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

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NOTE

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Chapter 7

Political Myth and Legitimacy
1. Introduction.

My central proposition in this thesis is that the past, as represented and communicated through political myth, is a powerful source of legitimation. To support such a proposition, the focus of my argument to this point has been to establish how the past is perceived in political myth. A close examination of the concepts of collective memory, tradition and commemoration has been fundamental to such an understanding. In establishing the nature of this past I have also shown that it is the dynamic interrelationship between collective memory, tradition and commemoration that makes up the core of a political myth. What makes political myth so important as a source of authority is that it communicates the norms, values, interests and legitimacy claims of a particular group that has the power to shape, re-shape and interpret political events of symbolic importance to the whole community. However, legitimacy claims based purely on political myths are rare. Political myths embody values and countervales that largely remain ‘hidden’ behind more orthodox claims to legitimacy. How a political myth gains authority has to be understood within the overall context of political legitimation. The concept of political legitimacy is not the focus of my thesis and I will not engage in a critique of the extensive literature of this branch of political theory. My focus will be on how the legitimating potential of a political myth can be conceptualised within a more general theory of political legitimation.
The crux of my argument is that legitimacy for governments and political systems is both elusive and problematic and that political myth is used to supplement waning sources of normative authority, or, in times of crisis or social stress, supplant these sources altogether. In developing my argument I will draw a distinction between the legitimacy of a government or ruling elite and the legitimacy of a political system, which includes the state. Failure to operate within the generally accepted legitimating principles of a society, or failure to satisfy performance criteria effectively, will weaken a government's legitimacy. The loss of legitimacy by a government normally has little impact on a political system. As David Held comments, "while particular governments may be vulnerable when citizens fail to confer legitimacy, the state itself is not necessarily more vulnerable to collapse or disintegration." However, the legitimacy of the political system itself can be undermined if there is a chronic performance failure and the political system cannot accommodate the necessary changes to resolve this failure. I will argue that attempts to resolve questions of performance; whether by increasing state intervention into areas of economic or social life, or by 'rolling back' the state, inevitably will exacerbate the basic contradiction that is embedded in the heart of modern political systems. The basic contradiction is that the modern state derives its authority from the principles of popular sovereignty, but the state as an instrument of the whole people

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2 As occurred with the collapse of state socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union.
must legitimate the *sectional* character of its intervention into all sections of the economy and areas of social life.

At a more serious level for the legitimacy of a political system, failure to resolve chronic problems can weaken the legitimating rationale that underpins normative sources of authority. The decline of normative sources of legitimating authority that lie outside the political process reduces legitimacy to a function of the ruling elite’s ability to manage and manipulate public opinion in order to create a belief that the system is legitimate. I argue that the absence of ‘higher order’ legitimating rationales have left a ‘symbolic void’ at the centre of modern political systems. The ‘symbolic void’ cannot be filled by indicators of performance alone, or by the shifting currents of public opinion, no matter how managed and manipulated. The most significant symbolic resource left to the modern political system is the authority of the past. Legitimating symbols derived from the past have ‘authority’ because they originate in the collective memory and traditions of communities. However, my argument is that a consciously ‘constructed’ symbolic past, as conveyed by a political myth, is both spurious and illusory and is contrived by ruling elites to mask unresolved legitimacy deficits within modern societies. As such, legitimacy based on political myth is a deception used to circumvent the need to base authority on normative values that reside beyond the political process, or on the need to resolve chronic performance failure. A political system that falls back on political myth as a source of legitimacy has therefore just ‘papered over’ fundamental
legitimation problems. Consequently, I argue that political myth only provides a political system with a simulated, ersatz form of legitimacy that can never be more than compensatory.

To understand how a political myth can provide a political system with legitimating authority, it is necessary to situate political myth within a more general theory of political legitimation. I will develop this framework in three sections. First, the importance of legitimacy for any political system will be stressed. I will also explain that the conceptualisation of the legitimating role of political myth can best be understood within the multidimensional approach to legitimation developed by David Beetham in The Legitimation of Power. I will take Beetham’s historically variable general criteria for legitimacy as a framework for developing my approach to the legitimating role of political myth. Second, the legitimating problems confronting political systems will be highlighted with the proposition that political myth provides the necessary legitimating symbols for an otherwise weakly legitimated state. Third, the question of how political myth can provide supplementary sources of legitimating authority to modern political systems will be developed in more detail using Beetham’s general criteria. This chapter will thus demonstrate how the past, as represented and communicated through political myth, plays an important part in the legitimation of modern political systems.

2. The Importance of Legitimation

I aim to establish the importance of legitimacy to political systems and suggest that the role of political myth in the legitimating process is largely ignored in current political theory. While "legitimacy is universally held to be desirable,"\textsuperscript{4} it is not until the authority of a state or regime dramatically collapses that the full significance of legitimacy is apparent. For this reason legitimacy is quite often neglected in political analysis. As Rodney Barker points out, "it is easier to describe the absence of legitimacy than its presence."\textsuperscript{5} Such an observation is equally applicable to political myth. The presence of political myth is mostly ignored in political analysis unless it emerges as a significant political factor during times of crisis. Even then, political myth is not analysed in terms of its potential to legitimate or de-legitimize a state or regime. I suggest that there are two reasons for this. First, despite the fact that the concept of political myth has been around for most of the twentieth century, there is as yet no coherent body of theoretical literature that has gained general acceptance with political theorists. Second, and related to the first point, political myth does not easily fit into most theoretical studies of political legitimacy. Where political myth is discussed in the context of modern legitimation it is portrayed usually as an aberration properly belonging to fascist or totalitarian societies.

Most studies of legitimation touch on aspects of political myth such as the role of tradition, the manipulation of symbols or the use of commemoration and pageantry, but to my knowledge no study directly analyses political myth as an aspect of political legitimacy. It is my contention that such neglect leaves a 'gap' in the conceptualisation of both political myth and political legitimation. Any analysis of political myth that does not include a consideration of how it can directly influence intentional political action does not fully explain why myth is political. Any analysis of political legitimation that does not include a consideration of political myth as a source of legitimation fails to acknowledge the historical reality of such political myths as the Serbian myth of Kosovo. As the focus of my thesis is political myth, it is not my intention to offer a reconceptualisation of political legitimacy or even a survey of the extensive and comprehensive literature of this topic. Instead, I will focus on those aspects of legitimacy relevant to the development of a concept of political myth.

For the purposes of my argument it is necessary first to establish the importance legitimacy has for states and regimes. Legitimacy is desirable for a

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number of reasons. Thomas McCarthy argues that there is an increased need for legitimating rationales to justify the growing power of the state and its intervention into new areas of social life. Legitimating rationales are particularly needed when areas of social life that were once traditionally legitimated become subjected to administrative planning and therefore become politicised. It is also necessary to legitimate the sectional character of state intervention with its unequal distribution of resources.

At its most basic level the state encompasses the common aspirations and purposes of the nation which is given form by, “those specialised institutions that exercise a monopoly of law-making and adjudication over a given territory, and of the organised physical coercion necessary to enforce it.” Control or influence over such specialised institutions of state power becomes the focus of intense political conflict because, as Beetham maintains, “the state is responsible for determining the rules which govern all other power relations in society, and for legitimating these relations by according them legal validity.” However, self-validating power to make its own rules also creates legitimacy problems because, “there is no superior legal authority to which it can appeal to confirm its own legitimacy, and to enforce its own rules in the face of an intense struggle within society to gain control of and exercise

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8 Beetham, D. *op cit*, p. 121.
9 *ibid.*
that sovereign power." In the absence of any higher legal authority the state reaches beyond itself to employ the normative authority of principles that reside outside the political process. Such sources of authority include divine sanction, scientific doctrine, tradition and popular sovereignty. However, in the next section I will argue that the weakening of such normative values of authority is one cause of the legitimacy problems confronting the modern state.

In addition to seeking validating sources of authority from 'outside' the political system, Alan Wolfe argues that state power is reinforced by a process of reification that invests the state with a wide variety of mythic powers. Wolfe argues that, "reification takes place when state power is justified as an end in itself and not as a means to some other end." In the same sense, Cassirer identifies 'state worship' and the justification of state power as an end in itself and an important characteristic of modern political myths. Reification also occurs through personification where, "rather than viewing the state as growing out of the activity of people, its activity is personified, given human characteristics, while the activity of people is depersonalised and made instruments to the state." The state also is objectified in that it "is assigned characteristics that make it seem a concrete thing as opposed to the

\[^{10}\text{ibid. p. 122.}\]
\[^{11}\text{State sovereignty can be restricted by various international treaties, conventions or covenants that the state freely entered into.}\]
\[^{12}\text{The subject of normative legitimating principles is the topic of the next section of this chapter.}\]
\[^{14}\text{Ibid. p. 281.}\]
instrument of the people's will." Finally, Wolfe argues that the state is reified through what he calls epicisation, where "political figures, rather than being seen as public servants, are transformed into public heroes, generally of epic dimensions." Again, Cassirer identifies the elevation of political figures into heroes as another important characteristic of political myths. To sum up, Wolf argues that,

Modern secularised reification will most likely occur when two conditions are present: first, extensive social conflict forces a reliance on the state and makes questions of government authority important; and, second, an element of democratisation requires a theory of legitimation. Taken together, both conditions characterise the essential dilemma facing the modern state. A reified state that appears fixed and immutable can be symbolised as representing the common values of the whole community. Political myth is one way of symbolically representing the state as the embodiment of the nation's culture, heritage and destiny.

David Beetham stresses that the importance of legitimacy for a regime lies in its contribution to securing order, stability and effectiveness, without recourse to coercion. Coercion is very costly to maintain because power has lost its justification. Once it has lost its legitimate authority, the system of power has only one line of defence, that of force; and power can collapse very rapidly if coercion is insufficient or if people believe that those in power have lost the will to use it. For weakly

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15 ibid.
16 ibid, p.282.
17 ibid, p. 280.
legitimated states or regimes, the exercise of power is a complex issue for, "disorder and insecurity are as much the product of inadequate legitimacy as they are its cause.... Any attempt to suppress discontent or disagreement by force, rather than resolve it by political means, may only weaken a state's legitimacy rather than enhance it."18 Such an intractable quandary confronting the state is well summed up by Beetham.

The relation between coercion and legitimacy is thus a complex rather than a simple one, at least as regards the state's function in ensuring internal security. Here the use of coercion to suppress deep-seated grievances can erode legitimacy in some contexts as surely as the failure to use it quell disorder can in others; the state can be both too weak and too overbearing.19 To avoid such a predicament legitimating rationales are required to provide a set of justificatory principles for obedience and obligation. Where these rationales have been successfully inculcated, subordinates will obey out of conviction and coercion will not be necessary. When these rationales are not successfully inculcated subordinates might obey because of self-interest, expediency or 'conditional tolerance', but compliance may still depend upon the threat of coercion. Legitimacy therefore refers specifically to the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate; the right of the dominant to claim a monopoly of the legitimate use of force and the obligation of subordinates to obey.

Legitimating rationales provide a theoretical basis for the exercise of political power by linking power to justifiable sources of authority. Political power, which is

18 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 139.
19 ibid.
often wielded in the name of specific social, cultural, ethnic or economic groups is thus justified in terms of legitimate authority. Consequently, a primary function of legitimating rationales is to bestow authority on a specific group that sets policies, priorities and allocates resources. Habermas argues that legitimating rationales not only justify the distribution of power and advantage in capitalist societies but also seek to create the illusion that the state is separated from the economic workings of society. The state is portrayed as merely impartially applying the rules and therefore escapes the opprobrium of contentious economic outcomes. Whether to justify or obscure the exercise of power, "legitimating rationales, necessary to any system of domination, are effective only if their underlying principles have been internalised by the public, that is collectively accepted as normative and thus as binding."²⁰ My approach to the concept of legitimacy is that it is specifically political involving the capacity of a political system or regime to engender and maintain the belief that its right to exercise legitimate power is morally right and proper.

Moreover, if the exercise of legitimate power is linked to belief, legitimacy tends to have moral overtones. Numerous writers argue that an analytical approach to legitimacy empties the concept of its moral element, what John Schaar refers to as the quality of 'oughtness.'²¹ As political systems and regimes couch their claims to the exercise power in terms of moral justifiability, ideally such moral claims should be

able to be objectively tested or judged against generally accepted criteria. Such a ‘test’ of moral justifiability however, is unlikely in any objective sense. On the other hand, a Weberian approach, that reduces the concept of legitimacy to belief in legitimacy, is unable to draw moral judgements about a political system or regime. As David Held argues, it is not just a matter of a political order being seen to be legitimate by its population, but that it merits to be accepted in a moral sense. A political order that earned the right to be legitimated is one that is normatively sanctioned through rational and informed reflection, what Habermas calls ‘rational consensus’.

I argue that legitimacy based on ‘rational consensus’ would be the exception rather than the rule. The next section of my chapter will advance the proposition that full legitimacy is elusive, problematic and difficult to attain. Full legitimacy is difficult to attain because the principle of popular sovereignty requires most political systems to secure their authority through mass legitimation. The political system must promote, maintain and reproduce a common framework of belief by mobilising the ‘people’ around a common social ‘identity’. I argue that common identity is most effectively communicated through political myth. The negative side of popular sovereignty is that if a weakly legitimatized political system or regime fails to mobilise the ‘people’ behind a common framework of belief or social identity, it can suffer a

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rapid erosion of legitimacy or a legitimation crisis. In such a case, an alternative social identity is most effectively communicated through political myth.

My argument draws on David Beetham’s approach to legitimation as the framework for conceptualising the legitimating function of political myth. Beetham’s The Legitimation of Power advances a heuristic framework for analysing the phenomenon of legitimacy that he claims to be “not merely an important topic, but the central issue in social and political theory.” Beetham develops a multidimensional approach to the concept of legitimacy that can be used to explain the legitimating and de-legitimating potential of political myth. He proposes a framework comprising a set of general criteria for legitimacy, “the specific content of which is historically variable, and must therefore be determined for each type of society.” Beetham does not conceptualise legitimacy as an all-or-nothing affair for, legitimacy is not a single quality that systems of power possess or not, but a set of distinct criteria, or multiple dimensions, operating at different levels, each of which provided moral grounds for compliance or cooperation on the part of those subordinate to a given power relation.

Beetham proposes three dimensions of legitimate power, each matched with a negative form of non-legitimate power. The first criteria of legitimacy according to Beetham is that the acquisition and exercise of power conforms to established rules. He refers to the negative form of non-legitimate power as illegitimacy. Illegitimacy

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22 ibid. p. 41.
23 ibid. p. 21.
24 ibid. p. 20.
occurs when rules are intentionally broken to acquire power or in the exercise of power. Illegitimacy also refers to the illegal seizure of power, such as a coup d'état.

The second criteria of legitimacy is the justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs. Shared beliefs about origins, history, traditions, ethnicity, culture, religion and ideology also provide a source of identity that is well communicated through political myth. Where the political system does not embody justificatory norms or beliefs it can be said to be suffering from a legitimacy deficit. Beetham states that,

rules of power will lack legitimacy to the extent that they cannot be justified in terms of shared beliefs: either because no basis of shared belief exists in the first place ... or because changes in belief have deprived the rules of their supportive basis ... or because changing circumstances have made existing justification for the rules implausible.25

The discrepancy between rules and supporting beliefs results in a legitimacy deficit or weakness rather than illegitimacy. Beetham’s third criterion refers to the capacity of the political system to secure specific actions that publicly express consent. Actions can range from elections and mass mobilisation through to participation in the rituals and ceremonies of the nation-state or political community. The public withdrawal of consent as expressed through demonstrations, strikes or armed rebellion has the potential to delegitimate a regime or the state itself. For Beetham legitimacy is thus a function of three continuous variables. Legitimacy is not wholly present in a political system or wholly absent; it is variable in that it is either enhanced or withdrawn. Such an approach to legitimacy accords with the principle of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty is the common thread that runs through

25 ibid, p. 17-18.
each of the legitimating criteria and takes into account the reality that most political systems must secure authority through mass legitimation.

3. The Problematic Nature of Legitimating Rationales.

I argue in chapter 1 that political myth is latent in all political communities and tends to re-emerge as a potential legitimating or de-legitimating phenomenon during periods of significant change, social stress or crisis. I will now develop my argument to explain how the legitimating potential of a political myth can be conceptualised within a general theory of political legitimacy. Cassirer associates political myth with a collective response to a crisis and expresses concern about any potential re-appearance of political myths as a source of legitimation. The source of Cassirer’s concern is the historical reality of fascism, which largely structured and communicated its legitimating ideology through powerful political myths.

3.1 Political Myths as Compensatory Sources of Legitimation.

For Vladimir Tismaneanu, the social and political discontinuity, disruption and fragmentation that characterised the first decade of post-communist Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union provided fertile ground for the re-emergence of political myth. Like Cassirer, Tismaneau is concerned with the fascist tendencies that underlie many myths. Tismaneau comments that, “fascism was historically
defeated during World War II but, as we have seen in recent years, its echoes continue to resurface each time conditions deteriorate and individuals find themselves under unbearable psychological constraints.\footnote{Tismaneanu, V. \textit{op cit.} p. 27. The institutions of fascism were defeated, but fascist political myths remained as subdued countervalues.} Echoes of fascism can be found in many political myths that arose in response to the range of crises that confronted post-communist states. Tismaneanu explains the allure of fascism during times of crisis as: "beyond its historical context, there is a psychological and social matrix to which fascism responds: the rejection of modern institutions and practices, the repudiation of reason, the cataclysmic celebration of soul against intellect."\footnote{\textit{ibid.}} However, a number of political myths don't have fascist overtones, nor are they necessarily harmful for a society.

Political myths can offer compensatory legitimation for a society adrift. As Tismaneanu states, "a political myth is needed around which the afflicted society or groups that have been displaced or uprooted by the stormy changes can identify themselves, can gather and attempt to restore their collective life."\footnote{\textit{ibid.} p.7-8.} In such cases, political mythologies and utopian fantasies are not necessarily exclusive and harmful. They also provide the "social glue" any collectivity needs to ensure its legitimacy and self-pride. When conventional identifications fall apart and old belief systems become vacuous, there is a normal tendency for symbolic compensation.\footnote{\textit{ibid.} p.35.}

The concept of `symbolic compensation' to replace 'normative' or 'philosophical' legitimating rationales is important to the argument of my chapter and therefore will
be analysed further. However, the types of political myths that arise in response to crises are generally not benign, as Tismaneanu points out.

Post-communist mythologies of salvation are ideological surrogates, competing with other intellectual and political trends. Their principal function is to unify the public discourse and provide the citizen with an easily recognizable source of identity as a part of a vaguely defined ethnic (or political) community. These mythologies minimize individual rights and emphasize, instead, the need to maintain an organic supraindividual ethos. Catering to mass frustrations, they speak in terms of collective guilt and collective punishment. Favouring a politics of anger and resentment, proponents of these mythologies often capitalise on legitimate aspirations and grievances. After all, there is a lot of despair in these countries, and the political myths provide fast, clear-cut explanations for the causes of the ongoing troubles.

Such myths are a repudiation of reason and tap deep-seated emotional resentments and frustrations. But myths can only "offer relatively facile explanations for perceived victimhood and failure." However, insightful explanation is not the point of such myths for what they offer is an emotional response to a crisis.

Individuals become entrapped in the mythological discourse, accept its axiomatic premises, and refuse to question its allegations. Demagogues, tribunes, and prophets emerge who can articulate collective hopes and anxieties in aggressive ways. These are mythologists who know how to stimulate fears and ecstasies, illusions and redemptive expectations.

It was an aspect of political myth that deeply concerned Cassirer more than fifty years ago and the re-emergence of such myths should be of equal concern today.

In using Tismaneanu’s depiction of political myths as they have re-emerged in post-communist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, I am focusing on a
response to a serious legitimation crisis. The types of political myths generated by such a crisis tend to be extreme. It is important, however, to recognise and include less dramatic forms of legitimation crisis or legitimacy deficits that have the potential to generate political myths. Such political myths still play the role of offering a form of compensatory legitimation to governments or states whose legitimacy has been seriously undermined by endemic social, political or economic dislocation and stress. David Beetham comments that “on a global scale ... what is striking is the difficulty that contemporary states experience in achieving ... legitimacy, and their rulers in governing in a manner that maintains it.” The difficulty that contemporary states face lies in the demands made upon them. Simultaneously, the state must secure strong economic growth to ensure the material well-being of the whole community – its source of legitimacy – while managing an inherently unstable economy over which it has little control. At another level, David Held comments that,

the precariousness of ‘government’ today is linked both to the limits of state power in the context of national and international conditions and the remoteness, distrust and scepticism that is expressed about existing institutional arrangements, including the effectivity of parliamentary democracy.34

Public scepticism coupled with the advent of a globalised economy has eroded the legitimate authority available to modern states. However, as Beetham points out,

the contemporary state is a form of power-structure that requires legitimation, not so much to function, or even to survive over a period of time, but to achieve those purposes that depend

32 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 117.
34 Held, D. op cit, p. 151.
upon the support of its population and to maintain its political system intact in the face of serious policy failure or challenge to it.\textsuperscript{35}

In my view the necessary legitimation required to underpin state power can no longer be found in traditional sources of legitimation alone: state legitimacy must now be supplemented by political myth. I will argue also that political myth is not a valid source of legitimacy for a modern state.

3.2 The Emergence of a ‘Symbolic Void’.

To explain how political myth can emerge as a potential legitimator of the state, I will examine why more traditional sources of authority have lost their saliency. I will base my explanation on two insightful observations made by Mueller and Held. Mueller argues that,

\begin{quote}
the disconnection of politics from a normative basis and the decline of traditional legitimating ideologies and collectively held political interpretations, on the one hand, and the growing intervention of the state into the social and economic order, on the other, have created a symbolic void which has to be filled by legitimating symbols of a new nature.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

The second observation comes from David Held, commenting on Margaret Thatcher’s success in bolstering the legitimacy of the state’s traditional authority while systematically discrediting its capability to assume direct responsibility for the management of economic and social affairs.

The political success of the Thatcher regime ... has rested ... in large part on the uncoupling or separation of the instrumental or performative dimension of the state, that is the state as an instrument for the delivery of goods and services, from consideration of the state as a

\textsuperscript{35} Beetham, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{36} Mueller, C. \textit{op cit}, p. 143.
powerful, prestigious and enduring representative of the people or nation. Thatcher has sought to draw upon and reinvigorate the symbols and agencies of the later while systematically attacking the former. Her achievement ... is to have recovered the traditional symbols of the British nation-state and made them her own ... while separating these from the idea of the state as a capable guarantor of economic and social opportunities.\(^{37}\)

Put together, Mueller’s and Held’s two observations provide an insight into the legitimacy problems facing the modern state and give an indication about where political myth might play a legitimating role. Mueller’s concern is that the decline of normative sources of legitimating authority combined with increased state intervention has created the need for new legitimating symbols.\(^{38}\) Held is commenting on Margaret Thatcher’s apparent success in ‘rolling back’ the ‘overloaded state’ in terms of welfare and services while symbolically strengthening the state as the embodiment of the nation’s destiny. Consequently, Thatcher’s appropriation and manipulation of national symbols fills Mueller’s ‘symbolic void.’ The ‘symbolic void’ created by the disconnection of politics from a normative basis is thus filled with an image of the past. This is in line with Tismaneanu’s observation that political myths provide ‘symbolic compensation’ “when conventional identifications fall apart

\(^{37}\) Held, D. *op cit.*, p. 140.

\(^{38}\) Mueller does not indicate what these new legitimating symbols might be other than to imply what they are not. In discussing advanced industrial societies, Mueller argues that legitimating symbols based on consumerism, affluence, productivity, efficiency and media-generated images have no normative values that sustain social or civic responsibility. They have no normative values because they have not been derived from collectively shared common meanings or belief systems. This is why Mueller speaks of a *symbolic void*. Mueller sums up his own position as: “Contemporary technocratic legitimation based on efficiency and the seemingly neutral administration of society, appears as credible at first glance. It emphasises material and social compensations which the political system indeed provides. However, the rationale of efficiency of technocratic legitimation negates itself. Efficiency is apparent only in the administration of things, in military and economic development, while it is blatantly absent in the delivery of human services. Though clouded in the para-ideology of science and technology, the technocratic legitimation is transparent. It lacks the evocative power of traditional legitimating ideologies. It offers no transcendent goals that could motivate the population politically and civically or relate it to any dimension beyond the consumer confines of their daily lives.” Mueller, C. *op cit.*, p. 179-180.
and old belief systems become vacuous."39 I argue, therefore, that the past, as represented and communicated through political myth can be used as an alternative source of normative legitimation.

3.2.1. Opinion as a ‘Justifiable’ Source of Authority.

Before examining how political myth might be conceptualised as a source of legitimation it is necessary to return to Mueller’s observation about why there was a need for new legitimating symbols. Mueller gives two basic reasons; the decline of a normative source of legitimation, and the growing intervention by the state into social and economic affairs. To take the first point, John Schaar argues that there has been an erosion of legitimate authority in modern states. "The gigantic and seemingly impregnable control structures that surround and dominate men in the modern states are increasingly found to have at their centres, not a vital principle of authority, but something approaching a hollow space, a moral vacuum,"40 or in Mueller’s words, a ‘symbolic void’. For Schaar, what is missing is a principle of authority that lies outside the political process. Such a source of authority is necessary “to buttress and justify obedience.”41 As Schaar comments,

Theory... by making power legitimate, turns it into authority. All theories of legitimacy take the form of establishing a principle which, while it resides outside power and is independent

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39 Tismaneanu, V. *op cit*, p. 35. See section 3.1 of this chapter for the context of Tismaneanu’s argument.
40 Schaar, J.H. *op cit*, p. 17.
41 *ibid*, p. 23.
of it, locates or embeds power in a realm of things beyond the wills of the holders of power: the legitimacy of power stems from its origin.\footnote{ibid.}

The thrust of Schaar's argument is that the justifiable authority that legitimates political power must have a source above and beyond those who exercise political power. Beetham also argues that the rules of power, "must be justified ... by identifying an authoritative source from which they stem. It is the impressiveness of the source from which they derive as well as the moral persuasiveness of their content that gives social rules their justifiability."\footnote{ibid} However, Schaar claims that modern legitimating rationales have "been trimmed of ... (their) 'normative' and 'philosophical' parts"\footnote{ibid} and reduced to belief in legitimacy or opinion alone. Such a simplistic approach "dissolve(s) legitimacy into belief and opinion. If a people hold the belief that existing institutions are 'appropriate' or 'morally proper', then those institutions are legitimate."\footnote{ibid} Legitimacy is therefore taken to be

a function of a system's ability to persuade members of its own appropriateness. The flow is from leaders to followers. Leaders lay down rules, promulgate policies, and disseminate symbols which tell followers how they should feel and what they should do.\footnote{ibid}

I agree with Schaar that legitimating rationales based purely on a belief that a state is legitimate, fundamentally weakens the authority that underpins state legitimacy. As Schaar explains,

\footnote{\textit{ibid}.} \footnote{Many of the authors used in this discussion allude to ultimate sources of authority. \textit{Ultimate} does not imply a transcendent source of authority, but a source of normative values that reside 'outside' the political process and beyond those who exercise political power. The elusiveness of the term is best summed up by the following statement by Beetham. "What is the ultimate source of law and social rules, from whence do they derive their authority, what provides the guarantee of their authenticity or validity – these are questions that concern the most fundamental of a society's beliefs, its metaphysical basis ... which cannot itself be questioned (except by philosophers!), since it provides the terms in which all other questions are settled." Beetham, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 70.}

\footnote{Schaar, J.H. \textit{op cit}, p. 21.} \footnote{\textit{ibid}, p. 20.} \footnote{\textit{ibid}, p. 21.}
the philosophical and experiential foundations of legitimacy in the modern states are gravely weakened, leaving obedience a matter of lingering habit, or expediency, or necessity, but not a matter of reason, and principle, and deepest sentiment and conviction."

I would extend Shaar’s line of argument to suggest that the replacement of normative principles as legitimating rationales by a mere belief in a political system’s legitimacy therefore deprives the state of legitimating principles that stand ‘outside’ the political system.

The consequence of removing normative legitimating principles which stand outside the political process is that, “belief in legitimacy has become a function of the system’s ability to manipulate public opinion.”46 The state actively creates, sustains and promotes its own legitimacy. Ritualised images of the pomp and ceremony of the state are communicated at a symbolic level. Legitimacy is also communicated through symbols that identify the state with the nation, and through state-sponsored commemorations of days and events of national significance. However, to achieve identification of state and nation, the state must win the co-operation of the cultural elite;47 those members of society who “share knowledge of the political process and (have) the ability to cope with and manipulate symbols.”48 Cassirer would argue

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41 ibid, p. 17.
42 Mueller, C. op cit, p. 132.
46 Mueller states that the cultural elite cannot be depended upon to communicate the necessary integrative symbols because they are largely immune from the political process in non-totalitarian societies. “The cultural and normative foundation of society is born by writers, poets, journalists, social scientists, educators, civically involved lawyers, doctors, scientists, and religious leaders well as by film makers, painters and all other artists. ... Because their work is not dependent upon dominant economic and political interests, persons belonging to this cultural stratum can function in ways which immure themselves, in comparison to other occupational groups, from official interpretations of reality.” ibid, p. 146.
47 ibid.
however, that the cultural elite have a responsibility to confront such symbolic manipulation, if what is being communicated is a political myth.

For Cassirer, responsibility for maintaining the cultural strength of a society rests with intellectuals; and that it was this group that had let Germany down during the first half of the twentieth century. Slavenka Drakulic makes a similar point in a scathing attack on Yugoslav intellectuals, "who willingly embraced and spread nationalist ideology." For Drakulic, "most intellectuals were collaborators of the system" and quite willing to manipulate the symbols of national myths on behalf of their respective states. There are of course notable exceptions of intellectuals in the Eastern European context, such as Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron and Vaclav Havel, who as dissidents challenged the legitimating rationales of the ruling elite. On the whole however, the cultural elite in most systems provides the requisite legitimating symbols to maintain a belief in legitimacy.

To a certain extent the maintenance of a belief in legitimacy is dependent on the capacity of ruling elites to project the state as a symbol of common values justly attracting the allegiance of its citizens. With support from the cultural elite, allegiance is achieved through techniques of public information presentation, public

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52 Ibid.
relations exercises and public opinion management. Schaar argues that it is not a sufficient basis for legitimating the modern state, for

legitimacy, then, is almost entirely a matter of sentiment. Followers believe in a regime, or have faith in it, and that is what legitimacy is. The faith may be the product of conditioning, or it may be the fruit of symbolic bedazzlement, but in neither case is it in any significant degree the work of reason, judgement, or active participation in the processes of rule.

Schaar highlights the dangers of disconnecting the political system from normative legitimating principles and replacing such principles with public opinion. Legitimacy is reduced to a ruling elite's ability to run a successful public relations exercise. Belief in the legitimacy of the state as a symbol of the common values of a community can be constructed through public opinion management. However, public opinion is open to manipulation, is notoriously fickle, unreliable, and at times capricious, and never can be considered as a stable base upon which to anchor the normative principles of authority necessary to legitimate the modern state. The unreliability of public opinion is why Schaar speaks of a 'moral vacuum' at the heart of modern legitimating rationales and Mueller writes of a 'symbolic void'.

3.2.2. The 'Limits of Legitimacy'.

The second point Mueller makes concerns the need for new legitimating symbols that arose during the 1970's and 1980's from the 'growing intervention of

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54 Schaar, J.H. *op cit*, p. 22.
the state into the social and economic order.\footnote{The corollary of this trend, the ‘rolling back of the state’ will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.} State intervention is seen as the cause of further legitimation problems for the state. Alan Wolfe notes that,

The growth in the potential power of the state is matched by a decline in the options that the state has at its command …. the increased activity of the state reflects, not an expansion of alternatives, but the exhaustion of them. The enormous political power in the hands of the leaders of Western societies is accompanied by a generalised inability to use that power towards positive ends.\footnote{Wolfe, A. \textit{op cit}, p. 258.}

Wolfe is arguing that the modern state has reached the ‘limits of legitimacy.’ It is his proposition and the ramifications it has for political legitimacy that will now be analysed. Habermas also argues that, “the expansion of state activity has the side-effect of disproportionately increasing the need for legitimation,”\footnote{Habermas, J. \textit{What Does a Legitimation Crisis Mean Today ? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism’}, in Connolly, W. [Ed.] \textit{Legitimacy and The State}, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, p. 146.} but the incapacity of the state to use its power for positive ends such as securing the material well-being of all its citizens, further weakens its legitimacy. The basic contradiction confronting the state is that the political and administrative system does not have the capacity to meet the tasks that the economy imposes upon it. The result is a legitimation crisis.

In the most detailed analysis of the legitimation crisis confronting modern states, Jürgen Habermas\footnote{Habermas, J. \textit{Legitimation Crisis}, Heinemann, London, 1980.} argues that modern states are confronted by four closely interrelated crisis tendencies. Such crisis tendencies occur at the functional level of the economic and administrative system or in the state’s need for legitimation and motivation in the legitimation and socio-cultural systems. In explaining his approach,
Habermas states that, “a theorem of crisis has to explain not only why the state apparatus encounters difficulties but also why certain problems remain unsolved in the long run.” The reason problems remain unresolved for so long is that, “the basic contradiction of capitalism is displaced onto the political plane, and constitutes the source of the latter's recurrent problems.” According to Habermas, a crisis is not resolved, it is merely controlled by displacing contradictions from one subsystem to another. Crises in the economic and administrative systems can only be contained. “Containment occurs, however, only at the cost of increasing legitimation pressures on the state: the state is the interface at which the tensions of both systems integration and social integration meet.” The effects of displacing a crisis onto the state itself are well summed up by Beetham.

The state’s intervention to complement the market, so that its privately determined activities produce socially acceptable outcomes, creates problems for the state which appear as autonomous problems of the political domain, quite separated from the underlying contradiction which is their cause. It is this complex process, whereby solving one set of problems systematically produces other problems of a quite different kind at a different level, that the idea of 'displacement' suggests. Thus, according to the concept of ‘displacement’, a crisis in the economic sphere compounded by internal structural complexities created by the expansion of administrative services, can only be ‘displaced’ onto the political system. The state is thus enmeshed in conflict arising from the underlying contradiction that lies at the

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59 Habermas, J. ‘What Does a Legitimation Crisis Mean Today? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism’ op cit, p. 145. The difficulties confronting the state apparatus will be discussed in the section that follows.
60 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 168.
61 Held, D. op cit, p. 93.
62 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 166.
The underlying contradiction of the modern state arises from the fact that, in order to sustain its own legitimacy, the state must represent the whole community or ‘general interest’ rather than sectional or individual interests. It is not just a matter of the state seeming to be neutral, but for the state to be seen to be consciously representing the general public interest. However, the dual task of ensuring continued economic growth by securing, stimulating and protecting the independence and integrity of ‘the market’, while simultaneously intervening to regulate the equitable distribution of social wealth, leads to a basic contradiction for the role of the modern state. Alan Wolfe argues that,

liberal democracy ... neatly symbolises a contradiction at the heart of Western polities, one that has been expressed as an inherent, if not omnipresent, tension between the needs of accumulation and of legitimation. The demands of a private system of accumulation gave rise to a liberal ideology that structured public conceptions about the state; the desire for popular acceptance and obedience gave rise to democratic notions about political life quite at odds with the earlier liberal ones.63

Wolfe is writing about late capitalist liberal democratic political systems, but I would argue that the tension generated between the need to provide an administrative framework to ensure economic growth and stability, and the need to meet the essential requirements and aspirations of the whole community, is a characteristic feature of most political systems.

63 Wolfe, A. op cit, p. 247.
Tension arises because the state cannot ensure its legitimacy through the equitable distribution of social wealth to the whole community because its status as an independent neutral structure is deeply compromised by its relationship to 'the market.' To ensure the maintenance of economic growth the state must intervene to supplement 'the market'. As Habermas states, "the government apparatus no longer merely safeguards the prerequisites of the production process." The state intervenes at the level of global planning and through direct market supplementation.

Global planning manipulates the marginal conditions of decisions made by private enterprise. It does so in order to correct the market mechanism by neutralising dysfunctional side effects. The state, however, supplants the market mechanism wherever the government creates and improves conditions for utilising excess accumulated capital.

However, 'the market', if left without regulation would pursue self-interest to the extent that economic and social inequalities would be widened and so undermine the legitimating rationale of the state. Habermas also points out that the state must intervene to ensure sustainable development, for "the economic needs of a growing..."
political myth and legitimacy

population and the productive exploitation of nature are faced with material restrictions: on the one hand, finite resources (cultivable and inhabitable land, fresh water, metals, minerals, etc.); on the other hand, irreplaceable ecological systems."^67

The state must intervene to regulate the market and protect the 'general interest.' However, as Beetham argues, such intervention leaves the state vulnerable to becoming co-opted and absorbed by the market.

These interventions have to be substantial, to ensure that the market power of international capital does not undermine national priorities and interests, and that limited indigenous resources are utilised in the most effective way. Yet the greater the intervention, the greater the potential scope for the state to be colonised by the self interest of the market place, to be penetrated by the forces it seeks to direct and regulate and to become simply an extension of the particular interests and dominant motivations of the economic sphere."^68

The state therefore becomes an extension of a particular interest, namely the political elite, whose ability to maintain power is directly linked to maintaining the legitimacy of the state. The essential contradiction embodied in the relationship between the state and the political elite, and the need of the state to secure legitimacy by seeming to be an independent structure exercising 'public power' on behalf of the whole community, is an important source of tension. According to Mueller, it is such a basic contradiction confronting the modern state, along with its disconnection from normative sources of legitimating authority that creates the 'symbolic void.'

(7) by paying for the social costs and real consequences of private production (unemployment, welfare, ecological damage). *ibid*, p. 137-138.

^67 *ibid*, p. 140.

^68 Beetham, D. *op cit*, p. 177.
Mueller called for the ‘symbolic void’ to be filled by legitimating symbols of a new nature. However, I am arguing that the ‘symbolic void’ has not been filled by new symbols, but by traditional symbols that have been reconfigured to secure current needs. Such legitimating symbols are not based on any ‘higher order’ principles of legitimation, but on an image of the past as communicated through political myth. In his analysis of the Thatcher Government, David Held suggests that Margaret Thatcher was perceived to have successfully ‘rolled back’ the instrumental and performative functions of the state, while symbolically strengthening the state as the embodiment of the nation’s culture, heritage and destiny.

3.3 ‘Rolling Back’ the State.

The program of ‘rolling back’ the state was seen as a solution to the basic contradictions confronting the modern state, while the reinvigoration of national symbols provided a normative source of legitimating authority from ‘outside’ the political system. The state could be strengthened by uncoupling it from those functions that were perceived to be undermining its legitimacy. For example, legitimacy is strained when living standards fall because economic growth has not been sustained and the state can no longer guarantee the material well-being of the whole community. Legitimacy is further strained when the state fails to meet extensive welfare obligations; maintain essential services such as transport, education and health, and fails to ensure high levels of employment. As Beetham argues, “there
is a marked discrepancy ... between the power the contemporary state possesses to control and coerce those subordinate to it, and its ability to meet the social needs that alone can justify its coercive and intrusive power. It is in just this discrepancy that a recurrent problem of government legitimacy resides."

The discrepancy between the power of the state and its ability to meet its social demands arises from the fact that the resources required to meet expenditure are largely generated in the private sphere. State intervention to sustain the economy on behalf of private interests has the potential to compromise legitimacy based on an equitable distribution of resources. Legitimacy is also compromised by the phenomenon of the state being unable to resolve the conflicting demands made upon it through rational policy and decision-making. Habermas refers to this phenomenon as a ‘rationality crisis’ because rational policy and administrative procedures fail to meet the political, economic and social demands being made of the state. Mueller argues that this phenomenon has led to a “gradual politicisation of the population stemming from its dependency on the state and the latter’s inability to deliver some of the services promised,” which in turn places further demands upon the state. In response to the legitimation crisis confronting the liberal-democratic state, neo-liberals argue the state has become ‘overloaded’. David Held maintains that,

69 ibid, p. 142.
70 Mueller, C. op cit, p. 181.
71 Robert McChesney states that, “Neoliberalism is the defining political paradigm of our time – it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit.” McChesney, R.W. ‘Introduction’ to Chomsky, N. Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order. Seven Stories Press, New York, 1999, p. 7.
both overload and legitimation crisis theorists claim that state power is being eroded in the face of growing demands and claims: in one case these demands are regarded as excessive, in the other they are regarded as the practically inevitable result of the contradictions within which the state is enmeshed.\(^3\)

The neo-liberal solution is for the state to ‘unload’ its responsibilities for services and welfare and to effectively ‘roll-back’ the state to restructure the public sector in favour of the private. The objective is, “the replacement of public policy objectives couched in terms of social good by public policy objectives couched in terms of economic goods.”\(^4\) As Anna Yeatman states, “the essence of this reshaping has been to reorient the business of the public sector so that it no longer services a welfare state, but, instead, services a state which defines its primary objective as one of fostering a competitive economy.”\(^5\)

The reorientation of the state away from fostering the ‘social good’ and representing the ‘general interest’ inevitably intensifies the fundamental contradiction between catering to the needs of a competitive economy and the need to win popular support for such policies. My argument is, that despite attempts by the neo-liberals to ‘roll back’ the ‘overloaded state,’ legitimating the modern state is still elusive and problematic. Legitimacy will continue to be problematic because the state will find it increasingly difficult to secure its legitimacy based on popular sovereignty. It is increasingly difficult to ensure the equitable distribution of social resources in the face of a competitive globalised economy. What the state does have recourse to are

\(^2\) David Held, op cit, p. 125.

the legitimating symbols derived from a common past: legitimating symbols originating in the collective memory and traditions of the community. Such legitimating symbols can fill Mueller’s ‘symbolic void’, but can only compensate for legitimating symbols that have been derived from actual performance in meeting the material, social and cultural needs of the whole community.

4. Legitimating Criteria.

I have argued that political myth provides supplementary sources of legitimating authority to governments or political systems and that in times of social stress or crisis political myth may become the sole source of legitimating authority. I have also argued that there is little acknowledgment of the legitimating potential of political myth in most theoretical approaches to political legitimacy. The final section of this chapter will show how political myth may be conceptualised as an important component of political legitimacy within existing theories of legitimation. As I explained earlier in this chapter, the framework I will adopt is that developed by David Beetham in *The Legitimation of Power*.

I first discuss Beetham’s argument that legitimacy must be derived from an authoritative source. To Beetham’s authoritative sources of divine sanction, scientific theory, tradition and popular sovereignty, I add the past that is represented and

\[74 \text{ibid.}\]
communicated by political myth. Second, the importance of belief systems and shared common meanings that underpin sources of authority are discussed. My focus is on political myth as an ideologically marked form of political narrative that is particularly found in discourses of national identity and foundation myths. Beetham’s third criteria for legitimacy, the capacity of the political system to secure specific actions that publicly express consent is briefly discussed. It is into this third category that I would place much of what was discussed in chapter 6: that participation in commemorating the memories and traditions of a political community confers legitimacy on the norms and values that define the common values of that community.

4.1 Legitimacy Derived from Rules

The first dimension in Beetham’s threefold structure of legitimacy is that the acquisition and exercise of power conforms to established rules. The ‘rules of power’ are derived from highly structured formalised legal codes as well as from informal conventions, customs and common usage. Beetham states that, while:

social rules ensure predictability though their normative or prescriptive force; they impose obligations and create corresponding entitlements, which are publicly acknowledged and collectively enforced. As such they both serve to regulate behaviour in a predictable fashion, and provide the reference point for entitlement claims which people can expect to have recognised by others.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Beetham, D. *op cit*, p. 65.
Through customary usage, such social rules can become both a source and a protector of the legitimacy claims of a political elite. Beetham also argues that dominant groups appeal to the law as a self-sufficient authoritative source of power. In the sense that dominant groups can control access to the law from which they derive and protect their power, the established law provides a politically 'cost-efficient' source of legitimacy.

Appeal to the law is also attractive to dominant groups because the legal process can be presented as being ‘outside’ and ‘independent’ of the political process. The perception of independence is reinforced by enveloping the law in a mystique of sanctity through the elaborative use of language, rituals and a sense of theatricality. For dominant groups, "legal validity is made to appear not only as the necessary, but also the sufficient condition of legitimacy: its ultimate, rather than its proximate source."

However, legitimacy claims based on the claimed self-sufficiency of legal validity raise the question of where these laws derive their authority. Because legal validity provides no criteria for justifiability as no authoritative source is identified," there must be a set of common shared meanings and beliefs between the dominant and subordinate to justify the rules of power.

I will discuss sources of normative validity in the next section, but at this point it is important to note that, "on its own, ... legality cannot provide a fully

\[76 ibid, p. 67.\]
adequate or self-sufficient criterion of legitimacy. .... circumstances will always occur which expose a more fundamental issue: why these particular laws, and what gives them their legitimacy?"78 The claimant to legitimate political power must therefore invoke some source of authority that is perceived to be external to itself, but as Mueller points out, "reference to ultimate principles has receded in most contemporary discussions of legitimacy."79 The authority appealed to may no longer have the status of an 'ultimate principle,'80 but to be normatively binding, the authority must appear to be independent of, and 'stand outside,' the system of government. Independence is an important point, for as Beetham argues, the legitimacy of the political sphere, as both the institutional source and guardian of the law, is bound up with the normative value of an external source of authority.

Where all other power relations in society are validated in the first instance by the law, the political sphere is itself the institutional source and guardian of that law; and there is no positive law beyond it to which it can appeal for its own validation. As institutional creator and guardian of the law, therefore, the political sphere is especially bound up with the ultimate source of normative validity that is acknowledged within the society. And since there is no positive law beyond it, it is uniquely dependent upon that source for its own legitimacy.81

I agree with Beetham that, while an important dimension of legitimacy, legal validity is not adequate on its own to provide a self-sufficient criterion of

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77 Except in those societies where religious law is practised.
78 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 68.
79 Mueller, C. op cit, p. 133. For example John Schaar noted that, "older definitions all revolve around the element of law or right, and rest the force of a claim ... upon foundations external to and independent of the mere assertion or opinion of the claimant. .... Thus, a claim to political power is legitimate only when the claimant can invoke some source of authority beyond and above itself." Schaar, J. op cit, p. 20.
80 For example, Rodney Barker remarks that the removal of religious sanction as an ultimate principle, raises questions about alternate sources of authority. "The problem of obedience arises in a unique way with the secularisation of the world, and the recognition, or belief, that people make their own institutions and their own history. The automatic sanction of a divine or supernatural order is thus removed, and other justifications for conduct have to be found." Barker, R. Political Legitimacy and The State. Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 7.
legitimacy. A further dimension to legitimacy requires that power be derived from a valid source of authority and it is in this second level of legitimating criteria that political myth resides.

4.2 Legitimacy Derived from an Authoritative Source.

Legitimacy depends not only on rule-derived validity, but that the rules themselves have been derived from an authoritative source. An authoritative source bestows normative validity upon legitimating claims of a political community. Beetham identifies divine sanction and scientific doctrine as authoritative sources external to a society, and tradition and popular sovereignty as authoritative sources internal to a society. I argue that none of these authoritative sources retain sufficient normative validity to provide an adequately legitimation for the acquisition and exercise of political power. And it is for this reason that the past, as communicated through political myth emerges as a potential source of supplementary legitimating authority.

4.2.1 Divine Sanction.

A characteristic feature of legitimation in pre-modern societies is that divine sanction served as the 'ultimate source' of external authority. The divine will, as

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81 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 70.
interpreted by the religious or political elite, provided the necessary sacred authority to legitimate secular power structures. With a few notable exceptions, such as Iran, religious beliefs no longer underpin the legitimation of political systems. However, modernisation and the processes of secularisation have not completely eliminated the potential of religious belief to provide a source of authority to political communities seeking to enhance their legitimacy claims or in providing subordinate groups with sources of authority to advance rival claims to legitimacy. The phenomenon of 'divine sanction' extends beyond the Islamic world to include fundamentalist Christian groups in highly secularised Western liberal-democratic societies, Hindu fundamentalism in India and the rise of fundamentalism in Israel. While a potent source of external authority for specific political communities, 'divine sanction' plays a relatively minor, and often only symbolic role in providing a source of normative validity to modern political systems.

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82 Iran provides the interesting example of its political structures deriving their legitimacy from both religious sources and the mass mobilisation of citizens that secured the Revolution. This is clearly stated in Article I of the 'Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.' "The form of government of Iran is that of an Islamic Republic, which received an affirmative vote from the Iranian people on the basis of their longstanding belief in the Qur'anic government of truth and justice, after their victorious Islamic Revolution led by the eminent marja'-i taqlid, Ayatullah al-Uzma Imam Khomeini ..." Article II goes on to state that the system of government was based on a belief in, "The One God, His exclusive possession of sovereignty and the right to legislate, and the necessity of submission to His commands ..." Algar, H. [Trans.] Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 26. Not so directly stated are the 'sacred and undeniable' truths expressed in the draft American Declaration of Independence. Hannah Arendt commented that, "the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence would provide the sole source of authority from which the Constitution, not as an act of constituting government but as the law of the land, derives its own legitimacy; for the Constitution itself, in its preamble as well as in its amendments which form the Bill of Rights, is singularly silent on this question of ultimate authority. The authority of self-evident truths ... certainly still bears signs of divine origin." Quoted by Mueller, C. op cit, p. 132.

83 Beetham claims that this 'regression' is unsettling for Western political theorists for, "the attempt to derive political legitimacy from a religious source of authority not only constitutes a conscious rejection of the exemplary claims of both liberal-democratic and communist models; it also challenges a basic premise of Western social science which links 'modernisation' firmly with the process of secularisation." Beetham, D. op cit, p.162.
4.2.2 Scientific Theory

A further external authoritative source is derived from ‘scientific theories’. As a source of authority, such theories have included, the legitimation of nineteenth century *Laissez-faire* policies by the ‘science’ of political economy and Social Darwinism; the legitimation of Marxist-Leninist societies through ‘scientific’ knowledge of the historical process; and more recent economic rationalist appeals to the ‘ultimate authority’ of the market. The ‘sanctity’ of the market is well summed up by Robert McChesney who argues that, “a generation of corporate-financed public relations efforts” has embodied the idea of the market with “a near sacred aura .... (that) demand(s) a religious faith in the infallibility of the unregulated market.”

Appeals to ‘science’ also tend to legitimate the authority of specialist elites at the expense of the democratic process. Also, with the collapse of communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the discrediting of Marxist-Leninist legitimating rationales, there has been a corresponding crediting of the market as an ‘ultimate source’ of authority. However, while the market may appear to be a viable source of external authority, I have argued already that reliance on the market creates an inescapable contradiction at the heart of the modern state that actually weakens the legitimacy of a political system.

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84 McChesney, R.W. *op cit*, p. 7-8.
4.2.3 Tradition

Tradition is an authoritative source of legitimacy that is located within a society. In most legitimation theory going back to Weber, tradition is portrayed as a major source of normative authority. Tradition is an internal authoritative source in that its norms and values are perceived to have been derived from a sanctified past. The authority of tradition is based on the belief that the present is a continuation of the past and that intentional action is determined by precedent. In pre-modern societies, continuity with the past underpinned the 'natural' succession of a hereditary elite and reinforced their role as custodians and interpreters of a community's cultural legacy. In such a hierarchically ordered society, rule change was difficult to accomplish and explains why tradition is often characterised as the very antithesis of modernity. Until very recently the antithetical nature of tradition in modernity is about as far as legitimating theory analysed tradition, because political theorists assumed that a fully modern society had no need of tradition. Tradition was no longer understood as providing a coherent organising principle for modern societies that were defined as being by their very nature post-traditional.

However, in chapter 5, I argued that tradition persists within modernity and continues to have a legitimating function when invoked. At their most basic level traditions can provide modern societies with patterns of already 'authenticated' practices and behaviour that confer legitimacy on the present. Also the focus of
modern scholarship has shifted from conceptualising tradition in terms of the transmission of the past, to the way the past has been remembered and carefully reconstructed to meet present political needs. I have argued already that traditions can be ‘invented’ and artificially sustained by the political system, the market or mass media. However, the ‘authenticity’ of a tradition is not important because tradition invests the past with authority, not because beliefs, practices or patterns of behaviour have been transmitted over a considerable length of time, but because a tradition is affirmed and accepted as normative. The fact that these normative values ascribed to tradition may have been created only in the present is thus irrelevant to tradition retaining its role as an internal source of authority. What are actually appealed to are carefully crafted images of traditions, specifically those symbols of integration, national identity and a common collective memory.

4.2.4 Popular Sovereignty.

The final authoritative source of legitimacy identified by Beetham, and the most common form of legitimacy today, is derived from ‘the people’. According to Beetham, “this source offers a highly generalised basis of legitimacy for the political domain, from which the rest of society’s rules can in turn derive their legitimacy via the legislative process, freed from the limitations of tradition.”[^85] The principle of popular sovereignty is expressed through election or plebiscite, or through mass

[^85]: Beetham, D. *op cit*, p. 75.
mobilisation, and as Beetham states, "it is virtually impossible for a political system to attain legitimacy without some acknowledgement of this principle in the accountability of government to a representative assembly, elected on the basis of universal suffrage." David Held agrees "that from the onset, consent has for democrats been the undisputed principle of legitimate rule." However, in the context of the 1989-90 'democratic' revolutions of Eastern Europe, David Held makes the comment that:

Not far beneath the surface of democracy's triumph there is an apparent paradox: while the idea of 'the rule of the people' is championed anew, the very efficacy of democracy as a national form of political organisation is open to doubt. Nations are heralding democracy at the very moment at which changes in the international order are compromising the viability of the independent democratic nation-state.

For David Held, the viability of the independent democratic nation-state opens up the whole question of consent and legitimacy as well as democratic theory in general.

Regional and global interconnectedness contests the traditional national resolutions of the central questions of democratic theory and practice. The very process of governance seems to be 'escaping the categories' of the nation-state. The implications of this are profound, not only for the categories of consent and legitimacy but for all the key ideas of democratic thought: the nature of a constituency, the meaning of accountability, the proper form and scope of political participation, and the relevance of the nation-state with unsettling patterns of national and international relations and processes, as the guarantor of the rights and duties of subjects.

86 ibid, p. 128.  
87 Held, D. op cit, p. 203. "The idea that consent legitimates government and the state system more generally was central to both seventeenth-and eighteenth-century liberals as well as to nineteenth-and twentieth-century liberal democrats. While the former regarded the social contract as the original mechanism of individual consent, the latter focused on the ballot box as the mechanism whereby the citizen periodically conferred authority on the government to enact laws and regulate economic and social life." ibid.  
88 ibid, p. 197.  
89 ibid p. 204.
In addition to the impact of globalisation on the nature of ‘consent’ arising from popular sovereignty, I have also raised the question of the construction of normative sources of authority through public opinion management. In a society dominated by marketing and public relations, Noam Chomsky raises the question of the nature of ‘consent’ itself.

The concept of the ‘sovereign people’ originates with the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man’ during the French Revolution that also “advanced the idea that ‘the people’ are sovereign and that governments exist to serve ‘the nation’, a corporate entity whose interests, ultimately, are *identical* with the individual interests of its membership.” Defining the ‘nation’ as ‘the people’ raises questions of national identity, national autonomy and which groups within the territorial boundaries of a state actually constitute ‘the people’. In the process of defining ‘the people’, nationalism could be both inclusive and exclusive, but in either case the principle of the sovereign people is enhanced. “The importance of the idea of popular sovereignty in this context was that it gave the cultural, ethnic and historical communities with which people could identify, and around which they could be mobilised, a political salience they had not previously enjoyed.”

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90 See Chomsky, N. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*, Seven Stories Press, New York, 1999, pp. 43-62. Chomsky claims that marketing in the United States amounts to “$1 trillion a year, one-sixth of gross domestic profit, much of it tax deductible, so that people pay for the privilege of being subjected to manipulation of their attitudes and behaviour.” ibid, P. 58.


However, the ‘political salience’ of the people does not necessarily translate into a valid source of legitimating authority. For example, when offered ‘free’ elections at the height of the crisis facing the German Democratic Republic in November 1989, the mass demonstration in Leipzig chanted, “we are the people.”

Even when elections are free and open the resulting government does not necessarily represent the values of a sizeable minority. For example, it is no accident that the February 2000 Vienna demonstrations against Jörg Haider’s populist Freedom Party, adopted the Leipzig demonstrators’ slogan of “we are the people.” In both examples ‘the people’ do not represent the whole people. A narrow definition also occurs when ‘the people’ are defined as a specific socio-economic group, a privileged ethnic group or even a parliamentary majority that undermines the rights of the minority. I argued earlier in this chapter that the state, as an instrument of the people, cannot represent the whole people due to the sectional character of its intervention into the economy and social life. Thus, while most modern legitimating rationales are based on the ‘ultimate authority’ of ‘the people’, in actual practice a political system may be legitimated by only a small portion of the people. Inevitably, this leads to a weakly legitimated political system that must find additional supplementary forms of legitimating authority.

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94 Denis Staunton, (Vienna) Feb. 20, 2000, ‘Weekly Protest Marches Planned as Thousands Take to the Streets’ http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3965513,00.html
4.2.5 The Past.

I argue that for a principle of authority to be binding on a society in a normative sense, the source of authority must be seen to be ‘outside’ and independent of the political process. However, I show also that the sources of normative validity found within divine sanction, scientific doctrine, tradition and popular sovereignty are no longer fully adequate on their own, or collectively, to legitimate a modern political system. My argument is that there is another source of normative authority available that largely is ignored in legitimating theory and political analysis; and that is the past. I do not mean the past in the familiar sense of the term, or the past as tradition in the conventional Weberian sense of legitimation, but the past that I have developed throughout my thesis. The past that I have developed is the past that is represented and communicated by political myth.

There is nothing ‘ultimate’ or ‘immutable’ in the past that a political community calls upon as a source of validating authority. Meaning is anchored to the present and that meaning is in a constant state of flux dependant on current political needs. The past that a political community calls upon to define its identity and validate its claims to legitimacy is not history in the formal academic sense, but a symbolic representation drawn from collective memory. I have argued already that collective memory is a subjective socially constructed discourse that evolves within
sustaining social contexts and so gives a common meaning to shared experiences that are important to the identity of a political community. Common meanings about the past are in reality about the present and should not be confused with history. What a political community requires is poetic and symbolic truth rather than ‘historical accuracy.’ If ‘history’ is invoked it is what Lewis refers to as ‘remembered history,’ which represents the past as both reality and symbol. Past and present co-exist in a kind of atemporal space. Where a suitable past does not supply the ‘symbolic truth’ required to provide a political community with validating claims to legitimacy, then that past can be fashioned through collective memory and ‘invented tradition.’ Such a suitably constructed past should not be envisaged as being fixed, and must be continually reworked to meet changing legitimacy needs. There is therefore a constant process of readjustment between a political community and its preferred past. The past is thus continually reconfigured and forced to conform to current needs. The process of reconfiguring the past not only reflects the changing needs of a political community, but is also a reflection of the power that a community has to define and frame its own version of the past. The ability of a political community to have its interpretation of the past generally accepted is an important source of legitimacy that is especially applicable when a political community develops the capacity to align its own version of the past with that of the nation-state.
The image of the past projected into the present by heritage is simplistic,\textsuperscript{95} selective and intentionally biased.\textsuperscript{96} Heritage represents a collective symbol of the past that asserts both the historical continuity, and the uniqueness of a community. The construction of a common heritage is therefore important to the development of a distinctive national identity. This is why heritage is usually associated with the conservation of historic sites, buildings and artifacts. David Lowenthal maintains that heritage has little to do with history\textsuperscript{97} and should rather be thought of as symbolically representing a sacralised past. Lowenthal argues that “heritage relies on revealed faith rather than rational proof,”\textsuperscript{98} and is thus ‘immune to criticism’ and ‘closed to critical scrutiny’\textsuperscript{99} In commenting on popular support for heritage, Lowenthal states that “the creed of heritage answers needs for ritual devotion, especially where other formal faith has become perfunctory or mainly political. Like religious causes, heritage fosters exhilarating fealties.”\textsuperscript{100} As a creed demanding allegiance, heritage provides a powerful source of normative values. I should also add that the normative values

\textsuperscript{95} In an American context, Michael Kammen is concerned that what he calls the ‘heritage syndrome’ projects a past that is detrimental, for “amnesia concerning the American past afflicts those who are responsible for policy at all levels.” Kammen, M. In the Past Lane : Historical Perspectives on American Culture, \textit{op cit}, p. 214. On a broader social level Kammen asks: “Have we perpetuated upon ourselves a form of self-deception? I believe that we have, in fact, and that highly selective, sentimental, and sanitised versions of American history have produced a severely simplified vision of how we came to be the society we now are.” \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{96} David Lowenthal comments that “it is futile to vilify heritage as biased. Prejudiced pride in the past is not the sorry upshot of heritage but its essential aim. Heritage attests our identity and affirms our worth. Lowenthal, D. ‘Fabricating Heritage’, \textit{op cit}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{97} “Heritage should not be confused with history. History seeks to convince by truth, and succumbs to falsehood. Heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error.” \textit{ibid.} p. 7.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{99} Lowenthal’s terms. See \textit{ibid.}, pp. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{ibid.}, p. 7.
embodied by what is considered to be heritage are also seen as a marketable commodity.\textsuperscript{101}

I would agree with Lowenthal that nostalgia is “perhaps the most dangerous ... of all the ways of using history.”\textsuperscript{102} The term dangerous is used in the sense that nostalgic yearning that arises during times of social stress can be easily manipulated and channeled by a ruling elite which invokes an idealised imaginary past to legitimate the present. Manipulation is possible because nostalgic sentiment arises when there is a perceived threat to the continuity of a community’s identity brought about by a severe cultural discontinuity or as a response to the experience of modernity. Nostalgia re-imagines and recreates a more unified, coherent and comprehensible past as a refuge from the perceived complexity and instability of the incoherent present. By offering a sense of continuity, no matter how illusory, nostalgia provides a psychological anchor in the past that helps alleviate disappointment and frustrations that arise out of the present. Like heritage, nostalgia is susceptible to corporate manipulation which converts the past into a commodity that can be nostalgically possessed and consumed. The packaging of the past through media mediated illusions creates an ahistorical world where present and past co-exist without any sense of conflict or ambiguity. The capacity of film to create a sense of

\textsuperscript{101} This can extend from marketing a nation’s past – see Fintan O’Tooles comments on Scottish Heritage, “the public body entrusted with marketing Scotland’s past.” O’Toole, F. ‘Imagining Scotland’, \textit{op cit}, – to using the past to market commodities. For example, Kammen states that “in the world of business, ‘heritage’ seems to connote integrity, authenticity, venerability, and stability.” Kammen, M. \textit{In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture}, \textit{op cit}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{102} Lowenthal, D. ‘Nostalgia Tells it Like it Wasn’t’ in Shaw, C. \& Chase, M. (Eds.) \textit{op cit}, p. 27.
I argue that power is legitimate when it has been derived from a valid source of authority. However, as Beetham argues, “the demonstration of an authoritative source for the rules of power does not suffice to answer the question: why these rules?” To a valid source of authority must be added a set of beliefs shared by both the dominant and the subordinate that determines the extent to which the rules of power can be justified. The importance of belief in securing voluntary submission to political domination is stressed by Mueller.

As distinct from coercion, authority has the peculiar attribute of meeting little or no resistance in its exercise. Since legitimacy induces voluntary submission to domination, all political systems will try to instill the belief that their domination is legitimate, whatever the source of this legitimacy may be. However, as Beetham points out, “belief systems ... at most locate an ultimate source of authority for power rules, rather than determining the particular form they should take.” Belief systems underpin the source of authority that governs the rules of power rather than the actual rules themselves. The maintenance of a belief system that links the dominant to the subordinate with shared common meanings stressing a community of common interest, is critical to securing a valid source of authority. The

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103 Beetham, D. *op cit*, p. 76.
maintenance of a belief system is closely tied to the political system’s capacity and effectiveness in providing security and economic sufficiency for its citizens. I have already argued that providing security and economic sufficiency is not a normative value that provides moral grounds for compliance and cooperation, but arises from the capacity of the political system to legitimate itself. Perceived failure in effectively serving the ‘general interest’ of a polity leads to a legitimacy deficit that can lead ultimately to a withdrawal of consent, or delegitimation.

Where a valid source of authority is undermined by shifts in belief systems caused by profound social change, the rules of power will lose their justification and hence their legitimacy. As Beetham argues:

Without a common framework of belief, the rules from which the powerful derive their power cannot be justified to the subordinate; and the powerful can enjoy no moral authority for the exercise of their power, whatever its legal validity; and their requirements cannot be normatively binding, though they may be successfully enforced. It can also be argued that the common framework of shared belief that links the dominant with the subordinate is in reality the beliefs of the dominant group only. Barker argues that these ‘shared beliefs’ may be “generated within the elite for

106 Beetham, D. op cit, p. 76.
107 Beetham places performance within the legitimating criteria of shared beliefs. Beetham explains why. “A government may work to consolidate the underlying beliefs on which the system rests; and its authority will be compromised by a serious infringement of the system’s principles, or by a serious performance failure. But how do we know what would count as an ‘infringement’ or a ‘failure’? Only if we know what expectations people have about what government should and should not do; and these expectations are crucially conditioned by their beliefs about the rightful source of authority and the appropriate ends of government, respectively, which will differ from one historical society to the next. ‘Performance’ and ‘belief’ are not separable entities, since the latter provides the criteria by which the former is to be assessed.” Beetham, D. ‘In Defence of Legitimacy’, Political Studies, Vol. XII, Sept., 1993, p. 489. I agree with Beetham’s point, but have separated ‘performance’ from ‘belief’ to better understand how legitimating symbols derived from political myth can be used as a substitute for actual performance. Performance was covered in the previous section of this chapter.
108 Beetham, D. The Legitimation of Power, op cit, p. 69.
internal consumption.”^108 In this sense, shared beliefs should be seen in terms of a ‘dominant ideology’, where the political elite not only shape beliefs, but control the manner of their propagation. David Held also argues that in terms of legitimating rationales for a political system, it is more important that a ‘shared’ framework of belief secures the cohesion of the ruling elite.

Some groups have to be normatively integrated into the governing political culture to ensure a society’s reproduction. But what matters most is not the moral approval of the majority of a society’s members ... but the approval of the dominant groups .... It is the politically powerful and mobilised, including the state’s personnel that are particularly important for the continued existence of a social system.110

4.3.1 Ideology and Political Myth

Ideology and myth are both systems of belief, but as Tismaneanu maintains “political mythologies are not ideologies.”^111 Instead, Flood argues that “political myth is a part of ideology. Political myth is ideology cast in the form of story.”^112 Flood’s approach basically follows Henry Tudor’s original observation.

In any reasonably civilised society, myths are incorporated into a general ideology composed of several mutually supporting practical points of view. And, if we wonder why the myth-maker resorts to myths when he has more sophisticated tools at hand, the answer is that,

108 Barker, R. op cit, p. 122.
109 The political elite therefore recreate their own legitimacy through the existing system of power. “A system of power relations itself indirectly shapes the experiences, the capacities, the expectations, the interests of subordinate groups, through a variety of social processes, so that justifications for the rules of power become credible because they are confirmed by their own experience.” Beetham, D. op cit, p. 106.
110 Held, D. op cit, p. 88.
111 Tismaneanu, V. op cit, p. 28.
112 Flood, C. op cit, p. xi.
although he doubts whether his mythical argument can stand alone, he regards it as being more lucid and compelling than an argument from abstract principles.\textsuperscript{113}

Tudor is suggesting that political myths must be embedded in a general ideology to support the meaning given to a political myth. In this sense, to use Flood’s terms, “political myth is a form of ideological discourse.”\textsuperscript{114} Although Moore warns that “distinguishing political myth from ideology or political discourse in general remains controversial,”\textsuperscript{115} the subtle differences between the two highlight those features of political myth that are important to the argument of my thesis. For a start, “a myth proposes a story, whereas ideology has its roots in systematic ideas.”\textsuperscript{116} As Raymond states, “the adherent to a political ideology subscribes to a rational use of concepts and their promotion.”\textsuperscript{117} Nimmo and Combs also point out that “ideology gives patterns for political action ... and it is ‘cast in the form of logic rather than drama.’”\textsuperscript{118} I believe that it is the dramatic presentation of enabling emotional images that gives political myth its ‘pouvoir moutur’ which distinguishes it from ideology. This is not to deny the emotional appeal of ideology but to identify a characteristic of political myth.

A more subtle difference is identified by Girling; “‘myth’ is a fusion of

\textsuperscript{113} Tudor, H. \textit{op cit.}, p.127
\textsuperscript{114} Flood, C. \textit{op cit.}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{116} Tismaneanu, V. \textit{op cit.}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{117} Raymond, G. \textit{André Malraux: Politics and The Temptation of Myth}, Avebury, Aldershot, 1995.p. 149.
concept and emotion: a passionate desire to achieve a primordial objective. ‘Ideology’ represents the agglomeration or systemisation of both emotional and conceptual elements.” By characterising myth as a *fusion*; a direct blending together of concept and emotion, while ideology is seen as an *agglomeration* or a more mechanical bringing together of the same elements, Girling captures both the similarities and differences between myth and ideology. Following the same line of thought, McGee states that, “myth and ideology … should not be viewed as either synonymous or antithetical concepts but as supplemental forms of political consciousness.” Such an approach is well summed up by Moore in his statement that, “political myth evokes suasive power by combining emotive elements of sacred myth with cognitive elements of ideology.”

As ‘supplemental forms of political consciousness,’ both myth and ideology can co-exist in political discourse. Where ideological thought dominates it expresses itself in “didactic, ground-dominated language.” Where mythological thought dominates it gives birth to “narrative, figure-dominated language.” It is from this sense of the interdependency of myth and ideology that Flood locates his definition of a political myth. Flood states that “a working definition of political myth would be:

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119 Girling, J. *op cit*, p.12.
120 Moore, in summing up the position taken by McGee, M. “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” Moore, M.P *op cit*, p.297.
121 *ibid*.
123 *ibid*.
an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group." The key to Flood's definition is the conceptualisation of political myth as an ideologically marked narrative. This concept is best explained by Flood.

The notion of ideological marking includes what is there in the discourse, what it actually says by virtue of the words it uses. But the notion also covers ideologically pertinent aspects of what lies outside the boundaries of the discourse, in terms of what it might have said, yet did not say, by virtue of the value-relevant choices of topic and treatment involved in its production as this particular discourse rather than any other. The choices among possible alternatives in the selection of information, the attribution of qualities, motives, and objectives to historical actors, inferences concerning relationships of cause and effect, use of descriptive terms or other lexical items, grammatical constructions, overall organization, location of the narrative, and any other factors are all relevant insofar as they contribute to the orientation of the discourse in the direction of one ideological current as opposed to another. The term mythopoetic can be applied to any political narrative to the extent that it is ideologically marked. The term indicates that the narrative has objective characteristics which could potentially produce or reproduce a political myth.

In the introduction I indicated that political myth would be conceptualised as being essentially narrative in form. I have shown how the ‘story’ of a political community is constructed by collective memory, given meaning by tradition and sacralised by the commemoratory process. My discussion of the ideological nature of political myth adds another dimension to conceptualising political myth as a form of narrative. I therefore concur with Christopher Flood's characterisation of political myth as an ideologically marked narrative.

Flood, C. op cit, p. 44.

ibid, pp. 42-43.
4.3.2 National Identity

I have argued that power is legitimate when it has been derived from a valid source of authority and that the extent to which the rules of power can be justified depends upon a set of common beliefs shared by both the dominant and subordinate. Shared beliefs depend upon what Charles Taylor refers to as common meanings.

Common meanings are the basis of community. Intersubjective meaning gives a people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings. Common meanings create a common reference world that must be communally sustained to link the dominant with the subordinate. One of the most powerful sources of common meanings is to be found in national identity. Earlier in this chapter I argued that the disconnection of politics from a normative basis created a 'symbolic void' that could potentially be filled by symbols of national identity. Political myths can be drawn upon to provide this 'symbolic compensation' but I argue that common meanings based on national identity are inherently unstable.

National identities have been undermined by economic globalisation and the emergence of supranational structures. Michael Ignatieff notes that,

\[\text{globalism scours away distinctiveness at the surface of our identities and forces us back into ever more assertive defence of the inner differences – language, mentality, myth, and fantasy – that escape the surface scouring. As it brings us closer together, makes us all neighbours,}\]

\[\text{126 Taylor, C. 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man' in Rabinow, P. & Sullivan, W.M. (Eds.) Interpretive Social Science : A Reader, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, p. 51.}\]
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...destroys the old boundaries of identity marked out by national or regional consumption styles, we react by clinging to the margins of difference that remain.\textsuperscript{127}

For Ignatieff, the ‘margins of difference’ define sub-national or ethnic groupings. From a different point of view, Anthony Giddens comes to a similar conclusion. Giddens, emphasises that globalisation not only draws power away from the nation and into the global sphere, but creates opportunities for local political communities to assert their autonomy. For Giddens, “globalisation is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world .... Local nationalisms spring up as a response to globalising tendencies, as the hold of older nation-states weakens.”\textsuperscript{128} Local nationalisms are more likely to be based on ethnic or cultural identity\textsuperscript{129} than the more traditional forms of national identity. Globalisation also leaves open the future nature of the nation-state. Giddens remarks that, “the nation state is being reshaped before our eyes .... Nations have to rethink their identities now the older forms of geopolitics are becoming obsolete.”\textsuperscript{130} Giddens argues that the nation-state has been fundamentally changed by the processes of globalisation, but that our perceptions of this change have lagged behind the reality.

We continue to talk of the nation, the family, work, tradition, nature, as if they were all the same as in the past. They are not. The outer shell remains, but inside they have changed.... They are what I call ‘shell institutions.’ They are institutions that have become inadequate to the tasks they are called upon to perform.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129} The re-emergence of ethnic or cultural identity as a response to globalisation can be contested. “It is not clear how far cultural globalisation, challenging and eroding the hegemonic position of national sentiments, is itself a key factor in explaining the rise and strength of diverse successionist movements. Alongside forms of local resistance there have been more coordinated attempts to contest the flow of imported images with the aim of reinventing and reconstructing ‘peripheral cultures.” Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D. & Perraton, J. Global Transformations : Politics, Economics and Culture, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999. P. 374.
\textsuperscript{130} Giddens op cit, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{ibid}, p. 18-19.
The impact of globalisation therefore calls into question the nature of national identity. I agree with Huyssen, that national identity can no longer be understood in terms of overarching narratives of national destiny, but must now be conceived of in terms of cultural and collective memory.

Pierre Nora also argues that national identity can no longer be found in fragmented national histories, but in the creation of a national memory. If, as Giddens suggests, the nation has been reduced to a ‘shell institution’, then the need for unifying common meanings based on a common identity is even more apparent. The need for unifying symbols of national identity to underpin state legitimacy is important because the nation-state is still the basic unit of a world community. The more the viability of the nation-state is undermined, the greater the need for compensatory symbols of national identity to provide the necessary framework of common meanings.

A sense of national identity is used to unify a people and to distinguish them from other national entities. National identity is made up of those collective memories that provide a consciousness of national unity and distinctiveness. A consciousness of national identity or self-image is based on a collectively shared knowledge of the past as constructed and mediated through collective memory and tradition. Such an identity is not fixed or objective, but a continuous symbolic process of constructing a national memory. In the process of constructing a national memory
collective memory is invoked to restore, recover and reconstruct an ‘imagined’ national identity from a largely ill-defined past. The nation is ‘imagined’ as a mythic, sacred given entity. The sacralisation of the nation is also closely associated with the ritualisation and commemoration of a sacred foundation, sacred sites and sacred days.

The sacralisation of the nation and the importance of maintaining collective identity is a role that has been increasingly taken over by the state. State-run commemorations to construct and reconstruct national memory are common to all nation-states. The importance of the creation of a national identity is emphasised by Smith who argues that, “national identity does in fact today exert a more potent and durable influence than other collective cultural identities.” Smith goes on to state that national identity,

provides the sole vision and rationale of political solidarity today, one that commands popular assent and elicits popular enthusiasm. All other visions, all other rationales, appear wan and shadowy by comparison. They offer no sense of election, no unique history, no special destiny. These are the promises which nationalism for the most part fulfils, and the real reasons why so many people continue to identify with the nation. Until these needs are fulfilled through other kinds of identification, the nation with its nationalism, denied or recognised, oppressed or free, each cultivating its own distinctive history, its golden ages and sacred landscapes, will continue to provide humanity with its fundamental cultural and political identities well into the next century.

Smith is overstating the role of national identity as the ‘sole vision and rationale of political solidarity today’, but in doing so he draws attention to the emotive allegiance

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133 *ibid*, p. 176-177.
that binds a community together. At another level, Barker also points out that the identification of the nation with the state is an important source of state legitimacy.

To represent the whole nation or the whole people is ... no common achievement. The state may well be legitimate because it is taken in some way to express or represent concepts of collective identity, whether these are nation, race, or faith. But insofar as it articulates these identities, the state also asserts its right and responsibility to interpret and define them, thus being in an important sense the author of the very principles or values by which its power is justified. In that sense the authority of the state can never be externally derived, because even when it seems to be so, it is in fact uniquely possessed.134

The legitimacy of the state is thus bound up with the nation, national memory and most importantly a sense of national identity. I have already argued in chapter 3 that the collective memories of a political community are framed within an all-encompassing national identity. The importance of this symbiotic relationship is that a political community taps a powerful source of legitimacy if it is able to align its collective memories with those of the nation. Any political community seeking to make their conception of the past the basis of national identity must define and gain control over this identity to secure their own legitimacy.

National memory and national identity are not fixed, but remain a contested domain. Attempts by a dominant political community to impose their version of the past through the creation of an ‘official’ cohesive and homogeneous national memory will be inevitably challenged by subordinate political communities. Also, subordinate political communities define themselves in opposition to ‘official history’ through the construction of counter-memories. Counter-memories seek to supplant ‘official
memories’ in order to make an alternative version of the past the basis of national identity and so support the legitimacy claims of subordinate political communities. National memory and identity are thus fluid and must be seen as part of the political process. Michael Ignatieff also reminds us of the impossibility of conceiving of a single national identity. “We tend to vest our nations with consciences, identities, and memories as if they were individuals. It is problematic enough to vest an individual with a single identity ... the identity of a nation is additionally fissured by region, ethnicity, class, and education.”\(^{135}\) In addition to these divisions Kellas argues that the state also imposes multiple identities on its population.

Identity is partly imposed on people from outside their own group. Politics enters into this, since it is often the state which classifies people according to ethnic group, nationality and race. This … usually leads to dual or multiple identities, especially when an historic national identity is overlaid with a contemporary political status such as citizenship, or with a new ‘national’ identification derived from the state.\(^{136}\)

National identity is therefore neither single or fixed, but multifaceted, fluid and contested.

A national identity, weakened by globalisation and based on cultural and collective memory, is also subjected to fragmentation in multi-ethnic nation-states. Durando argues that the reappropriation of their various cultural and linguistic identities by different ethnic groups within the nation-state should be seen against the

\(^{134}\) Barker, R. *op cit.* p. 28.
\(^{135}\) Ignatieff, M. *op cit.* p. 169.
backdrop of an emerging global society. One aspect of this emerging global society is that power increasingly resides outside the nation-state.

Power is a fundamental attribute of globalisation. In an increasingly interconnected global system, the exercise of power through the decisions, actions, or inactions, of agencies on one continent can have significant consequences for nations, communities and households on other continents. Power relations are deeply inscribed in the very processes of globalisation. In fact, the stretching of power relations means that sites of power and the exercise of power become increasingly distant from the subjects or locales which experience their consequences. In this regard, globalisation involves the structuring and restructuring of power relations at a distance.137

The restructuring of power relations by diffuse and difficult to identify sources of authority breaks the link between dominant and subordinate within the nation-state. Power can no longer be justified in terms of the common meanings and beliefs that underpin national identity. However, a sense of ethnic belonging as a source of identity can provide an antidote to the weakening bonds of national identity in a globalised society. Durando comments that,

the communitarian bonds peculiar to ethnic belonging are radically opposed to all these aspects of the globalised society. The experience of ethnicity reestablishes the individual at the centre of a network of direct and immediate social relations.... It allows the recovery of contact with reality, beyond the mediating veil of self-perpetuating global information.138

Durando also suggests that where ethnic identity has a territorial basis this not only fundamentally challenges the multi-ethnic nation-state, but challenges modernity in complex societies.

While the other criteria of belonging weaken and recede, ethnic solidarity answers a need for a primary symbolic identity. It provides roots that have all the consistency of language, culture,
and ancient history. The innovative component of national-ethnic identity has a peculiarly cultural character because the ethnic-territorial appeal challenges complex society concerning fundamental questions such as the direction of change as well as the production of identity and meaning.\footnote{ibid, p.26.}

I argue that the ‘primary symbolic identity’ Durando is writing about is provided by political myth. Political myth both compensates for the loss of common meanings based on waning sources of national identity as well as challenging the ‘production of identity and meaning’ in complex globalised societies.

4.3.3 Foundation Myths.

Shared beliefs about identity and meaning are tied to shared origins. Vladimir Tismaneanu emphatically stated that, “all societies need foundational myths, and this is a fact of civilization no one can or should deny.”\footnote{Tismaneanu, V. \textit{op cit}, p. 21.} The moment of ‘birth’ is idealised as embodying poetic and symbolic truth and is consciously used to legitimate the present needs of a political community. This moment also provides a temporal anchor that symbolically marks the creation of a community’s identity. For Henry Tudor, foundation myths, “explain the present in terms of a creative act that took place in the past. This act is sometimes sufficiently remote to be little more than a legend, but, in most cases, it is an actual and often quite recent historical event which has been dramatised for the purposes of political argument.”\footnote{Tudor, H. \textit{op cit}, p.91.} It is irrelevant whether this creative act took place in the distant past or within living memory; what
is important is that it is this event, 'real' or 'imagined,' which is sacralised by its
dramatic presentation within a commemorative framework. For Nora, the
commemoration of origins, "contributed to giving meaning and a sense of the sacred
to a society engaged in a nationwide process of secularisation. The greater the origins,
the more they magnified our greatness. Through the past we venerated above all
ourselves."^ The moment of 'birth' is probably the most symbolically important
event contained within the master commemorative narrative of a political community.

The importance of this moment of 'birth' is that it represents the symbolic
moment when a political community came into being and so gives the
commemorative process a precise point, usually a date, to focus upon. The
construction of a foundation myth does not necessarily focus on a historical event of
momentous importance to a political community at the time. As Nora remarked,
"there are those miniscule events, barely remarked at the time, on which posterity
retrospectively confers the greatness of origins."^ At the other extreme, Nora notes,
"those nonevents that are immediately charged with heavy symbolic meaning and
that, at the moment of their occurrence, seem like anticipated commemorations of
themselves."^ The master commemorative narrative gives 'meaning' by structuring
the narrative as a logical extension of this 'birth'. The story of the political
community is thus aligned with the master commemorative narrative.

^ Nora, P. 'Between Memory and History : Les Lieux de Mémoire', op cit, p. 16.
^ ibid, p. 22.
^ ibid.
Commemoration of the moment of birth not only re-establishes the unique identity and distinctiveness of a political community, but imbues that community with greater stature and symbolic meaning by directly linking it to the 'sacred' event of 'birth'. The capacity of a political community to identify itself with a birth date is therefore an important indicator of any group's claim to legitimacy.

The legitimating potential of a foundation myth has been recognised back to antiquity but the fundamental 'meaning' embodied in a foundation myth has changed. In discussing ancient Greek foundation myth, Pocock makes the point that these myths, "do not arise from the extrapolation of institutionalised continuities, but consist in ascribing a sacred or epic origin to the society conceived as a whole." This conceptualisation of a founding myth, in terms of the 'birth' of a 'whole society' is basically the same today. In a detailed explanation of the Roman foundation myth, Henry Tudor found it to be "'purest' example of a political myth I could find." Tudor also explained that, "the Roman Foundation Myth was pre-eminently a political myth. It told the story of how a political society was founded, and it expressed the values and aspirations of those who benefited from the continued existence of that society." Again, this is similar to the way a founding myth is

See especially, Cuthbertson, G.M. *op cit.*


conceptualised today. What is different is, that in the ancient world, the act of creation embodied in a foundation myth was absolute; it was not possible to make a fresh start. As David Gross reminds us, in commemorating the foundation of Rome, “the goal was at most to restore contact with the origins - ie, to reinvigorate political life by recalling the beginnings - but never to try and start all over again with some new act of foundation.” The concept of inaugurating a new beginning is of relatively recent origin.

In the seventeenth century, ... the idea that it was possible literally the ‘begin again’ was seriously entertained for the first time. Moreover, it came to be assumed that if a second beginning occurred, it could actually be superior to the first one if it managed to wipe away the shortcomings of the original.

Gross makes the point that, “conceptually speaking, this idea shattered nearly everything that was taken for granted in the Western intellectual tradition from the time of Homer to the Renaissance.” Even that most ‘modern’ of Renaissance political thinkers, Machiavelli, “still worked within the traditional framework that stressed renewal or restoration,” for, as Jennings states, “it was primarily through Machiavelli’s influence that the classical perspective continued to inform the political theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”

Since the Enlightenment, it is now conceptually possible to ‘begin again’ and

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150 *ibid.*
151 *ibid.*
152 *ibid.*
re-found a political community, but as Tudor points out, foundation myths are necessarily conservative. "There is, in principle, no limit to the ways in which such myths can be used, but they lend themselves especially to arguments justifying a status quo. They are conservative myths, even where the event mythologised happens to be a revolution." Revolutions provide dramatic images of new beginnings, but they also represent a break with the past. The construction of a revolutionary tradition generally precludes the possibility that the order established by a revolution would be similarly overthrown. As Pocock explains, the charismatic figures thrown up by a revolution, or who stand at the centre of a foundation myth, "will run counter to the theme of transmission and continuity, setting up alternative images of action and authority." Such charismatic figures therefore stand outside the images of continuity being represented by the commemorative process. The decisive, or revolutionary act that marked the moment of 'birth' must therefore be brought within a commemorative narrative of continuity. As Pocock argues, "most traditions claiming to originate in a creative act have to admit that the authority of the initiating charisma has become merged with that of the chain of transmission through which it has been mediated." Pocock therefore drew a distinction between traditions that communicated the actual 'meaning' of the moment of a community's 'birth' and traditions that only communicate the sense of continuity that originated from this creative moment.

154 Tudor, H. op cit, 1972, p.91.
155 Pocock, J.G.A. op cit, p. 244.
156 ibid, p. 245.
A tradition, ... may stress either the continuity of the process of transmission, or the creative and charismatic origin of what is transmitted. The two are conceptually distinct and entail different images of action and of time; but they are dialectically related, and are often - perhaps normally - found together within the same tradition. A distinction may be drawn between traditions which conserve highly specific and significant images of the creative actions which they began and of which they are in some ways the continuation, and traditions which depict themselves as sheer continuity of usage or transmission and conserve little or no account of their beginnings. Through the construction of commemorative narrative, political myth is able to both communicate the charismatic 'meaning' of a community's birth and give that meaning a sense of 'sacred' timeless continuity.

In Benedict Anderson's terms, most modern nations are 'imagined' political communities built on 'invented traditions', that nevertheless stress ancient origins. "If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression loom out an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future." The purpose and meaning that this 'immemorial past' had for a political community was given by tradition. According to Hobsbawm, tradition was 'invented' to create a sense of historical continuity; to create a greater sense of historical depth to legitimacy claims based on the past.

A sense of historical continuity is also given concrete representation through the erection of monuments and the preservation of archaeological sites said to embody the 'primal memories' of a community. In the process of constructing a

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157 ibid, p. 244.
158 Anderson, B. op cit, p. 19.
memory of origins, foundation events are likely to be given physical representation in the form of monuments. Such monuments provide material reference points that visually link the foundation event with the present. In Chapter 4 on memory sites it was shown how neoclassical design was used to link national self-representation of monuments to George Washington, Hermann and Vincingetorix, to not only link the emergence of the 'new' nations of the United States, Germany and France to a distant Roman past, but to align national memory with the origins of Western civilisation. This was an example of founding myths being embedded into a master commemorative narrative that extended beyond the temporal and physical boundaries of the 'new' nations themselves. The symbolic significance of archaeological sites to the construction of collective memory was also discussed in Chapter 4. I argued that archaeological sites are used to authenticate and legitimate memory; to give material substance to what is constructed to be the 'primal memory' of a community. These 'primal memories' are given substance, for archaeological sites and their artifacts bring visually 'concrete' representations of the past into the present. The identification of the nation with archaeological sites that pre-date the creation of the nation itself therefore has the potential to give added authority to the legitimacy claims of modern nations.

159 This also included a discussion of how both the Former Republic of Macedonia and Greece appropriated archaeology to legitimate claims to Macedonian identity. Masada was also used in Chapter 5 as the archaeological site that 'contained' the meaning of the Masada tradition that was used to validate Zionist claims to legitimacy.
5. Consent.

Beetham’s third criteria for legitimacy refers to the capacity of the political system to secure specific actions that publicly express consent. These expressions of consent range from elections and mass mobilisation through to participation in the rituals and ceremonies of the nation-state or political community. The principle of popular sovereignty requires political legitimisation to be mass legitimisation. Elections are a primary source of legitimacy and “the convention within contemporary liberal democracies is that it is the act of taking part in elections that legitimates government and secures the obligation of citizens in principle to obey it.”\textsuperscript{160} Mass legitimisation can also be achieved through the expressive or mobilisation form of consent. In the mobilisation mode, “consent is expressed through continuous mass participation in political activity supportive of the regime and contributory to the realisation of its political goals.”\textsuperscript{161} Consent is mobilised around a specific cause or ideological program. As Beetham points out, “what is central to popular legitimisation here is the mobilising power of a belief system or cause, rather than the exercise of choice between different leaders and policies.”\textsuperscript{162} Where a political myth is used as a primary source of legitimisation it is likely to provide the \textit{pouvoir moteur} for the expressive or mobilisation mode of consent.

\textsuperscript{160} Beetham, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{ibid}, p.155.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{ibid.}
Beetham stresses that public expressions of consent are not a measure of belief in legitimacy, but symbolic actions that *confer* legitimacy.

The first is that they have a subjectively binding force for those who have taken part in them, regardless of the motives for which they have done so. Actions expressive of consent, even if undertaken purely out of self-interest, will introduce a moral component into a relationship, and create a normative commitment on the part of those engaging in them. Secondly, such actions have a publicly symbolic or declaratory force, in that they constitute and express acknowledgment on the part of the subordinate of the position of the powerful, which the later are able to use as confirmation of their legitimacy to third parties not involved in the relationship, or those who have not taken part in any expressions of consent. They are thus often associated with impressive forms of ceremonial.\(^\text{163}\)

Beetham is arguing that specific actions that publicly express consent, simultaneously possess both a symbolic and a normative force. This is also true of participation in the commemoration of those events that define a political community. I have already argued in chapter 6 that the commemorative ritual process provides a political community with a sense of historical continuity by focussing on those key symbolically significant events that define a common identity and justify a community’s legitimacy claims. Commemorative activity is both expressive and presentational and is generally structured to be experienced. Participation in commemorating the memories and traditions of a political community thus *confer* legitimacy on the norms and values that define the common identity of that community.

\(^{163}\) *ibid*, p. 18.
Conclusion

In chapter 2 I analysed the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as an authoritative source of legitimation for the Milosevic regime of post-communist Serbia. What this example dramatically demonstrated was that in the absence of more traditional or identifiable sources of legitimation, the political elite was able to utilise the past by appropriating national legitimating symbols. While acknowledging that the Kosovo Myth represents an extreme example of a political myth being used as the principal source of legitimation, I have drawn from the Serbian experience a number of generalised observations that have been developed at a more theoretical level in chapter 3 on collective memory, chapter 4 on memory sites, chapter 5 on tradition and chapter 6 on commemoration. In each of these chapters the legitimating potential of political myth has been discussed. In this chapter on political myth and legitimation I have developed two further observations drawn from the Kosovo Myth that are directly related to political legitimacy. First, that the scant attention paid to the role of political myth during the breakup of Yugoslavia is mirrored by a similar lack of theoretical consideration of political myth as a significant legitimating criteria. Second, that recourse to the legitimating potential of the past is not confined to a political system in crisis, but is used by governments and political systems to supplement waning sources of normative authority.
The underlying argument of this chapter is that the necessary legitimation required to underpin governments and political systems is elusive and problematic and can no longer be found in 'traditional' sources of legitimation alone. I have also argued that the past, as represented and communicated by political myth is an important supplementary source of legitimating authority. A common past, originating in the collective memory and traditions of a community is a source of legitimating symbols for an otherwise weakly legitimated government or political system. The ability of a political community to have its interpretation of the past generally accepted is therefore an important source of legitimacy. I have argued throughout this study that there is a constant process of reframing and readjustment between a political community and its preferred past and that this political process not only reflects the changing needs of a political community in the present, but is also a reflection of the power a community has to shape its version of the past. The past, as represented and communicated by political myth is thus an important aspect of political legitimation.

I have therefore argued in this chapter that it is necessary to situate political myth within a more general theory of legitimation and used David Beetham's criteria for legitimacy as a proposed general framework. An analysis of political myth from the perspective of political legitimation raises questions about the nature of political myth as an authoritative source of legitimacy. Political myth can only compensate for legitimating symbols that have been derived from actual government or political
system performance in meeting the material, social and cultural needs of the whole community. Recourse to legitimating symbols based on a consciously 'constructed' symbolic past must be seen as an attempt by political elites to mask unresolved legitimating deficits. Political myth not only masks legitimating deficits but compensates for a loss of common meanings in an increasingly globalised but fragmented world. In times of social stress or crisis a weakly legitimated government or political system may have recourse to the legitimating symbols provided by political myth.