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## Introduction

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# Introduction

*Gemma Blok, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Claire Weeda*

'*IC* is not my book anymore.'<sup>1</sup> With these words, taken from the epilogue of the 2006 revised edition of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson closed his keynote lecture delivered at the symposium celebrating his book's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at the University of Amsterdam on 12 September 2013. We, the organizers of that symposium and the editors of this volume, took Anderson's words as a cue to explore his conceptual framework for identity formation in the context of the historical academic discipline.

Over the decades *Imagined Communities* has been a source of inspiration for scholars across the globe. Indeed, the ideas presented in Anderson's book have been applied to a bewildering variety of communities: in past, present and future, and on a local, national and transnational level. On the one hand, this scholarship is an impressive testimony to the intellectual vitality of the conceptual framework of imagined communities. On the other, however, it might somewhat obfuscate the concept's analytical power. The book's cogency is further complicated by the fact that both regimes and insurgents have used the conceptual framework underlying the imagined community to mobilize support for their political goals.

Anderson himself was keenly aware of this problem, as is illustrated by a joke he shared with us in our email correspondence about feeling part of a global community of *Benedicti*: 'Idly I checked out the tenure of the Papal Benedicts, quite amusing: Benedict I – 4 years; Ben II – 1 year; Ben III, less than one year; Ben IV – 3 years; Ben V – 1 year; Ben VI – 1 year; Ben VII – 9 years; Ben VIII – less than one year; Ben IX – 13 years; Ben X – 1 year; Ben XI – 2 years; Ben XII – 8 years; Ben XIII – 10 years (antipope?); Ben XIII True Pope – 6 years; Ben XIV – 18 years; Ben XV – 8 years, and Ben XVI – 8 years. 95 years in all, average tenure 6 years poor wretches. Ciao, Ben.'<sup>2</sup>

1 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (London/New York, 2006), 235.

2 Email B. Anderson to C. Weeda, 3 December 2013.

## Debating *Imagined Communities*

In his memoir *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (which appeared posthumously in 2016), Anderson reflected on the vicissitudes of *Imagined Communities* within the wider academic debate, including both its conception and dissemination. Initially, the main purpose of the book was to contribute to the emerging polemics between British Marxist and left-liberal scholars about modern nationalism in response to Tom Nairn's *Break-up of Britain* (1977), which argued for Scottish independence from the United Kingdom, the latter in Nairn's view being a fossilized political construction. According to Anderson, several scholars, including the historian Eric Hobsbawm, had unjustly taken aim against Nairn by positing that nationalism was incompatible with Marxism. Anderson, conversely, argued that nationalism was a different kind of phenomenon to Marxism and that it could in fact co-exist with other nineteenth-century -isms. For, whereas the main political ideologies might be based 'purely' on rational ideas, nationalism had enormous 'emotional power' with an 'ability to make people die for its sake'.<sup>3</sup>

After it was published, *Imagined Communities* was initially only known to a small audience, especially in the US, where a reviewer deemed it 'worthless apart from its catchy title'. But the end of the Cold War and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union dramatically changed the book's trajectory, when nationalism became a much-debated topic on political and scholarly agendas of a plethora of emerging countries in the former Soviet bloc. By that time, *Imagined Communities* had made its way by word of mouth to various departments in the humanities and social sciences, where it was used as a graduate-level textbook.<sup>4</sup> These two factors led to the book's breakthrough, after which it became a seminal work used in nationalism readers<sup>5</sup> and new scholarly analysis. Judging from an *n*-gram diagram based on the Google Books databank, by the early 1990s, Anderson had surpassed his main 'adversaries' in the British nationalism debate (including Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm) in terms of references.<sup>6</sup> These statistics underpin the general perception that the concept 'imagined communities' is part of

3 B. Anderson, *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (London, 2016), 126.

4 Anderson, *Life Beyond Boundaries*, 150-151.

5 See for instance: P. Spencer and H. Wollman, *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (New Brunswick, 2005); S. Woolf (ed.), *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present: A Reader* (London/New York, 1996).

6 Accessed at: [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Benedict+Anderson%2C+Eric+Hobsbawm%2C+Ernest+Gellner&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t1%3B%2CBenedict%20Anderson%3B%2CCo%3B.t1%3B%2CEric%20Hobsbawm%3B%2CCo%3B.t1%3B%2CErnest%20Gellner%3B%2CCo on 30-04-2017](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Benedict+Anderson%2C+Eric+Hobsbawm%2C+Ernest+Gellner&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2CBenedict%20Anderson%3B%2CCo%3B.t1%3B%2CEric%20Hobsbawm%3B%2CCo%3B.t1%3B%2CErnest%20Gellner%3B%2CCo on 30-04-2017).

the scholarly canon of 'nationalism studies' that emerged at the end of the twentieth century.

In the course of over three decades, the framework of *Imagined Communities* has been employed and debated in various contexts. One matter of contestation is the question whether the imagined community is a modern phenomenon. According to Anderson, in Western Europe, the eighteenth century marked the 'dawn of the age of nationalism', when the preliminary convergence of capitalism and print technology first enabled the conceptualization of an imagined community in people's minds.<sup>7</sup> Thus the framework held little relevance, he suggested, for the medieval or early modern world, in an era before print media that was dominated by religious thinking. According to Anderson, before Enlightenment eroded the powers of Christendom, the 'fundamental conceptions about "social groups" were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal'.<sup>8</sup> Only after the decline of religious thought and dynastic power and its supplanting by rationalist secularism did the New World spurn an ideology of nationalism, which was subsequently transplanted to the rest of the world. Only then did the rise of print-capitalism and calendrical timekeeping allow anonymous co-nationals to imagine one another's daily routines, thus fostering a sense of connectedness and shared experiences. Maps now defined the new boundaries; museums encapsulated the communities' heritage.

Nonetheless, one of the questions raised by scholars is how to account for the multifarious testimonies to an ethnic consciousness in the hierarchically organized societies of premodernity, before the introduction of print media, clear territorial boundaries and modern timekeeping. Does the imagined community indeed only exist in horizontal, boundary-oriented societies, or did premodern hierarchic, centripetal societies – headed by dynastic rulers – perhaps create their own conditions for imagining the community? For instance, the late medieval *metaphor* of the body politic – where the community was imagined holistically as a bounded physical organism – offered a concept of the national community that was limited yet hierarchically structured. The metaphor, based on medicine, presented the ruler as the head of the community's body, whose various subordinate limbs and organs worked together in harmonious cooperation.<sup>9</sup> The impact of this metaphor and, for example, notions of 'communal

7 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 11.

8 *Ibid.*, 15.

9 For the metaphor of the body politic and community formation in the late Middle Ages, see for instance J. Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge, 2014).

sin' remained relatively unexplored in Anderson's work. Accordingly, although it cannot be denied that the framework of the imagined community is pivotal to understanding the rise of nationalism and modern nation-building, several historians argued that the modern nation-state was certainly not the only biotope in which ethnic or national communities are imagined.<sup>10</sup>

Another point of debate concerns the 'transnational' nature of the concept 'imagined communities'. From the start Anderson argued that nationalism was not a uniquely European phenomenon, referring, for instance, to the importance of nation-building projects in Latin America in the early nineteenth century. Accordingly, over the years, scholars have used the framework of the imagined community in their studies on nation-building across the globe.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, this demonstrates the intellectual vigour of Anderson's ideas, and has enabled comparative research of different nation-states that suggest a 'modular' form of identity formation existed. On the other hand, it has also generated controversy. In a critique, the Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee, for example, argued that nation-building processes in Asia and Africa fundamentally differed from those in the modern West.<sup>12</sup> Anderson himself sought to address this problem in later publications, such as *Under Three Flags* (2005) and earlier in *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998), a collection of essays in which he explored common elements that shaped nation-building processes in Southeast Asia in the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the question as to how community-formation processes across the globe relate to each other remains a difficult scholarly problem.<sup>14</sup> As is clear from several contributions in this volume, a main issue is the fact that these connections were forged in the context of colonialism and as such can be approached from a range of perspectives, which makes it difficult to create an all-encompassing framework.

10 For instance, for the German territories, England and France respectively, see C. Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2012); M. Clanchy, *England and Its Rulers 1066-1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity* (Totowa, 1983), 241-262; B. Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1985).

11 It is impossible to include a full bibliography here, but the following examples discuss the wide dissemination: P.M. Kitromilides, 'Imagined Communities' and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans', *Eastern European History Quarterly* 19 (1989), 149-194; M. Kingsley, 'Art and Identity: the Creation of an "Imagined Community" in India', *Global Tides* 1 (2007), 1-10.

12 P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 5.

13 B. Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London, 2005); B. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London/New York, 1998).

14 Valuable discussions can be found in: J. Cullen and Pheng Cheah (eds), *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (New York, 2003); W. Glass (ed.), *Beyond Imagined Uniqueness: Nationalisms in Contemporary Perspective* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010).

A final matter of debate, directly linked to the problems of both periodization and transnationalism, is the prime importance Anderson attributes to 'print-capitalism', arguing that books and newspapers created a sense of national identity. Scholars have subsequently identified a range of additional media contributing to community formation, throughout time and straddling the borders of nation-states. In premodernity, the sermons of mendicant friars – of whom about 40,000 were active in cities in the early fourteenth century and who according to d'Avray represented 'mass communication before print' – served as an important medium for the dissemination of knowledge across large sections of the population at fixed moments on the liturgical calendar.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in the early 1990s, Howard Rheingold famously expanded Anderson's framework to include 'virtual communities' on the Internet.<sup>16</sup> The World Wide Web has enabled people around the world to share ideas and emotional support, and to 'do just about everything people do in real life, but [...] leave our bodies behind', in Rheingold's words. This new revolution in transnational communication, with its own rituals involving email contact, computer conferences and chats on Internet forums, is said to have turned 'modern man' into a 'citizen of cyberspace'. The web enabled people to engage in new forms of 'social solidarity that transcended and encompassed all previous kinds of human association'. Scholars have likewise argued that Anderson's concept of the imagined community is relevant outside the realm of nationalism studies as well, and can be applied, for instance, to transnational networks of scientists, or school communities.<sup>17</sup> This dovetails with Anderson's own statement that 'in fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined'.<sup>18</sup>

### The act of imagining: The intent and content of this volume

One underexplored aspect in Anderson's work, in our view, is the question how the imagining of communities *works*. Although Anderson's work discusses the perceived vital building blocks of an imagined community, such as a

15 D.L. d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford, 2005), 19–73.

16 H. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electric Frontier*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

17 M. Broersma and J.W. Koopmans, *Identiteitspolitiek: Media en de constructie van gemeenschapsgevoel* (Hilversum, 2010); S. Dorn et al., *School as Imagined Communities: The Creation of Identity, Meaning, and Conflict in U.S. History* (New York, 2006).

18 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

shared notion of time, the availability of print media and rituals that entice 'horizontal comradeship', he offers little understanding of how these factors relate to one another in the alchemy of community formation. His work thus provides few concrete insights on *where* and *by whom* the nation is imagined.

This volume of historical case studies aims to explore the possibilities for investigating the crucial processes by which individual citizens imagined their communities, based upon historical source materials. Offering eleven empirical case studies on community formation in a variety of periods and settings, we wish to contribute to understanding how processes of community formation unfolded. Throughout history, communities have been formed under divergent circumstances, in societies headed by dynasties or shaped by democracies, and taking on different guises in relation to 'the nation', something that may too easily be overlooked when using Anderson's framework as a given rather than as an analytical instrument. This volume thereby aims to furnish the conceptual bones of 'imagined communities' with empirical flesh, to begin to unravel the complex dynamics of the act of 'imagining communities'. To expand on the historical meaning of 'imagining communities', the authors were asked to analyse a specific case study on community formation, ranging from premodernity to the modern age. The results of these exercises have been presented here in chronological order.

Claire Weeda, Suze Zijlstra and Lotte Jensen engaged with the relevance of Anderson's framework for premodernity. Weeda argues that liturgical or messianic time – in which past and future concatenated in the present, imbuing it with meaning – infused the notion of ethnic identity with a layer of religious meaning that, although perhaps not experienced as routinely as in modernity, yet fostered feelings of ethnicity. Thus, for instance, the English in the early thirteenth century could imagine their anonymous co-members' actions when 'wassailing', a toasting ritual that was performed at set moments on the Church calendar, addressed in Church sermons, and which was replete with meaning about the fate of the English nation in the past, present and future.

Suze Zijlstra has explored the early years of the Dutch colony of Suriname, in the 1660s and 1670s. The new Dutch settlers who arrived at that time remained in touch with the towns they had left behind, mainly situated in the provinces of Zeeland and Holland. Their letters, until recently remaining untapped in the archives, reveal how in the early years they related to the idea of an overarching *patria* of the Republic, although at the same time often alluding to local identities. As time passed, however, the Dutch settlers sought closer ties to other European groups in the Caribbean and in this way a new local identity emerged that rivalled the older notions of 'fatherland'.

Lotte Jensen, in her chapter on how Dutch authors reflected on the Peace of Ryswick in 1697, discusses how in the seventeenth century the Dutch imagined community and Europeanness were defined in particular by in- and exclusion of other religious denominations, showing that there was a strong interplay between the national and European identities in which diversity of religion was a dominant factor. Concepts of the Dutch Protestant nation as a 'chosen people' continued to hold sway, revealing that religious ideas of ethnicity still retained cogency in a period marked as 'homogenous, empty time'. She thus highlights the strong mark that Christendom left on community formation, as a religion under whose umbrella various nations often competed as well as cooperated, sharpening rather than blurring boundaries of ethnicity.

Exploring nineteenth-century sources, Krisztina Lajosi looks at the potency of symbolic artefacts and culture in community formation, arguing that Gypsy music was essential in shaping Hungarian nationalism. The Gypsy 'Turkish pipe' (an eastern style oboe, known as *tárogató* in Hungarian) became an emblematic instrument in the imagination of the nation, partly because of its associations with anti-Habsburg uprisings and sentiments. As she concludes, the materiality of the *tárogató*, together with the famous Rákóczi March written by Hector Berlioz, held a prominent position in the canon of the nineteenth-century Hungarian national community.

On the other hand, Gemma Blok argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, advertisements for patent medicines for neurasthenia helped create an international imagined community of 'nervous sufferers'. Print media thus not only helped shape nations, but could foster multifarious imagined communities, for instance through its emphasis on the shared experience of sickness, whose patients were subjected to the shared ritual of swallowing pills at fixed moments during the day. Widely advertised in newspapers and extremely popular, Pink Pills and the extensive advertisements portraying their consumers, thus connected the ritual of daily pill taking to new psychiatric notions of 'nervous fatigue' as a legitimate modern condition. All over the world, newspaper readers were offered the opportunity to identify with other 'neurasthenics': people they had never met, but who, like them, apparently struggled with the tensions and quick pace of modern life.

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, Klaas Stutje and Marleen Rensen have analysed various transnational and ideological communities in the interwar years. Kuitenbrouwer discusses the impact of radio technology on the transnational imagined community between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s. At the time, the Indonesian archipelago was the prized colony

of the Netherlands, rendering it both a source of pride and anxiety for the colonial elites, who identified many internal and external threats. To counter these, the Dutch in the wake of the First World War started experimenting with wireless radio technology, forging direct connections between the two parts of the empire through broadcasting (in 1927) and telephony (1929). In this way radio created a sense of unity and pride amongst pro-colonial groups in the Netherlands and the Indies, who embraced these feelings to counter the uncertainties that haunted them at the time.

Examining the same period (the interwar years), Klaas Stutje analyses the network of anti-colonial Indonesian students in the Netherlands who were members of the *Perhimpoean Indonesia* organization (PI). With their newspaper *Indonesia Merdeka*, they tried to feed nationalistic feelings in the Dutch East Indies in order to reach their ultimate goal: independence. His case study allows Stutje to reflect extensively on long-term developments in Anderson's work, who wrote extensively on Indonesian nationalism but relatively little on the PI. Stutje argues that the history of the organization does not fit dominant theoretical models of nationalism, as its members operated from a country at the other side of the world in an effort to mobilize their compatriots back home – a phenomenon that Anderson diminutively called 'long-distance nationalism'. This concept, however, does not reveal the full complexities of the PI, who were active in and inspired by networks of anti-colonial activists from different countries and whom they mentioned extensively in *Indonesia Merdeka*. His source material shows, according to Stutje, that the PI thus engaged in 'long-distance internationalism' in order to shape its own identity, suggesting that nationalism is an inherently transnational phenomenon – a view that Anderson put forward in his book *Under Three Flags* (2005).

Marleen Rensen in her chapter 'Time, Rhythm and Ritual: Imagined Communities in *L'espoir* (1937) and *Les sept couleurs* (1939)' focuses on national imagining in fascist and anti-fascist communist discourses of modernity. Through her detailed analysis of two novels by André Malraux (1901-1976) and Robert Brasillach (1909-1945), she demonstrates the significance of the concept of the imagined community for the study of interwar 'political religions' like fascism and communism, arguing that rather than superseding a messianic concept of time, in 'secular' modernity the nation could still be imagined as a regenerative, cyclical rhythmic body in a semi-religious discourse.

Moving into the post-war era, Barbara Henkes analyses the community formation of Dutch migrants who moved to South Africa in the 1950s, focusing on the tercentenary celebrations of the landing of Jan van Riebeeck,

which was the start of white settlement in the region by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Using key insights from Anderson's work Henkes unravels the concept of *stamverwantschap*, a notion of kinship ties between the Dutch and the white Afrikaner population of South Africa, who were considered descendants of the VOC colonists. Henkes shows how, by actively participating in the Van Riebeeck celebrations, Dutch migrants who migrated to South Africa in the 1950s at the same time might display their Dutch-ness and a white 'civilized' South African-ness, a notion that was central to the discourse of the nascent Apartheid regime. In the Netherlands, journalists who underscored the close ties between the two countries, reviewed these activities favourably. In this way Dutch agency in the South African Van Riebeeck festivities opened a 'singular world' (to use Anderson's words) in which a sense of transnational whiteness was celebrated.

Niek Pas focuses on the role of sports in colonial and post-colonial community formation. In his chapter on the history and memory of the '*Tour d'Algerie*', Pas stresses the importance of cycling for the identity of French colonists in North Africa. During the period of colonialism, this type of sports connected Algeria to France. When the colonial period had ended, for nostalgic former French colonists the (racing) bicycle became 'more than a relic', and in fact functioned as a totem: a 'tangible artefact and also a symbol, a direct connection to the colonial era that brought with it a universe of memories, thoughts, feelings and emotions'.

Finally, Alexander Dhoest, in his chapter 'Remembering and Imagining the National Past: Public Service Television Drama and the Construction of a Flemish Nation, 1950-1980', explores the role of the past in Flemish television. He demonstrates how romanticized images of the past entered the homes of the Flemish from the 1950s at fixed times in their daily routines, creating a national community within a transnational state. As Dhoest argues, drama productions played an important role as vivid and popular narratives about the 'Flemish' region, its people – often portrayed as 'simple peasants' – and history.

## Emotions and community building

Thus, the boundaries between the world before and after 1800 are not so strict as Anderson suggested. Also, as several articles in this volume suggest, imagined communities were formed across national boundaries, not just within them. In particular, the case studies presented in this book encourage us to recognize the impact individuals had on the creation of

these various types of imagined communities. Whereas Anderson overwhelmingly focuses on larger structures rather than personal agency, in this volume, various individuals take centre stage who shaped imagined communities in the past: from early-twentieth-century Indonesian students, to seventeenth-century Dutch planters in Suriname, and from nineteenth-century Hungarian patriotic antiquarians and composers to medieval archbishops. To an extent it are specific historical actors who actively created imagined communities, such as the writers of post-war Flemish family shows, or the Dutch migrants in South Africa who participated in the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck celebrations. And in examining the acts of individuals, it does not suffice to look solely at the underlying changing economic, political or social interests. Sentiments and emotions always form part of the story as well, as well as attachment to culture and the employment of social and cultural metaphors.

Anderson wrote most of his work at a time when the 'history of emotions' had not yet developed into the productive and intellectually stimulating area of historical research it is today.<sup>19</sup> Yet his work is full of emotions. The nation as an imagined community, he wrote, was supported by feelings of comradeship. He also wrote about the universal human struggle with suffering and hardship caused by 'disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death'. The imagined community could offer its participants solace and support. Dying for the community was the ultimate sacrifice that the anonymous, individual soldier could make for the entire nation.

In the contributions to this volume, which is meant to explore the process through which individual citizens in various times and places imagined their communities, a range of expressed emotions that apparently unite people thus also comes to the fore. A key emotion in the process of building imaginary communities appears to be nostalgia. Dhoest talks about post-war Flemish television shows playing upon their audience's yearning for a lost, communal past at a time when modernization was rapidly changing Flanders. In fact, as Dhoest states, 'one may argue that nostalgia forms the very core of national identities, which commonly display a strong orientation towards an idealized shared history'.<sup>20</sup>

19 See for instance: U. Fevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest/New York, 2011); S.J. Matt and P.N. Stearns, *Doing Emotions History* (Champaign, 2013); J. Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2015).

20 See chapter 11 in this volume: Alexander Dhoest, 'Remembering and Imaging the National Past. Public Service Television Drama and the Construction of a Flemish Nation', 228.

This is certainly the case with the former French Algerians (*pieds-noirs*) portrayed by Niek Pas. In general, the memory cult of the *pieds-noirs* is highly developed, Pas notes – there is even a term for it: *nostalgie*, a contraction of the words ‘*nostalgie*’ and ‘*Algérie*’ – and the bicycle is central to it for a specific subgroup of *pieds-noirs* called the *Amicales*. As such, nostalgia – rooted in vertical time – emphasizes the perception of a shared past shaping community identities in the present, as both Weeda and Rensen also argue in their contributions.

Expressions of fear can also serve as the glue holding imagined communities together. Suze Zijlstra describes how in sixteenth-century Suriname, the Dutch colonial settlers suffered anxieties on various fronts: there were fears of conflicts with the indigenous population, who from the moment Europeans came to the Suriname area, had turned against the migrants. Also, the settlers worried the English would try to retrieve their former colony. Sharing these fears strengthened the colonists’ communal identity as inhabitants of Suriname. Belonging to an ethnic group could also in itself foster fear, which thus further sharpened ethnic identities and a sense of unity. As Weeda argues in her chapter about English identity formation, remarks made by Church prelates about how the ‘inherited’ communal vice of English drinking rituals supposedly shaped the nation’s fate – leading to the Church interdict placed on the English community – assuredly nurtured feelings of connectedness across the English populace shaped by fear, as the community members together purportedly faced eternal damnation.

Conversely, as Blok argues, Anderson’s concept of the imagined community might also be applied to fraternal groups who offered mental and material solace, support and comradeship to suffering people. For historians of psychiatry, the concept can thus help to explain how individuals came to adopt psychiatric labels and explanations for their experiences, feelings and behaviours. An extensive discourse on ‘listlessness’, feeling ‘unhappy’ and ‘nervous exhaustion’ was employed to sell Pink Pills in the early twentieth century. Possibly, as Blok speculates, reading the ads stimulated readers to self-identify and experience themselves as ‘neurasthenics’, supported in the process by the transnational imagined community of fellow nervous sufferers presented to them in the newspapers.

## Emotional practices

Most notably, the empirical case studies in this volume suggest the importance of ‘emotional practices’ in community formation. Emotional practices,

in the words of historical anthropologist Monique Scheer, are 'habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes that aid us in achieving a certain emotional state'.<sup>21</sup> As several contributions in this volume demonstrate, emotional practices involving objects (pills, bicycles, radios, television sets, musical instruments), commemorations and other rituals, as well as expected or real bodily sensations (a relief of bodily or mental suffering, sportsmanship, or the sensory experience of music, and marching) can stimulate, through the imagination, feelings of brotherhood and kinship with people one has never met.

Media use, for instance, is a very potent emotional practice. This is shown very clearly by Alexander Dhoest, in his article on Flemish television in the post-war period. For the generation who grew up with Flemish television in this decade, drama 'created shared memories which contributed to the sense of a collective, national past', Dhoest argues. This sense of a shared past demonstrates the power television has to create imagined communities of viewers. Viewers watched the same programmes at the same time, which created a horizontal dimension of simultaneity. On the other hand, the programmes they watched linked them to a shared past, creating a vertical dimension of collective history in which the emotional experience of nostalgia held sway.

Several decades earlier, during the 1920s, the development of modern radio technology strengthened the transnational, colonial Dutch imagined community, as Vincent Kuitenbrouwer shows. Radio connected people in different parts of the world, and celebrating this achievement as a feat bolstered the international prestige of the Netherlands. Listeners expressed awe and pride at being able to hear the voice of their young, royal Dutch princess Juliana, and great joy at being able to talk to their family members at such a great distance. The emotive language they use to describe these long-distance conversations emphasizes the personal connections 'from heart to heart'. Looking at ego documents and media reports it seems these feelings trickled down to a wider audience of Dutch people living in the colony and in the Netherlands, forging a colonial imagined community.

During the first half of the twentieth century, in the history of Hungarian nationalism, the radio also played an important role in popularizing and spreading Gypsy music, as Kristina Lajosi describes. The public in restaurants and cafés, and wealthier families in their homes, enjoyed broadcasts of concerts by famous Gypsy bands. The radio played an important role in the export of a romantic brand of nationalism that was closely linked to Gypsy music. The emotional practice of listening to the familiar tunes played by Gypsies

21 M. Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 193-220, here at 209.

wearing Hungarian Hussar costumes became a distinct marker of Hungarian identity, not only because of the particularity of the tunes, but also because of the spectacle Gypsy musicians provided for audiences at home and abroad.

Finally, Marleen Rensen, when analysing the novels of the French communist writer André Malraux, and his colleague Robert Brasillach, who promoted fascism, emphasizes the great power of marching as an emotional practice, strengthening the bonds between communists and fascists alike. Malraux and Brasillach both depict 'rhythmic movements in marching and singing that engender a strong affective bond', to quote Rensen. She argues that in their literary work, 'the sensation of being one and moving harmoniously together further expresses a yearning for a rhythmic experience of time that is directly related to a communal group held together by a shared past and a common destiny'.

Examining the expressed emotions and emotional practices tied to the experience of group membership, the concomitant nostalgia for the group member's past, the metaphors by which the community is imagined and the artefacts embodying it, together enriches the still potent framework of the imagined community, both in premodernity and modern times, in religious and secular societies, in transnational and national contexts. Thus, the analysis of specific case studies in this volume hopefully will contribute to opening up new fields of enquiry into the imagined community in Anderson's work, whose relevance continues to live on to this day, both in scholarship and in current socio-cultural and political developments.

## About the authors

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