinking. Cornelius Castoriadis, for example, absolutizes the concept of the imaginary, which, in his opinion, even contains the rational. Charles Taylor gives imaginary, though important, but limited role as a background knowledge. Speaking of the imaginary, one cannot, of course, ignore Benedict Andersen's imaginary communities. According to Andersen, the "imagination" of a nation, like any other community, reflects not the fact that they are "invented" or "constructed" but that they are the result of human practice, that social reality is a socio-historical and cultural product. Nation differs from other communities in the style of representation, namely, the representation-understanding, first of all, of space and time. A specific moment in time is connected not only with the past and future, but also with the same moment in another time and space measurement. People in this case, communicate and socialize through books, newspapers, and national languages. Most importantly, the nation as an imaginary community opposes itself to other communities, distinguishes itself from them, and strives for autonomy. And the guarantee of autonomy is the sovereign state, the nation-state, therefore the nation is always connected with the state and the territory of the exercise of its monopoly right. That is, the nation is an imaginary community that is real only to the extent that it is correlated with the modern territorial state. According to the author, the transformation of the national imaginary under the conditions of globalization is characterized by the loss of attachment to the territory, by the fact that territoriality ceases to be the main, organizing principle of social life. Social practices are increasingly formed beyond borders, belonging to ethnicity, national identity is not determined by territory and citizenship. Despite this, we must not forget that globalization is not a finished project. The transformation of the national imaginary should be viewed not only as the emergence of new imaginary communities, whether national or transnational, but also against the backdrop of interaction and even struggle between traditional forms of social practices and new ones, as evidenced by the growth of ethnic conflicts and separatist movements. According to Appudurai, this is also a consequence of globalization processes. And how this confrontation will end, the question remains open.

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Andersen, globalization, post-national, nation-state, transformation of the national imaginary

Why and When Does the Theoretical Understanding of the Imaginary Appear?

Understanding the social and national imaginary is a consequence or a concomitant phenomenon of the rethinking of modernity, postmodernity, and globalization. Why does the theorization of this term emerge and continue in this period?

The reason is the loss of the accepted grounds of the social, meaning primarily rational grounds. The imaginary itself arises from the inability to explain reality and the social in a rational or functional way.

The end of modernity raises the question of what, in fact, is reality and whether its theoretical description is possible at all. Sociologist Anthony Giddens, for example, is one of the theorists who try to “extend” the life of modernity through its radical rethinking in the era of globalization (Giddens, 2002). And the philosopher does this by radicalizing one of the main foundations of modernity—through the radicalization of reflection. Why does he resort to its radicalization? In short, according to Giddens, the dynamism of social life destabilizes everyday life, the stability of which is no longer fully ensured by the mechanisms of tradition, but requires, in the sociologist’s opinion, more and more reflexivity.

Cornelius Castoriadis reacts to the realities of the “rapidly changing world” in a somewhat different way. Separating himself from the functionalist mainstream of social theory, the philosopher problematizes and absolutizes the concept of the imaginary.

The same phenomena, the dynamism of social life, the loss of stability, and comprehensibility of postmodernity, prompt some philosophers, such as Giddens, to radicalize reflection, while others—among them, first of all, K. Castoriadis—thematize the imaginary.

In the late modern and postmodern era, in the new theoretical image of social life, there is no longer a primary “idea of society”; social matter is formed by the interweaving of everyday practices, and its reflection is constructed anew each time. Under such conditions, the imaginary community is problematized and becomes the object of theorizing philosophical and social concepts.

Cornelius Castoriadis not only problematizes, but also absolutizes and radicalizes the imaginary. For Castoriadis, the social imaginary is the principle according to which the elements that make up society are selected and formalized. That is, the imaginary, according to Castoriadis, is not about creating any images, but about what forms the integrity of a community. The meaning and order of interconnection of social life is set by interpretations and images of the world, the imaginary.

Just like any other social community, nations, according to Castoriadis, are imaginary. This is because nations create their identity through an imaginary reference to a common history. And this reference is imaginary in several ways: first, history is something that is past, gone, and can only be imagined; second, history is not so common to all; third, what is thought of as the historical foundations of collective identity mostly turns out to be myths. But the fact that the foundations turn out to be imaginary, myths, does not mean that they can be neglected; they have significant historical effects, and therefore are as real as any.

Why is Castoriadis’ imaginary also radical? Because rational and functional are parts of the imaginary, “the imagination is...the subject’s whole creation of a world for itself” (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 181).

Chalaz Taylor’s thematization of the social imaginary is occupied by the intermediate position between E. Giddens with his negation of the imaginary through the radicalization of reflexivity and K. Castoriadis, who absolutizes the imaginary.

What place does Taylor give to the imaginary? For him, the imaginary resembles the social consciousness, the unexplicated background knowledge that forms repertoires of practices.

Thanks to the imaginary, communication between people, any public sphere, and social practices are possible. Taylor's concept of "social imagination" is related to the concept of "culture" and cultural theories. Cultural theories assume the existence of background knowledge, the function of which is to mediate between different layers of society, and background knowledge arose due to the emergence of new means of communication between people who have never met in real life "face to face" (Charles, 2007).

Thus, the public sphere is a sphere of practical knowledge and a place of the social imaginary. It is defined not only by rules, but also by how we understand these rules and the public sphere in general. The understanding of these rules is formed mainly from background knowledge and the imaginary.

To define the social imaginary and the public imagination more clearly, Taylor contrasts it with social theory. While the subjects of social theories are groups of intellectuals who produce schemes to describe the life of society, the social imaginary is shared and produced by the general population and exists in the form of myths, legends, stories, and narratives. Thus, the social imaginary ensures the existence of common social practices, gives meaning to the events that happen to people, and thanks to the social imaginary, ideas about legitimacy are shared by the whole society.

To summarize, if we compare the understanding of the imaginary, Castoriadis's is the totality of the possibility of the existence of the social, and Taylor's is certain cognitive grounds for the realization of social practices, a cross-section of mass, non-theoretical social consciousness.

Benedict Andersen's Imagined Communities and Their "Constructiveness"

According to the French historian Ernest Renan (2008), every person makes a personal decision every day to belong to his or her nation, and neither a common language, nor a common territory, nor common blood are grounds for this affiliation.

Renan's idea was not the only one of its kind. At the same time, works by other theorists appeared that set a benchmark for further research on nationalism. These were the work *Nations and Nationalism* by historian Ernest Gellner (2006), a collection of articles edited by historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, and Benedict Anderson's (1991) book *Imagined Communities*.

What unites these works is the idea that the nation and the sense of national belonging are constructs that emerge as a result of communication and social interaction. But this does not mean that nations and other communities are "created" or, even worse, "invented" communities. It means that ethnic groups and nations are historical communities. The emergence of "constructivism" meant only that theoretical thought believes that the social is based on the life practices of individuals, that social phenomena are not given facts, but are the results of human practice. The construction of social reality is its formation in the course of people's activities and their interaction; it is a socio-historical and cultural product of human practices.

What is the "constructiveness" of a nation according to Andersen? For B. Andersen, an imagined community is any community that is larger than a community with empirically fixed boundaries, i.e., all communities larger than a family, village community, etc. are constructed, imagined communities.

Imaginary communities, according to the philosopher, differ in the style of representation. The understanding of time as a movement from the past to the end of the world changed to simultaneity, which meant that a particular moment was associated not only with the past and the future, but also with the same

moment in another dimension. This made it possible to imagine what was happening at the same time with other people whom we could not see visually, what events were happening where we were not, which was facilitated by the publication of books and later newspapers and the creation of national languages.

According to Andersen, a nation differs from other imagined communities in that it always seeks to oppose itself to other communities, to differentiate itself from them, and to strive for autonomy. And the key to such autonomy is a sovereign state, a nation-state. That is why the nation is always connected to the territory and the state.

The nation is a modern understanding not only of time and space, but also of territoriality. The novelty of modern territoriality lies in the clear fixation of territorial borders that define the area of monopoly exercise of state power. The state governs a territorially defined people and acts as the supreme “national” power in a given territory; the modern state is a power over a specific territory.

That is why Andersen offers this definition of a nation: a nation is an imaginary sovereign, limited community, not just imaginary, as is commonly said, but sovereign and limited. It is sovereign and limited because any nation has borders with another nation, because no nation imagines itself to be the whole of humanity, but this nation, not another nation.

A nation is real only to the extent that it is, first, correlated with a modern territorial state, and second, with the nationalism that represents it. Nationalism not only represents the nation, but also forms it. The phenomenon of “the magic of political representation” or “political fetishism” described by P. Bourdieu will help us understand how this happens (Pierre, 2000). In order for “possible classes” or “possible nations” to become real subjects, activists must appear—representatives of the interests of the class or, in our case, interests of the nation. By focusing and personalizing scattered social energy, activists create a national subject. Such a subject turns out to be a real force of social action, and nationalism performs a double role—it both represents and creates the nation as a social reality. That is why Andersen reconstructs the nation through the reconstruction of forms of nationalism.

Nationalism generates and creates a collective solidarity of special strength, effectiveness, and intensity. People shed blood and give their lives for the nation. Nationalism is a kind of religion of modern society, promising a person immortality in the eternal existence of the nation to which he or she belongs. Nationalism is closely related to the “idea of the nation”. The “idea of the nation” ensures that an individual is included in the whole, giving his or her life a transcendent meaning. Thus, it was through belonging to his nation and only through it that an individual felt included in historical existence. The discourse of the nation was a discourse of identity and uniqueness, but also a discourse of inclusion in the world’s historical progress.

So, if a nation is an institutional form, an association of a specific territorial state on a specific territory and a community of people, then we can assume that the loss of the fundamental principle of nations and nationalism, i.e., the attachment to territory, in a certain way transforms the imaginary community of the nation into other imaginary communities. Allow me to suggest that this is exactly what changes in the national imaginary under the conditions of globalization consist of.

This form of representation of the community as a nation is replaced or supplemented by other forms of representation. The relationship between the nation and the state is changing, it can be said that it is precisely this that marks crises. What does it consist of? The state loses its monopoly on moral and legal resources of the nation, and ethno-nationalism loses its attachment to the borders of the territorial state, forms imaginary communities

of both regional and global scale. Allow me to suggest that the loss of connection with territoriality determines changes in the national imaginary

Transformation of the National Imaginary in the Conditions of Globalization

This form of representation of the community as a nation is replaced or supplemented by other forms of representation. The relationships between the nation and the state change, we can say that this is where the crisis begins. What does it consist of? The state loses its monopoly on moral and legal resources of the nation, and ethno-nationalism loses its attachment to the borders of the territorial state, forms imaginary communities of both regional and global scale. States cease to be containers of national cultural spaces, and communities are no longer tied to a particular territory. This does not mean that they are imagined as supranational or extra-national, but only that they are transformed into extra-territorial ones.

The crisis of the nation-state, the national image tied to the territory and the state is a consequence of globalization processes, the consequence of which is, at the same time, the strengthening of the opposite tendencies, as emphasized by Anthony Giddens. In his opinion, on the one hand, transnational forms of social practices are being formed, and on the other hand, the opposite process is taking place—there is a need for local autonomy and regional cultural and national identity. The weakening of nationalist feelings associated with the classical forms of the nation-state is combined with the revival of local nationalism, which actually forms new styles of national representation.

The transformation of the nation-state and the national imaginary in the context of globalization is evidenced by the emergence of the concept of glocalization. Glocalization is actually an attempt to describe the patterns of correlation between the global and the local, the universal and the particular in late modern culture. Initially, glocalization is interpreted as a trend of globalization that manifests itself in various variants of regionalization of the world economy. Anthony Giddens (2002) considers the global and the local in terms of the unification of culture under the influence of globalization, which threatens local socio-cultural identities. In his opinion, globalization faces the reactive resistance of national cultures and leads to the revival of local identities, which becomes a source of social conflict (Giddens, 2002).

R. Robertson (1992) considers glocalization through the prism of the dichotomy of “universalism and particularism”. H. Khondker (2004) has an interesting approach to glocalization. In his opinion, it should be interpreted not as the preservation of the specificity of local cultures, but as a process through which the local peculiarities of cultures are directly introduced into the global world, bypassing the borders of national states.

In the context of the loss of attachment to the territory under the conditions of globalization and the related transformation of the imaginary, the concept of “mobile sociology” by Urry (2000) can and should be considered. It is about mobility as a key characteristic of society under the conditions of globalization. Mobility blurs the boundaries of territorial sovereignty and undermines the traditional understanding of society, which leads to a rethinking of the concept of society and sociology as a whole. In the context of the mobile world, Urry examines the concept of citizenship, or rather, its crisis.

Various displacements are blurring civil society and the authorities that organize the lifestyles of their “members” in a certain territory. At the same time, the “social” is also losing its stability, as new types of citizenship and identity emerge that are competing with national identity and citizenship. Minority citizenship is being formed, and they are being granted the right to obtain appropriate rights and responsibilities within traditional communities.

In the mentioned processes, the transformation of the national and social imaginary is in the center of attention of globalization according to Appadurai (1996). He pays considerable attention to the imaginary itself. In his opinion there is some gap between the existing order and what the community can imagine thanks to the electronic mass media, as a compromise between the actual state of affairs and what is imagined. It is actually an idea that prompts action, the imaginary is the organizing basis for action. The path of action lies from shared vision to collective action—this is what Appadurai emphasizes. And here, according to the anthropologist, electronic media plays the biggest role. Developing the ideas of B. Andersen, Appadurai assigns a significant role in the creation of communities to “electronic capitalism”, which replaces “print capitalism”.

The main consequence of globalization, according to Appadurai, is the deterritorialization of socio-cultural reality. At the same time, both the global and the local are deterritorialized. And the main contradiction of globalization is not the dichotomy of the global and the local, but the destruction of direct links between social organization and the territorial loci of nation-states.

The transformation of the national imaginary is primarily connected with the globalization of life practices, with the change of the imaginary at the level of everyday practices. Social practices cross any borders, and become, according to Appadurai, “supra-national”.

The system of mass movements, the high level of mass migrations, refugees, tourists, guest workers, students, intellectuals, illegal immigrants leads to the formation of “diasporic public spheres”, the transnational identity of which is formed by electronic media. The consciousness of diasporic public spheres is generated by the cultural industry, which builds a nostalgic image of the “historical homeland”, which, although it has nothing to do with reality, effectively forms a sense of “natural” ethnic closeness of people.

The logic of the social processes of the life world is changing—instead of the expansion of social processes, their intensification is taking place. If we use the conceptual apparatus of M. McLuhan, with the increase in the speed of social interaction mediated by electronic media, the explosion associated with the spatial expansion from the center to the periphery is replaced by an implosion. What does it mean? The fact is that, thanks to electronic means of information and communication, any place becomes a center, the concept of a center loses its meaning altogether, the implosion fundamentally decenters the world of life, which has become globally unified and totally inclusive. (McLuhan M., 1964)

And so, one of the manifestations of this logic of implosion is, according to Appadurai, the growth of ethnic and separatist movements. Appadurai sees them not as a consequence or extension of modern social movements and mainstreams, but as an effect of globalization, the result of its implosive logic. In his logic, separatism and episodes of ethnic violence are the product of pressing into local politics much larger (for this locality) political processes, as a result of which the local situation explodes.

Why do we often not notice the transformation of the national imaginary into a transnational or post-national one? To define new processes, we use the phraseology of modernism, the apparatus of nationalism. New identities, no longer tied to the territory, do not yet realize themselves outside the usual style of the social imaginary, “imagine” and present themselves as national, in the struggle with nation-states they use the ideologies of nationalism.

The erosion of the national imaginary, according to Appadurai, as the basic imaginary political community of the modern era, the community that represents and is considered a real subject of the historical process, generates historical uncertainty and raises the question of how to think about history in the context of globalization, which community now gives meaning to the life of an individual. The fact is that nations, like

any other community, are cultural systems, and thus semantic and symbolic systems. As a cultural system, a nation inherits from religion the worship of death and the idea of immortality. The symbolic immortality of compatriots who sacrificed themselves for the sake of their community, i.e. the nation, makes the nation similar to a religious collective in which the individual death of Christ for the sake of humanity gains meaning in a semantic horizon that transcends individual existence.

Modern nationalism has formed symbolic universes in which individual life has gained meaning through belonging to a unique and distinctive collective of compatriots, synchronizing with contemporaries living in their native land, the homeland, and having a diachronic dimension of a historical community that is continuously moving from the past to an open future. And if the synchronic dimension is lost, if contemporaries and compatriots no longer live on this land, in this state, and may have different citizenships, how can we think about such a new community in such circumstances? No one will deny that it is losing such an important component as territory, which in the modern era defined its essence, the essence of a nation on a certain territory.

It is important to emphasize that despite the emergence of new forms of imagined communities, globalization is not a complete project, and social identity continues to be defined by the idea of the nation. Therefore, the study of the phenomenon of globalization involves not only the study of transnational communities and the emergence of a post-national order, but also the recording and analysis of complex relationships and interactions between new forms of social practices and traditional forms of modern nation-states, which have not disappeared, but, on the contrary, have become stronger in certain periods.

The national state is under pressure both from “above”, from transnational institutions and organizations of a political and economic nature, and “from below”, or “from within”—from various “small groups”—local, ethnic, religious, gender, etc. with other semantic systems not tied to space.

The process of socialization continues to be influenced by traditional national institutions and even more so by the open communicative space of a planetary scale. The fact of the rise of ethno-national movements and the growth of related conflicts, which we are currently observing around the world, can be explained as the rollback of globalization processes, as the growth of the role of the nation-state, and the same for Appadurai, the “ideologist” of early globalization, who explains with “culturalism” is a factor of the same globalization.

What is “culturalism”? The term “culture”, according to the anthropologist, means the acquisition of certain attributes of identity, belonging to a community, awareness of these attributes, and their naturalisation as a condition of group identity. But that’s not all, “culturalism” in its most general form can be defined as the conscious mobilisation of cultural differences used in larger national or transnational politics, i.e. the use of cultural differences for political goals and objectives (Appadurai, 1996).

Culturalism movements consciously use the questions of identity, culture, and the historical past in their struggle against nation-states, and consciously mobilise existing cultural material for strategic and populist purposes. For this purpose, the forms of culturalism, according to the philosopher, accept any cultural differences in the era of electronic media, mass migration, and globalisation.

Contemporary ethnicities unite groups that are much larger in spatial extent and number than those studied by traditional anthropology. It is the combination of large size, desire for national self-determination and violence that characterises these new ethnicities. Although culturalist ethnicity is linked to nation-state practices, it is worth noting that a significant part of culturalist movements are transnational, as many of the mobilised ethnicities operate outside the borders of a single nation-state thanks to extensive migration.

According to Apudurai, the intensity and scope of ethnic movements observed in the world are not the result of primordialist feelings, but are the result of conscious efforts. Apudurai bases his concept on the line of American political theory that emphasises the role of the imagination in politics, which underlines the activity of ideology in political life. In his view, historical thinking, which influences the feelings and motives of individuals, does not emerge from the depths of the human psyche or from antiquity, but is generated by the politically determined play of public and group opinions about the past.

Many varieties of racial, religious, and cultural fundamentalism are consciously promoted and engaged by various nation-states (or certain parties within them) in order to suppress internal dissent, increase state homogeneity, and strengthen supervision and control over diverse populations.

Therefore, researchers, according to Appudurai, should pay attention to identities of a larger scale than ethnicities within the nation-state, which are created, transformed, and reified by the apparatuses of modern state and circulated through electronic media.

Of course, not all culturalism movements lead to violence between ethnic groups, but culturalism is particularly exposed to violence in an era when the cultural space of nation-states becomes subject to transnational influences (in the form of migration and electronic media). According to Appudurai, the nation-state as an organising form of the modern political order is in crisis under the influence of migration and electronic media, and part of this crisis is the increasingly violent relationship between the nation-state and the post-national Other.

So, the national imaginary, unlike other imaginary communities, opposes itself to other communities and tries to be autonomous, independent, and subjective. And the guarantee of autonomy is a sovereign state, therefore, the nation “imagines” itself as a subject whose sovereignty is confirmed by the state and the territory of its monopoly power.

The loss of an attachment to territory means only that territoriality ceases to be the basic, organising principle of social life. Such a change in the representation of community is associated with the appearance of somewhat different forms of social practices, “transnational” according to Giddens, which means nothing more than the loss of an attachment to certain territories. Life practices are shaped by events that take place not necessarily at the “place” of these practices, cross any borders, and have their own autonomous dynamics. To be oneself, to preserve one’s identity, including national identity, a person does not necessarily need to be on the territory of one’s state or even to be a citizen of that state.

The transformation of the national imaginary is not only the emergence of post-national or transnational communities, but also the formation of local autonomy and regional identities, which are post-national forms of social identity. According to Appudurai, the intensification of ethnic identity politics and the growth of separatist movements are not the result of national movements, but rather the effect of globalisation, which continues to use the phraseology of nationalism.

In any case, it should be remembered that the processes of transformation of national practices in the context of globalisation involve not only the formation of transnational or post-national communities, but also the complex interaction of new forms of social practices with the traditional forms of modern nation-states.

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