

Nation-states

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- Robbins points out that today, countries (nation-states) structure the social organization of essentially the whole globe
 - We can hardly imagine a person without a nationality
 - nation-states
 - establish the laws that structure how we all live
 - maintain or organize most of the infrastructure (roads, communications, etc.)
 - maintain order by using force internally
 - defend from or attack other countries by using force externally
 - essentially create the setting in which production, trade, and consumption happen
- Yet nation-states in the modern sense are a recent innovation
 - more than half of today's countries are less than 30 years old!
 - few are over 200 years old
 - prior to that, people identified with
 - an ethnic, language, religious, or other group
 - a city
 - a region
 - many were subject to the authority of a ruler or state
 - but that was separate from their sense of group identity
- The key to understanding this lies in the difference between a state and a nation
 - There have been many different definitions of what a state is, but they generally get at the same overall idea
 - that a state is primarily about coercive power
 - State:
 - A large group of people
 - in a defined territory
 - organized into a hierarchy of power
 - such that members of a professional government
 - have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force,
 - and use it to collect revenue
 - and maintain order internally,
 - and to defend the government's interests against other states externally.
 - Nation:
 - A large group of people
 - usually (but not always) in a defined territory
 - who feel solidarity due to sharing a common
 - culture
 - language
 - history
 - in contrast to others

- and thus tend to work together towards shared goals
- the idea that states normally are also nations is a relatively new idea
 - Nations have existed in the sense of “peoples”, like “the Hebrews”
 - First states roughly 4000 to 3000 BC
 - idea that states are the political manifestation of nations picked up very gradually in Europe from late medieval times forward
 - not completed until late 1800s
 - before then, people were usually coerced subjects of states
 - perhaps loyal to a ruler, but not to a country per se
- Running a state is much easier and more efficient if the people in it are a nation
 - they will feel that the state represents them legitimately
 - they will go along willingly with most of the state’s demands
 - rather than having to be forced to at every step
- Ultra-brief history of states and nation-states
 - take my “Emergence of Civilizations” class to look at this much more carefully
 - states originated independently in many parts of the world
 - with the earliest examples in Mesopotamia and Egypt
 - depending on exactly how you define a state, starting around 3000 BC
 - reasons are complex, but seem to relate to
 - people concentrating into cities
 - conflict resolution and maintaining order among growing, dense populations
 - warfare, both defense and conquering and exploiting others
 - organizing for public works like temples, city walls, etc.
 - storing and distributing surplus food and other products for community use,
 - from supporting religious specialists and rituals
 - to a safety net for drought years
 - to group defense, and probably many other purposes
 - differences in wealth and the tendency of some individuals to be self-aggrandizing
 - that is, hierarchies of power were developed by emerging elites to protect and extend their own interests
 - initially, city-states
 - City-state: a single city and its surrounding rural settlements, organized as a state
 - these may have naturally had a nation-like sense of social solidarity
 - later states and empires consolidated multiple cities and rural areas into larger states
 - at this point, the sense of solidarity was apparently lost
 - people identified with their
 - city
 - region
 - local hereditary lords
 - or “people” (recognized by shared culture, language, and history)
 - this is clear in historical records from the first writing up into the nineteenth century
 - but they were incorporated into larger units, usually by force

- the main impact of these larger governments was to coerce people
 - to pay tribute or taxes for tasks not obviously and directly related to them
 - to be conscripted into public projects or serve in militaries
- up through the 1800s, ever more of the world was organized as states
 - less formally organized societies were conquered and incorporated by existing states
 - or they organized themselves as states for self-defense and in order to be able to interact effectively with other states
- governments and rulers of states sought to establish legitimacy
 - that is, to have their subjects recognize them as rightfully being in control
 - this makes the position of the ruler much more secure
 - and saves the many costs of trying to stay in power by sheer force
- ways to maintain legitimacy
 - the “divine right of kings”: the idea that kings were endowed with the right to rule by God (or the gods)
 - many examples, from early Egypt to later Rome to Japan
 - propaganda about the power, piety, justice, achievements, and sometimes generosity of the ruler
 - many examples, from early Mesopotamia on
 - these generally focused on the person of the ruler him/herself, with the government as his/her agent
- large, durable, legitimate states developed in many parts of the world:
 - Ancient and classical Egypt
 - Persian empires
 - the Roman empire
 - China
 - but most of these (except China) did not last into the age of mercantilism
- so as mercantile trade began to link Europe, Africa, India, and Southeast Asia – basically the whole world other than China –, most of the world was organized as states
 - either small and independent
 - or large, but combining many different “peoples”, regions, languages, etc.
- Since the mercantile powers were European, we focus on those states
- As “merchant adventurers” gained wealth and mercantile trade was developing...
 - Europe’s small kingdoms were consolidating into larger states through
 - strategic marriages among royalty
 - military conquest
 - diplomatic agreements
 - Spain was pieced together by 1492 from Aragon, Castile, Grenada...
 - Great Britain by 1800 from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland
 - Italy by 1870 from Sardinia, Tuscany, Parma, Modena, Rome...
 - Germany by 1871, etc.
- as the small kingdoms of Europe began to consolidate, they faced increasing problems with integrating their people and maintaining legitimacy
 - belief in the divine right of kings began to break down

- resistance to paying taxes, doing military service, etc.
- States began to consciously try to create national identity, solidarity, and thus legitimacy for the state by...
 - Creating an “other”
 - get people to feel solidarity in opposition to an “other” group
 - enemies in war
 - “others” with different religion, language, culture, race, etc.
 - such as are encountered when creating and running colonies
 - Creating a shared tradition (an “invented tradition”)
 - get people to feel solidarity because they believe they share the same language, religion, etc.
 - encourage or force them to speak one language
 - encourage or force them to wear similar clothing, eat similar food, etc.
 - encourage celebration of national holidays, ideally displacing local celebrations into smaller family settings
 - build roads and railroads to increase contact, exchange, homogenization
 - encourage national media: newspapers, journals
 - recruit all the young men into the army for a shared, national experience and indoctrination
 - Creating a shared tradition (an “invented tradition”)
 - require children to attend national schools
 - teach them that the state provides benefits
 - teach them a history of the nation-state that they can be proud of
 - teach them geography in which the nation-state is a key unit
 - Ernest Gellner: education is the ultimate state power
 - the professor and classroom replace the executioner and guillotine
- But the legitimate use of force is still important
 - states use violence to eliminate groups that are too obviously different or won’t assimilate
 - sometimes indirectly by not preventing violence against certain groups
 - the frequency of state-sponsored killing in recent history and its large scale mean we can’t ignore it as an aberration
 - we have to face it as a regular feature of nation-states
 - one response: believe that it is possible, and be alert for hints that it might occur while it can still be prevented or stopped
- Nation-states helped to construct the roles of the culture of capitalism
 - Nation-states helped create consumers, as we saw
 - government experts, studies, recommendations, etc.
 - encouraging shift from subsistence to cash economy
 - policies that alienated people from land
 - imperialism that created consumers of manufactured goods abroad and imports domestically
 - Nation-states helped create wage laborers, as we saw

- by largely the same policies
- resisting recognition of unions
- A key function of nation-states: to keep conditions favorable for business
- Robbins (and others) argues that a major function of the nation-state is to maintain the economy
 - that is, keep the conditions good for capitalists and corporations
- How?
 - by ensuring access to raw materials, markets, or today, oil
 - by using military force abroad
 - Wars are unpopular, so states “manufacture consent”
 - using public relations techniques, including “spin”
 - a subtle variant of “lying”
 - Examples:
 - “The Maine was sunk in Havana by a Spanish mine”
 - pretext for Spanish-American war, 1898, to take Spanish colonies of Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam
 - Yellow journalism; Wm. Randolph Hearst: “You furnish the pictures, I’ll furnish the war”
 - underwater archaeology suggests it was an explosion inside the Maine
 - Woodrow Wilson’s Committee on Public Information (CPI) to create support for intervening in WWI (1917)
 - first job by Edward Bernays, the “father of spin”
 - Gulf of Tonkin incident: pretext for US shooting war in North Vietnam
 - two encounters between US signal-monitoring ships and North Vietnamese patrols
 - in the first, three North Vietnamese torpedo boats harassed two US signal-monitoring ships very close to the North Vietnamese coast
 - the US ships fired and sank one of the Vietnamese ships
 - two days later, the nervous US crews got spooked in a fog and misinterpreted some radio messages
 - they reported that they were under attack and fired again
 - but never actually saw any other ships
 - within a day, the military figured out that this was a mistake, and there had been no attack or other ships in the vicinity
 - but despite the fact that the encounter never happened, it was still used to convince Congress to authorize the use of military force against North Vietnam
 - “Saddam Hussein’s troops pulled babies out of incubators in Kuwait”
 - as Robbins explains, this was pure fabrication by a private PR firm hired by Kuwait
 - including supposed eyewitness testimony by the Kuwaiti ambassador’s daughter, who was not even there
 - supported the Persian Gulf War (G.H.W. Bush, senior)
 - much like yellow journalism’s reports of Spanish atrocities
 - “Saddam Hussein is linked to Al Qaeda and has WMD”

- support for Iraq War (G.W. Bush, junior)
 - which 90% of US soldiers in Iraq still believed in 2006, even after Bush conceded that neither was true
- by trying to lower barriers to free trade
 - One way: again, war
 - but governments rarely say that wars are economic
 - Example: Iraq war
 - obviously largely about securing oil
 - but also significantly about establishing a free-market friendly nation-state in the Middle East
 - evidence includes Paul Bremer's rules imposed on Iraq:
 - suspending all import and export tariffs
 - privatizing ~200 state enterprises
 - firing 500,000 state employees (soldiers, health care, teachers)
 - banning requirements to hire local workers, recognize unions
 - lowering the corporate tax rate to 15%, etc.
 - Another way: Trade agreements
 - Example: North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
 - agree to lower import and export tariffs between members
 - agree not to impose labor or environmental laws that would disadvantage another member's trade
 - once signed, resolution of disputes is handled by unelected officials who are obliged to honor the treaty
 - Still another way: Supporting multilateral organizations that pressure countries to improve investment climate
 - Example: IMF and World Bank
 - can demand policies that favor trade in order to give a loan or renegotiate an existing loan
 - Yet another way: Membership in the World Trade Organization
 - a member country can object to a tariff or regulation as impeding trade
 - if the WTO agrees, the country may impose sanctions to pressure the offending country to remove the barriers to trade
- Who benefits from reducing barriers to free trade?
 - Transnational corporations
 - Consumers, who get more and cheaper goods
 - Wealthy nations
 - WTO makes younger (and poorer) nations drop agricultural subsidies
 - but older (and richer) countries already had subsidies before the WTO, so they are grandfathered in
- Who loses?
 - small farmers and businesses that can't compete without protective tariffs or subsidies
 - labor, with fewer work, wage, etc. protections
 - citizens, with fewer safety and environmental protections