

Reflection 6

The idea of a tradition is not commonly one that invokes images of flexibility or versatility. Instead tradition is often seen as the opposite, as the antithesis of change or variability. But not all traditions are truly as aged as they may seem and in some cases these perceptions of age are deliberately forced. The idea of an 'invented tradition', coined by Hobsbawm and Ranger, then describes this use of both overt and tacit rules, as well as rituals of a symbolic nature to instill principles and norms. Here the distinction between an invented tradition and an 'organic' one comes in that, with an invented tradition the continuity with the past is largely artificially constructed. In addition, the writers mention that the crucial functions of these invented traditions can largely fall under three umbrellas, to establish social unity, to legitimize relations of power and to indoctrinate beliefs.

Although the piece discusses distinctions between invented traditions and other similar cultural forms, such as customs, in detail, perhaps not as well discussed were the limits of so-called 'invented traditions'. In this sense I mean, how does an 'invented tradition' become recognized as 'not legitimate' by the people that practice it and in the cases where this happens how does this affect the legitimacy of the values and norms that it chooses to impose. This question becomes relevant, in my opinion, to understand the creation of an ethnic identity among a group of people and the power dynamics that then align in either in harmony or opposition with a similarly constructed national identity. When a certain ethnic identity questions the truth of a

national one, how does a community then respond? Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that an important role of 'invented traditions' is that it is relevant to invent and imagine the idea of a 'nation'. And on a parallel note, the Boateng piece uses the idea of 'imagined communities' to ask probe ideas of ownership and appropriation in the content of a Ghanaian state. The next question to ask, in my opinion, then becomes 'Can we think of communities being invented in a similar way to traditions?' If indeed so, Boateng may be able to provide understanding of evolving ethnic identities in his argument stating that the important questions to ask are those of the stakes involved. Then perhaps this forms an avenue to truly understanding how self-perceived nationalities and ethnic groups interact with a 'national' identity.

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