6 Nationalism

6.1 KEY TERMS

→ Patriotism – literally, love of one’s fatherland; a psychological attachment and loyalty to one’s nation or country

→ Nation – a collection of people bound together by shared values and traditions, a common language, religion and history, and usually occupying the same geographical area

→ Chauvinism – uncritical and unreasoned dedication to a cause or group, typically based on a belief in its superiority, as in ‘national chauvinism’ or ‘male chauvinism’

→ Xenophobia – a fear or hatred of foreigners; pathological ethnocentrism

→ Colonialism – the theory or practice of establishing control over a foreign territory, usually by settlement or economic domination

→ Primordialism – the belief that nations are ancient and deep-rooted, fashioned, variously, out of psychology, culture and biology

→ Ethnicity – a sentiment of loyalty towards a particular population, cultural group or territorial area; bonds that are cultural rather than racial

→ Citizenship – membership of a state; a relationship between the individual and the state based on reciprocal rights and responsibilities

→ Community – a principle or sentiment based on the collective identity of a social group; bonds of comradeship, loyalty and duty

→ Constructivism – the theory that meaning is imposed on the external world by the beliefs and assumptions we hold; reality is a social construct

→ Sovereignty – the principle of absolute or unchallengeable authority or unquestionable political power

→ Separatism – the quest to secede from a larger political formation with a view to establishing an independent state

→ Nation-state – a sovereign political association within which citizenships and nationality overlap; one nation within a single state

→ Unification – the process through which a collection of separate political entities, usually sharing cultural characteristics, are integrated into a single state

→ Independence – the process through which a nation is liberated from foreign rule, usually involving the establishment of sovereign statehood

→ Cultural nationalism – a form of nationalism that places primary emphasis on the regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilisation rather than on self-government

→ Ethnic nationalism – a form of nationalism that is fuelled primarily by a keen sense of ethnic distinctiveness and the desire to preserve it

→ Internationalism – a theory or practice of politics that is based on transnational or global cooperation; the belief that nations are artificial and unwanted formations

→ Tribalism – group behaviour characterised by insularity and exclusivity, typically fuelled by hostility towards rival groups

→ Thatcherism – the free-market/strong state ideological stance associated with Margaret Thatcher; the UK version of the new right political project

→ Supranationalism – the ability of bodies with transnational or global jurisdictions to impose their will on nation-states

→ Militarism – the achievement of ends by military means, or the extension of military ideas, values and practices to civilian society
Nationalism came to stand for social cohesion, order and stability, particularly in the face of the rise of socialism, which embodied the ideas of social revolution and internationalist working-class unity. In this sense, the rise of nationalism can be seen as the conservative response to threats to social order from outside the nation; in order to oppose external threats one must emphasise internal unity. Nationalism sought to integrate the politically significant enfranchised working classes, and to do so they no longer relied on the prospect of political liberty or the realisation of democracy; instead, the focus was on chauvinistic and xenophobic commemoration of past national glories and military victories. Each nation began to claim its own unique or superior qualities, where all other nations were regarded as alien, untrustworthy and threatening. This new climate of popular nationalism helped to fuel support for the era of colonial expansion that spanned from 1870 until the turn of the century. It also contributed to the mood of international rivalry and suspicion, which culminated in the outbreak of World War One in 1914.

6.3.2.4 After 1918 – the re-emergence of liberal nationalism

At the Paris Peace Conference following World War One, President Woodrow Wilson affirmed the right of national self-determination in his Fourteen Points.

6.3.3 Interpretations of nationalism in development

There are a number of different interpretations of the origins of nationalism. The main interpretations are the following:

- Nationalism as a premodern phenomena
- Nationalism as a medieval invention
- Enlightenment nationalism
- Nationalism originated in the nineteenth century

6.3.3.1 Nationalism as a premodern phenomena

This first account of nationalism associates it with ancient ethnic groups and tribes. Thus, the nation is seen as a phenomena of great antiquity, with its roots in premodern communities. The nation is an expression of either a form or ethnicity or a straightforward normative commitment to a common birthright. This perspective has been advocated by Anthony D. Smith, whose *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* claimed the existence of traceable links between modern nation-states and pre-modern ethnies.

The nation is more than just ethnicity for Smith: he sees ethnicity as a necessary but not sufficient feature of the nation, from which patriotism and other features develop. Smith notes that: “modern nations simply extend, strengthen and streamline the ways in which members of the ethnie associated and communicated with each other”

Furthermore, he claims that nation-states continue the role of the ethnie in the past, doing more effectively what “premodern ethnicists tried to do, that is, keep out foreigners and diffuse to their kinsmen the traditions and myths of their ancestors, using the modern education system”

6.3.3.2 Nationalism as a medieval invention

These approaches usually only apply to the origin and etymology of the term *nation*

The contemporary legal scholar Neil MacCormick finds evidence for some sense of national identity in sixteenth-century Britain, particularly in Scotland.

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This occurred during the French Revolution and was influenced by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, principally *Émile*, the ideas of which were developed in *The Social Contract*. This led to the development of the idea of the nation-state, where the psycho-political notion of the nation is manifested in a democratic state – the nation-state can form in two ways:

- It may involve a process of unification
- This occurred throughout German history: in medieval times under Charlemagne through the Holy Roman Empire; in the nineteenth-century under Bismarck; when East and West Germany were reunited in 1990
- It may involve the achievement of independence
- This is characterised by Polish nationalism: Poland ceased to exist in 1793 when it was divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia; it gained independence in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles; it was absorbed by the Soviet Union and even though it gained formal independence in 1945, it was not until 1989 that it actually gained independence from the Soviet Union

For nationalists, the nation-state is the highest and most desirable form of political organisation – the strength of the nation state is that it offers both cultural cohesion and political unity

When a people who share a common cultural or ethnic identity gain the right to self-government, nationality and citizenship coincide

Furthermore, nationalism legitimises the authority of government, where the government acts in the ‘national interest’

It would be misleading to suggest that nationalism has been committed to the idea of self-determination; some nationalist movements seek some political autonomy but stop short of full statehood, i.e. Welsh nationalism

Nevertheless, it is unclear whether partial devolution is sufficient to satisfy nationalist demands

For example, the granting of wide-ranging powers to the Basque region did not end the ETA’s terrorism campaign, and the creation of a Scottish Parliament in 1999 has not ended the SNP’s campaign for full independence

6.4.4 Identity politics

All forms of nationalism address the issue of identity – whatever political causes nationalism is associated with, it advances these on the basis of collective identity, usually understood as patriotism

Certain forms of nationalism are less closely related to overtly political demands than others:

- Cultural nationalism
- Ethnic nationalism

*Cultural nationalism* is a form of nationalism that emphasises the strengthening or defence of cultural identity ahead of political demands – whereas political nationalism is ‘rational’, cultural nationalism takes a ‘mystical’ aspect

This creates a ‘bottom-up’ form of nationalism that focuses on popular rituals, traditions and legends than on elite or ‘higher’ culture

Writers such as Johann Fichte (1762-1814) and Johann Herder (1744-1803) highlighted what they felt to be the superiority of German culture in contrast to the ideas of the French Revolution

Herder believed that each nation possesses a *Volksgeist* or ‘national spirit’, and the role of nationalism is to defend, develop and define this *Volksgeist*

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