

Re: So it is true...

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-12/msg00197.html>

- *From:* "Seán O'Leathlóbhair" <jwlawler@xxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 3 Dec 2005 08:22:16 -0800
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Peter T. Daniels wrote:

> Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:

>>

>> Peter T. Daniels wrote:

>>> Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:

>>>>

>>>> I think that few here in the UK are aware of that but that may improve
>>>> since the countries have split. There is a very common naive view of a
>>>> one to one relationship between country and language. You can even
>>>> stump many people with questions such as: what language is spoken in
>>>> Belgium or Switzerland? I would bet a fair amount that if you asked
>>>> what was spoken in Czechoslovakia, you would get the single answer
>>>> Czech. But I would also think it likely that if you asked about
>>>> Slovakia, you may now get the answer Slovakian.

>>>>

>>>> Belgium and Switzerland (and Iraq) are nations in the American sense,
>>>> but not really in the more widespread sense of the word. (We needed a
>>>> term for the "United States" in 1787 and took the word that previously
>>>> designated both an ethnic and a state unity, to designate a political
>>>> unity.)

>>>>

>>>> Which also explains why Americans don't understand how Saddam could try
>>>> to eliminate the Kurds -- they kept calling them "his people," which
>>>> they weren't. They were drawn within his (and the others') borders by
>>>> Woodrow Wilson.

>>>> --

>>>> Peter T. Daniels grammatim@xxxxxxxx

>>>>

>>>> Do you mean that Americans today use "nation" differently to other

>>>>

>>>> No, differently from [colloq. than] others

Sorry.

> Except we don't realize it. In the US, "nation" and "country" are
> synonymous; in Europe, the question didn't arise until fairly recently.
> What did Germans or Italians think of themselves as before 1871? Wasn't
> there a sense of nationhood long before there was political unity? Was
> Yugoslavia a nation?

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>

> Are or were England, Scotland, and Wales "nations"?

A tricky question. Some would say yes and some would say no, a single person may give different answers according to the context. It is fairly common to hear the phrase: "The Home Nations", particularly in the context of sporting events. Usually these "nations" are England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In some sports they compete separately e.g. football (soccer) and in others they compete as one e.g. Olympics.

There is now a Scottish Parliament with a moderate amount of power and a Welsh Assembly with rather less. I would guess that even the Scottish Parliament has rather less power than one of your States. The Northern Ireland Assembly is currently suspended. Oddly, there is no government at this level in England. The next level above county is the United Kingdom. So, today at least, England probably has a weaker claim to nationhood than the others.

>> English speakers? Or, do you mean there is a distinct sense in which
>> the United States is a nation? That may become an issue for the
>> European Union one day but probably not in the near future. I expect
>> the vast majority of EU citizens would name a smaller entity as their
>> nation. I am happy to say that I am an EU citizen rather than
>> British or Irish but I think that I am in a small minority.

>

> Do you pledge allegiance to the flag of the European Union, and to the
> Republic for which it stands, one nation, ..., indivisible, with liberty
> and justice for all?

I have never been asked to pledge allegiance to any flag nor have I been required to sing any national anthem, we don't do that sort of stuff here. I don't recall even seeing flags in British schools except in unusual circumstances. If I had to sing a national anthem, I would prefer the EU one but that choice is encouraged by the music.

If you are offered British citizenship then you will need to swear an oath of allegiance but if you are born a citizen then this is not required. Rather oddly, when my brother was offered Australian citizenship, he was required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen of England even though he was already British.

> (Never mind that allegiance to a flag is a purely American thing, born,
> it seems, of the Civil War.)

Yes, it seems an odd concept to me.

>> The sense that I meant was an area under a particular government. Here
>> is the first definition from the Cambridge Online Dictionary.
>>
>> 1 [C] a country, especially when thought of as a large group of people

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- >> living in one area with their own government, language, traditions,
- >> etc:
- >>
- >> Which is pretty much what I had in mind.
- >
- > Evidently this dictionary doesn't arrange its definitions in historical
- > order, like the Oxford and M–W dictionaries.

I don't know its rationale but another sensible order would be the frequency of use today. Interesting though a historical order may, it is not necessarily the most useful one. If you follow the link you will see the subtitle: Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary. I am not familiar with the hardcopy version of this dictionary but I do have the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. This omits etymology and gives only one definition for nation:

"large community of people, usu sharing a common history, language, etc, and living in in a particular territory under one government"

which sounds more like 1 from the Cambridge dictionary. I expect that both dictionaries consider that a learner is better served by emphasising the most common contemporary uses. The reason for my choice of dictionary in my previous post is that it is the best UK English dictionary I know that is freely available online.

- > But even here, note the distinctive "language, traditions, etc."

Did you mean distinctive?

Yes. If you were too strict about that requirement then most nations would be very small. Belgium and Switzerland would fragment but what about the United States? Do you all share common traditions?

- >> I am aware of other senses e.g. some people talk of the Muslim Nation
- >> or the Nation of Islam which does not fit the above definition. The
- >> second definition is a better but not perfect fit.
- >
- > I don't know what Muslim Nation is, but Nation of Islam is the name of
- > the denomination headed by Elijah Muhammad and then by Lewis Farrakhan,
- > which is not the same as Islam (as Malcolm X discovered during his
- > Hajj).

I was not thinking of that organisation but a proposal that Muslims across the world should unite. Maybe I have the wrong name for this idea or maybe the name has been used more than once. The organisation that you refer to is not well known here.

- >> 2 [S] a large group of people of the same race who share the same
- >> language, traditions and history, but who might not all live in one
- >> area: the Navajo nation
- >

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- > What are [C] and [S] introducing these definitions?
- >
- > (And what does Cambridge think "race" means?)

I cannot speak for Cambridge but it is an online dictionary so you could have a look yourself.

- >> Here's a link:
- >>
- >> <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=52976&dict=CALD>
- >>
- >> Sadly, despite the possible confusion of the meaning of nation,
- >> Saddam's attempted elimination of the Kurds is not hard to believe.
- >> There have been plenty of others incidents of rulers attempting to
- >> eliminate groups within their same nation / country / state / area
- >> which they control. Also there have been many civil wars.
- >
- > But probably not people of their own "nationality," i.e. "ethnicity."
- > ("Ethnicity" could be seen as a recent invention -- M-W makes it 1950 --
- > that turned "nationality" into a retronym.)
- >
- > I met a recent Polish immigrant in Chicago (I think it was before 1989)
- > and happened to mention the Jews of Poland. And he said, They're not
- > Poles! they're Jews!
- > --
- > Peter T. Daniels grammatim@xxxxxxx

How about Pol Pot in Cambodia? What were the criteria for his killings?

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Seán O'Leathlóbhair

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• *Follow-Ups:*

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◇ *From:* Paul J Kriha
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
◇ *From:* Peter T. Daniels

• *References:*

- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
◇ *From:* Thomas Widmann
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
◇ *From:* Wiktor S.
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
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