Worksheet 2 – Nations and nationalism - note taking

Read the extract from '*Nations and nationalism*' by Andrew Heywood.

Having read the extract make notes on different interpretations of cultural nationalism using the table that follows.

Nations as cultural communities
The idea of the nation as an essentially ethnic or cultural entity can be traced back to late eighteenth century Germany and the writings of figures such as Herder (1744-1803) and Fichte (1762-1814). For Herder, the innate character of each national group was ultimately determined by its natural environment, climate and physical geography shaping the lifestyle, working habits, attitudes and creative propensities of a people. Above all, he emphasised the importance of language, believed to be the embodiment of a people's distinctive traditions and historical memories. Each nation thus possesses a Volksgeist (literally, the 'spirit of the nation'), which reveals itself in songs, myths and legends, and provides a nation with its source of creativity. Herder's nationalism therefore amounted to a form of culturalism, emphasising an awareness and appreciation of national traditions and collective memories instead of an overtly political quest for statehood.

The implication of Herder's culturalism is that nations are 'natural' or organic entities, that can be traced back to ancient times and will, by the same token, continue to exist so long as human society survives. A similar view has been advanced by modern social psychologists, who point to the tendency of people to form groups in order to gain a sense of security, identity and belonging. From this perspective, the division of humankind into nations reflects nothing more than the natural human propensity to draw close to people who share a similar culture, background and lifestyle to oneself. Such psychological insights, however, do not explain nationalism as a historical phenomenon, that is, one that arose at a particular time and place, specifically early nineteenth-century Europe.

Ernest Gellner (1983) emphasised the degree to which nationalism is linked to modernisation and, in particular, to the process of industrialisation. Gellner stressed that while pre-modern or 'agro-literate' societies were structured by a network of feudal bonds and loyalties, emerging industrial societies promoted social mobility, self-striving and competition, and so required a new source of cultural cohesion. This was provided by nationalism. Nationalism therefore developed to meet the needs of particular social conditions and circumstances. Gellner's theory nevertheless also implies that nationalism is now ineradicable, since a return to pre-modern loyalties and identities is unthinkable. However, Anthony Smith (1986) challenged the idea of a link between nationalism and modernisation by highlighting the continuity between modern nations and pre-modern ethnic communities, called 'ethnies'. In this view, the nation is historically embedded: it is rooted in a common cultural heritage and language that may long pre-date the achievement of statehood or even the quest for national independence. Smith nevertheless acknowledged that, although ethnicity is the precursor of nationalism, modern nations only came into existence when established ethnies were linked to the emerging doctrine of political sovereignty. This conjunction occurred in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in Asia and Africa in the twentieth century.

The cultural or ethnic dimension of national identity is most clearly expressed in so-called cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism commonly takes the form of national self-affirmation; it is a means through which a people can acquire a clearer sense of its own identity by heightening national pride and self-respect. This can be seen in the case of Welsh nationalism, which focuses much more on attempts to preserve the Welsh language and Welsh culture in general, than on the search for political independence. Friedrich Meinecke (1970), went one step further and distinguished between 'cultural nations' and 'political nations'. 'Cultural' nations are characterised by high level of ethnic homogeneity; in effect, national and ethnic identities overlap. Meinecke identified the Germans, the Russians, the English and the Irish as cultural nations. Such nations can be regarded as 'organic', in that they have been fashioned by natural

or historical forces, rather than by political ones. Cultural nations nevertheless tend to view themselves as exclusive groups. Membership of the nation derives not from a political allegiance, voluntarily undertaken, but from an ethnic identity that has somehow been inherited. Cultural nations view themselves as extended kinship groups, distinguished by common descent. In this sense, it is not possible to 'become' German, Russian or English simply by adopting the language and beliefs of such peoples. Such exclusivity, however, has tended to breed insular and regressive forms of nationalism and to weaken the distinction between nation and race.

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Herder	
Gellner	
Smith	
Meinecke	