Political myth: the political uses of history, tradition and memory

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NOTE

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Chapter 5

Tradition
1. Introduction

My analysis of the Kosovo Myth showed how Serbian collective memory was given meaning by tradition. I will argue in this chapter that tradition is the second key component in modern political myths. I have already indicated in previous chapters that the central tenet of my study is that the past as communicated by political myth is fashioned by three processes; collective memory, tradition and commemoration. Each of these processes forms an essential component of a political myth and can be analysed separately, even though I have stressed that it is the dynamic interrelationship between memory, tradition and commemoration that is the essence of a political myth. I analysed the past, as represented by collective memory in the previous two chapters. I argued that the image of the past 'constructed' by collective memory should not be confused with history, but conceptualised as a symbolic representation of a past that has been collectively constructed by a political community to legitimate its present needs.

This chapter focuses on tradition, the second component of political myth. I analyse a different aspect of the past that is represented in political myth. I will argue that the past, appropriated by collective memory, is given normative meaning by tradition. And it is the image of the past imbued with both tradition and memory, that makes up the core of a political myth. While I conceptualise tradition separately to highlight its persuasive influence on both modernity and collective memory, it should be remembered that the essential symbiosis between
Tradition and collective memory is what creates the past found in political myth. The persistence of tradition in modern societies and tradition's relationship with modernity is analysed to establish a generalised conception of 'modern' traditions. My conceptualisation of 'modern' traditions shows how a sense of continuity and social cohesion is created through the transmission of normative values. The role of 'invented' traditions in promoting a form of compensatory legitimation forms the last part of my study.

2. Persistence of Tradition

To recapitulate my argument, it is the past that is appropriated by collective memory to serve present political purposes that is given normative meaning by tradition. Such a past, imbued as it is with memory and tradition sustains political myth. To conceptualise political myth it is necessary to examine the nature of tradition as it survives in modern society. However, we first need to acknowledge the persistence and resilience of tradition within modernity and even post modernity. Furthermore, when invoked, tradition continues to have a legitimating function. I find it necessary to stress these aspects of tradition because in much scholarly writing on modernisation, tradition is either dismissed as being incompatible with modernity or is dismissed as a contrived and fabricated illusion used to bolster the dubious legitimacy claims of a particular elite. While both positions have merit, an approach that denigrates and disparages tradition underrates the persistence of tradition and detracts from the role tradition continues to play in all legitimacy claims. What is important to understand is not
that tradition may be contrived and "invented", but that tradition persists in modern societies and infuses collective memory with normative meaning.

The persistence and resilience of tradition does not sit easily with commonly held concepts of what constitutes a modern society at the end of the twentieth century. The assumption that the advent of modernity necessarily leads to the destruction of tradition is challenged by authors such as Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Kammen, Anthony Giddens and particularly David Gross.¹ They are challenging not just the durability of tradition but the way tradition is conceptualised. The focus needs to shift from conceptualising tradition in terms of transmissions of the past, to the way the past has been remembered and carefully reconstructed to meet present political needs.

As part of analysing the structure and nature of tradition it is first necessary to acknowledge that traditions persist in modern societies. Modern societies are, on one hand by their very nature post-traditional. Yet traditions persist and continue to play a variety of legitimating roles. Modernity may have deprived tradition of its role of providing a coherent organising principle for society, but modernity has not destroyed tradition as such.² Tradition invests

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² Lowenthal argues that tradition persists to play an important role in modern society because of our ambivalent attitude towards the past. "In the modernist view, industrial and post-industrial society no longer needs the props and shibboleths of tradition; and the modern study of history emancipates us from the past's tyranny. But our rampant nostalgia, our obsessive search for roots, our endemic concern with preservation, the potent appeal of national heritage show how intensely the past is still felt. Yet new historical perspectives have outmoded once customary ways of feeling and using it." Lowenthal, D. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. 
collective memory with meaning, norms and values, so it is important to understand the nature of tradition that persists in modern society. For the purposes of analysis it is useful to divide surviving traditions into three categories which necessarily overlap.

First, and most commonly, there are traditions that only survive as fragments of once intact traditions. Second, are traditions that survive more or less intact and play an active role at the centre of society because they fulfil a perceived need. Third, there are more parochial traditions that survive at the periphery of society or persist in the private realm of the family. All three categories survive in modern society either because of their own internal coherence and strength, or because they are artificially sustained by the state, market or mass media.

The first category of tradition persists as fragments of once intact traditions that have been profoundly changed by modernity. Such traditions have persisted, not as organic wholes possessing an inner coherence reflecting their original historical setting, but as residues, traces and fragments of a social world that no longer exists. Such fragments coexist and interact with newly emerging patterns of belief, conduct and social action which "owe a great deal of their form and substance to things which once existed and from which they took their point
of departure and direction."^3 It is an infusion of past into present which leads to noncontemporaneity. It "denotes something that originated in and was appropriate to an earlier era but which continues on into the present."^4 Such remnants of noncontemporaneity should not be seen as being necessarily in conflict with the present but as "very powerful catalysing agents that can be used in either a progressive or regressive direction"^5 in bringing about change.

Whether or not noncontemporaneous residues become catalysts for change depends upon where they are 'situated' in society and the degree to which a society is experiencing political, social, cultural and economic stress. Remnants of tradition are most susceptible to being reactivated and refashioned by elites to provide illusions of continuity as an antidote to social discontinuity. At the extreme end of this process, beyond providing a mere antidote to social discontinuity, disaffected and alienated groups within a society can be consciously 'retraditionalised'. It has been argued^6 that the various ethnic militias that wreaked such destruction upon urban centres and sites of cultural significance during the Yugoslav Wars were drawn from the 'retraditionalised' sections of a disaffected and alienated population. The process of manipulating remnants and residues of tradition to invest Serbian collective memory with specific norms and values, and to mobilise a community through 'retraditionalisation', was discussed in chapter 2 on the Kosovo Myth.

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^3 Shils, E. op cit, p. 34.
^4 Gross, D. op cit, p. 95.
^5 ibid.
The second category of traditions that persists in modern societies are those that are more or less intact and provide stable linguistic and institutional forms and structures which channel and frame the collective memory of a community. Except for established religious traditions, these traditions, in surviving in the centre of society, have usually been coopted by the state or ruling elites and are subjected to manipulation and institutionalisation. Such traditions obviously fulfil a perceived need otherwise they would not be sustained by the state, market or mass media and would be marginalised in society. In this category the persistence and in some circumstances the resurgence, of religion at the centre of society is an example of the survival of tradition. For a start, religion “has historically been and remains the most formidable bastion of traditions.”

Religion inevitably invokes the past to provide the framework of meaning for the present and future. The authority of the past is also reinforced by religious ritual, which not only formalises relationships between humans and the spiritual world, but usually involves the reenactment of past events of religious significance.

A criticism directed at David Gross in his otherwise comprehensive analysis of tradition, is that he fails to pay sufficient attention to religion, especially the more politically active branches of fundamentalism. The revival and resurgence of religion appears to be a world-wide phenomenon, but its

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8 “In the 1990’s a meditation on tradition must consider a fundamentalism that taps two elements that Gross finds valuable: the past and a discontent with modernity.” Russell Jacoby, R. ‘Rotten Traditions ?’, *Telos*, No. 94, Winter 1992-93, p. 68.
reemergence as a potential legitimating factor in highly rational and secular modern societies raises some questions as to how modernity is conceptualised. Anthony Giddens suggests that,

the reasons for this (religious revival) concern quite fundamental features of late modernity. What was due to become a social and physical universe subject to increasingly certain knowledge and control instead creates a system in which areas of relative security interlace with radical doubt and with disquieting scenarios of risk. Religion in some part generates the conviction which adherence to the tenets of modernity must necessarily suspend: in this regard it is easy to see why religious fundamentalism has a special appeal.9 Areas of 'relative security' are often common to the final category of traditions; those surviving on the periphery of society. Peripheral traditions are the province of subcultures such as ethnic communities and other minority groups and are tolerated by the centre as long as they remain depoliticised. Other peripheral traditions are associated with the private spheres of family life and are mostly ignored by the state unless they become politicised. Traditions that do become politicised or are actively repressed by the state or established church tend to go underground and help sustain revolutionary or separatist movements, religious extremists and secret societies.

The three categories of overlapping traditions do not necessarily function in the pure form envisaged by Max Weber. Weber postulated for the purposes of analysis that there can be said to be basically two 'ideal types' or kinds of society: traditional societies where legitimating claims are based on the authority of the past, and modern societies where legitimating claims are based on the authority of a legal-rational decision-making process. Theoretically, a fully

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9 Giddens, A. Modernity and Self-Identity, op cit, p. 207.
modern society should have no need of tradition as a source of authority. In practice however, modern societies do have recourse to traditions because at their most basic level traditions provide a pattern of already authenticated behaviour and practices that confer legitimacy on the present. Habermas notes that when weakly legitimated states or political communities suffer from a legitimation deficit\(^\text{10}\) or legitimation crisis there is a tendency to fall back on tradition as a compensatory form of legitimation. However, it is not tradition \textit{per se} that is the subject for appeal. As Habermas argues, "traditions ... retain legitimising force only as long as they are not torn out of interpretative systems that guarantee continuity and identity."

Tradition might persist into modern society in a variety of forms but the long-standing traditional interpretative systems that gave them meaning have largely disappeared under the impact of modernity. Carefully crafted images of traditions, specifically those symbols of integration, national identity and a common collective memory form the basis of appeal. By associating itself with such symbols of historical permanence and timeless heritage a state, nation or political community aims both to transcend and elevate itself above immediate legitimation problems. Habermas suggests that even though the tradition being invoked by modern states is only an image, symbol or even an illusion, the original legitimating functions of traditions still operate when invoked. The legitimating role of tradition therefore warrants re-examination. To a certain extent David Gross attempts this in \textit{The Past in Ruins},

\(\text{10}\) The term is used by Habermas. "A legitimation deficit means that it is not possible by administrative means to maintain or establish normative structures to the extent required." Habermas, \textit{J. Legitimation Crisis}, Heinemann, London, 1980, p. 47.

\(\text{11}\) ibid, p. 71.
although his main objective is to rehabilitate tradition in order to revitalise modernity.

David Gross argues that the continuing role played by tradition is underrated because tradition is so often associated with the authoritative and oppressive social structures of the past because, "ideologically speaking, tradition has been used more often to defend an established reality than to oppose it".\(^\text{12}\) Such a situation has led to the belief that, "rather than being judged valuable, tradition is today more likely to be thought of as a liability".\(^\text{13}\) Gross is picking up on Shils' argument that, "a mistake of great historical significance has been made in modern times in the construction of a doctrine which treated traditions as the detritus of the forward movement of society".\(^\text{14}\) For Gross one of the primary purposes of focusing attention on tradition is a better understanding of the nature of modernity. Gross states:

> my contention is that the best way to accept modernity and yet maintain a critical attitude towards it is to return to tradition - not, however, in order to stay there, but rather to bring tradition forward in such a manner as to disturb, not affirm, the clichés and complacencies of the present.\(^\text{15}\)

Because tradition is said to stand outside modernity it can be used as a critique of modernity and so "provide a perspective from beyond the boundaries of the present".\(^\text{16}\) Gross is not suggesting that traditions, as such, have any potential integrating force left in modern society, but rather that, fragments of tradition can be used to criticise what he perceives as the current sterility of modernity. This is

\(^\text{13}\) Gross, D. 'Rethinking Traditions', op cit, p. 5.
\(^\text{14}\) Shils, E. op cit, p. 330.
a line of argument, Gross acknowledges, that follows Marshall Berman's suggestion that modernity can be revitalised by returning to the dynamism of its origins.17

To Gross, the importance of tradition is "its ability to provoke contradictions and open up new ways of thinking about 'what is' in light of 'what was'."18 To cite Gross' own stated aims in *The Past in Ruins*: "the kind of subversive genealogy I have in mind would not, like Nietzsche's, try to destroy the past's hold on the present, *but rather destroy the present's hold on the past*."19 It is in no way a falling back on tradition for Gross argues that one of the greatest dangers confronting modern society is the "exploitative refunctioning of tradition, particularly in the political and economic spheres."

Gross' solution in *The Past in Ruins* is to acknowledge the resilience of tradition within modernity, rather than just define it out of existence as being of no relevance to modern society. Gross suggests that acknowledging the existence of tradition enables the critic not only to expose the exploitative use of tradition by the political, economic and cultural systems, but to use tradition constructively to critique modernity. Tradition can be used, "to deepen the significance of the

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16 *ibid*, p. 87.
17 "It may turn out, then, that going back can be a way to go forward: that remembering the modernisms of the nineteenth century can give us the vision and courage to create the modernisms of the twenty-first. This act of remembering can help us bring modernism back to its roots, so that it can nourish and renew itself, to confront the adventures and dangers that lie ahead. To appropriate the modernities of yesterday can be at once a critique of the modernities of today and an act of faith in the modernities - and in the modern men and women - of tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow". Berman, M. *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Verso, London, 1989, p. 36.
18 Gross, D. 'Rethinking Traditions', *op cit*, p. 9
19 Gross, D. *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and The Critique of Modernity* *op cit*, p. 117 *my italics*
20 *ibid*. 
present. If that present is seen as a time of crisis, then it is the perspective of tradition that allows one the criterion to measure the depth of the crisis.”  

My study will not pursue Gross' main thesis of how tradition can be used to critique modernity further. My emphasis focuses on the nature of traditions and how they have been refashioned to serve the legitimating needs of modern political communities.

3. Conceptualising Tradition

Acknowledging the persistence and resilience of tradition in modern society makes it vital to develop a concept of tradition that encompasses its relationship to modernity and its role of infusing collective memory with normative values. Tradition needs to be conceptualised as an integral component of modernity. It is not diametrically opposed to modernity. In developing my concept of tradition it is first necessary to examine general characteristics of tradition, to review how it has been defined and how it has been framed within a tradition-modernity matrix. As an 'ideal form,' tradition is regarded as giving continuity of meaning by transmitting a relatively unchanged essential core of normative values.

Second, when tradition is placed within a tradition-modernity matrix, the unreflective 'sacred quality' of tradition is envisaged as the 'dead hand of the past'. If tradition is seen as the very antithesis of modernity it has to be discarded.

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so that the authority of the past can be replaced by the authority of reason. Modernity therefore becomes defined in opposition to tradition, consequently tradition accrues its negative connotations. Implicitly, to understand the nature of traditions that persist in modern society it is necessary to blur any sharp distinction between modernity and tradition. Blurring such a distinction means tradition is better able to be conceptualised as a recrudescent component embedded within modernity than antithetical vestiges to be eradicated. The final point to be made is vital. Any conceptualisation of tradition must take into account that far from being immutable, tradition is never static and is subject to change.

The recognition of the recrudescent nature of tradition means that my account differs sharply from many other views of tradition. Because traditions are social constructions of the past that are “inevitably a political phenomenon,” their survival is often treated as something artificial, even contrived and above all to be treated with suspicion. It is a view that largely stems from conceiving tradition as the antithesis of modernity; as something negative. A negative side more correctly described as traditionalism, “that emotional and relatively inarticulate tendency to cling to established values and inherited patterns of living.” Traditionalism is non-reflective and ideological in character. However, tradition is not itself an ideology and should not be confused with traditionalism.

22 Kamen, M. Mystic Chords of Memory : The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture, op cit, p. 5.
23 For example, Allan states, “tradition has become synonymous with dogma, which is to say that it is no longer believed, no longer gives vital purpose to our lives, no longer undergirds our understanding of what is real, worthwhile, and significant.” Allan, G. The Importance of the Past : A Meditation on the Authority of Tradition, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1986, p. 199.
which often is an ideology. Friedrich argues that, "traditionalism is the normative theory of the importance of tradition (and) only appears when tradition has been impaired or lost."  

When tradition, as a value in itself is incorporated into a set of ideas for political action and is invoked either to change or maintain a political system it has the potential of becoming the ideology of traditionalism. The process of 'retraditionalisation' falls within this category. However, tradition can survive without becoming traditionalism, as some traditions persist because they continue to convey meaning that is perceived to be relevant. Shils makes the point that, "no tradition could long be sustained if it brought about obvious and widespread misfortunes to those who practice it; a tradition has to 'work' if it is to persist".  

It is a functional character of tradition that is also emphasised by Hammer.  

By tying the life of traditions to its use, tradition is made more proximate to individual life. It is through this process of appropriation that one becomes attached to these traditions, including the practices and ideas of the society. We come to cherish our institutions not because they are so overwhelming as to leave us little choice, but because these institutions or rituals, as they express particular traditions, have come to signify something to us. Tradition therefore carries an assumption of value which lies at the heart of what it is. A tradition can be identified as the essential core of beliefs, practices, ideas and behaviours that have been transmitted in a relatively recognisable form from the past to the present. However, it is not this essential core that is in itself a tradition but rather the continuity of meaning embodied in the core which makes

24 Kammen, M. *op cit*, p. 289.  
26 Shils, E. *op cit*, p. 203.  
28 See Kammen, M. *op cit*, p. 166.
up a tradition. A tradition needs to be seen as an inherited pattern of human behaviour, practices and ideas that have been invested with meaning and coherence over time.  

The essential characteristic of continuity of meaning is common to most conceptions of tradition. Tradition is a widely used term in many disciplines but there is no clear and unambiguous concept of how a tradition may be identified, what constitutes a tradition or how a tradition establishes and maintains continuities of behaviours, practices and ideas from one generation to the next. Part of the problem is that assumptions about what constitutes traditionality are based on a fairly loose and open-ended conception of what constitutes a tradition.

Etymologically the word tradition comes from the Latin, *tradere*, which means to hand on or to transmit directly from one generation to the next. Carl Friedrich also suggests that in its original context *tradere* meant that, “the very words of the founder and leader must be transferred and delivered from generation to generation.” Tradition therefore implies the transmission over time of something of value; ie, the words of the founder. Therefore, at its most basic level, tradition can be conceptualised as the repetition of modes of thought, beliefs and practices that have been passed down through time. In this sense Pocock states that,

29 For a full discussion of how tradition can be conceptualised as continuity of meaning, see Hammer, D.C. *op cit.*


a tradition, in its simplest form, may be thought of as an indefinite series of repetitions of an action, which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before; its performance is authorised ... by the knowledge, or the assumption, of previous performance.32

Eisenstadt proposes a more sweeping concept of tradition as the symbolic process underpinning social continuity.

Tradition can perhaps best be envisaged as the routinised symbolisation of the models of social order and of the constellation of the codes, the guidelines, which delineate the limits of the binding cultural order, of membership in it, and of its boundaries, which prescribe the 'proper' choices of goals and patterns of behaviour; it can also be seen as the modes of evaluation as well as of the sanctioning and legitimation of the totality of the cultural and social order, or of any of its parts.33

Eisenstadt thus extends the concept of tradition from repetition to include the transmission of normative values, the creation of collective identity, and political legitimation in general. A somewhat more pragmatic and 'down-to-earth' approach is adapted by Finley.

There is the tradition which shapes a large part of our lives, perpetuating customs, habits of behaviour, rites, ethical norms and beliefs. There is nothing mysterious about tradition in this sense; it is transmitted from one generation to the next, partly by the ordinary process of living in a society, without any conscious effort on anyone's part, partly men whose function it is to do so: priests, scholmasters, parents, judges, party leaders, censors, neighbours. There is also nothing reliable about this sort of tradition; that is to say, its explanations and narrations are, as anyone can judge by a minimum of observation, rarely quite accurate, and sometimes altogether false. Reliability is, of course, irrelevant; so long as the tradition is accepted, it works, and it must work if the society is not to fall apart.34

While incorporating the ideas of both Pocock and Eisenstadt into his concept, Finley focuses rather on the constructed nature of tradition in terms of its useability and on the idea of tradition providing the cohesion necessary for the survival of any society. These three conceptions provide a representative sample


of approaches to defining tradition. However, it should be noted that the concept of tradition can be extended further to include clusters of traditions. In this case the term tradition is often applied somewhat loosely to describing sets of intellectual practices or beliefs such as the 'Marxist tradition', the 'socialist tradition', the 'liberal tradition' or certain cultural and religious traditions. My study will not examine such broad-based traditions. My focus is on the role of tradition in providing continuity of meaning through the transmission over time of a relatively unchanged essential core of normative values. My approach to tradition, however, must also be understood within the broader context of how tradition has been conceptualised in relation to modernity.

The concept of tradition has been clouded by its conceptualisation within the matrix of a tradition-modernity dichotomy. I outlined above that such an approach creates a false dichotomy. The artificial division of societies into 'traditional' and 'post-traditional' leads to modernity being defined in contrast and opposition to tradition on the assumption that tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive. The 'modernity' of a society is seen as a merit in itself; it is a society based on the ideal of rationality rather than a society based on

35 Giddens comments that "the use of 'tradition' to describe such perspectives, which justifiable enough as shorthand, is clearly elliptical." Giddens, A. ‘Living in a Post-Traditional Society' in Beck, U., Giddens, A. & Lash, S. Reflexive Modernization : Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 86. "Reference to a body of ideas as a tradition should mean more than the assertion that there has been a sequence of believers in approximately the same ideas and ideals This account of a tradition as a sequence of approximately uniform patterns of belief or action has its merits but it obscures the formative influence of the particular beliefs, as they existed at a given time, on whatever was thought subsequently about the objects to which the beliefs referred." Shils, E. op cit, p. 41.
36 See Michael, J. op cit, p. 47.
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traditional precedent that is not subject to the exercise of analytical reason.37 In those societies where tradition is still the main agent of legitimation, empirical inquiry seldom revises received views, and tradition is the pre-eminent guide for behaviour, especially if the precedent is believed ancient and constant. The past is an infallible source of truth and merit; things are deemed correct simply because they have happened.38

The ideals of modernity are characterised by Shils as being ‘dynamic’ and therefore inherently antithetical to tradition. They are ideals which require active and deliberate movement away from substantive traditional patterns of belief and action. The dynamic ideals are not ideals of heroism; they are ideals which entail rationality in the application of abstract principles, and the thoroughgoing utilisation of empirical knowledge for the attainment of ends still unrealised thus far in these societies. The “dynamic” ideal in Western societies requires departures from traditional ways of seeing and doing things.39

Shils stresses that only the modern state has the capacity to achieve a totally rational society, although this ideal has never yet been achieved.40 In his approach to modernity, Shils generally follows Max Weber. To Weber, traditional modes of conduct, belief and legitimation would eventually be destroyed by increased rationalisation.41 Rationalisation was accelerated by the emergence of capitalism and the rise of the centralised state. The trend towards the modern bureaucratic,

37 This difference is well analysed in Robin Horton’s discussion of the differences between traditional African thought and modern Western sciences. “In traditional cultures there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets; whereas in scientifically oriented cultures, such an awareness is highly developed. It is this difference we refer to when we say that traditional cultures are ‘closed’ and scientifically oriented cultures ‘open’. ” Horton, R. ‘African Traditional Thought and Western Science’ in Wilson, B. R. Rationality, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1970, p. 153.
38 Lowenthal, D. The Past is a Foreign Country, op cit, p. 369.
39 Shils, E. op cit, p. 287.
40 See ibid, pp. 289 - 290. Shils states,”If the ideal is that of a maximally rational society, then government which has the resources, the powers, the competence, and the comprehensiveness of view for this task, is the most appropriate agent for it. No other institution has powers over the entire range of society; government alone can make the entire society rational.” ibid, p. 289.
41 Weber “meant by rationalisation the coherent ordering of beliefs and actions in accordance with a unifying central criterion ….Rationalisation is the organisation of actions aimed at the attainment of an optimal combination of ends”. Shils, E. op cit, p. 291.
functional state founded on administrative rationality made the weakening of traditional authority inevitable. David Gross states, "where rational authority held sway there was no need to accentuate the value of custom, precedent, or collective memory, all of which became more or less irrelevant. Only the rationality of the regulations themselves became important." Tradition, on the other hand, stands opposed to rationality as, "its medium is not consciousness but the pregiven, unreflected and binding existence of social forms" which are drawn from a sacred past. The 'sacredness' of the past negates any attempt at rationally testing the validity of a tradition.

Accordingly, de Benoist argues that a tradition "is fundamentally spiritual, possesses a religious character and implies the metaphysical." Tradition implies the metaphysical in that it claims to represent universal principles that are both immutable and invariable. It is the unreflective 'sacred quality' of tradition that has led social theorists to conceptualise tradition as the antithesis of modernity, a symbol of those outside regressive determinants that restrict individual experience and obstruct the progress of modernity. As such, traditionality became associated with a particular kind of society and culture. Traditionality was regarded as the cause or the consequence of ignorance, superstition, clerical dominance, religious intolerance, social hierarchy, inequality in the distribution of wealth, preemption of the best positions in society on grounds of birth, and other states of mind and social institutions which were the objects of rationalistic and progressivistic censure. Tradition became the ubiquitous enemy to every critic of the ancien régime.

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42 Gross, D. *The Past in Ruins*, op cit, p. 34.
45 Shils, E. *op cit*, p. 6.
As Marx put it, "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Tradition is envisaged as a dead weight, an oppressive dominance; the burden of the past that restricts political action. Marx's well-known formulation sums up this concept well. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."

The 'Enlightenment Project' sought to emancipate society from the dead hand of the past by replacing traditional authority with the authority of reason. "The rational construction of abstract principles and their use in explicitly defined techniques of action, observation, and analysis were regarded as the antitheses of tradition in substance, in mode of communication, and in the organisation of belief and action". Thus the Enlightenment was explicitly anti-traditional. Tradition was held to have no inherent value and those traditional values and beliefs that did not withstand rational scrutiny were to be discarded. Especially redundant were those traditional values that underpinned existing political, social, economic and religious institutions. The legitimacy of tradition itself was undermined, a process compounded by the Industrial Revolution and the expansion and consolidation of the modern nation-state. Thus the drive for modernisation in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century was

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47 ibid.
48 Shils, E. op cit, p. 19.
accompanied by an attack on tradition and everything it stood for. As Lowenthal states,

the Nietzschean view that history was futile and the past a destructive incubus suited the weary decadence of late nineteenth-century Europe. *Fin-de-siècle* anti-traditionalism posited the worthlessness of the entire past. Rebellion against inherited forms reached anti-rational or even irrational levels early in the new century. The very concept of history was resented for binding men in antiquated institutions, ideas, and values; now reduced to studying the past for its own sake.49

Time-honoured precedent no longer carried validity; the past, now disregarded, became a foreign country. As Tocqueville notes in his conclusion to *Democracy in America*:

> Although the revolution that is taking place in the social conditions, the laws, the opinions, and the feelings of men is still very far from being terminated, yet its results already admit of no comparison with anything that the world has ever before witnessed. I go back from age to age up to the remotest antiquity, but I find no parallel to what is occurring before my eyes; as the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity.50

Not only did the past offer no guide to the future, “the past ceased to be a repository of true doctrines and became an incoherent heap of errors and inhumanities”51. In the new republic of the United States such obscurity or lack of a past was seen as a positive attribute52 that gave birth to a new kind of man.

The new habits to be engendered on the new American scene were suggested by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of

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52 “In the American republic, elites proclaimed their self-made status; they could, and did, more readily dispense with the past. A belief emerged and became deeply embedded in our culture that the United States had broken free of the dead hand of the past, had shattered tradition’s chains Wallace, M. ‘*The Politics of Public History*’ in Blatt, J. [Ed.] *Past Meets Present : Essays About Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1987, p. 38.
family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to
confront whatever awaited him with the aim of his own unique and inherent resources.
Such an image of an emancipated ‘American Adam’ had no place for tradition.
The child of the Enlightenment had discarded the past as having no inherent value at all.

This idealised conception of the fruits of modernity did not mean however, that the Enlightenment had completely eradicated tradition and the past from human consciousness. This optimistic assessment of the benefits of modernity was countered by a sense of anxiety about the future, especially in Europe. At the end of the eighteenth century Burke noted that, “when ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer.” In the middle of the nineteenth century, Marx also noted that in times of revolutionary crisis we still ”anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past” to legitimate the new. Desire for the complete eradication of tradition from modern society was also countered by a nostalgic and somewhat romantic reaction early this century.

The rationalisation of society was thought to empty human existence of meaning by destroying what was valuable from the past. Scientific rationality was

55 “And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up spirits of the past to their service, and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of
said to have undermined social and individual values and morality to such an extent that modern civilisation itself was directly threatened. The romantic reaction against rationality equated tradition with the natural order that underpinned Western Civilisation. The romantic reaction did not extend much beyond a poetical evocation of past traditions. But the romantic movement partially fuelled the development of political myths in fascist states between the wars.

At the end of the twentieth century the sense of anxiety engendered by modernity is well captured by Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* and is examined in some detail in David Gross’ *The Past in Ruins*. Gross suggests that, “almost as soon as the autonomous self emerged under modern conditions, it was threatened by the very force that once appeared emancipatory - namely, the force of triumphant rationality.” Gross argues that, “though we might appear to be freer than our forebears, we may actually be more vulnerable to a host of new and more effective political and economic determinations”. For Gross, scientific rationality has become a surrogate for the role that tradition used to play. “Because of the enormous power they wield over all aspects of modern life, the state, the market, and the culture industry exercise more control over thought and behaviour than traditions ever did.”

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56 Gross, D. *op cit*, p. 49.
57 *ibid*, p. 5.
58 *ibid*. 

*world history in this time honoured disguise and this borrowed language.* Marx, K. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis op cit*, p. 97.
Anthony Giddens also addresses the question of anxiety through the construction of modernity itself. "Modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge". Giddens also states that there can be no certitude. When the claims of reason replace those of tradition, they appear to offer a sense of certitude greater than that provided by preexisting dogma. However, such certitude is persuasive so long as we do not see that the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, in the sense that reason is understood as the gaining of certain knowledge. Modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge, but the equation of knowledge with certitude has turned out to be misconceived. The structure of modernity is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but there can never be any guarantee that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised. The illusion of the unreflexive certitude of tradition is therefore a source of its appeal in an uncertain world.

The conceptualisation of tradition within a tradition-modernity matrix and the emergence of a considered response to this approach provides an opportunity to re-examine the nature of tradition as it has survived in modern societies. Shils argues that the generalised classification of societies as traditional is actually a conceptualisation of the 'other', a construction of social scientists against which

60 "The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character .... The production of systematic knowledge about social life becomes integral to system reproduction, rolling social life away from the fixities of tradition." Giddens, A. The Consequences of Modernity, op cit, p.38 - 53.
the secular, progressive and scientifically rational Western societies can be measured. The designation of what actually characterises a society as traditional is therefore postulated rather than analysed. Accordingly, Goetschal argues that ‘the concept of tradition presupposes a concept of modernity’. To Goetschal, tradition is therefore a modern concept which only emerges with the development of historical consciousness because, ‘only an intellect conscious of its relation to its own history can conceive the specific ensemble of its culture, customs and lifestyle as a tradition’.

Using modernity as a defining context for conceptualising tradition, Michael states that, ‘in the context of modernity, which is the defining context for all these problematics, tradition is precisely those forms of belief or patterns of behaviour that fail to achieve the “thorough-going reflexivity” and transparency to reason that are the distinguishing marks of modernist institutions’. However, Michael also notes that using modernity as a defining context masks some of the similarities between tradition and modernity.

Modernity can only define itself in opposition to the traditional, which it also defines, producing itself while producing the other. This opposition obscures a more fundamental similarity. Both modernity and the traditional represent a certain modern dream of a

61 ibid, p. 39.
62 “The characteristics of traditional societies have generally been said to comprise the following: preponderance of agriculture - and fishing - in the economy; relatively little occupational differentiation; absence of mechanical technology; a relatively low degree of orientation of production towards the Market; high degree of illiteracy or very restricted literacy; pronounced dominance of communal opinion over the conduct of individuals; a widespread consensus of beliefs; rudimentary administrative machinery; widespread acceptance of authority; preponderantly ascriptive determination of status; saliency of biological descent as a criterion of identification of individuals; bureaucratic deferentiality; pervasiveness of magical and religious beliefs; little demand for modifications of distribution or resources and rewards; little active demand for enhanced income and status and no marked dissatisfaction with existing income status; little deliberate initiation of change.’ Shils, E. op cit, p. 293 - 294.
64 ibid, p. 163 – 4.
65 Michael, J. op cit, p. 60.
homogenous social order, united by a single principal. Whether the unifying principle be the administrative equality of a rationalised bureaucracy or the organic unity of a traditional mode of life, the dream of homogeneity within a single society or community remains the same. Michael thus blurs the sharp division between tradition and modernity. Rather than ascribing a host of specific features to a society in order to define it as traditional it is more useful to examine a society’s relationship with the past as expressed through the collective memory of a community. This shifts the emphasis away from tradition as an incongruous aberration within modernity towards tradition being conceived as that component of modernity that provides the collective memory of a community with normative meaning.

A further characteristic of tradition that requires re-examination is that far from being immutable, tradition is never static and is subject to constant change. My argument therefore challenges the assumed unchanging nature of traditions found in common discourse and textbooks. Traditions are perceived as representing a sense of permanence in an otherwise changing modern world. However, the proposition that a tradition is immutable and unsusceptible to change and passed on unaltered to the next generation is an exaggeration. Even in premodern societies traditions were never static. They were often modified, adjusted and reordered to meet changing political, social, economic and cultural circumstances.

66 ibid, p. 47.
67 While admitting that traditions do in fact change Giddens points out that it is the perceived stability of tradition that gives it its integrity. “There is something about the notion of tradition which presumes endurance; if it is traditional, a belief or practice has an integrity and continuity which resists the buffeting of change.” Giddens, A. Living in a Post-Traditional Society, op cit, p. 62.
Pocock points out that these changes can be subtle perceptual modifications as "the concepts which we form from, and feed back into, tradition have the capacity to modify the content and character of the tradition conceptualised and even the extent to which it is conceived and regarded as a tradition."\(^6^8\) In such a process tradition may survive only in an attenuated form with a corresponding diminution of its authority. Changes to a tradition, however, are more likely to arise from direct conflict with rival traditions.

As with identity, tradition emerges as a concept when its contingent character is challenged by another tradition. Like identities, traditions do not grow and develop independently. They do so in relation to and in interaction with other traditions. It appears impossible to speak of tradition in the singular. No tradition can be imagined as isolated and self-contained. Traditions derive their power from interaction and often complex interdependencies.\(^6^9\)

In a premodern society the process of change is relatively slow, but with the emergence of modernity and the creation of nation-states, traditions are forced into contact with other, often alien and unaccommodating, traditions or the outright resistance to tradition itself. In circumstances of forced change, a tradition can absorb another tradition in its entirety so that once its memory is erased it disappears, unless it is consciously resurrected at a later time.\(^7^0\)

Alternatively, a tradition can be modified by absorbing elements from other traditions, without fundamentally changing the core meaning of the original tradition. In the process of interaction an entirely new tradition can arise from the synthesis of two or more traditions. "In such a synthesis of traditions, the dominant new theme embraces elements from other traditions previously

\(^6^8\) Pocock, J.G.A. *op cit*, p. 235.
\(^6^9\) Goetschel, W. *The Differential Character of Traditions*, p. 163.
independent of each other". Finally, a tradition can be destroyed as a coherent organic whole but "continue on as fragments of value or behaviour outside their original contexts". The actual way in which these 'fragments of value' continue is what imbues tradition with a sense of 'authenticity'. It is the transmission of 'authentic' values and norms that is the subject of the next section.

4. Tradition, Memory and Continuity

In developing a concept of tradition that is compatible with modern political myths, I first argued that tradition, in even its most attenuated forms, still persists in modern societies. I also argued that in order to understand the nature of these 'modern' recrudescent traditions it is necessary to blur the distinction usually made between tradition and modernity. I conceptualised tradition as a variable component within modernity rather than being diametrically opposed to it. To this point the role of tradition in providing continuity of meaning through the transmission over time of a relatively unchanged essential core of normative values has been mentioned but not developed. In the second part of this chapter I will focus on tradition as the medium through which normative values are transmitted, especially where tradition is 'invented' consciously to create the normative values required to construct new cultural forms. It is the conscious political use of tradition to legitimise the present by infusing it with selected or invented normative values from the past that is important to conceiving how a

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70 "The tradition itself having ceased to exist, its record becomes a tradition; as an oral tradition its chances of survival are diminished. In societies with writing the chances of survival of records and patterns of conduct which were one traditional are enhanced." Shils, E. op cit, p. 25.

71 ibid, p. 279.
Tradition

past imbued with memory and tradition can sustain a political myth. I will therefore analyse the way traditions create a sense of continuity through the transmission of normative values before specifically examining the political uses of 'invented' traditions.

The first point to make is that tradition cannot be fully separated from the mode of its transmission. While communication of tradition and collective memory is the subject of the next chapter, it is necessary at this point to examine briefly the transmission of tradition by text and image, as this has a specific bearing on the conceptualisation of tradition I am developing in this chapter. Theoretically, 'authentic tradition' encapsulates a normative 'truth', which is transmitted across generations. However, the body of tradition that is transmitted should not be thought of as monolithic and appealing to all areas of society and all localities. There is a great diversity of traditions that are often divergent, contradictory and in conflict. Such diversity reflects the variety of 'pasts' that any society draws upon. In fact, there may be little consensus about what is to be transmitted and how it is to be received. Traditions can convey multiple meanings with variable truths.

However, for a tradition to 'survive' there must be an element of consensus between generations, if not with the specifics of a tradition, at least with a coherent core of common meaning. Even a coherent core of meaning is subject to interpretation as the form and content of a tradition is often framed by

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72 Gross, D. The Past in Ruins op cit, p. 77.
the medium of its transmission and those who decode its message. The problem of decoding tradition that is largely transmitted as a text is highly problematic. Written material is more likely to be highly structured and organised than if it was passed on orally. Written material is also not as dependent on continuity for transmission, and is less dependent on the need for special custodians of tradition for maintenance and interpretation. In a traditionally oriented society the conservation and transmission of tradition was usually the preserve of a small cultural elite which had a vested interest in preserving those traditional aspects of society that supported their social standing. However, with the extension of literacy there has been less need for tradition to be 'officially' interpreted. Once a tradition has been committed to text and could by-pass the 'official custodians' it is also open to interpretation, re-interpretation and critical reflection. This is also true of political myths that have been committed to text. The mode of transmission of tradition also privileges the centre against the periphery. The spread of literacy through compulsory education, the creation of a national press, and later, the use of radio and television focuses attention on the central government and whatever traditions it has appropriated to itself at the expense of local, more parochial traditions. The traditions most likely to be appropriated by the central government focus on those that engender loyalty to the nation-state. So with the creation of national historiographies, traditions are subject to further revision and refashioning. The form and context of tradition transmitted by text is therefore more likely to be subjected to critical revision in literate societies. This in turn calls into question the nature of the authority the past has over the present.

73 "Intellectuals then feel the urgent need for a traditional society to protect the place intellectuals would like
The form and content of tradition is also affected when the normative values of a tradition are transmitted through images, symbols or public performance. Because tradition is so often transmitted by symbols and images, it is possible to mistake an image of a tradition for tradition itself. Shils argues that such images of the past are traditions, but without the normative power a tradition usually conveys. Shils states that, such images, “are traditions in two senses: they bring the past as an image into the present and they bring a past image of the past into the present.” Shils’ point however, ignores the fact that the image, representing a past tradition, may have been created in the present, with little or no reference to the past at all. In such a case, “no messages are really received from the past. Rather, present-day messages are inserted into the past and then supposedly recovered; but what is actually recovered is only the present’s conception of the past.” Such an image of the past can even be accepted as authentic. However, the image can never replace a tradition and become a tradition in its own right; it can only signify a tradition. One reason for this is that such symbols and images have become disembedded from their original social, political, economic and cultural contexts. They are ahistorical and emptied of any normative power they once possessed. According to Gross, traditions that have been lifted out of their traditional lifeworld cannot fulfil their original normative and integrative functions.

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to image themselves occupying in that society, as producers and guardians of its official culture, its institutionally sanctioned meanings, value, and norms.” Michael, J. op cit, p. 58.

74 Shils, E. op cit, p. 52.
75 Gross, D. op cit, p. 76.
Traditions cannot be reconstituted simply because they are needed for social purposes beyond themselves.... Any tradition that presents itself as “reconstituted” is likely to be only symbolic and for this reason one that is highly susceptible to manipulation and misuse. It is precisely when traditions are converted into symbols or images that they run the risk of being commodified by the markets or instrumentalised by the state.\(^{76}\) Symbolism is however, precisely the point, for it is not so much the ‘authenticity’ of a tradition that is important but whether a tradition, reconstituted fragmented or not, is affirmed and accepted as normative.

We need to recall my discussion in the first chapter on the use of symbolic language to convey meaning in political myth. It suggests that images and symbols are an effective medium for conveying traditional meanings. One reason is the use of symbolic language, as de Benoist explains,

just as myth is beyond events and a properly historical significance, the symbol, contrary to allegory, is beyond words and semantic definitions. Seeking to manifest the inexpressible, it communicates the abstract by transfiguring it into an always provisional and imperfectly concrete representation.\(^{77}\) Images and symbols are open-ended and can therefore take on a variety of meanings, which makes them susceptible to manipulation, especially through the electronic media. Gross bemoans the fact that, “the reliance on images seems to have become so extensive today that images appear to have literally merged with ‘reality’ and become indistinguishable from it,”\(^{78}\) However, it is the merging of image with ‘reality’ that enables elites to communicate the elusive normative values embodied in ‘modern’ traditions.

\(^{76}\) Gross, D. 'Rethinking Traditions', op cit, p. 10.
\(^{77}\) de Benoist, A. op cit, p. 85.
\(^{78}\) Gross, D The Past in Ruins, op cit, p. 58.
The form of tradition most likely to be found in political myth can be said to have been 'invented'. In the final section of this chapter I will examine the concept of 'invented' tradition as developed by Eric Hobsbawm in terms of its role in promoting a form of compensatory legitimation. I will argue political action proceeds on the assumption that tradition provides a framework of purpose and meaning that symbolises social cohesion. Moreover, social cohesion is based on the presumption of a common identity; a sense of affinity developed over time. For this reason political communities, particularly nation-states, utilise the past to create a sense of historical continuity with which to legitimate the present. However, as my discussion of collective memory demonstrated, no sense of continuity can be guaranteed as a community's relationship with the past is frequently contested. In addition, I argued that tradition can no longer play a prime legitimating function in modern society. Instead, tradition is used to symbolise the legitimation process. Tradition provides a form of compensatory legitimation. The crux of my argument in this section is that during times of social stress, a legitimation crisis or where the integrity of a political community is itself threatened, elites will fall back on tradition as compensatory legitimation. The traditions that are fallen back on are consciously created for this purpose. Such 'invented' traditions are 'constructed' from symbolically significant remnants of traditions whose meaning has been created in the present. But they are given the illusion of being transmitted from the past. It is the 'invented' traditions that imbue collective memory with the normative values and give meaning to political myth.
An ‘authentic’ tradition establishes a sense of social continuity. In the context of political action, tradition provides a sense of continuity within a stable interpretation of reality. “Tradition provides a framework or matrix in which new actions take place and to which these actions may be assimilated; although it does not tell us what to do, it provides us with a way of making sense of what we are doing.”79 To Pocock, tradition is an inherent part of any society for he finds it “conceptually impossible to imagine a social complex coming into existence at a single moment”.80 Societies evolve; continuity being preserved by tradition that establishes a framework of social and cultural meaning that moulds communities into cohesive, organic wholes. Society, therefore has a temporal depth in that it can only exist through time. One of the most important functions of tradition is to promote a consciousness of this continuity through time. Traditions preserve continuity in images, that Pocock argues, focus on either “the continuity of the process of transmission, or the creative and charismatic origin of what is transmitted.”81 Both forms are usually found together in the same tradition but give rise to “different images of action and of time”.82 The past that is being evoked to create these images is only an image itself,83 reflecting the collective memories of a variety of political communities that are often contrived and fabricated.

81 ibid, p. 244.
82 ibid.
83 “the past can be seized only as an image” Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, Collins/Fontana, London, 1973 p. 257.
The 'authenticity' of the past is not as important as the image of continuity between past and present that is being conveyed by a tradition. However, general acceptance of images of continuity, relies on a sense of historical consciousness, the erosion of which many social theorists blame on the decline of traditions. For example, Adorno ascribes the weakening of tradition to a “breakdown of temporal continuity”\(^{84}\), which inevitably leads to a basic loss of historical consciousness. It needs to be emphasised that the authority of a tradition is not that a belief, practice or pattern of behaviour has recurred over a considerable length of time, but that a tradition is affirmed and accepted as normative. Anthony Giddens emphasises that what characterises traditions as opposed to habit is that, tradition always has a 'binding', normative character. 'Normative' here in turn implies a moral component: in traditional practices, the bindingness of activities expresses precepts about how things should or should not be done. Traditions of behaviour have their own moral endowment, which specifically resists the technical power to introduce something new. The fixity of tradition does not derive from its accumulation of past wisdom; rather, coordination of the past with the present is achieved through adherence to the normative precepts tradition incorporates.\(^{85}\)

My argument is that traditions play a normative function irrespective of their 'authenticity'. The truth or validity of a tradition at the time of its creation, or in its transmission, presentation and reception is no guarantee of its acceptance. Reverential attitudes towards traditions\(^{86}\) reinforce their normative qualities, but it should be emphasised that the use of tradition as a source of normative authority involves a conscious political choice.\(^{87}\)


\(^{85}\) Giddens, A. Modernity and Self-Identity, *op cit*, p. 145.

\(^{86}\) See Gross, D. *op cit*, p. 20-21.

Tradition also should not be confused with custom that at first sight seems to be so intertwined as to be indistinguishable. While both custom and tradition seek to preserve a sense of social continuity, customs do not carry the normative, prescriptive and moral authority of tradition. Customs are more concerned with "relatively insignificant modes of behaviour."\textsuperscript{88} Once a tradition has been emptied of its normative authority its residues might persist in the form of customs. On the other hand, customs can be consciously appropriated and elevated to traditions by imbuing them with moral authority.

Traditions can gain a sense of 'authenticity' by being given an outward 'concrete' form. Traditions are often equated with the material remains of the past whether these be heritage buildings or monuments, memory sites or artifacts that once represented past traditions. However, it should be noted that images, objects or artifacts from the past are not in themselves traditions, but they can become powerful symbolic representations of the past which, when associated with a specific tradition, can give that tradition an outward 'concrete' form. Hammer argues that to define a tradition only in terms of its outward physical manifestations is highly problematic. A "tradition is not defined by particular outward manifestations, but by the meanings ascribed to these practices and ideas by participants in the tradition".\textsuperscript{89} The importance of ascribed meanings is crucial in traditions associated with memory sites. The political landscape can be divided between memory sites that 'contain' the memory of a specific event sacred to a

\textsuperscript{88} Cross, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 12.
nation or political community and more diffuse memory sites representing the
cultural heritage of a community. The appropriation and control over the material
manifestations of a culture that imparts an aura of ‘authenticity’ to a tradition is
vital to the formation of both group identity and legitimacy.

What constitutes heritage is therefore fiercely contested in that the
values of a political community are made visible and given a sense of continuity,
stability and familiarity. The apparent political potential of revitalising a
tradition by investing its physical traces with symbolic meaning has led to what
Lowenthal describes as the “artifactual recovery of the past.” Lowenthal
describes how the Thatcher Government in Great Britain used artifacts to invest
past traditions, or more correctly the remnants of traditions, with contemporary
relevance.

Thus the raising of the Tudor flagship the *Mary Rose* resonated with traditions reinvoked
for the Falklands campaign. And traditionalism suffuses the heritage establishment, which
portrays Britain as a nation with an already achieved historical identity that demands of
the present only appropriate reverence and protection. For those nations that had not achieved ‘historical identity’, or who were
imposing a new identity, artifactual recovery extended to archaeological sites and
the creation of retrospective traditions to inform the present. As I detailed in the
previous chapter, archaeological sites, whose history is obscure or unknown, are
turned into memory sites by investing them with sacred significance for the

89 Hammer, D.C. *op cit.*, p. 558 - 559.
91 See Koshar, R.J. *Building Pasts: Historic Preservation and Identity in Twentieth Century Germany*, in Gillis, J.R. [Ed.] *op cit*.
93 ibid. p. 1274 – 1275.
nation or political community. Because archaeological sites can be used to reconstruct cultural identities, material artifacts recovered from these sites become icons for collective identity. This explains the political rhetoric often associated with calls for the restitution of cultural artifacts residing in foreign museums. The material value of these ‘priceless treasures is not the issue so much as their return as symbols of cultural identity. The question of how traditions are linked to identity leads directly to an examination of what may be referred to as the politics of 'modern traditions'.

5. Tradition, Social Cohesion and Identity.

The first point to be discussed is the perceived need to provide social cohesion through tradition. A common assumption is that a primary function of tradition is to provide social cohesion. Tradition is thought to provide the organising medium for social life by providing a framework of purpose and meaning. However, tradition no longer provides the cohesion necessary to hold together modern society. Gross argues political and bureaucratic power, market interests and media culture have replaced tradition as the new cohesive ‘glue’. The underlying assumption of Gross’ argument is that tradition held together pre-modern societies and that the now latent function in modern societies can be tapped to provide the perceived need for social cohesion. For example, Michael Kammen states that, “from an affirmative point of view, a surge of tradition can

94 Lowenthal observes that demands for the restitution of cultural materials can be more symbolic than real. "communal identity is often secured, honor satisfied, simply by fervent reiteration of a claim. It may better serve Greek pride to go on demanding the Elgin Marbles' return than actually get them back. Nothing rouses
supply the basis for social cohesion, especially in a nation so heterogeneous as the United States." However, J. Michael doubts whether tradition ever had such a cohesive function. Michael is wary of any retrospective conceptualisation of tradition that assumes the existence of a relatively homogeneous, cohesive social order. Michael argues that, "tradition can only be imagined to have functioned as society's organic glue by critics reflecting on it after its functioning as second nature has ceased, after it has been named and made self-conscious, after the whole way of life that it organically determined has changed." Michael therefore questions whether "the functional equation between traditional forms, coherent meanings, and social cement is not itself a modernist myth rather than a reliable characterisation of traditional society." Michael doubts the usefulness of conceptualising tradition as promoting social cohesion and having relevance to modern societies.

In an analytical sense, Michael is probably correct. But what his approach evades is the perceived need for tradition, even if the past being alluded to is an illusion, for it is precisely such illusion which is useful in appeals to the authority of tradition. As Kammen states, "traditions are commonly relied upon by those who possess the power to achieve an illusion of social cohesion. Such people

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95 Kammen, M. Mystic Chords of Memory : The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture, op cit, p. 4.
96 Michael, J. op cit, p. 46.
97 ibid, p. 48.
invoke the legitimacy of an artificially constructed past in order to buttress presentist assumptions and the authority of a regime.”

Whether a tradition provides social cohesion or not is therefore not the point; what is important is that political action proceeds on such an assumption. Rather than providing actual cohesion, Hobsbawm argues traditions symbolise social cohesion. Traditions symbolise a meaningful social context for individuals to function within. Gross recognised that, “there is no such thing as a need for tradition per se, since nothing in our biological makeup indicates the existence of such a need.” What is important is that the perceived need for tradition is “experienced as real by countless generations of people who were born into and grew up within traditional frameworks .... Many of the major institutions of the past, especially cultural and religious ones, made a point of addressing and satisfying this apparent need for tradition.”

Social cohesion can only be based on a presumption of a common identity. Just as tradition can be conceptualised as symbolising social cohesion, traditions can also symbolise identity. Despite a considerable amount of overlap, traditions are often identified by names which bring together common beliefs and ideas while simultaneously distinguishing one tradition from another. The idea of a tradition as a community of beliefs is a symbolic construction associated with

98 Kammen, M. op cit, p. 4 – 5.
100 Gross, D. op cit, p. 65.
101 ibid, p. 67.
defining identity as "collectivities define themselves partly in terms of their tradition of belief, which they regard as constitutive of themselves".\textsuperscript{102} For Lowenthal it is the defining function of tradition which is its main characteristic today. ""Tradition' now refers less to how things have always been done (and therefore should be done ) than to allegedly ancient traits that endow a people with corporate identity"\textsuperscript{103}.

With the rise of the nation-state, the cohesive role once played by tradition was replaced by political and cultural nationalism, which stressed a common shared language and a common shared history and heritage. In the process of creating nation-states during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the past was often utilised to legitimise the future. Identification with a common past was seen as essential to the creation of national societies and their continued legitimation. Nationalist movements established direct links with a past that evoked a 'golden age' of political and cultural greatness. Not only did this stimulate pride in national achievements, but by association gave nationalist movements the added authority and status of historical precedent. The state "actively fostered nationalism by institutionalising it in official ceremonies and public 'days of observance', by working it into the legal codes and statutes, and even by ensuring that it is included in school textbooks and curricula."\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Shils, E. \textit{op cit}, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{103} Lowenthal, D. \textit{The Past is a Foreign Country}, \textit{op cit} p. 370.
\textsuperscript{104} Gross, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 69.
Consciousness of a common citizenship was created through communal rituals and ceremonies associated with the national flag, the national anthem and national emblems that all signified the distinct identity of a sovereign nation. A coherent national history was thought to be essential to the creation of nationality. History embodied the ideology of the nation, the state and political communities and established continuity with an 'imagined' national existence in the remote past. The assumption was that "national society would be legitimated and strengthened by the assimilation of knowledge of its own past by the oncoming generations." With the advent of mass compulsory education, school became the medium through which national values could be instilled. Hobsbawm argues that the use of history as the legitimator of national values, national symbols and the nation itself is a conscious act of social engineering, which was not just confined to the nineteenth century.

All historians, whatever else their objectives, are engaged in this process inasmuch as they contribute, consciously or not, to the creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere of man as a political being. To a certain extent such a process is based on the presumption of a relatively unified approach to national history in a basically homogenous society. That the opposite is the case, has not stopped authors such as Bloom from trying to use the United States' education system to impose an imagined unified coherent national identity onto a fundamentally heterogeneous society.

105 Shils, E. op cit, p. 58.
106 Hobsbawm, E. op cit, p. 13.
Traditions were never applied uniformly throughout traditional society as the vast majority of the population led lives relatively untouched by the political centre. The traditions of the centre often did not penetrate to the periphery of society and where they did, local traditions often had enough resilience to contest their transmission. However, with the emergence of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, national integration required that parochial traditions be suppressed. The nation-state privileged those traditions that underpinned 'national identity' as opposed to traditions that represented regional and ethnic differences. It is possible for an ethnic community to retain its traditions while at the same time tolerating traditions of national integration promoted by the centre. However, the growing ascendancy of the centre over the local has also caused a reaction, the point of resistance being revitalised local traditions.

A common sense of identity is also symbolised by the name adopted by a society to classify its citizens and characterise them with certain usually undefined qualities that mark them out from other societies. These 'national characteristics' link citizens both spatially and temporally. Labelling all people sharing a common territory with the same name is literally to define them into existence as a distinct entity. Naming is also important to establishing a sense of affinity and continuity with those having the same name in the past. The symbolic importance of naming was developed in the previous chapter through an examination of the 1990's controversy generated by the name Macedonia as used by the former Yugoslav Republic. A name links generations and gives a

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108 "Often there were linguistic differences as well as other cultural schisms between local communities and
society a sense of its own unique continuity. Shils emphasises that identity depends upon social continuity.

A society is in continuous existence. Continuity is one feature of the oneness over time; it depends on the partial stability of identities. The constituent identities, those identities in the various spheres of social life, some longer than others and interconnected with each other, preserve the society by keeping some of its past in the present not by sustaining the sense of identity through time. These identities rest on the consensus of the present with the past. 109

However, a consensus of the present with the past cannot be assumed as the relationship of any society with its past is frequently contested.

Identity should not be envisaged as fixed and unchanging, but rather as dynamic and multi-dimensional, responding continuously to the constant need to reinterpret the past so as to conform with current needs. In situations where centralised national traditions lose their integrative function due to a legitimation crisis it is possible that allegiance to a national identity may also weaken. It is especially so in heterogeneous societies where national identity is closely associated with a dominant ethnic or social group. Resurgent nationalist or ethnic groups reconstitute themselves around previously marginalised or suppressed traditions. Reemergence of multiple identities within a nation-state has obvious implications for the integrity of a nation-state based on the premise of a common accepted identity. Nationalism had proved particularly effective during periods of crisis, but nationalism could not provide stable normative meanings and values over a long span of time.

109 Shils, E. op cit, p. 168.
Habermas argues that one reason the state has been unable to generate normative meanings and values inherent in tradition is that the cultural system is peculiarly resistant to administrative control. *There is no administrative production of meaning.* Commercial production and administrative planning of symbols exhausts the normative force of counterfactual validity claims. The procurement of legitimation is self-defeating as soon as the mode of procurement is seen through.\textsuperscript{10}

Tradition, as a major source of legitimation has therefore declined with the rise of the modern bureaucratic nation-state. Habermas argues that the normative values once transmitted by tradition cannot be directly replicated by the modern bureaucratic state.

However, as Goetschel suggests, while tradition no longer performs a primary legitimating role it is still called upon to perform what he calls "compensatory legitimation."\textsuperscript{11} Traditions do not directly legitimate the state but "function as the medium or discursive sphere through which legitimation is represented."\textsuperscript{12} Traditions therefore "represent symbolisations of legitimation processes."\textsuperscript{13} In a communicative sense, the use of tradition to complement existing legitimation can be most clearly seen in traditions that provide the ceremonial frameworks that underpin the political process. Traditions that provide frameworks for collective understandings and identity and generally support the nation-state are also retained. Most importantly, the nation-state falls back on tradition as compensatory legitimation in times of a legitimation crisis or

\textsuperscript{10} Habermas, J. *op cit*, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{11} Goetschel, W. *op cit*, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{12} *ibid*, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{13} *ibid*. 
especially when the integrity of the nation-state itself is threatened. Compensatory legitimation however, requires a tradition to fall back on and in many cases such tradition has been invented for this purpose.

The question of why certain traditions have persisted in modern society, is addressed by Eric Hobsbawm. His insight is that many extant traditions that claim the authority of age are in fact of recent origin and many have been consciously created. He coins the phrase 'invented tradition' to draw attention to those traditions that are constructed to cater for a specific need, whether these be social, political, cultural or ideological. One specific need that Hobsbawm focuses on is the need to create common traditions in newly emerging social and political orders over the last two centuries. Tradition is invented to create a sense of historical continuity; to give a sense of greater historical depth to legitimating claims based on the past. Where there are no suitable traditions to be tapped into, the state will invent them. The state symbolically identifies itself with those traditions that have the capacity to evoke strong feelings of communal loyalty to the nation-state itself or its institutions. As Hobsbawm comments, "plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups - not least in nationalism - were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented."

The new nation state is given greater historical depth by associating itself with an idealised fictitious 'golden age', which is incorporated into invented traditions and the collective memory of a community.

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114 It is possible to quibble with the term 'invented'. "Hobsbawm's substantive thesis may be correct, but his concepts are more open to question. ... For all traditions, one could say, are invented traditions." Giddens, *Living in a Post-Traditional Society*, op cit, p.93.

115 Hobsbawm, E. *op cit*, p. 7.
Traditions able to be utilised by the state are consciously refashioned and invested with new political meanings centred on the state itself. No state risks weakening its legitimacy by expending considerable resources of time, power and money or supporting or resurrecting traditions for their own sake. Only those traditions or fragments of traditions that can be utilised to augment the legitimacy of the state will be ‘saved’. It should not be assumed automatically that the rapid social transformation of the nineteenth century and the weakening of the institutional carriers of tradition are the only reasons for the fragmentation of old traditions. There is also a conscious decision not to endorse certain traditions whether they are viable or not.

In consciously setting itself against tradition and for radical innovation, the nineteenth-century ideology of social change systematically failed to provide for the social and authority ties taken for granted in earlier societies, and created voids which might have to be filled by invented practices. These newer, invented practices, constructed patterns of behaviour and values are more amenable to the needs of the emerging modern national societies. However, in contrast to the strongly binding normative social practices embodied in old traditions, invented traditions tend to “be quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate: ‘patriotism’, ‘loyalty’, ‘duty’, ‘playing the game’, ‘the school spirit’, and the like.”

\[116\] \textit{ibid}, p. 8.  
\[117\] \textit{ibid}, p. 10.
Invented traditions are more concerned with the outward trappings and ritual practices signifying loyalty, devotion, allegiance and a common identity than the actual meaning lying behind such emotionally charged symbols. Those emotionally charged symbols are either extracted from the remnants of old traditions and given new political meanings, or consciously constructed from scratch. Therefore traditions that no longer perform their original normative function can still retain symbolically significant remnants that can be utilised by the state. Accordingly, such remnants are refashioned as symbols of tradition that can be directly appropriated by the state itself. Essentially “fragments of old traditions are lifted from their previous settings, drafted for new purposes, and represented to people as if they were authentic national traditions of long duration.” In reality the meaning ascribed to such traditions is created in the present as only their form is transposed from the past and not necessarily their content. Content is extensively reworked and may contain little of the original tradition. Invented traditions can therefore be made up of a montage of meanings mixing genuine elements from original traditions with consciously created elements from the present.

It is difficult to separate ‘authentic’ from ‘inauthentic’ elements within a tradition, especially when the form of the tradition is presented as an organic whole. If reworked traditions are accepted generally, the distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘fabricated’ traditions loses any significance. What is more important is that they are perceived to be authentic in both form and content.

Tradition

There are two main criticisms leveled at the whole concept of invented traditions. One is that the term ‘invented’ tradition implies the conscious creation of a tradition to cater for a specific social need. The term ‘invented’ has also been taken to imply a lack of ‘authenticity’; a suggestion that such traditions are deceitful in that they are based on a fabricated past and false memories as opposed to long-standing supposedly ‘authentic’ traditions based on the ‘genuine’ collective memories of a community.\(^{119}\) Hobsbawm takes a less value-laden approach.

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.\(^{120}\)

For Hobsbawm it is not only the conscious nature of their construction and use that mark ‘invented traditions’ off from older traditions, but the implied nature of the continuity established between past and present. What invented traditions emphasise is social continuity, a symbolic representation of a society of indefinite duration with deep-rooted and unbroken links to a suitable past.

The second criticism is that the very idea of inventing traditions to fulfil legitimating needs in modern societies is illogical. For example, for Anthony

\(^{119}\) “Ever since the 1978 Past and Present Conference on ‘the Invention of Tradition’, and the publication of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s influential collection of essays drawn from it, historians have come accustomed to thinking of commemorations as a cheat, something which ruling elites impose on the subaltern classes. It is a weapon of social control, a means of generating consensus, and legitimating the status quo by reference to a mythologised version of the past.” Raphael Samuel, Theatres of Memory, Vol. 1 op cit, pp. 16 -17. Kammen takes a more pragmatic approach. “We need not be overly cynical about societies that ‘invent’ traditions. Sometimes that occurs in order to perpetuate power relationships or to foist a mystique of false consciousness; but sometimes it actually occurs for benign reasons.” Kammen, M. op cit, p. 31.
Giddens there is a “burgeoning preoccupation with the reconstruction of tradition to cope with the changing demands of modern and social conditions.”\textsuperscript{121} The perceived need is adjusting to modernity itself, a position that most other social theorists would agree with. However, the use of tradition as a fallback to meeting the challenge of modernity is seen as basically illogical. As Giddens comments;

\begin{quote}
whether tradition can effectively be recreated in conditions of high modernity is seriously open to doubt. Tradition loses its rationale the more thoroughly reflexivity, coupled to expert systems, penetrates to the core of everyday life. The establishment of ‘new traditions’ is plainly a contradiction in terms.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

Seeking legitimation in invented tradition may represent a regression, but dismissing invented traditions as a contradiction in terms does not explain why they are created and maintained in the first place.

6. Conclusion

Tradition makes up one of the three major components of political myth that I have argued are inextricably intertwined. I analysed first, collective memory, in chapters 3 and 4. The third component, commemoration, is analysed in the next chapter. I argued in the previous chapters that collective memory was a key component of political myth because one of the characteristics of a political myth is that it is constructed around an \textit{image} of the past. I also argued that this image of the past is not history as such, but a symbolic representation of the past that has been collectively constructed by a political community to legitimate its present needs. This chapter has argued that the past appropriated by collective

\textsuperscript{120} Hobsbawn, E. \textit{op cit}, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{121} Giddens, A. \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity \textit{op cit}}, p. 206.
memory is given normative meaning by tradition. It is this image of the past that lies at the core of political myth and is imbued with both memory and tradition. In developing my argument, tradition has been analysed under two broad categories. First, the persistence of tradition in modern societies and its relationship with modernity, and second, the role of ‘invented’ tradition in providing a form of compensatory legitimation for transmitting normative values through images of social cohesion and historical continuity. I have included a case study of the Masada Tradition in Appendix 2 to illustrate the role invented tradition has played in the creation of an Israeli historical consciousness.

In this chapter I first established the persistence of tradition in modern societies. It is necessary to acknowledge the ‘survival’ of tradition because the concept of a ‘modern’ tradition is either dismissed as being incompatible with modernity, or is dismissed as a contrived and fabricated illusion manipulated by elites to underpin legitimacy claims based on historical continuity. However, tradition cannot be so easily dismissed, even though the role of tradition as providing a coherent organising principle for modern societies is no longer tenable. In examining traditions that have survived I suggest that these can be divided into three basic categories. The first category is those traditions that survive as fragments or remnants of once intact traditions. As remnants taken out of their historically interpretative frameworks they are susceptible to being reconstituted and infused with new meaning to form ‘invented’ traditions. The second category is those traditions that survive more or less intact and play an

122 ibid, p. 206 - 207.
active role in the centre of society because they fulfil a perceived need. These traditions are either institutionalised, sustained by the state or supported by established religions. The third category is those more parochial traditions that survive at the periphery of society. During times of social stress or legitimation crisis these traditions can be reactivated at the centre of society to become a focus for resistance. I show that these forms of tradition exist as variable components within modernity, rather than being detached and separated from modern society.

In a tradition-modernity paradigm, the concept of a tradition as promoting continuity of meaning through the transmission of an essential core of normative values is seen as being the very antithesis of modernity where authority is theoretically based on reason rather than on the past. I argue however, that such a dichotomy distorted the conceptualisation of both tradition and modernity and that to understand the nature of traditions that have persisted into modern society, it is necessary to break down the tradition-modernity paradigm and blur the distinction usually drawn between tradition and modernity. In blurring the distinction, tradition is able to be better conceptualised as an essential component embedded within modernity. The first section of this chapter therefore establishes a generalised conception of tradition as it survives in modern society. This concept is then used to show how tradition is used to create a sense of continuity and social cohesion through the transmission of normative values.

The second part of my chapter focuses on tradition as the medium through which normative values are transmitted, especially where tradition is 'invented' to consciously create normative values as symbolic forms of compensatory
legitimation. It is argued that the perceived primary role of tradition as providing social cohesion in pre-modern societies is problematic and represents a retrospective conceptualisation of tradition. The assumption that tradition provides such a cohesive role that can be tapped by modern societies is misguided. Tradition does not provide actual social cohesion; it can only be symbolic and give an illusion of social cohesion. It is however, the illusion of social cohesion that is politically acted upon. The goal of social cohesion can only be based on the presumption of a common identity. A common identity is based around collective memory given normative meaning by tradition. Evoking a sense of historical continuity through the utilisation of selected images of the past is therefore important to the legitimacy claims of any political community. In this sense, even though tradition no longer plays a primary legitimating role it can be used to symbolise the legitimisation process and so provide a compensatory form of legitimisation. I argue therefore, that during times of social stress, a legitimisation crisis or in situations where the integrity of a political community is threatened, elites will fall back on tradition as compensatory legitimisation. However, such compensatory legitimisation needs a tradition to fall back on; a tradition ready-made to cater for this specific need. Such a tradition is ‘invented’ in that although it might contain remnants of values from once intact traditions, its primary meaning is created in the present. ‘Invented’ traditions create a sense of historical continuity to give greater historical depth to legitimacy claims based on the past. My final point was that it is ‘invented’ traditions that imbue collective memory with the normative values that give meaning to political myth.
Through a detailed analysis of the concept of 'modern' traditions this chapter therefore prepares the theoretical background for analysis of the way in which the past, infused with memory and tradition, is represented in political myth. The past, as 'constructed' by collective memory, has been invested with normative meaning by tradition. It is most likely that normative values that have been ascribed to tradition have been created in the present and transmitted through 'invented' traditions. However, the 'authenticity' of such traditions is not an issue, for the normative values imparted to collective memory through 'invented' traditions' still frames and shapes that memory. A past imbued with memory and tradition forms the core of a political myth, but such a representation of the past is not a political myth itself. It is the commemorative process of communicating memory and tradition that has the potential to transform both collective memory and tradition into political myth.