The Invention of Tradition Study Guide

The Invention of Tradition by Eric Hobsawm and Terence Ranger

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Plot Summary

The Invention of Tradition is a classic work of historiography, edited by the great British Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, a prominent African historian. The book, which is in fact a compilation of seven works, focuses around a single theme of the invention of many so-called historical, cultural, and social traditions. This statement implies that these traditions were often deliberately created much later than many realize and arose in response to real social needs. 'Invented traditions' are often used by elites to manipulate the powerless but they are also used by a number of different institutions to maintain social unity and to prevent themselves from falling apart due to the challenges of rapid social change.

The essays in The Invention of Tradition analyze a number of traditions that were invented quite recently; the authors explain how the traditions were invented and why. They also point out that many groups can benefit by understanding the real history of their social practices. The methodology of the book is laid out in Chapter 1, 'Inventing Tradition', where Eric Hobsbawm explains both the concept of invented traditions and how the authors will proceed to illustrate it.

The authors take somewhat different approaches to analyzing tradition. For instance, in Chapter 2, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland,' author Hugh Trevor-Roper analyzes the Scottish Highland traditions of food and dress. He shows that the kilt is not a historical form of Scottish dress and that Scottish national identity is actually several centuries younger than the Scots commonly believe. Trevor-Roper shows how these traditions were invented to promote a sense of Scottish unity.

Chapter 3, 'From a Death to a View, the Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' takes a similar approach to the Welsh nationalist movement. The author, Prys Morgan, shows how attempts during the late nineteenth century to revive Welsh culture and identity led to the invention of a number of new ceremonies. Both pieces track the pressure to invent traditions to the Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century and the desire for many English and Europeans to be part of a 'people.'

Other chapters focus on how ceremonies were invented to produce a sense of social cohesion. Chapter 4, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual' analyzes the history of the British Monarchy's approach to royal ceremonial rituals between 1820 and 1977. The author argues that the nature of the ceremonies changed in response to a number of social factors that reflected the needs of the British people. Chapter 5, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', shows how British Imperialists in India used the 'Imperial Assemblage' ceremony, where Indians were made official subjects of the British Empire, to replace local authority structures and create a historical myth. Both authors, David Cannadine and Bernard Cohn, focus on the details of ceremony and how they connect to the need to invent tradition.

Chapter 6, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', written by Terence Ranger, advances a similar thesis to Chapter 5, that imperial powers invented traditions to help

legitimize their subordination of colonized peoples. Chapter 7, 'Mass-Producing Traditions' written by Eric Hobsbawm, argues that many traditions were created in Europe in order to produce national unity in response to the decline of other unifying social institutions like the church and regional affiliations in response to the social change of the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 1, Introduction, Inventing Traditions

Chapter 1, Introduction, Inventing Traditions Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 1, author Eric Hobsbawm, analyzes his concept of 'invented tradition' which includes those traditions invented, constructed, and formally instituted which are tied to false histories and have contemporary origins. The overtly or tacitly accepted rules that make up a tradition have a ritual or symbolic nature that imbue certain values and norms through repetition and try to establish continuity with the past. Yet this continuity is fictitious. The apparent continuity is produced in the human mind by repetition of ritual.

Hobsbawm distinguishes traditions from customs. Traditions imply invariance, whereas customs allow more fluctuation. Traditions are also distinct from routines; routines have no ritual or symbolic function of significance. These routines, while invented, have a technical rather than ideological function; thus, they are not invented traditions. Inventing of tradition involves formalization and ritualization with reference to the past. Hobsbawm claims we should look for such invention when a quickly transforming society looks to maintain social patters due to the destruction of old traditions. Thus invented traditions will tend to be located around the last two hundred years. Many institutions have had to reinvent themselves such as the Catholic Church, professional armies and law-courts.

Ancient materials are often used to construct invented traditions, as are ancient dates to which new powerful rituals are tied. Traditions are invented when old social forms are deliberately not used or adapted. The nineteenth-century liberal ideology of social change could not provide social and authority ties that were part of earlier societies. Many new traditions were invented to supplement it.

Hobsbawm argues that the invented traditions of the industrial revolution can be classified into three types that overlap such as (a) traditions that establish or symbolize social cohesion and group membership in real or artificial communities, (b) traditions that legitimize institutions of authority and (c) traditions that promote socialization, belief and value inculcation and behavioral conventions. Types (b) and (c) tend to support (a).

The basic type of invented tradition was 'communitarian' or traditions that outlined the historical practices of some salient group. New invented traditions tend to be vague and not binding. Instead, they inculcate general values like patriotism and school spirit. Nonetheless, the practices are compulsory, such as saying the American pledge of allegiance. These traditions have filled a lot of the space abandoned by secular decline of old tradition and culture, though exceptions are to be found in traditions within the armed forces, law and administration.

Historians should attend to these phenomena because they expose social problems and function as evidence for important historical trends. The study of invented traditions helps historians make sense of human relations to the past and to make sense of the invented concepts of the 'nation,' 'nation-state,' and national symbols. All of these symbols rest on social engineering.

The book, the Invention of Tradition, is interdisciplinary, bringing together a few professions. The essays will cover the invention of specific traditions.

Chapter 2, The Invention of Tradition, The Highland Tradition of Scotland

Chapter 2, The Invention of Tradition, The Highland Tradition of Scotland Summary and Analysis

Scotsmen celebrate their national identity with common symbols, such as the kilt and the bagpipe. They ascribe these elements to antiquity but they are modern, developing after union with England as a form of protest. Some of these items and practices existed in the past in primitive form but at the time Scotsmen saw them as barbaric and representing backward Highlanders.

The notion of a distinct Highland culture is a myth that did not exist prior to the seventeenth century. At that time, the Scottish people were merely an overflow of Ireland. Two Celtic societies in the West Highlands and Ireland merged into each other centuries ago. The culture of the Highlands was a crude imitation of Irish culture. The eighteenth and early nineteenth century created the Highland tradition in three stages. They are (i) a cultural revolt against Ireland, the usurpation of Irish culture and a re-writing of early Scottish history, (ii) an artificial creation of new Highland traditions and (iii) a process through which historic Lowland Scotland adopted the traditions.

The first stage occurred in the eighteenth century. The Scots were merely Irish invaders from the fifth century A.D. The author then discusses the individuals who helped to invent a distinct history, such as Thomas Innes, David Malcolm and James Macpherson. Macpherson, for instance, took Irish ballads to Scotland and transferred the songs' settings from Ireland to Scotland. James Macpherson and Rev. John Macpherson set in motion a process based on distortion that lasted for a century.

The author then explains the history of the kilt and the philibeg. Even the dress of the Scottish Highlanders was similar to the Irish for centuries. The Highland costume changed in the seventeenth century. The Romantic Movement and its associated cult of the noble savage threatened by civilization helped to produce the invented tradition. The Highland regiments, fighting in India and the United States, would adopt the unique Highland garb that would be used to invent the tradition of Irish dress.

The spread of Highland garb was brought about through the work of the Highland Society in London in the late eighteenth century. They had many aims, including the repeal of laws forbidding Highland dress in Scotland. In the early nineteenth century, the Celtic Society of Edinburgh was founded and helped to push the Highland cause. These young civilians continued to promote Highland dress. Sir Walter Scott and Colonel Stewart promoted the Highland takeover.

In the mid-nineteenth century, The Costume of the Clans was written, which helped to reinforce the myth. It was a well-written and powerful work with many colored

illustrations. Despite its falsity, the book was never significantly criticized and the learned world did not notice it. Although actual descendants of the Stuart Kings challenges a similar later work, Tales of a Century, written by the same Sobieski Stuarts who were The Costume of the Clans. By the time they were exposed, the culture of wearing old Highland garb had already spread and would assume a life of its own.

Chapter 3, From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period

Chapter 3, From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period Summary and Analysis

The cultural life of Wales in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century appeared to be in decay despite the interest in Welsh practices and attempts to preserve them. During this period, Welsh scholars and patriots rediscovered past traditions, including historical, linguistic and literary varieties. But when these traditions were insufficient a new past was created and romantic mythology took on its own power. A small number of Welsh scholars long knew that distinct Welsh forms of life were evaporating. A native legal system was abolished and the old language was outlawed. Attitudes were anglicized. A loss of cultural self-confidence produced a loss of a sense of history.

The old Welsh version of its history included its origin as a nation, its conversion to Christianity, and their princes' lives. The oldest part of the history held that the Welsh were the eldest people of the British Isles. The second argued that the Welsh became Christians first and defended the church against the then pagan Saxons. The third part maintained a native line that descended from tribal leaders. But the history was lost and Welsh self-identity was threatened. In the sixteenth century, Protestant theology undermined Welsh culture by replacing its symbolism. Its language began to be dissolved in the late seventeenth century. The Anglican literature and the Welsh Bible kept the Welsh language from decay. Elizabethan Welsh Protestant leaders struggled to maintain Welsh culture. In the 18th century old Welsh music began to be preserved.

The author, Prys Morgan, then discusses a number of groups and individuals who engaged in various forms of preservation. Examples include the Society of Sea Sergeants that promoted polite and genteel behavior. These practices were drawn from greater England and France, not Wales, however. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge collected Welsh verse.

Methodism, the Protestant denomination, was created out of a movement to moralize and evangelize the Welsh people by dissenters and evangelical Anglicans between 1660 to 1730. Not only did it aim to save souls, but promoted literacy and was lively and vigorous. But Methodism destroyed old culture and promoted a new form of life, removing the Welsh from their past. The Welsh were once addicted to magicians and fortune-tellers after such things were dying away in England; but the Methodists fought against this. In the early nineteenth century, Welsh culture was on its last legs.

Several men, such as William Jones of Llangadfan, decided that Welsh culture should be preserved and taught the Welsh that they should not support a decaying society. This led to the invention of a tradition. The new tradition began with the eisteddfod, a 'session' or set of musical and poetic competitions for which prizes are awarded. Welsh bards would be awarded prizes for producing unique Welsh hymns. These bardic meetings were recreated around 1700 and the results were published in the Almanack Eisteddfodau. Many started to read it. It had limited public impact until the 1780s when it was associated with 'Welsh societies' aimed to promote things Welsh, spreading throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. They were first set up by London Welshmen. The author explains how the societies grew and spread.

The author then discusses ancient and modern Druids. While the Welsh once had genuine Druids they were forgotten, only to be rediscovered during the Renaissance. They were originally authority figures and bards. They were thought to have built Stonehenge. A number of archaeologists became interested in the old Druid practices, such as Iolo Morganwg who developed his own druidic theology related to his Unitarianism. Many scholars were suspicious of him but while he came up with a number of original findings, these scholars could not disprove him. A number of ministers, Unitarian, dissenting and Anglican, began to use druidic theology to their advantage. What had initially been a joke at the beginning of the eighteenth century was turned into something serious and sublime by the romantic period. New bards and neo-druids appeared and Welshmen started to publish neo-druidic literature.

The Celts were also rediscovered. In the Middle Ages, the Welsh knew that they were connected with the Cornish and Bretons. In the seventeenth century, the Welsh thought their lineage included the Hebrews. But new empirical examination of language, through figures such as Edward Lhuyd led to the discovery that the Welsh language was connected to ancient Celtic. The Welsh then had a chance to invent their own history. The Celts were a magnificent race of conquerors as far as the Welsh were concerned.

In the early modern period, the Welsh language was initially downplayed and satirized. But Welsh acquired a new status. A number of anti-English Welsh scholars arose in the eighteenth century but they still used English in conversation. In 1773, Rice Jones of Balenau published a book of medieval Welsh poetry which revived interest in the Welsh language and gave it an ancient and beautiful status. A new mythology grew up around it. The author reviews how the mythology arose.

In the mid-eighteenth century, new anthologies of Welsh verse began to appear. Lyrics derived from the tunes of the common folk and the Welsh patriots were embarrassed that so much of their music came from the English and the English mocked them. But within a century this position was altered and Wales was seen as a 'Land of Song'. A number of Welsh scholars were able to adapt early Welsh tunes and write a number of scholarly works about ancient Welsh music and Welsh instruments. The Welsh began to believe that they had an inexhaustible wealth of native melody. English song titles were adapted without apology.

Tourists to Wales in the eighteenth century noticed that the Welsh had no distinct dress. Wales was also a poor country with few resources for fine clothes but costumes and clothes began to be invented. This garb was symbolized by 'Dame Wales,' a figure on various Welsh products. National heroes also began to appear at this time such as Owain Glyndwr or Glendower, who fought against Henry IV and ruled Wales in the early fifteenth century. The myth of Glendower arose in the late eighteenth century when a number of books were written about him. Other historical myths arose as well, such as the myth of the Madoc family. Iolo Morganwg played an important role in these inventions.

T. J. Ll. Pritchard was part of a movement that tried to help the Welsh cherish their landscape and so the Welsh started to give every landmark a special history and status, which the author illustrates with examples. Tourists started to see Wales as having a beautiful landscape by the end of the eighteenth century.

In the early eighteenth century, while colorful Welsh rites and customs were dying many patriotic insignia began to arise helping the Welsh to see themselves as part of a single nation. The most common symbol of Wales was initially the three ostrich plumes of the Princes of Wales, though it later became the leek. The now well-known red dragon was hardly used, though it was a Welsh symbol during the middle ages. In the eighteenth century, the Welsh also used the Druid and the harp.

Due to a rising Welsh national consciousness, in 1847 the royal commission on the state of education in Wales reported to the government that the Welsh were growing rebellious. They wrote these in Blue Books and created a storm of protest in reaction to 'The Treason of the Blue Books'. While the Welsh became more nationalistic in response, they also submitted to pressures to become more English. A number of Welsh factions arose, such as Welsh patriots, Methodists and dissenters which allied and fought politically.

The Welsh nationalistic movement was not aimed at achieving statehood. Instead they focused on culture and the recovery of the past; though when the past was inadequate new myths were created. Romantic mythologists had created a new Welsh identity and made Welsh things seem charming and quaint. When the Welsh mythology was exposed, Welsh identity had to change and in the late nineteenth century it became associated with radicalism and nonconformity. The revival of the Welsh tradition and its invention has no equal in England though it was not unlike the recoveries in small European countries. The movement grew out of a crisis in Welsh life when their nation seemed to be dying.

Chapter 4, The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual, The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977

Chapter 4, The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual, The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 opens by noting that in the nineteenth century English elites began to frown on the pomp and circumstance surrounding the British monarchy, but the author notes that today few heads of state are more popular than Queen Elizabeth II. The purpose of the chapter is to analyze these and other changes in attitudes towards English royal ceremonials. The author will analyze attitudes towards the monarchy in terms of their historical context. Repeated rituals like coronations may use the same text but the meaning of the text can change given the context. Rituals and ceremonies are dynamic.

The author, David Cannadine, suggests that ten aspects of ritual, performance, and context deserve study. They are the political power of the monarch, the personal character and reputation of the monarch, the economic and social structure of the monarchy's country, the type, extent, and attitude of the media, the prevailing technology and fashion, the self-image of the nation, the condition of the capital city where royal ceremonies took place, the attitude of those responsible for liturgy, music and organization, the nature of the ceremony performed, and the question of how the ceremonies were commercially exploited. By answering these questions, the author believes that the meaning of British monarchical ceremonials can be more clearly uncovered.

The British monarchy went through four distinct phases as the ceremonial image of the monarchy developed. The first, between the 1820s and 1870s, had ineptly managed ritual within a largely local and pre-industrial society. The second, starting when Victoria was made Empress of India until the First World War, was the high point of 'invented tradition' when old ceremonials were staged and new ones invented. From 1918 to Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 the British started to believe they were always good at ceremonies and since 1953 and Britain's decline as a great power, the meaning of ceremony has changed again.

The first period of the British monarchy was ironically the one in which it had the most influence. While monarchical power was restricted, the monarch could still dissolve parliament and vote on membership in the House of Lords. However, actual power in the hands of the monarch made grand ceremony unacceptable as did royal

unpopularity. George III's children made him particularly hated. The monarchy was not above politics. The press attacked it constantly. English royalty traveled in the industrial manner of the day in an unsophisticated fashion. London was not well suited for grand royal ceremony because many new buildings were symbols of the power and wealth of private individuals due to rising capitalism. Love of freedom and economy brought hatred of displays of wealth by the throne; the clergy were indifferent or hostile to the throne as well. The author substantiates these facts with evidence and uses the observations to explain why the monarchy was held in low regard. Some details are discussed.

The second period of the monarchy, between the 1870s and 1914, brought a change in image. Ritual became splendid in the eyes of the people. This was brought about through a number of factors. First, the monarchy started to retire from politics and the growing electorate made Victoria less relevant. Veneration for the monarchy increased. Victoria and Edward were now above politics. London reasserted national dominance as provincial ties decayed and Britain became a more urban, industrial society.

The monarch was now the symbol of what was otherwise a divided nation. The media played a role in promoting the monarch as media became more nationalized and nationalistic. Changes in transport allowed the monarchs to have lavish carriages, for instance. The Empire boomed. Royal ceremonials may well have been an expression of national self-confidence or perhaps national self-doubt. As the period wore on, Britain was challenged by new, rival world powers with respect to economics, colonization and politics. This state of affairs produced extreme international competition and threatened the pride of Londoners. Reviving ceremonial was part of the competition. Music and music history grew at this time and helped to promote the extravagance of royal ceremonial as well. The Established Church changed its view as well, as Bishops started to become more ceremonial themselves.

During this time, the position of the head of state was enhanced with respect to ceremony. The monarch was the head of state, a symbol of societal consensus in a growing and tumultuous world. This produces pressure to invent tradition. Victoria's Golden Jubilee, her funeral and the coronation and funeral of Edward VII, and the coronation of George V were all grand ceremonies. The author then discusses the people who promoted and enhanced the ceremonies in the background.

In the third period, 1914 to 1953, the context shifts again. The ceremony of the previous period was repeated and made stricter. George V stayed above the political fray and developed a strong reputation, which his successors have followed. The monarchy represented consensus, stability and community. The media became even more obsequious and obsessed with grandeur. The B.B.C. had more impact than any other institutions since they could broadcast ceremonies on newsreel and radio. George V could now speak directly to people in their homes, representing himself as father of the nation. The royal ritual helped comfort people during a time of change. Music and transport innovation made accenting grandeur even easier. International competition died down as monarchies were destroyed elsewhere and replaced by republican governments. England was left largely alone.

Increasingly the ceremonies became symbols of national hope and pride and demonstrated a link with the past. Thus the meaning of royal ritual was extended. The monarch was still the father of the people and the continuity of the ritual helped to produce a sense of stability at a time of international revolution. New ceremonies were invented to extend this sense. Large marriage ceremonies were held for royal children. The last great ceremony in this sequence that stressed stability and continuity was Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. There was also a high level of commercial exploitation and commemoration.

The period from 1953 forward cannot be clearly analyzed as it is too close to the present since the book was published in 1983. While royal ritual has new meaning the analysis that went before still holds. In a modern and increasingly technological world, the ceremony of the royals has acquired romantic glamor. Ritual is an antidote to social change. Britain's power wanes in this time but pride in the Royal Family grows. Television has made matters even easier as coronations can be seen by the entire people.

In conclusion, ceremony so poorly maintained in the early nineteenth century has become refined and well managed. The more literate and educated public increasingly loves royal ceremony. Old ceremonies and new ones give an impression of stability. The author then emphasizes how deluded the British media is by thinking that these ceremonies are one thousand years old. They are in fact quite new and reflect the needs of modern peoples.

Chapter 5, Representing Authority in Victorian India

Chapter 5, Representing Authority in Victorian India Summary and Analysis

By the middle of the nineteenth century, India was divided between the small ruling class composed of the British or those who emulated British culture and the quarter of a billion Indians who were ruled. The British turned themselves into 'insiders' by giving their monarch sovereignty over India. The Queen now had Indian subjects. The Indian people gained the rights of the British, at least in theory. Many saw the integration as a cultural statement about maintaining India as both a feudal order and changing it such that the old order would be destroyed. The colonial government saw itself as having the sole right to rule but this involved creating a secured and usable past. The incorporation of India was thus made official through a ceremony that was used to produce continuity between Indian and British rule.

The author, Bernard Cohn, explains that India was initially ruled by the British for purely economic reasons. The British East India Company wanted to secure and monopolize trade routes by sea from the east. In the mid-eighteenth century, they secured dominance in the area and increasingly governed India. They started to function as tax assessors, judges and legislators, though they took no part in Indian ritual. They also restricted Indian or Mughal ritual.

The author argues that the cultural-symbolic constitution of India was contradictory because it contained and contrasted two cosmologies, world views, ethical systems, religions, myths and rituals. The British ruled through the Mughal Emperor but due to the differences between British and Indian culture, British authority and prestige was hard to maintain. Thus the British spent much of the early nineteenth century trying to construct rituals through which British authority could be legitimized to the Indian people. Yet Indian and British officials differed over ceremonial details. TheBritish experimented.

These contradictions were resolved in 1857 with the 'Indian Mutiny' that cost the Mughal emperor authority while forcing the British to expose the coercive basis of their power. The British quickly responded by making India part of the empire. The Indian government changed as did the British and Indian peoples' expectations of it.

A new ritual idiom was created through the imperial assemblage of 1877. In that year, Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India. The Mughal Empire was finally deprived of its remaining authority. A new social order made the British Crown the center of authority and sustained an Indian and British hierarchy. Indian princes now owed allegiance to the queen. Indian royal titles were ordered into a hierarchy and new orders created. The British royal family began to take regular trips to India to see the

people. Indian culture became more highly regarded and Indian heritage began to be preserved. The author discusses how the declaration of Victoria as Empress of India came about in Britain. It was established by the Royal Titles Act of 1876.

The planners of the imperial assemblage began their work in secret after Lord Lytton and O. T. Burne came to power in India. They created a committee that would survey relations between Indian princes and chiefs. Thomas Thornton was president of the committee. The committee planned to help replace the Mogul authority with the Queen's authority by using Indian cultural symbols. Thus the incorporation ceremony was held in Delhi, the Mughal capital.

Other details of the incorporation or 'assemblage' are discussed. The committee also aimed to impose a British conception of aristocracy and citizenship on the people. They would have to co-opt the 'native aristocracy' which the British regarded as natural. The author also discusses the strategic invitations the committee sent out for the assemblage ceremony; it would legitimize those they wanted to have authority. There is also a discussion of the logistics and physical planning of the assemblage. An amphitheater was built and even the seating of Indian rulers was arranged.

The central figure of the assemblage ceremony was the viceroy, Lord Lytton. Eighty-four thousand Indians and Europeans were located in camps around the ceremony area. Activities surrounding the assemblage would last for two weeks and would accompany Queen Victoria's accession. The author then describes many of the ceremonial details to indicate the meticulousness with which the committee used their knowledge of Indian culture to promote the legitimacy of their preferred center of power. At the ceremony, the British authority in India was said to be created by 'Providence' to do what native authorities could not. The British brought order, an order that India could not give to itself.

Cohn argues that historians of the British Empire in India should pay more attention to the assemblage of 1877 as an event of great historical consequence. While the event was initially criticized, it came to represent a turning point in the history of Britain and in India. While Lytton was not ultimately successful, his actions were successful for a long time from 1877 to 1947. Even Gandhi's resistance movement could not immediately dislodge the British idiom when they came to power.

Chapter 6, The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa

Chapter 6, The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa Summary and Analysis

Much of European invented tradition arose in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Europe also colonized Africa during this time and the two processes were connected. The idea of Empire helped to invent tradition but African empires came late so they were affected by already invented traditions. This gave the newly created traditions an odd character. Many parts of Africa were colonized by whites who felt that they had to define themselves as masters of Africans. Invented traditions justified their roles. Unlike India, Africa did not offer a framework of a state to rule and so they had to use monarchical ideology. The British began to codify and promulgate African tradition as well.

Many whites arrived in Africa in the late 19th century and unevenly imported new traditions. A cultural system spread by missionary Christianity was spread by the colonial powers. Many Europeans developed traditions of 'traditional' community to introduce into Africa. Some peasants brought ideologies but ideologies were mostly imported by gentlemen and professionals. These latter traditions had the most impact on blacks. They aimed to invest capital and make European activity in Africa respectable. One process by which this occurred involved the spreading of norms of gentility and attaching it to various occupations. Gentility meant submission; social rule by the British led to political rule.

New traditions helped bind dispersed white society so that they could rule; Africans were brought in to create a new ethic. Whites first accepted that some Africans could become members of the ruling class and then to use European invented traditions to redefine the relationship between leader and led. The author, Terence Ranger, then gives some examples. Many traditions of subordination were available. For instance, blacks were taught to mirror English privates and non-commissioned officers. Black replicas of European institutions were created. And these institutions gave blacks paths to enter white society. Africans could then be separated into specialized categories and divided.

Monarchical traditions were invented as a new form of subordination. The English were not the only ones to import such traditions; the Germans did as well. European Kings were painted as benefactors to the African people and made credible in the eyes of Africans.

Africans often attempted to utilize European neo-traditions. Europeans gave symbolic form to new types of authority and submission. In Africa these symbols became simpler and more intense. Africans saw the importance Europeans attached to monarchical

ritual and military ritual and Africans tried to use these symbols without realizing that the emulation brought subordination. For instance, the African bourgeoisie used European neo-traditions to define a middle class; they would do so by emulating European values. Tribal African rulers used attitudes drawn from neo-traditional monarchy to legitimize their power as it was threatened by colonialism. Thus many local rulers reinforced their power; however, in doing so, they often committed themselves to submission to Europeans.

Neo-traditional thought had an ambiguity, however. Europeans inside of neo-traditions thought they had respect for the customs in their areas. But by maintaining some African customs they undermined their own neo-traditional narratives. Europeans saw African custom through their own lens. They thereby misunderstood the reality that African custom was in flux. Africans often changed tribal identities, for instance. Competition and movement were the rule. So the Europeans responded by ossifying some existing traditions rather than others. Many African peoples were 'restored' to old identities. New rigidities were introduced and the author covers some examples.

Of course, many Africans participated in these creations. African chiefs and intellectuals used neo-traditions to enhance their own power, as did African clergy. But African traditions still contained ambiguity. Tradition was also used by elders against the youth which helped Europeans extract labor from youth who felt dominated by their elders. Men often used 'tradition' against women to impose new patriarchal norms and tradition was often manipulated to abuse subjects and immigrants.

African politicians, nationalists and histories were left with two ambiguous legacies following colonial invented traditions; some imported from Europe still influence ruling class culture along with the idea of 'traditional' African culture which was invented by the colonials.

Chapter 7, Mass-Producing Traditions, Europe, 1870-1914

Chapter 7, Mass-Producing Traditions, Europe, 1870-1914 Summary and Analysis

From the previous chapters, it is clear that traditions are often invented. However, they sprang up particularly often in the thirty years prior to World War I. Traditions were created by social and political institutions. Both invented traditions to handle the rapid social transformations of the time. The state's role was largest however and it did so to expand administration, the reach of law, state education and the like. The goals of states were to invent nations, produce peoples over which each state could rule and create nationalist sentiment. Mechanisms were needed to produce obedience, cooperation and a sense of legitimacy. Transformation was most difficult when states were new.

Tradition was also used as a bulwark against the challenges of popular politics. Mass politics made many loyal and even more pressing needs and irrationalism were promoted. The classical liberal regimes of the nineteenth century collapsed when the institutions that promoted social unity, the church and the monarchy, collapsed. Nonetheless, regimes and associated bourgeois classes wanted to stop radical socialists. Three innovations were created: the secular equivalent of church—primary education, public ceremonies (such as the celebration of Bastille Day) and the mass production of public monuments. The author, Eric Hobsbawm, then compares and contrasts these innovations in France and Germany. Choices of national symbols had to be made. And both symbols and national experiences associated with those symbols were created. Many countries would structure national experiences around rehearsing the founding acts of the new regime. This was as true in the United States as anywhere.

Universal political traditions invented at this time were state achievements. They had to be solidified in opposition to cosmopolitan movements and religious ones. The author then discusses the case of the formation of May Day in conjunction with these matters. The adoption of national sports also played a role, such as soccer.

The most difficult problem facing the legitimacy of modern nation-states was how to assimilate the growing middle class and the upper-middle class elites. Their class membership had to be invented as their social mores no longer set them apart. They also needed an identity that was neither elite nor proletariat. A fusion of upper and middle class cultures was created and set up as an ideal. Some organizations that claimed elite connections were created, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. Schooling was also an important control factor.

Then the institution of 'good ole' boys' and 'alumni' was created. Fraternities came to play this role and formed inter-generational social and economic networks. However,

the most central informal device for identifying middle class elites was the formation of acceptable social partners, such as marriages and connections between those who attended elite private universities. Elite sports existed for this purpose as well, such as tennis in the United States and Britain. Nationalism became a substitute for social cohesion which was once promoted by a national church, the royal family and other elements.

It is easy to identify the grouping of invented traditions. But three aspects of these inventions merit comment. First, Hobsbawm distinguishes between the traditions that lasted and those that did not. Extravagant national costumes declined but public parades did not. The second aspect is the practices tied to specific social classes as distinct from nations as a whole; sports are an obvious case. The final aspect is the tie between what was invented and what spontaneously arose on its own. Sometimes traditions evolve to serve needed functions and sometimes individuals and groups create them. Yet however they arise, they can be used to manipulate large groups of peoples. The historian's job is to understand how the need for cohesion arises and how it is satisfied.

Characters

Eric Hobsbawm

Eric Hobsbawm, the author of The Invention of Tradition, is an important British Marxist historian. Hobsbawm spent most of his career as a lecturer in history at Birkbeck College and the University of London between 1959 and 1982. Of significance, is Hobsbawm's past activism as a communist in Britain. Hobsbawm's doctoral work concerned the history of the British Fabian society, a democratic communist advocacy organization and was a member of the Association of Socialist Pupils, becoming a member of the Communist party in 1936 and consistently defending the Soviet Union from any and all criticism until its collapse. Thus, his commitment to a Marxist philosophy was unyielding.

Hobsbawm is known for his Marxist approach to history which emphasizes class analysis, or the understanding of history as a struggle between distinct economic classes. Hobsbawm is known for his theory of the 'dual revolution' that holds that the primary historical events that shape modern life in Western nations were the French revolution and the industrial revolution in Britain. He has also focused on the concept of social banditry. He was famously hostile to nationalism, arguing that it was always fleeting and a cover for oppression. Hobsbawm was a cosmopolitan par excellence. Hobsbawm is also famous for the present work. His concept of 'invented tradition' has become widespread as a tool to expose oppressive traditions as false subterfuge rooted in promoting the interests of the elite few. Hobsbawm, for instance, sees the creation of many nationalist myths in these terms.

The British Empire

One criticism of The Invention of Tradition is that it is Anglo-centric, meaning that it focuses excessively on invented traditions in the United Kingdom. Whether or not this is a flaw of the book, the criticism has some truth. Nearly all of the essays concern either invented traditions within the United Kingdom such as Welsh and Scottish invented traditions and the tradition of royal ceremonial associated with the English monarchy or the invented traditions in British imperial territories such as the Imperial Assemblage ceremony.

Thus it is fair to say that the most important group of people in The Invention of Tradition other than the authors themselves is the set of actors known as the British Empire, from the Kings and Queens of England themselves, to local viceroys and regional nationalist movements within the Imperial home territories.

The various authors have similar depictions of these actors. By and large the British Empire and its members are seen as self-interested actors willing to pull the wool over the eyes of those they need to dominate. This is true at least in the case of the Imperial

Assemblage. But in the case of royal ceremonials, the invention of tradition seems less intentional, exposing the Empire as a group with real historical needs for social unity that gave rise to invented traditions. However, this need for social cohesion often led them to undermine local diversity, as in the cases of Wales and Scotland.

Terence Ranger

This is the co-editor of The Invention of Tradition and author of Chapter 6 concerning the invented traditions of colonial Africa.

Prys Morgan

This individual is the author of Chapter 3 concerning the invented traditions of the Welsh Nationalist movement.

Hugh Trevor-Roper

This individual is the author of Chapter 2 concerning the invented traditions of the Scottish Highlands.

British Monarchs

A number of British monarchs were integral parts of many invented traditions, especially the traditions of royal ceremonials. One prominent example is Queen Victoria.

The Scots

One of the original peoples of the United Kingdom, the Scots invented a number of traditions to solidify their distinctiveness such as the kilt. These traditions are much younger than many Scots believe.

The Welsh

Another one of the original peoples of the United Kingdom, the Welsh invented a number of traditions as part of preserving their culture.

Victorian-age Indians

The British Empire incorporated India in the19th century, making Indians citizens at least ostensibly of their empire. The British used the opportunity to undermine the governing institutions of Victorian-era India.

Colonized Peoples in Africa

Many of the African peoples oppressed by colonial powers were oppressed in part through the use of invented traditions.

European Elites in the late nineteenth Century

To promote national unity during tumultuous periods of unification, European elites invented a number of national traditions to generate a cultural consciousness of nationhood.

Objects/Places

Invented Traditions

The central concept of the book, invented traditions are traditions that are created by powerful social groups to promote their interests and values. The traditions are often new. They are created in response to needs generated by rapid social change and supported by false beliefs about the past.

Rapid Social Change

There was a cluster of invented traditions in the late nineteenth century that were a response to the rapid social and economic change of those periods, according to many of the authors of the book, especially Hobsbawm.

The Romantic Movement

A nineteenth century cultural, artistic, and political movement that tried to recover what many felt like was the lost beauty of humanity and nature destroyed by the rise of capitalism.

British Royal Ceremony

British royal ceremony fluctuated in degree, organization, and importance according to social context between 1820 and 1970.

The Scottish Highland Tradition

The second chapter focuses on the invented traditions of the Scottish Highlands such as the kilt.

The Welsh Romantic Past

The Romantic Movement promoted a Welsh nationalist movement that tried to preserve Welsh culture. In the process, many Welsh traditions were invented.

The Imperial Assemblage

This is the process in the nineteenth century, initiated by Queen Victoria, to make Indians citizens of the British Empire. An elaborate ceremony was organized to promote the new British political institutions and eliminate the old Indian ones.

Britain

This region is the primary nation of interest and focus in the book.

Scotland

This is the northern English territory that contains the Scottish Highlands discussed in Chapter 2.

Wales

This is the central English country that is the ancestral home of the Welsh people and the primary setting of Chapter 3.

India

This is the major country that was subject to British rules throughout the nineteenth century and the subject of Chapter 5.

Colonial Africa

This region includes a series of colonially ruled African territories that are the subject of Chapter 6.

Subordination and Social Control

These are too methods employed by invented traditions to ossify the subordination of some social groups by others, thus solidifying social control of some by others.

Social Unity

This occurs when an invented tradition is not used for domination but instead to promote social unity lost with the decline of European monarchies and state churches.

Themes

Invented Traditions

The Invention of Tradition's main theme is the use of invented traditions throughout primarily British history. An invented tradition is a tradition, distinct from a mere practice or custom, that has historical meaning but is thought to be based on a history that is largely fictitious. Invented traditions are also invented or generated by a group of individuals of social groups. Examples include the Scottish kilt, which the Scots believe is a millennium old but in fact was invented as a national symbol only several centuries before the present one. Another example is the British royal ceremonial, thought to be a thousand years old, which has changed and fluctuated dramatically in response to social needs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Traditions are invented for two primary reasons. They are to promote the dominance of one social class over others and to produce social cohesion undermined by state oppression and liberal capitalism. Examples of invented traditions used for oppression are the imperial assemblage ceremony used in India in the mid-nineteenth century, the traditions of colonial Africa used to generate a ruling ideology over a disparate and unstable group of Africans, and the national founding traditions of many nation states invented in order to empower the nation-state.

Examples of traditions invented for social cohesion include the invented royal ceremonies surrounding the British crown, the Scottish Highlander, and Welsh Nationalist traditions.

The Impact of the Romantic Movement and Late Nineteenth Cent

While much of The Invention of Tradition emphasizes that invented traditions were used by the powerful to dominate the less powerful, the authors often admit that traditions are invented in response to genuine needs of society as a whole. One common thesis of the articles is that the system of liberal capitalism such as democratic government, freedom of speech, press and religion, the disestablishment of state churches, free trade, the rule of law and strong private property rights and freedom of contract destroyed social cohesion.

Under liberal capitalism, people focused on their private lives, their own pursuits of wealth, family and religion, and ignored the nation causing social instability. With the loss of monarchical and clerical power, many societies began to fall apart. As a result, the leaders of nation-states felt a need to invent traditions in order to promote social cohesion.

The authors see the major reaction to liberal capitalism in the nineteenth century as taking form with romantic movements that emphasized national spirit, nature, the noble savage and the life of emotion and passion over reason. Romantic movements fostered many myths among peoples seeking to unite in order to recover what they felt was lost community. Many traditions were embraced by peoples like the Scots and the Welsh not because the traditions were genuine but because they served a new but vital social function, that of keeping people together in the face of liberal capitalism, which undermined the association of politics and community.

The Power of Ceremony

The Invention of Tradition concerns the illustration of invented traditions in history and hence focuses on concrete examples. One of the most powerful examples of invented traditions used in the book is the ceremony. The two most prominent examples are the focus of Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 focuses on the use of royal ceremony in Britain between 1820 and 1970. The author divides the time period into four parts according to how the royal ceremonies performed in the United Kingdom were understood at the time and the social functions they played. Early on, royal ceremonies were poorly performed. The king was not widely respected and was even hated due to the fact that he still had political power and wielded it in an unpopular fashion.

However, later in British history, as the monarch withdrew from politics, the office of royal monarch became less divisive and could be used to signify the British as a people thus becoming a source of national unity. The power of ceremony arose in magnifying the social function of the monarchy during each of these times. When the monarch was politically influential, ceremonies magnified little as the people did not much care for the monarch, but when the monarch could represent the nation and produce social cohesion, royal ceremonies became elaborate and significant.

A similar theme occurs in Chapter 5, when the British brought India into the British Empire, making Indians subjects of the British Crown. The British used the imperial assemblage ceremony to promote a certain way of thinking about British rule and trying to ascribe legitimacy to British rule.

Style

Perspective

Eric Hobsbawm, the main editor and author of The Invention of Tradition, is a famed British Marxist historian. One of the prominent features of Marxist historiography is to see social history in terms of class conflict. Economic interests dominate history and the most powerful groups that can secure the most benefits tend to dominate the other classes. One of the points of invented traditions is that they are a social tool through which dominant economic classes produce in order to secure legitimacy and get the lower classes to submit, even willingly. Most invented traditions discussed in the book were created by some elite group to benefit themselves.

There are exceptions, however, as Hobsbawm admits that not all traditions are invented deliberately to serve the needs of a few. Some traditions arise spontaneously without dishonesty and others arise to benefit a society as a whole and not merely a single social class. For instance, in Chapter 7, Hobsbawm argues that invented traditions were used to create national identities that would help to legitimize the rule of European elites. However, he admits that these traditions filled the social void created by liberal capitalism which undermined the unifying institutions of the monarchy and the state church.

Another element in the perspective of the book is the post-colonial perspective. The post-colonial tradition tends to emphasize the psychological effects of colonization by imperial powers on those who are colonized. Thus chapters like Chapter 5 on India and Chapter 6 on Africa shows how traditions were used to dominate colonized peoples.

Tone

The tone of The Invention of Tradition combines the impartial tone of historical analysis with the cynical approach to analysis characteristic of the Marxist and post-colonial traditions. The impartiality of the tone comes through in the empirical and theoretical sections of the book, both when the authors of giving real world examples and when they draw theoretical lessons from these examples.

For instance, in Chapter 4, which concerns British royal ceremonials, the author carefully divides the causal factors that contributed to the periodic variation in the degree and meaning of the ceremonies. The tally of ten factors manifests itself in a dry but thorough fashion. Another example includes the analysis of the Imperial Assemblage ceremony in India, where the author focuses on reported the important details of the ceremony.

In contrast, the opinions of the historians come across as callous and cynical. This tone is particularly prominent in Hobsbawm's contributions. He tends to see invented traditions as attempts by some to dominate others and he often seems to see such

domination everywhere. Consequentially, one gets a sad impression that many millions who practice traditions that are full of meaning to them, are constantly laboring under a delusion crafted for them by another. For instance, the Scottish Highlanders clearly love their traditions. The kilt is highly regarded and represents Scotland to the world. If the thesis of Chapter 2 is correct, this high regard is based on a lie and much of Scottish pride is rooted in falsehood.

Structure

The Invention of Tradition is an anthology of articles that focus on the theory underlying the concept of invented traditions and examples of them in a number of historical contexts. The chapters have a number of authors, all writing from a Marxist or postcolonial perspective. Each chapter contains a number of sections that give the chapters a smooth, logical and argumentative structure. Some chapters trade off sections that cover theoretical matters and those that give practical, historical illustrations.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of an invented tradition and explains the theory behind invented traditions, about how they are used to dominate social groups and create others. The chapter, written by Hobsbawm, lays the groundwork for the remainder of the book. Chapter 2 focuses on the invention of tradition in the Scottish Highlands. Chapter 3 discusses the invented traditions of the Welsh Nationalist movements. Both show how invented traditions were used to give cohesion to minority movements striving to preserve a sense of cultural and historical identity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the invention of royal ceremonial in the British monarchy between the early nineteenth century and the later twentieth century. Chapter 5 focuses on the use of ceremony in India to extend British dominance of the nation. Both chapters focus on the use of ceremony as invented tradition. Chapter 6 focuses on the invented traditions used by colonial powers to dominate Africa. Chapter 7 analyzes the role of invented traditions in creating nation-states in the late nineteenth century.

Quotes

"'Traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Chapter 1, pg. 1.)

"Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition" (Chapter 1, pg. 4.)

"This apparatus, to which [Scotsmen] ascribe great antiquity, is in fact largely modern" (Chapter 2, pg. 15.)

"However, history is not rational: or at least it is rational only in parts" (Chapter 2, pg. 24.)

"In this period Welsh scholars and patriots rediscovered the past, historical, linguistic and literary traditions, and where those traditions were inadequate, they created a past which had never existed" (Chapter 3, pg. 43-44.)

"Methodism was itself (although it did not admit it) the child of a complicated movement to moralize and evangelize the Welsh people, organized by dissenters and evangelical Anglicans from about 1660 to 1730" (Chapter 3, pg. 53.)

"A century late the position was totally altered, for Wales was considered to be above all else a 'Land of Song'" (Chapter 3, pg. 74.)

"The Wales we have been describing was not a political state, and for want of such a state the people were driven to give a disproportionate amount of their energies to cultural matters, to the recovery of the past and, where the past was found wanting, to its invention" (Chapter 3, pg. 98.)

"Modern societies still need myth and ritual. A monarch and his family supply it" (Chapter 4, pg. 102.)

"I am sure that this, my Coronation, is not a symbol of a power and a splendor that are gone, but a declaration of our hopes in the future" (Chapter 4, pg. 150.)

"Old ceremonies have been adapted and new rituals invented, the combined effect of which has been, paradoxically, to give an impression of stability in periods of domestic change, and of continuity and comfort in times of international tension and decline" (Chapter 4, pg. 160.)

"Authority once achieved must have a secure and usable past" (Chapter 5, pg. 167.)

"The historic basis of British authority in India was created by 'Providence' which had called upon the crown 'to replace and improve upon the good and great Sovereigns', but who successors failed 'to secure the internal peace of their dominions. Strife became

chronic and anarchy constantly recurrent. The weak were the prey of the strong, and the strong the victims of their own passions"' (Chapter 5, pg. 205.)

"Neo-traditions functioned to hold together the small and dispersed white rural society" (Chapter 6, pg. 219.)

"[African historians] have to free themselves from the illusion that the African custom recorded by officials or by many anthropologists is any sort of guide to the African past" (Chapter 6, pg. 262.)

"Glory and greatness, wealth and power, could be symbolically shared by the poor through royalty and its rituals" (Chapter 7, pg. 283.)

"Nationalism became a substitute for social cohesion through a national church, a royal family or other cohesive traditions, or collective group self-presentations, a new secular religion, and that the class which required such a mode of cohesion most was the growing new middle class, or rather that large intermediate mass which so signally lacked other forms of cohesion" (Chapter 7, pg. 303.)

Topics for Discussion

What is an 'invented tradition?' Why does Hobsbawm think the concept is worth analyzing?

Discuss two purposes the authors think that invented traditions serve. Give detailed examples.

Explain the ten factors that affected the variation of royal ceremony in Britain between 1820 and 1977 and how they affected the four periods of ceremony documented in Chapter 4.

How was the Imperial Assemblage used to subordinate the Indian peoples?

Why do so many of the authors track tradition invention to the late nineteenth century and the Romantic Movement?

What does social cohesion have to do with invented traditions? How are they associated?

Compare and contrast the Scottish Highland Tradition and the Welsh Traditions discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. How are they alike? How are they different? What purposes did both traditions serve?