

Theories and Practices of Nationalism - Assignment 3

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Question: *Explain the concept of “invented traditions” in your own words. How does it link with nationalism and the nation-state? Use examples of invented traditions which have become a part of national cultures, and some invented traditions which have not.*

Word count: 0

Introduction

This essay attempts to detail the concept of ‘invented traditions’, and how their *alterative nature* is a key feature in shaping nationalist movements as a way to gather mass support. It is primarily based on Hobsbawm and Ranger’s ‘The Invention of Tradition’ (???).

What is Invented Tradition?

Invented traditions are traditions¹ that are perceived as, or claimed to be, ancient - but are in fact new(er than people assume them to be); often intentional political creations. British Royal Ceremonies, for instance. They may also arise naturally through regular practice or chance over time, such as the adoption of ‘chai’ in India due to inability to sell tea overseas during the First World War. It is unclear on the details of how invented traditions come into being due to a lack of a detailed study in the direction,² but generally speaking they can be created either through political directive, or just come into being due to regular practice of certain customs among people.³

A key point to take from the concept is that to the layperson, invented traditions are just traditions. And just as traditions enable an imagination of the past; invented traditions - accidental or otherwise - replace that with their own version of reality. This will be a central concept for understanding the links to nationalism, and we define it here as the *alterative nature* of invented traditions.

Invented traditions also differ from traditional ones by other metrics - they tend to be far more vague and unspecified as to the nature of the values they inculcate - ‘patriotism’, ‘loyalty’, ‘the school spirit’, and the like, while simultaneously being very strictly adhered to in practice, such as the requirement to stand up for the National Anthem. In addition, they seem to have only filled in the space of older traditions in people’s public spaces, and not their private ones.⁴

Hobsbawm observes three overlapping types of invented tradition:⁵

¹As for what is tradition? That is outside the scope of this essay, although we can refer to Shils (1981, 12–13) for a brief summary. Broadly, we use it here as “that which is handed down - includes ... beliefs about all sorts of things ...”. The idea is that tradition allows people a connection to the past so to speak, thus giving them a view of what the past would have been like as described by said tradition.

²See (???)

³Customs are not the same as tradition. We elaborate on this soon.

⁴See (???)

⁵See (???)

- Those establishing/symbolizing social cohesion or group membership in real or artificial communities
- Those establishing/legitimizing institutions/status/relations of authority
- Those with the purpose of socialization, and the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour

The interplay of Tradition with Customs

- Customs aren't tradition. Here's how: not just ideological, can change for bureaucratic efficiency, are not assumed invariant unlike traditions.
- Customs used to give sanction of precedence
- Customs come by repeated practice, and it affects tradition

Invention of Tradition for Continuity

- Kind of an extension of Tradition, but plays heavily into how it's useful for nationalism, so setting this as a middle ground for both answers.
- All invented traditions can be used to establish continuity with *some* suitable historic pasts. Including those built on revolutions, or progressive movements. The history does not need to be real; it's often embellished⁶
- This allows invented traditions claiming links to a distant, superior past to be accorded the status of 'symbols of invariance' in times of drastic social change.⁷ "Soften the impact of novelty by dressing it up as antiquity"⁸
- Not to be mocked, as showing ideological importance of perception (Buchanan 2018)
- This nature means all societies use it, even modern ones. They can adopt other histories, stretch them, make up their own.
- Even with explicit gaps in the continuity, these are espoused.

In Brief: The link between Invented Tradition and Nationalism

- Hobsbawm's theory of nations aligning with Gellner - "Nationalism is a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 1983, 1)

Overview of ideas

- Some explanation on "Invented tradition" in itself. My definition, how it is created, what "invented" changes, types of invented traditions
- Elaborating slightly more to emphasise the point: On the interplay of tradition with customs as a prelude to Invention for Continuity
- Now, Invention for Continuity: still about Invented traditions, but is in direct relation to how it links to nationalism and the nation state.
- The central link: Hobsbawm's views on nationalism as constructed from above, and how continuity enables the people to follow that line.

⁶(???) mentions a few examples of embellished or straight-up falsified "histories" used to further national interests, such as the Czech medieval manuscripts

⁷We have already spoke of tradition as shaping views of the past. It is taken as justification for future actions. An invented tradition then, posits a synthetic reality of the past. This link to the past gives an action the sanction of precedence and legitimizes its acceptance. It allows revolutionaries to claim their desired future was the default since time immemorial, usurped only in recent memory by the vile parasites currently in control - earning sympathy, and often support.

⁸As discussed in class

- Demonstrating said link with the Invented Traditions of various nations, and the circumstances they arise in:
 - France as a model of general national symbolism, and minimization of history
 - German as a model of unification against some ‘enemy’
 - The United States as a model of expressing nationalism in a heterogeneous immigrant-heavy environment

Outline

- What invented traditions are:
 - Invented traditions are traditions that are claimed to be old, or are perceived as old, but are in fact new(er than people assume them to be). They have supposed links to actions of the past, even if there were none.
 - Invented traditions are either intentionally created through political directive, or originate organically over time through regular practice of certain customs among people.
 - It is not entirely clear how Traditions are invented, either intentional or organic, as it has not been studied in too much detail. (???)
 - Difference from old tradition: vague construction, strict adherence.
- Three types of:
 - Those establishing/symbolizing social cohesion or group membership in real or artificial communities
 - Those establishing/legitimizing institutions/status/relations of authority
 - Those with the purpose of socialization, and the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour
- Quickly, traditions vs customs:
 - Customs are not tradition, although it is linked to tradition - the decline of a custom changes the tradition around it. How a lawyer’s wig is not a matter of ‘tradition’ until it is no longer customary to wear a wig.
 - Customs come by repeated practice. The reason for their existence is often practical and not ideological, existing for bureaucratic efficiency, which can be changed as practically seen fit. In Marxist terms, they belong to the “base” and not the “superstructure” (???)
 - “Customs” are used often to give the sanction of precedence and social continuity to demands for protection and defence of practices (???). This plays into a key feature of Invented Traditions.
- The value of Invented Tradition in Continuity
 - A key feature is that Invented traditions are often used to establish continuity with some *suitable* historic past. Even for invented traditions built on revolutions/progressive movements, there is some historic past that is (has to be) constructed for acceptance (elaborated later). This historic past does not need to be real, and is almost always embellished. (???). This is something we will see often with its usage in nations.
 - This allows invented traditions to be held as symbols of “invariance” in times of rapid change in social patterns - establishing “time immemorial customs” that can, as we saw earlier, give the sanction of precedence and legitimize change in the eyes of masses. Nominal continuities that have a major impact.
 - “Hobsbawm’s point, however, is not to mock such fictions, but to highlight the ideological importance of at least the perception of continuity with the past.” (Buchanan 2018)
 - The use of Invented Traditions for such reasons is not limited to “traditional” societies alone, but also extends to “modern ones”. Traditions are also given up, not due to need, but by intention.
 - How traditions can be invented - parties can make their own ones, co-opt existing traditions in a new light, or rework older traditions outside the boundary of their original imagination.

- They can even be completely made up.
 - Sometimes, these invented traditions - even those espoused by self-defined ‘traditionalists’ - have a clear break in continuity.
- Hobsbawm’s theory of the nation aligns with Gellner’s.
- The Nation precludes the Nation-State.
- Small group of pioneers, intellectuals are politically motivated about the existence of a state, for whatever reason. Nation has been constructed from above.
- Need to get the masses in the picture too. The new state needs to justify its legitimacy as a ruler (especially when no suffrage). National identification of the people of the state as “of the nation” can’t be forced from above with ideological arguments, do not assume the rational calculation of Individual members. Invented traditions can fake a past. Give abstract markers to shout for without any clear definition on what they are.
- Invented traditions aren’t all, but focusing on only that. Also they don’t guarantee success for the inventor, but the nation lived on.
- Lot of the construction thus is to justify consolidation of political power by classing under “nations”. Requires the linking of National, Political, Social.
- Essentially, introducing Gemeinschaft into the Industrial society, status into a world of contract, normalising the change for people.
- Also used for spreading nationalism, of course.
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General Points

- What are Invented tradition:
 - Commonly, claim to be old/are perceived as old but are actually new
 - Can be invented, either intentionally or organically
 - Symbolic use as traditions once no longer practical
- Tradition vs Custom:
 - Traditions come from custom
 - Tradition seems invariant, but depends on custom. Which is variant
 - Consider the customs of a conservative regimented army vs traditions of big game hunters
- Invented tradition for Continuity - intro to nationalist uses:
 - All the time, there is a past for continuity. It is factitious
 - Invention as a thing accompanying any change in society. Tradition used for invariance
 - Can make their own, co-opt, or expand
- ...
- Nationalism of the few precludes the Nation-State, ‘from above’. Invented traditions do not guarantee, but provide some support for, convincing the view from below.
- Invented Tradition and Nationalism:
 - Nationalism gets its history wrong to create the Nation.
 - This requires linking of National, Political, Social. Once that is done, nationalists can make use of Invented Traditions to:
 - * bring Gemeinschaft into Industrial society, normalising it for people.
 - * “make nationalists” through propaganda embedded into new institutions and systems. “peasants into frenchmen”
 - New traditions are dressed up with the garb of “ancient links”.
 - French - alternate civic religion:

- * Secular eq of the church, education for creating masses
- * Public-facing ceremonies, Expression of state power and pomp
- * Public monuments mass-produced as symbols - Marianne.
- Imagery sans history:
 - * Tricolour
 - * Monogram
 - * Motto
 - * Marseillaise
 - * Marianne, statues
 - * Bastille Day
- French: non-historic imagery. Nation constructed by education and utilising love for the Revolution.
- German: only commonality as being unified; extensive “historic” imagery. Nation constructed as in opposition to an “other”
- USA: propaganda for americanising immigrants
- India:
 - * Nagari script
 - * Cultural: Chai, Paneer, Sweets
 - * Celebration of religions:
 - Ganesh Chaturthi
 - Durga Puja
 - Santoshi Mata
 - * From French Marianne: Bharat Mata
 - * From French Flag: National Flag
 - * From British: National Anthem

Buchanan. 2018. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press.

Shils, Edward. 1981. *Tradition*. University of Chicago Press.